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ROUND TABLE DISCUSSION ON POLYGLOTTERY AND EDUCATION (NEW YORK, 2013)

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The round table discussion on polyglottery and education took place at Baruch College (CUNY) in New York City on September 6, 2013, as part of the international conference *Multilingual Proficiency: Language, Polyglossia and Polyglottery*[1]. The tentative agenda of the discussion distributed among participants in printed form included the following questions:

- What does it mean to be a polyglot?
- What does it mean to know a language?
- How can foreign language expertise be qualified?
- Pluses and minuses of poliglossia vs. monolingualism,
- How do polyglots learn languages?
- How can the knowledge of multiple languages be acquired more efficiently?
- What are the problems of language training in general education?
- How can these problems be dealt with?
- How can polyglottery/polyglossia education models be created and promoted?
- What methods/techniques/textbooks/courses can improve language training?
- Cultural aspects of polyglottal language learning,
- Suggestions for Nigeria[2].

The speakers' names are abbreviated by their initials as indicated below. The utterances whose authors could not be identified from the audio recording are left without initials. The transcriber's and editor's notes are given in square brackets in italics. The transcript preserves the conversational style of the original.

Participants:

AA – Alexander Arguelles
AF – Alfred Friedlander
AR – Alex Rawlings
GK – Grigory Kazakov
HK – Hikaru Kitabayashi

[1] Its proceedings were published as: *International Conference on Multilingual Proficiency: Language, Polyglossia and Polyglottery* (W. Finke & L. Ashley eds.). New York: The American Society of Geolinguistics, 2016. 209 p.

[2] On the first day of the conference Nigerian participants raised questions concerning the language situation in Nigeria.

HR – Harri Ruohonen
LA – Leonard Ashley
MB – Marcelline Block
RM – Ravi Maharjan
TD – Timothy Doner
TU – Takashi Umemoto
WF – Wayne Finke

— GK: We have some preliminary suggestions for discussion, they are in this little paper that you have. [...] We don't have to follow this sequence of questions as they are put here. It's just some ideas to think over, and to discuss. Anyone is welcome to say short notes, your opinions, or to pose some questions, say, from one to five minutes maximum, then somebody else may take the turn of speaking. So, if anybody is willing to start with any particular question of these or to suggest some idea, you are welcome to do that.

— AF: I think the most interesting question is the second one: "What does it mean to know a language?" We've had some suggestions about that. And then, of course, from a pedagogical point of view, some of the questions about the most efficient way of doing language instruction which was alluded to earlier. But, I have no suggestions on any of these things. I'd like to hear others.

— WF: Well, I would ask a simple question: how many polyglots do we have in the world? Is there any number that we can codify?

— HK: You have to define that first.

— AF: Yeah, we have to define a polyglot, exactly.

— LA: The answer to that one is about six billion because everybody manages various dialects and different languages. Then, we would have to draw the line between a dialect, like Deep South and Far West and Valley Girl and Upstate Vermont, and so on. These are actually quite different, and when they get a little more different then we get to a Nigerian sort of situation, tribal languages and so on. But everybody speaks a lot of languages. You know how to talk to babies, you know how to talk on formal occasions…

— AA: Do you talk about speech registers?

— LA: I'm talking about speech domains and registers. I'm talking about the fact that everybody has an idiolect, everybody has a private language. Then they have a social… they have a family language, maybe with vocabulary that is not shared with the outside world. Nicknames for each other and that kind of thing, right? You have a family language, a lovers' language, a neighbourhood language, regional language, a national language, sometimes.

— GK: Here, I presume that we are speaking about polyglots who speak several different languages recognised linguistically as formally separate languages, as foreign languages. Yes, Harri.

— HR: I was just about to make a comment about the definition of a language. Like my professor in Daito Bunka University said that the difference is very vague because it's always a political decision, not a linguistic one. For instance, let's take the Nordic languages: Swedish, Norwegian and Danish. Okay, Danish, while spoken, sounds very different but still, when written it's understandable with, basically, all of these three groups of people. And then, let's take some dialects from China that are actually way further away from one another than the Nordic languages that are defined as languages. And yet, these are defined as dialects because the Chinese government has said so. So, where is the definition?

— AR: I think, the question which Wayne poses is not necessarily to do with how many dialects of a language you can understand because, of course, there are plenty of people in the world who have the ability to speak languages that are completely unrelated and there is quite a number of them, for example, English, Arabic, Chinese, Hausa, etc. I think those people are what we kind of mean by polyglots, right? Not people who understand, like, Boston English and New York English.

— GK: So, we've started with the first question anyway as it appears to be: what does it mean to be a polyglot, who we understand a polyglot might be and who can be considered to be a polyglot. How many languages he must speak or… what could be the measure of polyglottery. So, probably we should start

with the polyglots present… to hear their voices, and then everybody else, to deal with this first question. So, professor, would you say your criterion?

— AA: I've touched on this in my talk already a lot today. To me, again, the whole question of numbers is moot in terms of thinking about the more important things… Like knowing lots of Romance languages – that's one thing, you'd be a polyglot, but knowing, what you've just said, Chinese and Arabic and Hausa – that's… different... So, it's possible to know more closely related languages than it is to know more varied languages, and that brings an issue. But the whole issue of numbers again when you start talking about… needing to know six, and if you know more than 11, you're a hyperpolyglot… That just gets kind of silly to me. When you know 20 languages, you are a super-duper polyglot?

— LA: I can't see how anybody can know 11 languages, and in each language be able to read newspapers in it every day, watch TV in it every day… keep up in the literature, know popular culture and serious culture and so on. It's hard enough to do it in one single language. And, by the way, it's a question of speaking a language when I say *know a language*. The French make that distinction between a *parole*, which is the spoken language, and a *langue*, which is the language you get learning from books. I would suggest that if you want to be a polyglot, you have to be able to speak the language. You have to speak it with native speakers and understand everything they say.

— AR: I agree entirely with what you are saying. And I also agree that it's extremely unlikely, if not almost impossible, to ever speak a second language at the same level you speak your original language. Simply because the logic of how long you've been learning your original language for, compared to second language, proves that that's kind of difficult. However, the problem with that line of thinking is that it denies the fact that you can make significant inroads in second, third, fourth, fifth, etc. languages, which means that you do have an ability to communicate with other people and you can say that you are a polyglot on that basis. That does not mean that you could write a PhD thesis in 15 languages.

— TD: At the same time, too, I think even, taking from Professor Arguelles's speech, it's not necessarily impossible to practise 10, 15 languages a day, especially when you have tools such as Skype or Facebook or whatever it may be. You, theoretically at least, have access to native speakers at any time of the day, any time of the year. In addition to that, too, take from this example of studying Russian for 15 minutes every day: I think, realistically, if you're trying to keep (even if it's an intermediate level, say, in European system, B1 or B2) in a certain language, that is something that is possible. Even in five to ten languages if you put aside a relatively small amount of time but if you do it continually, if you do it regularly. At the same time, too, I think it's very important… how you define speaking a language. Realistically, if you can't ever carry on discussions about philosophy or the tax system or comparative religion in a foreign language, does that mean that you don't know it?

— LA: Well, these famous polyglots, like some cardinal who speaks 60 languages, the famous one in Erard's book. He could probably say the Lord's Prayer in 60 languages or *hello* and *goodbye* in 60 languages. But he couldn't possibly have had a discussion with people of five or six different ages who are native speakers of that language.

— TD: Sure, now, I understand what you are saying. But… Okay, from my personal experience, I've been taking Arabic for three years, two summers of which were spent at universities studying Arabic literature as well as doing an Arabic language course. And I have translated for newspapers in New York, I talked to native speakers on a daily basis but I still probably couldn't discuss things like taxes or… very complex issues of religion. But would that qualify me as not a speaker? […] I think… there is a sharp distinction to be made between knowing the Lord's Prayer, knowing four or five set phrases in a language and actually studying it to a point of seriousness and fluency. Again, it's hard to define fluency but at the same time, too, I think you have to, sort of, lower your standards in a sense that in learning a foreign language, as Alex said, you're never necessarily going to get to a C2 level. That is to say, you're never going to get to a level where you are completely comfortable in a foreign language as you are in your native language. Or, if that is possible, it takes decades of immersion. I understand what you're saying on that point.

— GK: Well, even native speakers may not be able to maintain a conversation about taxes or comparative religion or issues like that.

— AR: I think that an interesting point that came up with Professor Arguelles's speech is that… He talks about a polyglot not just being someone that can talk in a lot of languages but as someone who has a different approach to learning languages and someone that retains languages even if they are exposed to it for only 15 minutes, whereas you are talking about 10 hours a day. You know, I think, Professor Arguelles demonstrates that that's not necessary for everyone. And that's maybe a complete different distinction not on the basis of how many languages you actually do speak that we can kind of explore more to understand what actually is a polyglot.

— AA: To me, the whole aspect of learning has to do with… To give a totally different perspective, we're all here because we're interested in it but… As a way of anecdote, many years ago I had a problem with my computer in my office, and the IT guy came and he was fixing my computer: you know how it is when they're sort of rebooting and… So, he was doing… did what he did, and just leaned back and looked at all my books, looked at my magnificent language-learning library and just went, "Man, you spent your whole life learning languages?!" He was just like, "What a waste!" That was a totally different take on it, but yes, it means that you are devoted to learning languages. So, it's not a question of numbers but… I mean, you can't get away from [the fact that] the term *polyglot* means *many languages.* Many is not just one, two, three… I use the term… cracking the code of learning languages, and I think that is something, I hope, other polyglots will bear out… Again, it's… difficult to learn your first language, your second language, but they do get easier. And after you learnt about five or six, it's not hard anymore. So, you mentioned that, I think, in your talk, and I would be interested in hearing other people, to know more about the anthropology of natural multilingualism, and that is something that's brought up… In places like South Africa, or Nigeria, or India where they may speak 500 languages, you don't find villages where everybody speaks 500 languages, you don't find villages where everybody speaks ten languages but you do find villages where everybody speaks four languages… and five languages. Six – I'm not sure, seven – I don't think so. So, if five or six languages is the boundary of natural multilingualism, five or six languages is also the amount of experience that you need to have in order to not find it difficult anymore. Then there is something, you know, about that area. It's not that you need to know that many because then that's the second question – what does it mean to know the language. But if you're going at languages like conscious study because you love them, because you're interested and passionate and involved in them, and you get that amount of experience so that you know about that, and then it's not hard for you to learn more if you want to and try to. To me, that's sort of getting in the realm of defining a polyglot.

— AF: You know, your saying after the first five or six languages it gets easier reminds me of my… high school Spanish teacher who pronounced that, "In life, the first hundred years are the hardest", but anyway… [*laughter*]. Speaking with the ignorance of a layperson, I know some people here who have spoken against this but, to me… I would distinguish between someone who has a conversational… fine, fluent conversational knowledge of, say, half a dozen languages and someone who may know fewer languages but knows them in a certain, if you will, scholarly sense, who knows the morphology, who knows the structure of the language, the syntax, the history, the cognates, where the language evolved from. To me, you may dismiss… well, not dismiss, but you may contend that… you have sort of polarity or something between linguists and speakers of language, which, as I say… as a lay person I don't. I think, someone who knows two or three languages on a deep scholarly level, all aspects of it, multifaceted knowledge, to me, that's a polyglot. I guess, not everyone agrees with that definition, and you're looking, perhaps, just at the ability to speak and understand a language but I guess, I'm also looking at... You know, five-six-year-old children are quite fluent in languages. But that's not the same level of knowledge to me, there's a different meaning of the kind of language knowledge everyone here (with the exception of me) has from a five or a six-year-old, and I think that counts. But, as I say, you may want to put that into a different category, but I don't.

— HK: Can I make a few comments? We regularly had at these conferences a speaker, Professor Lucia Buttaro, and she specialises in bilingual education, specifically Spanish and English, children of Spanish immigrants receiving English education in the school system in New York, and so forth. And her finding is that with the bilingual education programmes, children are fluent for the playground within six months to a year. But what she also found out: even in case of a fairly closely related language, like Spanish

and English, it took 10–12 years before children whose native language was Spanish were able to reach the same set of academic skills of children whose native language was English… So, her conclusion was that they need real content education in both languages because trying to raise the second language up to the level of the first language and ignoring the other educational necessities of those years of life would result in retarding the development of both languages. And I think that could apply for other language-learning. I myself was learning Japanese like a child, almost exactly the same way. It took six years before I was fully fluent in speaking and about 12 years before I felt comfortable reading Japanese.

— WF: Did you start studying it here, in America, before you went?

— HK: No, after I got there. But when I went there I just decided I would forget that I was 23–24 years old, that I would do it like a baby learns a language. So, it took the same amount of time. It takes a child about five to six years before he's fully conversational in his own language and a child has to be 10 to 12 years old before they are comfortable reading their own language. So, it was the same for me in doing Japanese. So, I would say, we're talking about polyglots and then to what level. And then, if we say, okay, the level is good communication ability then that would be one matter. If we say, okay, it's full equivalence across the board between the two or three or four languages… And I think, full academic equivalence, if we're considering that and we have unrelated languages, perhaps we can consider three languages to be polyglottery. Like, if we are having English, Japanese and Chinese, and they are all equal, and students can perform at an academic level equally in the three, that might be enough. If we're considering playground competence or street smarts, the ability to get along, then maybe we could increase the number from three to five or six, even distantly related. If we're talking about closely related, we could bring it up to eight or nine, I think, with no problem.

— GK: So, there should be a measure for cognitive effort in learning different languages, like distant ones or related ones…

— HK: And then levels, to what extent: you're looking at academic competence and equality… If you're looking for equality, and you're looking for academic competence, you have a seriously more profound problem facing you than if you're looking for communicative ability and, maybe, primary academic competence in one language. But the ability to do research, the ability to communicate in other languages, that's a different matter.

— LA: I think there's another level behind that. It's the level at which, when you're in that foreign language situation, and someone yells at you in Turkish, "Watch out for the car!" If you translate before you jump, you're going to get killed. It's the point where you think in that language, where you actually dreamt in that language. Where you can forget for a while that you speak English and just listen to the people around you and not translate. We have to make a distinction between people like Gunnemark who could translate from this language to that language and so on, but didn't think… He always thought in Swedish and translated it into Russian. Very quickly. And very accurately, I gather. I don't know Russian at all but I know he knew it well, because I presented him once with a document which I had a translation of in English, and he read it right off from that. But there's a difference between being able to translate… I can translate Latin but I couldn't converse in Latin. There was a time when I had to compose in Latin, but then I did it in my head first and translated and put it down, you know…

— AR: I don't think that's a reliable way of measuring a universal ability of learning languages. Because if you take me, for instance, I don't speak a single language that I've learnt to the level that has been described, with like absolute equality with my English. But that doesn't mean, for example, that I haven't dreamt in 12 different languages. I mean, I swear in 12 different languages depending on my mood, you know. I don't think that's the same. Also, I mean I think in 12 different languages simultaneously. If I don't know a word in one language, I switch to another; if I can express something better in one language, I go another way, you know. I don't feel ever like it's 12 different things that I'm translating to and from English. In a way that I think was described very well by Professor Arguelles, I internalise these languages, and they become a part of the way that I go around the world seeing things. So, what you are describing, I understand it but, personally, I don't find it applicable to me and I can't see that, despite learning, etc., it's not to that point, when, you know, I'm exclaiming in Turkish that I've sleek Turkish, to me.

— AA: I don't think "polyglot" should be a word, it's like… a badge of honour, a distinction or something, so we go around saying: "Oh no, you only know two languages, you're not a polyglot". […] Make it somebody who's going at it in a scientific manner, doing the art of science, as Gunnemark said, or… actually trying to explain how it is… You know, if you look at the tables of statistics put out by the Foreign Language Institute, the Defense Language Institute of how many hours it takes people to, basically, in an intensive learning situation, develop a certain level of competence – it's possible to really cut that level down. It's possible not to need to put that much time in if you do it a different way. So, to me, a polyglot is somebody who's figuring that out, is getting better at doing that, learning more efficiently, more effectively, as I said, more permanently.

— AF: You know, at least half a dozen of the questions here allude to education and language. And you brought up the question about learning Japanese as a child. I remember my first day of Russian class: teacher came in, moves on and says, "Nash uchebnik". So, first of all, *nosh* is Yiddish for *sweet* or *candy* or something, so that's what I'm hearing: *nosh*, not *nash* [*spells the words out*], and then *uchebnik*… So, I didn't know – *nash uchebnik* – is he showing us…

— GK: The cover, or the page, or the book itself…

— AF: Yeah, exactly. And, "Eto potolok, stena…" What is *potolok* [*probably points at the ceiling*]?

— GK: No, that was correct, yes.

— AF: Or that, you know, *pol* is for… [*probably points at the floor*].

— GK: *Pol*, yes.

— AF: And he very quickly renounced that, gave it up, as being inefficient. A child is… well, maybe I shouldn't say, concentrating only on learning language. A child's, I guess, learning everything but… What he concluded was – that wasn't working, it was inefficient, and that, as adults who could read, he could show us the alphabet, and then we could see words as well as hear them, and it was just more efficient to look at vocabulary and learn it rather than trying to guess… What he's getting at… You know, they have the same problem in mathematics books… I was just looking at calculus book I'm teaching from, and it shows… whatever it is… x equals t squared [$x = t^2$] and y equals three t plus one [$y = 3t + 1$], and says t is known as the parameter. Well, what makes t the parameter? […] Because it's written on two lines? So, I had the same problem with trying to learn language. I would like to use the advantage of knowing one language to have another language explained to me in the language I already know instead of having to try to figure it out and maybe be wrong, and finally have it corrected.

— LA: I think, immersion is the way to do it. My mother said she learned French because they put her in a convent school where you couldn't get anything to eat unless you could ask for it by name. I think that the combination of necessity, and our keynote speaker made a very excellent point, this one: you have to love the idea, you have to get real pleasure of learning this. You are not doing this so people would say, "Gee, he knows 24 languages". Even if no one knew you knew 24 languages, you would know it and you would be very pleased about it.

— AF: Okay, so that kind of cruelty: predicating or getting food on remembering a word is antithetical to loving the language. That's like teaching someone to swim by shoving him into water. I think that's cruel. That's not the way to do it.

— GK: You will have to have a strict diet in your Polyglot Institute, professor.

— AA: But that's the whole point of the idea that I wanted to say is that… You three are hitting on something right away, it tends to become acrimonious…

— AF: Oh, no-no-no-no! This is purely intellectual, there's no personal anger…

— AA: I know that.

— AF: Professor Ashley, whom I respect as my teacher 52 years ago… There's no acrimony, I'm mostly speaking gladly, so he can hear, and I also do have this tendency, after teaching for nearly 50 years myself, of speaking authoritatively, and I don't mean that… I'm the least authoritative person here, I'm just enunciating a personal opinion, and there's no acrimony whatsoever.

— AA: Okay, but the point is that there are so many different ways of learning languages, so many different approaches, okay. And what works well for some people, doesn't work at all for other people, and that's something… So, when you start saying, "Oh, this is the way to do it", or, "That's the way to do it…" –

that's what happens in most schools that you would go to. It's like, they adapt one approach, and you have to stick with that, and that's what's done there. And I think the beauty of language-learning, foreign language-learning, polyglot-type language-learning is that that's not the case. There are ways, there are things that I could do to learn a language that maybe he [*probably points at somebody*] could do, but he [*probably points at somebody*] couldn't; and there are things that he [*probably points at somebody*] could do and, you know, that would work for you [*probably points at somebody*] as well but wouldn't work for me, depending on the structure of experience. Some people have analytical minds and they like to use their knowledge of native language to get explanations, some people like to be, yes, truly immersed and have to sink or swim, some people like to take that real… start over by natural… immersion. There's no one right way…

— AF: That's the way I speak up to: to have this diversity of ideas… exactly.

— HR: I wanted to make a comment about what Dr Ashley said but I couldn't get a word in on time, so… about forceful nature. My grandfather learnt Russian the same way. When we asked him about how he learnt Russian, he said hunger taught him because he was a POW for three years in the Soviet Union. So, that works. I don't recommend that for anybody, but if it works…

— LA: Immersion.

— TD: Sure, but at the same time, too, think about... The immersion experience is dependent on the fact that you're not going to use your native language, you're not going to use English or whatever it may be and you're simply going to learn from experience as a child does. And I understand that and I think that is a very effective method, and that's what you see in programmes like Rosetta Stone, effectively. There are no grammar explanations, there's nothing with regards to writing or conjugation. You just see a picture of a cat in a box, and you'll see a sentence which you're supposed to interpret as "the cat is inside the box" or "the man walks with a woman", etc. And that makes sense to a certain degree but at the same time, too, I don't think you should drop the fact that you're a cognitively competent adult. At the same time, too, there are such peculiarities in language (simply from the fact that it is human language, it has to be complex) that really can't be described simply with pointing at something and saying a sentence. I mean… in Arabic, for example, there's a dual. Right, so there is singular, plural and then dual for body parts or for just two people, so "the two men walk" is different from "the men (general) walk". And I feel like if somebody were to show a picture of that, it wouldn't necessarily be clear to me right off that, okay, there is a different conjugation set for this. Or if you have a language that is agglutinative or that is ergative… I don't think I would know off the bat from the sentence, "Oh! If something is in the past tense in this language, then I have to switch the conjugation for the subject and then change the object to an oblique case", or something like that. That all seems like something that, honestly, I would benefit more just from having a straight explanation from in English. And I think at the same time, while immersion is important, you shouldn't discard the fact that you can observe languages when it gets very mathematical, not something you just have to guess and fail at, even that is part of the process.

— GK: Dr Fink.

— WF: Question. When did you know you're a weird polyglot?

— TD: I… I don't…

— He doesn't know!

— WF: But you must've felt something somewhere along the line, you had a passion, a drive…

— AR: Okay, so I come from the United Kingdom, we have a national obsession with the game which in this country is called *soccer* [*laughter*]. When my friends at home (and this is honestly something that's dogged my life since the day I was born) talk about what we call *football*, I'm out of the room. I don't understand what's going on, I don't understand who are these people they are talking about. They have this drive, this absolute obsession to know every single fact about this game since the year dot. Now, I've always explained the fact that I decided to learn languages, that I devoted this memorization process not to knowing who was transferred here, what's *Bayern Munich* blah-blah-blah-blah-blah… I just decided to learn languages, you know. And I think everybody has a little field of expertise, little obsession, you know. Maybe someone knows every fact about motorcycles; maybe someone knows loads about German history… Mine is just languages. And I don't think that's like… I'm a weird polyglot… It's just like… I'm trammelling that into something, which actually happens to be useful in a real life context. You know, like

you have the kids at school say, "Why don't I get A's at maths but I have a high score in *Rayman*". It's the same thing; it's just different skills.

— That's a good point.

— GK: So, then our definition of a polyglot is "a person who is devoted to language-learning and to acquisition of as many languages as possible". Yes?

— TU: I have a question for every one of you. Is it really possible for a person to be a polyglot? I mean that I'm Japanese, and my native language is Japanese, and I studied English for a long time. But still I don't understand English articles. The second question: *to know a language* and *to know the language, to know language* – what's the difference? See, if you say *to know language* – that's probably the universal language. *To know A language* – that may be a concrete language. But that's [adjourned?] as knowledge. I don't have English intuition.

— AF: That's what Professor Ashley was talking about: can you really know another language?

— TU: Yeah, so…

— HK: Yes, you can.

— TU: …for Japanese people, you know… to me, it's almost impossible to know the feelings of intuition of native speakers, native English speakers. So, I know nobody, no Japanese, who has studied English for a long time to know English perfectly. So, what I'm asking is: is it really possible for a person to know two languages at exactly the same level?

— WF: I would answer, yes. I'm a dumb jerk from Jersey, but I know French, Spanish, Italian, Portuguese…

— TU: But they are related languages.

— WF: But not to English. Not to American English. He was in America. He added languages to his repertoire, and he mastered them to a very good degree, right? Nothing to do with American English. I mean, if you have… drive, passion, feeling, and you want to learn…

— LA: The reward is in the pleasure of learning. Not in the utility of it…

— GK: Right?

— HK: Well, I think it does have utility.

— LA: …prestige of that particular language. You might just as well be very interested in some minor African language that's about to go extinct and you want to learn it. I learned Cornish because I wanted to write about… I was writing about names and I wanted to find some area where I could do all the names, where the language was fixed, dead; and translate them: all the place names, all the personal names in Cornwall are translatable into English. They are no commemorative names, they are all descriptives. So, there was a little weirdness about it, because Cornish is a dead language. Nobody spoke it natively since 1978, the last native speaker. But now I was able to go and talk to people in Australia, because they had learned Cornish, too, there was a kick, they thought they'd try that… but I think there were only four little plays in Cornish – that's the literature. So, to learn the literature of English is impossible, it's so vast. Nobody has read the entire English dictionary, no one. Not even the editors!

— AF: What about Joseph Conrad, you read *Heart of Darkness*, and I think he was Polish-speaking, was he? Very few of us can match his English.

— [*unclear, HK and MB make comments*]

— GK: Professor, yeah.

— AA: You've raised an interesting point earlier, there are exceptions: you can kind of tell the difference between somebody who has a high school education to somebody who's been to college, somebody who's been to college to somebody who's been to graduate school. The longer you're educated in your native language, the better you know it. And, so, part of the answer (what you were saying to a certain extent) – no foreign language… You're never going to catch up to that but you can transfer a lot in a language, you know. You can transfer the experience. And who says that you need to know it to that exact same level? I think studies of truly multilingual people, bilingual people… show that they don't use them to the exact same level. They use, maybe, this language in these circumstances and that language in those circumstances. I don't think it's true… Yes, Japanese and English are as different as you can get, so your average Japanese is not going to ever be able to learn English well. But Japanese who has passion for lan-

guage, once the language goes with certain approach, can certainly get quite-quite good at it. I think we have an example of somebody going the other way here, of somebody learning Japa… I was in Korea for nine years… I don't speak Korean like a Korean but I can fully function in it. And I know people, I know lots of people… not lots but a handful of people who, like, became Korean citizens, the way he became a Japanese citizen, who've been there for 10–12 years…

— HK: Forty.

— AA: And they all say the same thing that it takes about 12 years, 15 years to feel truly comfortable in the language and to be able to know it and to use it in that way.

— TU: In Japanese there is a word *ga* and *wa*, it's like a…

— TD: Subject versus topic.

— TU: Yeah, *ga* and *wa*. All the native Japanese can tell when to use *ga*, when to use *wa*. I cannot explain why *ga* is used here, why *wa* is used *here*. It's not education. Even the homeless people who have never been educated in Japanese, can tell.

— AR: But there must be a rule, right?

— TD: One is a subject marker, one is a topic marker.

— TU: …who have studied Japanese for a long time cannot really properly place… which word should be used, you know. I can't really explain it, I just say it.

— WF: But a Japanese person would know it instinctively.

— TU: Distinctive, yes, they are distinctive.

— AF: Can I ask a question? I don't know if anyone knows about this, but I've long been fascinated… Sometimes on the elevator, I'm listening… And there are students… And they say a couple of things in English, and all of a sudden one responds in Spanish, and then the other responds in Spanish, and it goes back and forth… Sometimes with Chinese students, more often with Spanish… What's going on? How do they know when to... Is it just easier or more comfortable to say a certain kind of expression in one language than in the other? What's going on there?

— HR: I can say when it comes to English and Finnish, for instance… As I told you, I went to IB high school, meaning that all my subjects were taught in English, excluding other languages. Especially there we learned that there are just different languages, there are different strengths. There are more expressive words in English, sometimes, than in Finnish, and vice versa. […] And sometimes the English word just describes the situation first of all shorter and probably more accurately. So we might straight use the English word or the finlandization of the word. So, it's not about when it's appropriate and when it's not but when it's easier to describe something.

— AF: When we borrow phrases like (forgive my French pronunciation) *joie de vivre* or something… There are certain expressions that we use, specific expressions that we adapt because… just what you said. What about in conversation when… all of a sudden they are talking in different language? I just find that fascinating.

— TD: There is a sociolinguistic aspect to it as well. I was talking to a professor of MIT recently who had done a research specifically in code-switching, and he'd been recording conversations on the subway in New York City. And he was listening to a conversation of people who were code-switching between English and Spanish. And what he found, let's say, over five minutes of conversation, these two women were talking and switching to Spanish every time they wanted to say something negative. Every time they wanted to complain, every time they wanted to say they weren't happy – they used Spanish. Every time they talked about a positive emotion: they were happy, they were feeling generous, whatever it was, it was a relatively normal conversation – they would switch into English. And that obviously has the connotation: okay, in this country English is perceived as, like, the language of success, whereas Spanish is the minority language, the language of… However you want to interpret it. And you can see that in a lot of other scenarios, too, for example, in the Arab world. Right, there is a very-very sharp diglossic distinction between dialects, which are spoken at home, on the streets, etc., and the written language. Some people say it's akin to normal English speech as we might speak it today and Shakespeare English. I personally don't agree with that but it gives you the idea that one is incredibly formal or might be old-fashioned and kind of stiff-sounding and the other seems like natural speech. And in the Arab media this obvious-

ly causes a huge problem because when you're doing talk-shows – do people speak naturally? Do they speak with this very formal informative language? And part of the solution has been to come up with this mixture called [*pronounces the term in Arabic*] which is like *the dialect of intellectuals,* the translation of it. And we watched a video in an Arabic class of mine and we saw this woman switching between the formal language and Egyptian dialect, and every time she did it, it was associated with an emotion. So, when she was quoting a friend… she would switch into Egyptian. When she was talking about emotion, she would also speak in Egyptian, because that's something that's… You know, it touches you to your core. When she wanted to talk about things that, let's say, have less of an emotional pull on her, just like a book she had read or, I don't know, her studies abroad; she would switch into formal Arabic. So that's, as you can see, a very sharp sociolinguistic distinction between, like, the connotation that each language has.

— GK: Marcelline, please.

— MB: It's okay, I just wanted to build on that point because that's actually relevant to my topic of research in terms of the French… the southern dialect, the *accent du midi,* the language of Marseille in particular. There are these films which were made in the 1930s, *The Marseille Trilogy* by Marcel Pagnol. And whenever the characters go into… Whenever they have an emotional reaction to something – they'll immediately switch into the old language, to Provençal. You know, when something emotional happens, like there is a woman that might be pregnant out of wedlock, and so the parents are screaming, they immediately switch codes into the ancient language versus the formal French, the Parisian French that is sort of associated with educated classes. And a lot of scholars who research it really discuss how the emotion… the language of your heart versus… I mean, the instinct is to switch into this language which can't be expressed in sort of the formal standard French. You know, you're talking about your child, you're talking about your son, your daughter, you know… Their future, their lives, and immediately they start switching into the Provençal.

— AA: I think emotion is definitely the key. I have a good friend, she's the daughter of American missionaries in Korea, she was born in Korea and she grew up there… She's truly totally bilingual in Korean and English. And so is her sister. My friend looks like the typical Irish girl with red hair and freckles; and her sister is adopted, she's African-American. And they speak English almost all the time to each other, but when they get in a fight and have a bad relationship – they switch to Korean. I've seen them do this on the subway in Seoul… and just the reaction of, like, the populace watching these two foreign ladies who all of a sudden start fighting, yelling at each other in Korean, and nobody knows what to do [*laughter*]. But it has to do with emotion, yeah.

— GK: Mr. Ruohonen.

— HR: Thank you. As a reaction to what Timothy said, actually now that I think about it, it makes perfect sense. My friend Yoshi over here: sometimes we speak English, sometimes we speak Japanese… But now that I think about it, whenever I bitch, I bitch in English. And I would prefer to bitch in Finnish, but nobody… Well, I have only one person in my sort of social group, as we speak, now living in Japan who speaks Finnish. So, I've become rather fluent in bitching in English. And I do it, sometimes, in Japanese but for me it's less powerful that way, so I prefer to bitch in English. And I didn't even think about it until it was mentioned here. Answering Dr Umemoto's question here, I think that one can become fluent in a foreign language, even though not being a bilingual person by birth. And I don't know… I don't like to use superlatives, and I don't want to brag about myself, but I would say that I am at a comfortable level of English to call myself perfectly bilingual. Even though sometimes I make mistakes, but that's not because I didn't know, it was just because I had a brain fart; and that just happens to everybody. And that even happens to me in Finnish. Maybe not as much, but sometimes… I forget single words, but it doesn't mean that I didn't know the word, and I didn't know how to work myself around it. If I come to a dead end – that usually doesn't happen. Usually, if I forget a word, I'm like, "Okay, so, this is what I mean", and just go around it. I started to study English when I was seven, so it was not spoken to me when I was at home. And yet I still consider myself bilingual, even though I make mistakes with *he* and *she*, because in Finnish there is no distinction. So, if I'm talking about my mother's father – if the link is a woman, I might say *she*, even though I mean *he*. And then I correct myself, because it's just naturally coming out, because the

link is my mother who is a female. But it's not that I didn't know how it goes, it's just… When my mouth is quicker than my brain, sometimes this happens.

— AA: Going back to the idea of knowing a language, I think you and even you, sir, I don't know your name…

— [*somebody says the name*]

— AA: …you said you're not comfortable. But to me, the proof that you do know English (maybe not as well as those of us here who are native speakers, but…) just to a perfectly adequate functional level is the fact that you've been in the conference all day in English carrying on in it, and to me that question what it means to know a language… That temporal factor can enter in. I mean, I remember when I was first doing immersion experiences in some languages. After an hour or so you can get really tired. I mean, if you're putting a lot of energy into learning a language. You're not putting energy. Maybe you have accents, maybe you're using articles wrong, maybe you make more mistakes than we do, but you're not putting energy into it right now. You're using it, you're functioning in it. And that's why, you know, a number of us who are polyglots we're having conversations in different languages, and when I do that… I mean, I love to do that, but I like to stay in one language for a while, you know. At least five minutes or so. I've been with other polyglots, and they like to keep switching languages every 30 seconds or so, and that does make me kind of uncomfortable, because I do think that some people learn languages really almost by a sort of phrasebook methodology where they're just memorizing certain things that they can say. Or they are preparing themselves for what they know they are going to converse about on a regular daily basis, and I have met people like that. You first start talking, and you think, "Hey, this person speaks this language pretty well", and then you realise after five or ten minutes they are talked out. They've said everything that they can say, they don't have anything more, you know. So… I mean… You're not going to be perfect, no. If you learn a foreign language as an adult, the odds that you are ever going to speak it perfectly are not zero, but they are pretty close to that. It's a rare individual who can do that under various circumstances. But it's not necessary in order to use it functionally and fully.

— LA: Even than… I spoke English originally, and I learned American at the age of 20 when I went to American university for graduate school, and I arrived speaking [*switches to a hyperbolic British accent*] *very much like this*, with my handkerchief up my sleeve. And people thought that if you wake this guy up in the middle of the night, he'll be human like anybody else. And it was very difficult at first, because English and American are rather alike but very different. And people would say, "Will you do this?", and I would say, "I will do". And they would look at you, right? And Americans can't get *should* and *would* straight or *shall* and *will*. And they use *got* and *have* in weird ways. And, of course, the spelling is crazy. Americans spell *harbour* with an *-or* but *glamour* – *-our*. There is no *x* in *connection*, in American. There is an *x* in *crucifix*. So, you just learn how to do that. But when I get very angry, I scream in English.

— WF: British English?

— AF: Can I ask if any of you have any comments on this: my former, now retired chairman [*name, unclear*] once said that he noticed that when foreign students were speaking to him in English… they would count in their own language. And he conjectured that was because, maybe not in Arabic but otherwise… Maybe even in Arabic… The symbols for one, two, three, four… The symbols are universal, and so, even though they speak in English, they would count in a different language. Does anyone have any experience with that?

— LA: I've always liked the fact, when I was reading French, the dates were all in American: 1948, you know. The French way of counting – *quatre-vingt-dix*. That's crazy. There is an easier way to say that.

— GK: Marcelline.

— MB: Oh, I just wanted to say my mother is from France…

— WF: She's as French as a French bread and butter. I know her.

— MB: But she counts in French… I mean, she's completely fluent in English and has been here for more than half of her life… I mean, she's an American citizen and everything, but she definitely will always count in French.

— AF: And you… Would you speculate that that's the reason that she's seeing the same symbols, so…

— MB: Not sure…

— AF: …she uses them in the same way she always did?

— MB: I don't know, I can ask her, but she'll definitely always count the numbers in French.

— WF: I mean, the numbers are international. Anyone can see a number *four*, they know it's *four*, how they express that word for *four*…

— AF: But would you persist in your original way of reading the *four*, even though you're speaking in a different language?

— AA: You're not the first person to make this observation. I don't have an answer for you, but… You're not the first person to make this observation. We, people, do tend to do that.

— LA: It's easier to say *ninety* than *four times twenty plus ten*…

— WF: But then there are also connotations. It was in Chinese, in Japanese – the number *four*, however you say it, is like the word *death*; so you could not go to a hospital room and look for *four twenty-four.*

— AF: Some buildings because of superstition don't have a 13th floor.

— WF: I mean, he keeps looking in my building – I don't have a 13th floor, we don't have it.

— GK: No, there was no C13 in my airplane when I arrived here. All right, tovarishi, let's move a little bit into the area of language education. So, what could polyglottery suggest in terms of practical advice to our education systems or language training programmes and institutions?

— LA: Learn the spoken language rather than the written language. Learn the language and you'll learn the grammar. Don't start with trying to read the grammar to the language.

— AR: I disagree.

— LA: Talk to native speakers of all kinds, but most of all, I'm going to say in my paper tomorrow, if you're going to learn American – decide where you're going to use your American: on the West Coast or the East Coast, the Deep South, the Middle West or whatever… What social and economic group you're going to talk to – and learn that kind of American, because we speak all kinds.

— AF: Yeah, but perversely enough language-learning in this country (I don't know about other countries) is going in the opposite direction: it's being de-emphasised. You know, halfways and de-emphasis in foreign languages – it's horrible.

— GK: Well, Alex, you wanted to say something, to disagree with…

— AR: Sorry, just to take up your point… So, you think you should learn grammar afterwards?

— LA: You will learn it good, if you start talking to native speakers. When, say, señorita Hankens comes in the room and starts reading in the Spanish course, beginning Spanish. We should never be beginning Spanish in college; we should get beginning Spanish in grade school. By the time you get to college, they should be teaching you Spanish literature and culture in Spanish, not teaching you the words for *go* and *sit* and *stand* and so on. But she comes in and she starts reading the names, and somebody says, "Here!" And she says, "No". And somebody says, "Present!", and she goes, you know, "A little longer". "Presente!" – "That's right". She never spoke a word of English to us. We would stop her in the corridor – she wouldn't speak to you in English. She spoke only Spanish. Unfortunately, she taught *Spanish like this* [*lisping*]. Which, when I went to Cuba, people laughed in the streets at me, it's just ridiculous.

— WF: I was a witness, it is true [*laughter*].

— HR: That is the real Spanish!

— AR: With regard to the question of "how we can take polyglottery towards the education system", I think it's very difficult to deny that language-teaching in every single country is in huge crisis at the moment. This is for a number of reasons, so… First of all, I think people go into classrooms in schools expecting learning a language to be like learning a science, that you can be taught it, which I think is wrong. Language-learning is far more than an hour and 20 minutes a week, or however long you get. And, interestingly, let's look at the countries where you actually do get an enormous amount of kids leaving school speaking extremely good English, like in Finland. It often comes down to the fact that they don't have dubbed films, they have subtitles. There's more than just what's going on in the classroom. Those are exposed outside, they have plenty of reasons to, you know, autodidactly, if you like, but independently keep these languages going. In the United Kingdom and possibly in the United States as well, we don't have exposure to foreign languages in a day-to-day life. It

doesn't exist. We don't have signs on the Underground, we don't have television programmes in foreign languages…

— LA: [*unclear*] Welsh programmes. I tried to learn Welsh watching BBC.

— AR: In Wales?

— LA: Yep.

— AR: Not in the rest of the country. Like… No.

— LA: In London.

— AR: There's no Welsh in London.

— LA: Well, there was in the seventies when I was there.

— AR: I was born in the nineties [*laughter*]. And I've lived there since then.

— LA: And by the way, people in Wales would speak to me in English, once they discovered I was American. But if they'd thought I was English, they would insist and speak in Welsh in those days. And Welsh is where you have *bread and butter:* the word *and* has to agree in number and gender with the stronger of the two nouns.

— AR: People in Wales tend to know Welsh pretty well. Actually for similar reasons that I think people outside of England learn foreign languages pretty well, which is that Welsh language families have Welsh around them as well. There are signs in Welsh, there is Welsh outside the language classroom, and they take that going. People in England do not learn French when they do the minimum requirement which isn't even a requirement anymore, because it is a school subject. They learn to pass an exam. People in Holland who learn English, by the age of 16, speak English on a high enough level to be able to take history and geography in English. Why? Because they're exposed to it. Because they have an opportunity to learn it independently. So, this way raises a wide question: can languages be taught or do they have to be learnt? And then what is the role of the school in encouraging people to learn languages rather than expect to be taught them?

— Hear, hear.

— TD: That's a very good point. I spent a summer in Berlin in a programme for European kids who learn German, and, out of 150 kids, maybe 10 or so were native English speakers, either from the United States or from the United Kingdom. Outside of the other 140, all spoke English at an intermediate level and above. And all of them said that they'd learned it through listening to music, watching TV-shows, watching movies. And, interestingly enough, all these kids who were going through German classes couldn't really communicate in German. Which was, obviously, to the detriment of the 10, whatever, English speakers there; but all of them were practising English with each other. Which raises a very interesting point, which is, realistically, what are we doing wrong in this country? If everybody from Slovenia to Poland to Croatia (at least in this programme) is speaking English at idiomatic level – what is that we're missing out here? I think there was a really good point, like… At least I'm going to speak from my experience but… In what I've done, I really do have to keep up with whatever language I've learned in class-time with radio broadcasts, with watching movies, watching TV. And I think that's been the only real scenario that is making the language come alive, in which I've actually learned to speak it at a comfortable level. I think, realistically, learning languages for the sake of passing a test really doesn't cut it. And, you see, especially in this country that there is such a drive towards monolingualism, that you are even removed yet another space from achieving any sort of conversational fluency or even just comfortability in the language.

— WF: Timothy, why do you study languages?

— TD: As Alex said earlier (I thought this was a great explanation), some people like science, some people like history, I…

— WF: So, it's a personal choice.

— TD: It's personal, yes, but also at the same time, too, I think (especially growing up in a city like New York) you do have so many opportunities to speak English. And I think so many people come to this country (but also very specifically this city) thinking, "I have to learn English". People only speak English, and I think, in a lot of ways, that creates bad stereotypes about Americans abroad or about English speakers. And realistically, I think, as many other speakers have touched on, if you learn a foreign language, you

start to adopt a new personality. You start to understand from a better perspective how politeness works in a foreign language, or how you need to have some sort of appreciation of history and literature, as you get more and more competent or fluent in it. And I think, realistically, all that is fascinating. For me, it's fascinating to see the interplay between history and language… To see sociolinguistics and everything in that perspective. So, for me, that's just been a personal interest; and it's unfortunate more people don't have that.

— WF: What first turned you on to languages? I'll tell you my case. I was a little dog from New Jersey, monster kid; and I had… the crystal radio – a little thing that had no electricity, and you put up a big antenna up in the backyard, and here – Rrrrrr-radio Canada, and here – Rrrrrr-radio Moscow… It was fascinating – what are these people talking about? That's how I got started… a century ago.

— AF: You know, as you were saying, some people memorise football scores… and some people memorise languages.

— GK: Kitabayashi-sensei.

— WF: Yeah, why did you go to Japan and then why did you abandon us?

— GK: Oh, you need some preparation. Ravi, yes.

— RM: May I make a comment on why people learn languages? In a country like Nepal, you know, they learn English and Nepali to get opportunities to make their career. And they never learn other languages because of the interest. In a country like Nepal, they learn only those languages, from which they can get better opportunities. So, people don't learn languages to research, to study… People don't say, "I want to learn this language because I want to know their culture", no.

— WF: Right, it becomes a requirement…

— RM: Yes.

— WF: …and then a mandatory, a compulsory requirement.

— LA: And then you forget it, like the Irish are forced to learn Irish, and nobody uses it. I once wrote, "All the people who speak Gaelic could be put in one football stadium"… I could think of no more horrible thought. A football stadium for the Irish speakers! They're forced to learn it in school, and they forget about it. You have to use it, you have to want to use it. You have to love the language but also… Professor Fink is a person of non-Hispanic background who learns the language and is perfectly good in it in Spain, in Cuba – all kinds of Spanish. As opposed to most people who teach Spanish in America, who are native speakers of Spanish, who may be not that good in Spanish to start with and whose English is so bad that they convince the students that it is impossible to learn a foreign language well. So, what we should do is have people who have learned foreign languages teach foreign languages showing that they are Finnish and they can speak American. Therefore, you can learn Finnish.

— HR: I wouldn't go that far [*laughter*].

— LA: Well, isn't it much more impressive that this gentleman speaks Korean or something, or this guy from New Jersey speaks Spanish, or this guy from America speaks Japanese than someone who is Japanese who speaks Japanese? Probably they speak it equally well by now. He's become a Japanese citizen, professor in a Japanese university…

— GK: Kitabayashi-sensei, stage for you.

— HK: I have a couple of points. I think, they are related to each other somehow. First, one key phrase in this morning that stuck in my mind was *language-learning*. The graduate school programme I managed for a long time – we have a course in English education, so we train future teachers of English. But the emphasis is education. I've never heard an English education teacher talk about language-learning. I've always heard them talk about language-teaching. And I think language-teaching is rather well-developed: there are many techniques and so forth; but language-learning would appear to me to be seriously defective. It hasn't been studied properly. Another thing I'd like to say again that I commented on this morning: polyglottery does have practical applications. My intellectual bias is that all knowledge is connected. All knowledge has importance, if you only know where to look for it. And I could immediately think about the study of languages, it would allow a better writing of history, for instance. The monolingual approach is very serious. There are very serious problems with the monolingual approach when we write history. But that's almost all of the history that's coming out. Also, for understanding networks, social networks:

a world with networks doesn't respect linguistic boundaries, and for understanding culture. There are so many areas that I see practical applications if people would only study. If you have theory, if you have research – the practical approaches flow from that. You'll have careers developing that we can't imagine now because we haven't done the research to make those careers possible. So, I don't think that we have to entirely rely on love. We can also, in part, rely on a more selfish interest, too. One other comment I have… Earlier today there was something about communicative teaching or communicative method… And I happened to live in Japan in a period where I saw the birth of the communicative method. And I saw its development, and it was tied in with Chomsky's early work, generative grammar, the primacy of the native speaker: the native speaker has to be right. And that's obviously wrong, we know it from our personal experiences that it's wrong. What it did was – it meant that people who did not know the language of the student that they were teaching to could have a theoretical justification for being a teacher of that language. With the communicative theory, as it was put into practice in Japan, it meant that a teacher of English in Japan did not have to know Japanese. And I think… my own experience is that this is a terribly inefficient way of carrying out any language programme (and I've managed in undergraduate and graduate school programmes). But that's a very popular way of teaching Japanese, too.

— GK: Professor Arguelles, you wanted to make a note?

— AA: Oh, there are a couple of things that I've been thinking about as people jumped in. Most recently, sir, what you've said about, you know, being maybe more impressive than this gentleman who speaks Japanese and something else, but… The question was raised earlier by a Japanese gentleman over there about… speaking languages equally, and the idea of perfection. I think you threw that out, too. To me, the idea of really wanting to speak another language and pass yourself off as a native speaker is something, I think, a lot of people really would like to do. But I, actually, do not like to do that because in my experience when you sound exactly like you're a native speaker, there's a lot of expectations… They are not going to cut you any slack, if you make any, sort of, social *faux pas.* If you have a slight foreign accent on the other hand, people will appreciate the fact that you have learned that language really well, and they'll know that you're not from there, and they won't expect you to be from there.

— LA: It depends on the accent. There are some accents that people should never lose. The Southern Belle accent is very attractive in women only. The French accent – some people hate, and some people think it's very sexy. There are certain accents that people think sound stupid or backward or whatever. There are all kinds of prejudices, and it varies on the basis of your native language. I think that Afrikaans and Yiddish sound very unpleasant, but that's because I speak English, I think [*laughter*]. People tell me who don't speak English natively that it's so flat; and I said, "Well, I'm aware of that because when I spoke British, as opposed to English [*meant American*], it was all up and down like this".

— WF: Give an example.

— LA: [*very articulate British impersonation*] *…no example is possible in this time* – that kind of thing. I've seen cousins of mine pick up this stuff. One of them went to Harrow, which is a British school. My mother had the same accent and, of course, she never went to a public school but she spoke Harrow English, where all the A's are E's.

— WF: Give an example!

— LA: *Thet is kerrect…* that sort of thing. She said *gell* for *girl.* All right, so, he spoke that to start with and then he went to Oxford, where you [*imitates the accent*] *HIT on a certain word and then you run along to the end of the sentence, and then you slow down and deliver the last word.* And when Americans look at people speaking British like that, they kind of riot with it… But when, finally, to add to this, my cousin Maurice decided he had to marry… So, he bought a commission in the lifeguards which are not at the beach but in those cuirasses and ponytail hats and all that stuff. And [*imitates*] *what THEY do is they EMPHASISE a word and then PUNCH and then they swallow the rest of it…* And so, you're on this roller coaster thing, and then it bumps along. And so, an American compared to that is just flat. Speaking French, you must've realised that American sounds very flat. And British, depending on the dialect, it goes to different tunes.

— AR: You see, you've just said, "Depending on the dialect, it goes to different tunes". To me, you're going like this [*very flat*].

— LA: [*heavily articulated British*] "Are you all right?" You can't say [*very flat*], "Are you all right?" The British say, [*heavily articulated British*] "Are you all right? You must be joking!" [*laughter*] When this gentleman was speaking this morning about the influence of… languages, I was thinking about Geordie, which is a dialect I know they speak it in Newcastle. I'll never be back in Newcastle. But it has a Scandinavian note to it. It has that trochaic… You know, if you pinch a Swede, he goes *ahhhhh-ooooooch*… And, so, the Geordies speak like that and they have weird things… If I'm talking to a stranger, and let's say, Alex is my brother, I would say *our Alex* meaning *my brother Alex*. But if I'm talking to one of the family, I say *wor Alex* which means *our Alex* also, but it's a different word. And then use Scottish words like *bairn* for *child*, right? I could never quite get it right. My British friend said, "It sounds a little bit too Irish, why don't you try to learn Scouse?" Scouse is Liverpool, and it's very Irish.

— AA: Another note getting back to it, that sort of thing I was asking before about why people might want to start learning languages, so… To a certain, real degree I can really resonate with my namesake across the table, across the pond. You know, I've just never understood… I love running and swimming but organised sports… I just never got it, and, you know, people like to learn that… To a certain sense learning languages is just your choice of what you do, but in my case I had a real push. And then my father is polyglot, and I grew up in a house that was full of books in different languages. And on a few occasions I've found myself without studying materials or reading materials in other languages like staying in my uncle's house; and my uncle is a monoglot: he only has books in English and… I started reading some books and when I spent a couple of days just reading English, I started to get this, sort of, vapid feeling as if I'm not getting, you know… It's like I'm eating almost junk food and not getting any real sustenance. So, when you have exposure to them, and you see that there are different ways of phrasing things and different ways of knowing things… Almost when it's taken away, you feel the real lack of that. To me, I don't think I really had any choice. My father never pushed me or made me do that but by rearing me that way, by taking me around the world when I was a kid and showing me that you could speak lots of different languages – to not do that would almost be like choosing to be handicapped, choosing just to have one single perspective, when there are lots of perspectives out there. And so, as a result, I rarely need books in English. I read far more in German and French than I do in English. And when I do pick up a book and read it in English, every so often I can go back and enjoy a real work of literature or something, it's just… It's not satisfying. It's not filling. It's not like eating real food.

— GK: Anybody has a brainwave or a revelation like notes to make before we end this session, so you are free to say that at this point.

— HR: Okay, did we answer the question "what does it mean to know a language"? Then I'd like to elaborate on that one, because many people say that if they sit in a lesson just once, they claim that, "Ah, okay, I know the language". But I'm very critical about myself and my own language ability. Whenever people ask me, "How many languages do you speak?" I always say, "Two and a half, but I've studied five". And what I mean is… I don't remember who mentioned it, maybe it was Kitabayashi-sensei, who said that when you're able to work on an academic level with a language – to me that is the definition. If you can do that, if you can pull that off – that means that you know the language. When it comes to everyday conversation, my level of Japanese… I get by, but whenever the conversation moves out of my comfort zone, I drop like a rock. I can't keep up, I get confused and scared and I panic. I go like [*gibberish*]. It's like I lose all my languages. But with English, since I've been studying it… Even before I came to Japan, I took very many courses. Actually there was a subject called North American Studies in my university, and the professor is Finnish-American (meaning all of her four grandparents were immigrants from Finland to America, and now she has moved back to Finland). It means she speaks Finnish but with a very-very strong American accent. English is her first language by no comparison, and she usually teaches in English. So, I've used it academically for many-many years – no problem. But I hope that I gain the ability, one day, with Japanese. I'm just not assuming it's going to happen in quicker than five years. So, I would draw the line in academic use of language. Okay, thanks.

— WF: May I ask an impertinent question?

— Yes, sir.

— WF: How good is Hikaru's Japanese?

— HR: I don't use superlatives but…

— WF: Excellent, superb?

— HR: Perfect. I don't use the word often but perfect. I've never seen a situation… I've been around him a lot, and I've never seen a situation where he couldn't manage in Japanese.

— AR: So, can I now just ask how would you classify your knowledge of Japanese?

— WF: Thank you.

— HK: It's not perfect.

— AR: Exactly.

— HR: Okay, spoken Japanese.

— HK: But it depends. Like, in terms of street smarts, yes, it's perfect. In terms of emotion, it's perfect. The ability to understand another person's feelings and to see the world from the other person's viewpoint, it's perfect.

— WF: And you said you've been like 35 years there?

— HK: Forty.

— WF: I see.

— HK: The ability to write in Japanese, that has never been something that I put high priority on. I do force myself occasionally to write, but it's with a help of a word-processing programme. I couldn't do it by hand. But I'm forcing Harri to learn how to write Japanese, because he has to be better than I am if he's going to get a job…

— HR: I'm going to starve to death.

— AR: You see, because I've always thought as a language learner, you're always far more aware of what you don't know than what you do. That's why if, for example, you ask him what his teacher's Japanese is like, he says, "Perfect". Then you ask the actual person what his Japanese is like, and he says, "Well, not perfect". There's always something somewhere that you don't quite…

— HK: The writing skills are still, perhaps, no better than a 12-year-old. The reading skills are probably, like, 15-year-old. Speaking, listening – I think those are native.

— HR: And I did correct myself by saying *spoken*.

— HK: Well, that's absolutely right to do that.

— TD: …suggestions for Nigeria? As the last point.

— GK: The Nigerian lady is not even here! So, we're not going to discuss that.

— WF: One will be back tomorrow.

— GK: Tomorrow we'll see. So, sires, let me conclude this session. So, what have we arrived at? To be a polyglot – I would suggest this generalised definition – it's the one who loves to learn languages and who knows how to do that (I don't know if everybody is happy with that working definition). Well, as for the measuring of language knowledge – I don't know how to do that, but probably it's more like doing with the cognitive efforts of the person doing different languages rather than with the fixed numbers of particular languages. As for the practical applications in language training, so that's first – more exposure to the language in everyday life, then shifting from the language-teaching paradigm to the language-learning paradigm. So, the role of the teacher being like a language-learning consultant, and to enthuse students to make them more interested in the language. All right, have I missed something?

— LA: Yes, you didn't say something in American, like, "We're going to wrap it up".

— HR: Okay… I'd like to disagree… I'm not passionate about languages. I'm only passionate about "what can I do with it?" Like, to me learning a language – I couldn't care less. I love English because of what I can do with it. I love Finnish because of what I can do with it and what I can appreciate about it. I like Japanese because of what I'm not able to do yet but would like to be able to do. But languages themselves are not a passion of mine, even though I love learning languages. But never for the sake of learning languages but always for some purpose.

— GK: So, our round-table is finished. Thank you all very much. I enjoyed it enormously. I hope you did so also.