

Exploring the World of Foreign Languages

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“To have a second language is to have a second soul.” (Charlemagne)

Introduction

On behalf of the foreign language teaching staff of the School of Political Science and Economics, I would like to repeat here our warm welcome to all those who joined the School for the new academic year of 2015. Although the School’s specialist fields are political science, economics, and global political economy, Seikei has a long and distinguished history of language teaching that stretches all the way back to the 19th century.

As was pointed out at the Welcoming Symposium for Incoming Students, life at a university differs greatly from that at a high school. Those differences include the numbers and types of students found on campus, the availability of subjects that can be pursued, the types and lengths of classes, the facilities that have been provided for student use, and the extracurricular activities in which students can participate. With only twenty-four hours in a day, and such a vast variety of options to choose from, there are some serious decisions every new student must make to ensure that maximum benefit can be derived from the few years that will be spent at Seikei. These decisions have a great effect on the intellectual and social development of each individual and must therefore be taken only after ample consideration.

Languages of the World

Among the opportunities for intellectual development at Seikei, one that can have important lifelong advantage is the study of foreign languages. Six major languages—some of the most useful in the world—are taught as part of the Seikei curriculum, one as required and five as optional. But how many languages are there in the world as a whole? If somebody gave you an hour and asked you to write down a list, how many do you think you could name? Thirty? Fifty? One hundred, even? For most people, writing out a list of one hundred of the world’s languages is a tough task. What is the *global* total? The answer, you may be surprised to learn, is that there are around 7,000 languages currently spoken in one place or another on this planet! Most of these languages are related to one or more of the others, sharing some common ancestor that was spoken in ancient times. Groups of languages that are thus related are known as “language families,” and although the classification of languages is a rather controversial subject, we can say that there are about twenty distinct language families in the world. The most closely studied and best understood is the Indo-European family, which contains subgroupings covering most of the languages of Europe—the Germanic group (German, English, Danish, etc.), the Romance group (French, Spanish, Italian, etc.), the Slavonic group (Russian, Polish, Czech, etc.), the Indo-Iranian group (Hindi, Bengali, Farsi, etc.), and so on. The main

languages of Finland, Estonia, and Hungary are exceptions, belonging to a so-called Uralic group, while most of the languages of the southern half of India belong to a group known as Dravidian. Africa can be divided into four large groupings (some with hundreds of members), while other groupings cover languages in a huge arc from Turkey to the Far East (the Altaic family), languages in China and other parts of Asia (Sino-Tibetan), languages across Southeast Asia and the Pacific (Malayo-Polynesian), and languages in the Americas (Amerind and Na-Dene).

The global figure of 7,000 given above is not to be taken as an exact count. To provide an exact number is simply not possible. This is because counting languages is a trickier exercise than it first seems. To begin with, we have to contend with the existence of dialects. Dialects are often regarded as minor variants of a "standard" language—basically, the same language as that "standard," but with some differences of pronunciation and vocabulary, and perhaps some slightly different grammar, too. In fact, however, the word "dialect" takes on different meanings in different contexts. In a linguistic sense, the principal consideration is "intelligibility": If two people speak different forms of a language but are able to communicate intelligibly when speaking to each other in their native tongue, they are speaking dialects of the same language. (It is worth noting, by the way, that the so-called "standard" language of a country is itself merely a dialect, albeit the most prestigious one.) In nonlinguistic contexts, however—say, a social or political context—the word "dialect" may mean something quite different, and the criterion of mutual intelligibility may become irrelevant. Take China, for example. From a political point of view, the country is a unified whole. We therefore talk of "Chinese" as the language of that country, taking the Mandarin form as the standard ("Putonghua") and thinking of other forms of Chinese (Cantonese, Hakka, Hokkien, etc.) as "local dialects." These so-called "dialects," however,

are not intelligible in their spoken form to speakers of Mandarin. Linguistically, they are different "languages." Yet the perception of them as dialects is practically universal outside China itself, largely because the country is seen as a single political unit.

The opposite problem may arise in areas that do not constitute a single political unit, with different names being applied to what is effectively the same language. In Scandinavia, for example, it is a fact that the people of, say, Denmark and Norway have little trouble understanding each other. Linguistically, Danish and Norwegian are dialects of the same language. But politically they belong to independent countries, and few Danes or Norwegians would agree that they do in fact speak "the same language." A similar situation occurs in the Balkan peninsula, in southeast Europe, where, for much of the 20th century there was a language called "Serbo-Croat." After the breakup of Yugoslavia in the 1990s, the language itself was "broken up," resulting in the establishment of Serbian, Croatian, Bosnian, and Montenegrin. From a linguistic point of view, these are all variants of the same language. But most citizens of these countries are keen to emphasize that they have a separate identity—and with it, a separate language. So are these four languages ... or just one?

A third difficulty in reaching agreement on a count concerns changes that occur over time. The roots of the language in which this article is written, English, go back over 1,500 years to a time when Germanic tribes in northern Europe were expanding. One of the places to which they expanded was the British Isles, which had recently been left vulnerable by the collapse of the Roman Empire. When they migrated across the water separating those islands from the mainland of Europe, they brought with them, of course, their Germanic dialects. For hundreds of years thereafter the southern, eastern, and central parts of Britain were home to a variety of slowly evolving West German dialects. Even when

Britain was invaded by the Vikings from the north, language among the German speakers of the island was not seriously affected, as the Vikings themselves were speakers of dialects belonging to the North Germanic branch of the family. But when William the Conqueror invaded in 1066, he brought with him Norman French, and within a couple of hundred years, the language spoken by the common people of England—the Anglo-Saxons—had changed beyond recognition. The language spoken before the arrival of the Normans is often referred to as Old English. But while this name suggests that the language of the Anglo-Saxons was “simply an older form” of the language we speak today, the reality is that modern English speakers can understand barely a single word of Old English (i.e., Anglo-Saxon) without special study. So do we count Old English and Modern English together, as simply the same language that has developed over time, or should we count them as two languages, because they are mutually incomprehensible? The fact that language changes naturally over time is one of the most fundamental characteristics of human language. But at what point can we say that “a new language” has emerged? In fact, there is no single point. The change occurs over great periods of time and all we can say is that the beginning and end points may be very different indeed—as in the case of English.

One final reason for being unable to specify exactly how many languages there are in the world is simply that even in this modern era, we are not yet fully familiar with every place on earth. We know that deep in the jungles of South America, Africa, or Papua New Guinea, there are small tribes of people effectively isolated from the rest of humankind. We are also well aware that every human community, in the normal course of events, has language. It therefore stands to reason that there must be languages in the world that have not yet been documented or in any way recorded. They remain beyond the list of languages that we can name. They therefore cannot

be included in our count—leaving us unable to give an accurate global total.

Setting aside the problem of counting the languages of the world, can we at least count the number of speakers that known languages have? We know, of course, that languages vary greatly in the numbers of speakers who speak them and in their relative “importance.” We must be careful, of course, not to fall into the trap of thinking any language “unimportant.” No matter how few speakers a language has, a language will always be important to those who speak it as a native tongue. Furthermore, every language is the vehicle that embodies and supports its speakers’ culture, and as such is equal in importance to any other. But there is no doubting that some languages have a “cultural impact” far beyond that of others. The languages taught at Seikei—Chinese, English, French, German, Russian, Spanish—are all global in their cultural (and politico-economic) impact, and, as we shall see below, have very large numbers of speakers indeed.

The language with the greatest number of speakers is undoubtedly Mandarin Chinese. As the PRC has the world’s biggest population, that should come as no surprise. But what exactly do we mean when we talk of “speakers”? Clearly, only being able to say hello and count to ten in a foreign language does not make one a speaker of that language. What about being able to order a meal at a restaurant, then, or a ticket at a railway station? Is that enough? Or does a real “speaker” need to be able to converse at length on a difficult topic? There is no clear point at which we can call someone “fluent.” Perhaps we should just count “native” speakers. Unfortunately, if we decide to do that, we will exclude countless millions of bilingual or multilingual people who “speak” a language perfectly well without necessarily being “native” to it. Further difficulties relate to the role that other language skills play—reading, writing, and listening. Isn’t it possible to read a language without being able to understand its

spoken form? (Yes—learning Chinese kanji from a book would be a good example of this: the reading and the speaking involve very different skills.) Or to write a language without being able to have a conversation in it? (Yes again—countless students in the past have learned to write Latin without ever being able to converse in it at all.) Finally, even if we *can* decide on the definition of a “speaker,” how are we going to count all the speakers of a language in reality? The usual method is to use national surveys, but these can be very imprecise when it comes to language use and are confounded by all the issues normally associated with gathering accurate, meaningful data.

The difficulty of counting the number of speakers of any given language explains why lists giving estimates of the relative “size” of languages (measured, that is, in terms of their speakers) vary from one to another. A typical ranking is that given by the publication *Ethnologue*, one of the most well-known sources of information on the languages of the world (Lewis et al., 2015). That ranking reflects a count of “L1” (i.e., first-language) speakers and suggests an ordering of the “top 15” as follows: Chinese, Spanish, English, Hindi, Arabic, Portuguese, Bengali, Russian, Japanese, Lahnda, Javanese, German, Korean, French, and Telugu. It may be a surprise to see languages such as Portuguese on the list—but the reason for its place here is that it is the main language not only of Portugal (a relatively small European country) but also of Brazil (which has one of the largest populations in the world). As for Lahnda, that is actually a group of language varieties related to Punjabi, spoken on both sides of the border between India and Pakistan. (India has the world’s second-largest population and much greater linguistic diversity than most countries, which explains the appearance of four Indian languages on that list of fifteen.) It is interesting to note that six of the languages on the list are specifically named as official languages of the United Nations: Arabic,

Chinese, English, French, Russian, and Spanish. As for cultural impact, that will be touched on in the discussion below of the languages taught at Seikei.

Languages at Seikei

On the Waseda campus, more than two dozen languages are available for study. As for Seikei itself, as mentioned above, there are six major languages in the curriculum. Given its global prominence, English is a must for all the School’s students. In addition, Chinese, French, German, Russian, and Spanish are also offered. It would be an amazing achievement to become proficient in all of these, but given the difficulty of reaching a high standard in even one foreign language, such a goal is beyond the reach of all but the most determined. The question, then, is which of the last five language(s) to focus on. Each has its own difficulties, of course, but each also has its own advantages and pleasures. (As English is a requirement for graduation and is therefore not optional, the characteristics of the language will not be discussed here.)

Chinese

As we saw above, the question of what Chinese actually is constitutes a thorny problem. As far as Seikei is concerned, the language variety taught is Mandarin, which, as the language chosen by the Chinese government to be the language of officialdom and education, is by far the most useful variety of Chinese. As we saw above, it is spoken by more people than any other language on earth, and as the main language of a country that is growing in importance both politically and economically, its profile has risen considerably, especially over the last couple of decades or so. Although it lacks the universality of English, it is used widely beyond the confines of the Chinese state, with large communities in Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, and Vietnam, as well as many

smaller communities in countries further afield.

Mandarin Chinese is a tonal language, which makes the pronunciation somewhat difficult for speakers of nontonal languages like Japanese and English, but with the right training and practice, such a difficulty can be overcome without too much effort. As for the grammar, Chinese is what is called an “isolating” language: It is blissfully free of complicated word endings for verb conjugations or special forms that show the function of a noun in a sentence. It does not bother with grammatical gender, and the word order of Mandarin is fairly close to that of English, so Japanese learners who have already learned English do not have to make any big adjustment there. The main difficulty for most learners of Chinese is the traditional writing system, which uses a very large number of characters, but as Japanese was derived from that very system, those with a good knowledge of Japanese can adapt very easily.

As for culture, the Chinese language has an exceptionally long lineage, tracing its roots back to written records produced more than 3,000 years ago. It has therefore developed a magnificent body of poetry and other literature, together with a profound tradition of philosophical thought. Some of the masterpieces of Chinese literature—from the ancient works of Confucius, Mencius, and Sima Qian, through Hui-Neng, Luo Guanzhong, and Cao Xueqin, to the more modern writing of Lu Xun, Ding Ling, and the Nobel prizewinner Gao Xinjian—have had an impact that is truly global. Of course, beyond literature, China has a wealth of other culture worth exploring (much of it borrowed and later adapted for their own purposes by the Japanese), and a vast territory in which each area has its own attractions. Visitors to China will find a warm welcome awaits any visitor that can speak even a little Chinese. Add all this to the growing importance of China on the world stage—especially in terms of business and commerce—and the benefits of learning Chinese become very clear.

On a final note: Some people claim that learning Chinese is good for brain development. An interesting study published some years ago (The Guardian, 2003) claimed that, while speakers of English only need the left part of their brains when speaking their native tongue, in the brains of Chinese speakers there was “a buzz of action in both the right and left temporal lobes.” Whether this actually means that learning Chinese will help to boost your brainpower is open to question, of course, but that alone may be a good reason to give Chinese a try!

French

French has a long and glorious tradition as one of the world’s great languages and is spoken as a native tongue by vast numbers of people spread across the five major continents of the world. Its international reach is well demonstrated by the Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie, a large, multinational grouping representing speakers of French whose mission is “to embody the active solidarity between its 80 member states and governments” (Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie website, n.d.). It is either an official or working language (or both) of many international organizations, including the U.N., the E. U., the International Committee of the Red Cross, and the International Olympic Committee. Anyone hoping to work in such an organization cannot hope to do well without being familiar with French. For several centuries, French was regarded by many as the premier language of Europe, and even today is often seen as the language *par excellence* of culture. (Its use just then in the middle of an English sentence is typical of the influence it has exerted not only on English but on many other languages in Europe and beyond.)

As a language, its authentic pronunciation is a little difficult for learners to recreate, but, as in the case of English, its widespread international use has accustomed French speakers to wide variation, so learners do not need to concern them-

selves too much with mastering the finer points of French phonetics. The spelling of the language is a little tricky, too, as many of the written consonants are not pronounced in speech. As for the grammar, French is one of the Romance languages (a descendant of Latin, together with Portuguese, Spanish, Italian, and Romanian). It therefore distinguishes grammatical gender, requires adjective-noun agreement, and has a verbal system that is fairly complex. All of this can take some time to become accustomed to, but for those already familiar with a language like English, learning the vocabulary is relatively straightforward.

The effort required to learn French is handsomely repaid when one considers the vast contribution French culture has made to the world. French is the language of great philosophers like Descartes, Rousseau, and Voltaire, great playwrights such as Moliere, Racine, and Corneille, great authors like Flaubert, Hugo, and Proust, and great scientists like Lavoisier, Pasteur, and Madame Curie. A knowledge of French is also key to the worlds of fashion, cuisine, music, painting, and architecture. Anyone choosing to learn French is likely to reap a lifetime of reward.

German

In German we have another of the most prominent languages of the world. It is usually thought of as the language of Germany, Europe's largest country west of Russia, with a population of well over 80 million. As such, it has enormous political and economic importance in Europe. However, the German tongue is spoken in many other places besides its homeland. It is the main language of Austria and Liechtenstein, both to the south; it is one of the three official languages of Luxembourg; it is also one of the four official languages of Switzerland. Additionally, there are large numbers of native speakers living in the southeast corner of Belgium, in the east of France, and in the north of Italy, while many throughout eastern Europe, even if not native speakers, are at

least familiar with the language. There are also expatriate German-speaking communities found throughout the world.

The pronunciation of German is sometimes seen as difficult, but, as with most languages, a little practice with a native speaker soon helps to make the learner able to pronounce the language intelligibly, and once that hurdle is cleared, reading and writing become very straightforward—the spelling of German is a fairly good reflection of its pronunciation. The grammar seems a little complex at first—it has three grammatical genders and its nouns may change their endings according to the role they play in a sentence, for example—but, again, some careful study should clarify these points before long. As for vocabulary, German words have a reputation for being long and difficult, but that is only a superficial impression. They can all be broken down into their component parts, and the meanings then become clear. It is interesting to note that many basic words in German are either the same as or very similar to their counterparts in English. That much is not surprising: English itself started out in life as an amalgamation of German dialects.

Once the study of German is undertaken, a wonderful world of discovery awaits—the cultural heritage of German is one of the richest of the global community. Germany has often been considered the land of “Dichter und Denker”—poets and thinkers. Goethe and Schiller represent perhaps the best of German classicism, and more recently, more than a dozen writers of German have been awarded Nobel prizes for literature. An even greater debt is owed to German culture for the classical music it has given to the world. Most of the greatest names in classical music—Bach, Beethoven, Mozart, Haydn, Wagner, Brahms, Schumann, Schubert, Mendelssohn, Mahler, Strauss...the list goes on and on—came from the German cultural sphere. So did many great philosophers (Leibniz, Kant, Hegel, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Heidegger, and

Frege jump immediately to mind) and many of the greatest scientists (Kepler, von Humboldt, Planck, von Braun, Schrödinger, and numerous others, including perhaps the most famous scientist of modern times, Albert Einstein). Add this to the German world's contributions to world art and architecture, and it is easy to see that a knowledge of German gives direct access to one of the world's greatest cultures. Incidentally, German is also a useful gateway to other Germanic languages—the Dutch of the Netherlands and the Flemish of Belgium are very close relatives, while the Scandinavian languages, Danish, Norwegian, Swedish, and Icelandic, share much of the same basic grammar and vocabulary. The study of German puts learners well on the path to being able to use these languages, too.

Russian

Of all the European languages taught at Seikei, Russian is probably thought of as the most difficult. One characteristic that makes it stand out immediately as different from the other four is its use of a non-Roman script. The alphabet used for writing Russian is known as Cyrillic, an alphabet that looks something like a cross between the Latin and Greek alphabets, with a few new symbols added. In fact, learning the Russian alphabet is no difficult task, and once it is mastered, the reading and writing of Russian words is a relatively simple matter—there is a fairly good correspondence between the writing and the pronunciation of a Russian word. One potential problem for Japanese speakers is the consonant clusters of Russian, groups of sounds in combinations that do not occur in Japanese. As usual, a bit of practice can sort out this problem. The grammar, too, can seem complicated at first—as an Indo-European language, Russian nouns have the three grammatical genders of German, plus two more case endings for nouns than German has. As for verbs, they demonstrate typical Indo-European patterns but have a special emphasis on perfective versus imperfective

aspects (showing whether an action is completed or not), which gives a fascinating insight into one of the thinking modes of humankind, complicated though the situation seems at first sight. (Interestingly, one report suggests that Russian speakers “are better able to visually discriminate shades of blue” because their language makes “an extra distinction between light and dark blues” [Boroditsky, 2010].)

For all the initial problems faced by a beginner in Russian, the merits of learning the language are beyond question. Russia, a major world power, is home to about 150 million people, for most of whom Russian is the language of daily life—that explains its presence in the global top ten. By some estimates, that 150 million can be doubled when taking into account those for whom it is not a native language. The predecessor state to Russia, the Soviet Union, was one of the two superpowers of the twentieth century, and its influence was very widely felt, especially throughout the whole of eastern Europe. After its breakup, its international impact did wane, but the country is now reasserting itself on the world stage and is a worthy subject of study for anyone interested in politics. The state's foreign policy and military power give Russia far-reaching influence in global affairs. It is also one of the most resource-rich countries in the world, annually churning out vast quantities of raw materials such as oil, gas, and coal, as well as precious metals and minerals. It therefore plays a major role in the world economy, with a huge influence on many global markets. Its political and economic importance has led to many U. S. federal agencies declaring Russian to be one of those languages for which there is a “national need for expertise” (U.S. Government, 2010). The same can be said for the fields of science and technology. There is a rich tradition of investigation into all branches of science, with many illustrious contributors to chemistry and physics in particular. The Russians sent the first human into space, and even today the rest of the world depends on Russia for space

exploration.

Back on earth, Russia's contributions to culture are recognized worldwide. This vast country is home to one of the world's greatest literary traditions, with towering figures such as Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Turgenev, Gogol, and Pushkin. It has contributed hugely to the world of music—Tchaikovsky, Rachmaninov, Rimsky-Korsakov, Borodin, and Mussorgsky are household names—as well as to many other fine arts: ballet, theatre, cinema, architecture, and so on. Russia shares much with the Western world, but it is built on its own unique foundation. The key to full enjoyment of its great treasure-house is familiarity with the Russian language. On a final note, it should be pointed out that just as German is a gateway to most of the languages of northern Europe, Russian is the gateway to many of those in the east of Europe. With a knowledge of Russian under your belt, the languages of Ukraine, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland, Bulgaria, Slovenia, Bosnia, Serbia, and Croatia are all just a step away.

Spanish

Spanish is the most widely spoken of the whole Romance family (to which French and Italian also belong, as we saw earlier) and has a truly global reach. It is the dominant tongue not only of its original homeland, Spain, but also of most of the countries of Central and South America. It has a presence in Africa, too (in Equatorial Guinea, for instance), and it was an official language of the Philippines until as late as the 1970s. It is also by far the most frequently spoken foreign language in the United States, especially in the southern states, where Hispanic culture exerts a powerful influence on areas from politics and economics to commerce and the arts. Large numbers of newspapers, magazines, TV and radio stations, and other media are produced for consumption by the Hispanic-heritage population, and many of America's leading cultural figures (in particular, in music and film) are Spanish speaking.

The Spanish language that is standard in Spain today derives from the language of the region known as Castile and is therefore referred to as Castilian Spanish. This language was, of course, the basis from which all the Latin American varieties developed, and it is these varieties that account for a large majority of native speakers, although the Castilian variety is the standard that is taught in classes outside the Americas. Whichever variety of Spanish is being learned, the writing of the language is a straightforward affair—it is written along generally consistent phonemic principles (which is to say there is a close correspondence between speech and writing). Spanish, like Italian, is frequently described as a beautiful language—it makes plentiful use of vowels, avoiding difficult or unusual consonant clusters, and it is not a language full of unusual or guttural, throaty sounds that may sound unattractive to some ears. Of course, beauty is in the eye of the beholder—and the ear of the listener—but in terms of general attractiveness (unlinguistic though that term is!) it has a good reputation. As for the grammar and vocabulary, Spanish is another of the Romance languages, so the comments made above about French are generally relevant here, too.

In terms of contributions to global culture, Spanish has been another giant. Owing to the geographical spread of the language, a huge variety of influences have made themselves felt in Spanish literature. From Spain itself, of course, we have Cervantes, author of *Don Quixote*, one of the most celebrated pieces of work in the entire Western canon, as well as a number of Nobel prizewinners of the caliber of Benavente and Jimenez. A number of Latin American writers have also been awarded the Nobel prize for literature, including Asturias (from Guatemala), Neruda (from Chile), and Gabriel Garcia Marquez, usually known just as Gabo (from Colombia). Spanish culture has also given the world great painters—Murillo, Velazquez, Goya, and Dali, for instance—and classical composers—Alb-

eniz, Granados, and de Falla are some of those who immediately come to mind. Flamenco music and dance are other aspects of Spanish culture that have gained worldwide popularity, as have many forms of ballroom dancing that originated in Latin American culture, like the tango, the samba, and the cha-cha-cha. It is clear that learning Spanish not only puts you in touch with hundreds of millions throughout the world, vastly expanding the communication you can enjoy in commerce or travel in many parts of the world, but also opens up an exciting new world of cultural richness.

Why bother to learn foreign languages?

There are many reasons for taking up foreign languages. First of all, of course, for every Seikei student, there are foreign-language requirements that must be completed before he or she can graduate. But to study a language merely to obtain credit is a trivial reason indeed compared with the benefits that come with knowledge of a foreign language. Here are ten good reasons for taking the trouble to engage in foreign-language learning:

(1) *Enhance your travel experience.* When you are traveling abroad, the ability to use a few phrases in the local language is not only helpful in getting you what you want, but is also likely to ensure you receive a warmer welcome in the place you are visiting. People always appreciate it when they think an outsider has taken the trouble to learn something of their language and then makes the effort to communicate using it.

(2) *Meet new people and develop lifelong friendships.* Learning a foreign language means that you enter a new world—a new world peopled by those who already speak that language. Communicating with these people is likely to spark new relationships, the best of which can last a lifetime.

(3) *Benefit from study overseas.* When embarking on a program of study at an institution overseas, it is highly likely that there will be courses on offer that are not available in the language you use in daily life back home. If you make the effort to learn something of the language of the host country, you will open up new academic horizons for yourself.

(4) *Make a good social impression.* Although being bilingual or multilingual is not actually a rare accomplishment (millions throughout the world use more than one language in their daily lives), the fact is that many people are still impressed if they know you speak a language other than your native tongue. Many see competence in a foreign language as an intellectual achievement, and that in itself often makes a good impression on those around you.

(5) *Improve your decision-making skills and increase your brainpower.* In a study carried out several years ago, psychologists found that although people intuitively think they would make the same decision in a foreign language as they would in their native one, or that the difficulty of thinking in a foreign tongue would lead to decisions being less systematic, the opposite was true. They suggested that this was because “a foreign language provides greater cognitive and emotional distance than a native tongue does” (Keysar et al., 2012). A study by a separate group of researchers compared the brains of those who knew just one language and those who had also learned other languages. They found evidence that the foreign-language learning had altered the areas of the brain where information processing takes place and suggested that “learning a second language increases the density of grey matter” —the parts of the brain that are thought to be related to intellectual skills (Mechelli et al., 2004).

(6) *Increase your general knowledge of the*

world...and of yourself. When you learn a foreign language, you learn far more than just its grammar and vocabulary. As you progress down the path towards fluency, you find out more and more about the country or countries where the language is spoken, about the people who speak it, and, of course, about the way those people fit into the world as a whole. By the same token, you also begin to see yourself in a new light—how you and your own culture fit into the world—seeing yourself, as it were, with outside eyes.

(7) *Understand the world as seen from another perspective.* Learning another language opens your mind to a different way of understanding the world itself. It has long been recognized that conceptual systems and world views are conditioned by the way the language that carries them has split the world up. A simple illustration of this is the way the color spectrum is divided differently by different languages, one example of which was mentioned earlier, in the discussion on Russian.

(8) *Enjoy the beauties of new cultures.* The wonderful cultural treasures that become directly available to learners of foreign languages have already been explored in the section above describing the individual languages taught at Seikei. Literature, theater, movies, music, art—the great cultural accomplishments of each society—are there for the pleasure of everyone who takes the trouble to explore them in their original form. It is true that you can explore foreign cultures through your own language, using translations, for example, but that is like watching a TV program in black and white instead of in color.

(9) *Gain access to a world of information.* We often hear that we are living in the Age of Information. The digital revolution that took place towards the end of the last century and became one of the defining characteristics of this one has

created a knowledge-based society in which access to information has been a key to success. That information exists mostly in a form that is encoded in language. But no single language embodies all of it—it is spread across many different languages, and the more familiarity we have with them, the easier and more reliable our access to information becomes.

(10) *Upgrade your employability.* The world today is a globalized one, and globalization is as much about the international expansion of commerce as about anything else. As a result, every company these days keeps an eye out for employees with foreign-language skills. In the competitive world of the job market, being competent in a foreign language gives an edge that may be decisive in securing a place with the company you most want to work for.

Concluding Comments

How long does it take to learn a foreign language? The simple answer is that it depends almost entirely on how much effort you put into it! There is no royal road to language learning, no shortcut—the energy you put into language learning will be rewarded by benefits that appropriately reflect the effort expended. Of course, there are particularly efficient ways to go about it—for more on those, read the advice given in Seikei's standard textbooks for the first-year reading course, *Language, Economics, and Politics: 12 Perspectives* and *Wordscape*. Essentially, though, your progress is up to you.

The challenge of mastering a foreign language is no doubt a tough one. Is it necessary to try and “master” a language in order to derive benefit from it? Not at all. Even learning some basic grammar and a few hundred simple words can take you a long way in communicating with others around the world. They will be pleased and impressed by the fact that you have made the

effort. If you wish to acquire any degree of fluency, though, regular study and plenty of practice are the key. How much time you put into the enterprise is a decision you make on your own—and it is an important decision. Of course, you will find ample support for language learning at Seikei. You will also have the option of studying abroad—an option that is strongly suggested during your time at Waseda, as it is the perfect way to get the practice you need to become proficient. But even without leaving the campus, the large numbers of students at Waseda who have come from other countries provide a ready source of help, advice, and practice in many foreign languages, and the resources provided by the University, together with what is available on the Internet, cater for all types of study. It goes without saying that the acquisition of native-like fluency is an ambitious goal indeed and takes time and effort to accomplish. But whatever your goal, the time to start expanding your horizons is now. Welcome to the world of foreign languages!

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