

Learning Languages

By Frank Alan Bruno

When many of us are ready for summer or winter vacation, our thoughts turn to exotic places with white shimmering sands and cool crystal-clear waters. When we arrive—adults, high school students, or elementary school students—we often face a challenge, as not everyone there speaks English. Whether one is actually planning a trip or just keen to daydream, the Internet is a useful place to learn a few conversational phrases to order a refreshing drink, find a restroom, and converse with the locals.

Two useful sites for software programs to learn the language or simply to look up a phrase in a language dictionary are **ZDNet Downloads** (<http://downloads-zdnet.com.com/2001-20-0.html>) and **C/Net Downloads** (<http://download.com.com/2001-20-0.html>). In doing a search on the general term “language,” you will get dozens of false hits because of computer programming languages, so be selective and use specific terms like “Spanish language,” “French language,” and so on. A perusal of the first couple of hundred “language” hits turned up a few free ones, such as *American Sign Language Learning Aid*, *ASL SLanT Sign Language Teacher 1.06dna*, *American Sign Language Learning Aid (ASLLA) 7.18.02*, *Kurso de Esperanto 2.3*, *Travel Dictionary (Spanish/Portuguese/French/Italian) 2.0*, *Pardon 1.6*, *LingoPack French 2.1*, *Who Wants to Learn French Vocabulary? 1.6*, *Arabic Sounds and Pictures 1.1*, *Choice 1.4 (English, German, French, Italian, Spanish, and Swedish vocabulary)*, and *Hieroglyph (Egyptian) Library*. Most of the dozens of downloadable language learning programs allow you to try them out for free and range in price from \$5 up to \$50. Try out a few so you can find one with the drills and visual aids that suit your preferences.

A few good series are as follows: *Rosetta Stone Language*, *Pimsleu*, *Eurotalk (Talk Now and World Talk)*, *Teach Yourself*, and *Transparent Language (101 Languages of the World, Language Easy Translator, KidSpeak, and Language Now)*. Michel Thomas is one of the more popular language software producers, since he is the teacher to many movie stars. His programs include *Spanish with Michel Thomas*, *French with Michel Thomas*, *German with Michel Thomas*, *Italian with Michel Thomas*, *Spanish Language Builder*, *French Language Builder*, *German Language Builder*, and *Italian Language Builder*.

An exceptionally well-done software series is ECTACO's *Language Teacher*, which comes in Albanian, Arabic, Bulgarian, Chinese, Croatian, Czech, Danish, Dutch, English, Estonian, Farsi, French, German, Greek, Hebrew, Hungarian, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Latin, Polish, Portuguese, Romanian, Russian, Serbian, Spanish, Turkish, and Ukrainian. The program is compatible not only with Windows but also with

several PDA devices, including Toshiba Pocket PC, iPAQ, HP Journada, O2 xda, Casio Cassiopeia, NEC Mobile Pro, Symbol, Dell Axim, Razor Zayo, HP iPaq, Compaq iPaq, T-Mobile, Palm, Palm Pilot, Visor, Treo, Handera, Sony CLIE, and Sony Peg. The device-specific programs range in price from \$49.95 to \$99.95. The *Universal Translator for Windows* (which covers English, Spanish, French, and German) sells for \$49.95. A specialized English/Spanish *Law Enforcement Universal Translator* sells for \$69.95.

ECTACO (31-21 31st Street, Long Island City, NY 11106; www.ectaco.com) is one of the premier companies that manufacture both software and handheld electronic language devices. ECTACO produces two feature-rich electronic devices, The Language Teacher and Partner, each capable of translating up to 30 languages. The devices come in three types: speech-to-speech pocket voice translators, linguistic microcomputers, and business and travel dictionaries.

Two electronic speech-to-speech voice translators are the ECTACO Universal Translator UT-103 (\$249.95) and the ECTACO Partner UT-203 (\$249.95). The Universal Translator has speech recognition software that translates English into Spanish, German, or French. A useful feature is that it plays back in the selected language. To use it you would say something in English such as, “Bring me a cool margarita,” then you push the button and the device repeats the phrase in the selected language. The Partner device translates to and from English, German, and Russian. The ECTACO Partner EP-X5 (\$449.95) is a Polish language model.

Linguistic microcomputers are not only dictionaries but have the capability of text translation, e-mailing, faxing, and digital voice recording as well; they also include a grammar book. They recognize multilingual speech and have touch-sensitive displays. The Partner ER-X5 (\$449.95), a Russian/English bidirectional dictionary, has more than a million words including idioms and medical, technical, legal, and business terms. The 2MB organizer has over 1,100 phrases and can act as an interpreter when you are going to the store or registering at your hotel. It also includes a grammar book, a TOEFL guide with sample tests, flash cards, a list of irregular verbs, a telephone directory, a memo pad, a calendar, a schedule, an anniversary list, a currency converter, and a metric converter. A digital voice recorder can hold up to eight minutes of speech.

A couple of multilingual travel dictionaries are the ECTACO Universal Translator ML101 (\$99.95), which covers 10 languages (Czech, English, French, German, Italian, Polish, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish, and Turkish) and the

ECTACO Universal Translator ML105 (\$99.95) with five languages (Albanian, French, German, Italian, and English). A unique and currently useful product is the Partner MP 4, a four-language (English, Spanish, Arabic, and Chinese) loud-speaker translator, which can be used by military, police, and fire fighters to control large groups. It has a set of phrases like "Freeze!" and "Hands up!"

Several other companies make handheld language devices. You can buy an inexpensive one for between \$20 and \$50 at **Amazon.com** (www.amazon.com). The Franklin TWE-118 Five European Language Translator (\$39.95 list price; \$19.99 sale price) can provide 210,000 translations in English, French, Italian, German, and Spanish with 5,000 conversational phrases. The Seiko DF4033 Six Language Translator, Organizer, and Travel Clock (\$29.99 list price; \$27.88 sale price) can provide 200,000 translations in English, Spanish, French, German, Italian, and Portuguese. It also stores 160 names with addresses and phone numbers and can give time in 32 major world cities. There are several inexpensive language-specific dictionaries such as the Seiko Spanish to English Translator (\$29.99 list price; \$19.99 sale price), and the Franklin TES-118 English/Spanish Translator (\$39.99 list price; \$19.99 sale price). There are even language cards that can be added to your PDA: the Franklin TWE-500109HSMP 5 Language Western European Translator Springboard Module (\$19.99) and the Palm PalmPak Language Translator Card (m125, m130, i705 & m500 series), which covers English, French, Italian, German, and Spanish and sells for \$37.99. A more expensive translator is the Lingo 10 Talk Translator (\$165.99), which translates 60,000 words plus 1,200 useful phrases to and from English, German, French, Italian, Chinese, Japanese, Turkish, Russian, Arabic, and Hebrew. The 10 Talk displays the word in foreign characters and shows how to pronounce it phonetically. A large selection of handheld language devices can also be found at **World Language.Com** (www.worldlanguage.com/). This site boasts that it has 121 handheld dictionary products in 32 languages.

Also at Amazon is an interesting line of children's electronic learning devices, including Leap Frog Spanish Baby Tad (\$24.99 list price; \$14.97 sale price), Fisher-Price Spanish Learning Phone (\$12.99 list price; \$9.98 sale price), and Neurosmith Little Linguist (\$69.99 list price; \$49.99 sale price). Individual language cartridges for the Little Linguist sell for around \$9.99.

A comprehensive site for learning languages is **I Love Languages: Your Guide to Languages on the Net** (www.ilovelanguages.com/). The site is a hodgepodge of over 2,000 links and includes over 170 languages. The site is arranged by *languages, schools, jobs, and commercial*. Under *languages*, many of the sites have a few free beginning lessons. There are a few broken links that need fixing, including *Afrikaans Links* and *Akkadian*. Some sites include audio and graphic instruction; a good example is *Arabic*. If you need help finding a word for translation purposes, there are over 135 links to language dictionaries, including a Tibetan-English dictionary. If you want to immerse yourself in a language, there is a broad selection of language camps, language programs, and language schools listed. If you have the sum-

mers off and you want to pick up a few extra bucks, there are links to *jobs* in other countries as instructors of English as a Second Language.

If you want to find a few quick phrases, you can use **Foreign Language for Travelers** (www.travlang.com/languages). The site is very basic and contains a lot of commercial banners but does provide simple conversational phrases with audio pronunciation for over 90 different languages. The audio portion uses the Real Audio Player software program. The phrases are categorized into *basic words, numbers, shopping/dining, travel, directions, places, time, and dates*. Each pronounced phrase includes both the English and the selected language's pronunciation.

There are several basic conversational phrases at **Transparent Language** (www.transparent.com/languagepages/languages.htm). The languages covered are Arabic, Chinese, Czech, Danish, Dutch, English, Finnish, French, German, Greek, Hebrew, Hungarian, Indonesian, Irish, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Latin, Norwegian, Polish, Portuguese, Romanian, Russian, Spanish, Swahili, Swedish, Tagalog, Thai, Turkish, and Ukrainian. All of the language pages have sections on *Language Overview, Survival Phrases, and Language Products*.

A couple of sites with extensive language information are **Yamada Language Center** (<http://babel.uoregon.edu/YLC/selfstudy.html>) and **E.L. Easton Languages Online** (<http://eleaston.com/>). The Yamada site includes Arabic, Swahili, Dutch, Romanian, Cantonese, Hindi/Urdu, Greek, Ukrainian, Portuguese, Thai, and Farsi.

The Easton site includes Albanian, Chinese, Croatian, English, French, German, Italian, Latin, Polish, Russian, and Spanish.

Each language is divided into various categories. For example, the *Albanian* section is arranged into *Language, Read Albanian, Listen to Albanian, Vocabulary, Quizzes, Mail Lists, Famous Albanians, Albania Today, Country Study, Government, History, Religion, Music, Religion, Travel, and Weather*. The *Chinese* section is arranged into *Grammar, Quizzes, Listen & Speak, Pronunciation, Read & Write, Literature, Dictionaries, The Language Classroom, Distance Education, Study & Work in China, Mail Lists, Business, Calendar, Culture, Feng Shui, History, Movies, Music, Names, Sun Tzu, and Books & Videos*. The *Spanish* section, one of the largest, is arranged into *Test Your Spanish, Courses, Grammar, Quizzes & Tests, Exercises for Textbooks, Dictionaries, Listen, Speak, Read, Write, Why Study Spanish, The Language Classroom, Study In—Country, Distance Education, Key Pals/Mail Lists, Art, Bullfighting, Business, Cervantes, Christmas, Computer, Culture, Dictionaries, Don Quijote, Dialects, Etymology, Famous Hispanics, Food, Holidays, Latin—Spanish, Literature, Movies, Music, Names, Newspapers, Quotes—Proverbs, Radio & TV, Religion, Search Engines, Sports, The U.S., and Weather*.

I cannot cover all the languages spoken throughout the world but I will try to include a few of the more widely spoken that might be used by a person traveling. A few useful Spanish language sites are **Learn Spanish: An Online Tutorial** (www.studyspanish.com/), **About Spanish for Travelers** (<http://spanish.about.com/msub-spanishfortravelers.htm>), **BBCi Languages Spanish** (www.bbc.co.uk/

education/languages/spanish), **Syvum Spanish** (www.syvum.com/squizzes/spanish) and **Webspañol: Span-ish Language Resources Online** (www.geocities.com/Athens/Thebes/6177/).

For Portuguese, try **Syvum Portuguese** (www.syvum.com/squizzes/portuguese/), **Sonia Portuguese** (www.sonia-portuguese.com), **Transparent Language Learn Portuguese** (www.learn-portuguese-language-software.com), **Enchanted Learning Portuguese** (www.enchantedlearning.com/languages/Portuguesedictionary.html), **KidSpace Say Hello in the Portuguese Language** (www.ipl.org/div/kidspace/hello/portuguese.html), **BBCi Talk Portuguese** (www.bbc.co.uk/languages/other/portuguese/talk/), and **Yamada Language Center Self-Study** (http://babel.uoregon.edu/YLC/selfstudy/port_lang.html).

Some useful French language sites include **Syvum French** (www.syvum.com/squizzes/spanish/), **BBC Languages French** (www.bbc.co.uk/education/languages/french/), and **Resources for Learning French** (www.fourmilab.ch/francais/lfrench.html).

Those looking for Italian might go to **E.L. Easton Languages Online Italian** (<http://eleaston.com/italian.html>), **Syvum Italian** (www.syvum.com/squizzes/italian/), **Learning Italian** (www.learningitalian.com), **Centri Studi Italiani** (www.locuta.com/eclass.html), **Enchanted Learning Italian** (www.enchantedlearning.com/themes/italian.shtml), and **BBCi Languages Italian** (www.bbc.co.uk/education/languages/italian/index.shtml).

A few Japanese sites are **Japanese Learning Tools on the Web** (www.sabotenweb.com/boomarks/language.html), **Japanese Online** (www.japanese-online.com/language/), **Tumbleweed's Resources for Learning Japanese** (<http://users.tmok.com/~tumble/japlan.html>), **Nihongo Introduction to Japanese Language** (<http://sp.cis.iwate-u.ac.jp/sp/lesson/j/doc/japanese.html>), and **eJapanese** (www.research-j.org/e-japanese/english/forinter.html). A few Chinese sites include **Learning Chinese Online** (www.csulb.edu/~txie/online.htm), **Conversational Mandarin Chinese Online** (www.csulb.edu/~txie/ccol/content.htm), **OCRAT Chinese Language Learning for English Speakers** (www.ocrat.com), and **Learning Chinese** (www.chinapage.com/learnchinese.html).

Russian sites to check out include **Learning Russian** (<http://learningrussian.com>), **RussNet Russian Language Modules** (www.russnet.org/online.html), **Russian: An Online Interactive Reference Grammar** (www.departments.bucknell.edu/russian/language/), **RusLang** (www.ruslang.com), **Russian Web Tutor** (www.semiology.com/rwt/), and **Russian Language** (www.uni.edu/becker/Russian.html).

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German sites include **German for Travelers** (www.germanfortravellers.com), **About German Language** (<http://german.about.com/mbody.htm>), **E.L. Easton Languages Online German** (<http://eleaston.com/german.html>), **Syvum German** (www.syvum.com/squizzes/german/), **Learning German** (www.dw-world.de/english/0,3367,2547,00.html), **German Language Resources** (www.mckinnonsc.vic.edu.au/la/lote/german/links/gerlink.htm) and **BBCi Languages German** (www.bbc.co.uk/education/languages/german/).

In doing translation, the most widely used site for high school and college students is **Altavista's Babel Fish Translation Service** (<http://world.altavista.com>). A user can cross-translate a block of text of up to 150 words from English to Chinese, English to French, English to German, English to Italian, English to Japanese, English to Korean, English to Portuguese and English to Spanish. An interesting feature is the ability to translate web pages into different languages.

I hope you will find enough phrases to get around wherever you go and can at least order a drink. Remember to bring your suntan lotion. And don't forget to drop me a postcard. *Ciao.* 📮

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