

LEARNING LANGUAGES FOR MAGIC

**A Handbook to the Study of
Languages for the Occult
Practitioner**

Patrick Dunn

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Chapter I: What does Studying a Language have to do with Magic?

If you grew up in most of the United States, you probably have had several years of a "foreign" language in school. For most of you, that was Spanish, but for others it may be French, German, or Italian, or even a less commonly studied language like Japanese or Chinese. Perhaps you can speak that language now and feel quite comfortable reading it. But my guess is, just from knowing the statistics of American second language instruction, that you can remember almost none of it and do not feel comfortable reading it at all.

My readers in other countries may have had more luck, because they started earlier and used more effective instructional techniques (like immersion) rather than the commonly used techniques in the U.S. (grammar translation, it's called -- you probably remember it as worksheets and headphones). I can make less accurate predictions of my non-American readers' experiences, but my guess, based on my friends who learned English as a second language, is that there were still painful periods of memorization, struggle, and frustration. One such friend told me she had to learn English all over again when she got to the United States, because her teachers taught her such a formal and stilted version of English she didn't know how to make small talk.

What could this tedious, difficult, and often futile endeavor have to do with magic? Magic is fun, awesome, neat, cool, life-changing. Language learning is repeating "hablo, hablas, habla, hablamos . . ." until your mouth gets dry and you fall asleep.

I wrote this little booklet to combat that attitude and help convince a few interested people, I hope, that language learning can improve your magic.

First, learning a language trains your memory and your discipline, which are both faculties necessary in magic. How can you visualize something unless you can keep in mind? How can you do a daily practice without discipline? Learning a language is good, low-stakes practice for those things.

Second, foreign languages put ideas together differently, and learning a language helps you to think more flexibly and in new ways. In Hebrew, for example, the connection between nouns and verbs is blindingly obvious: a noun is just a special way of putting vowels around a verb. Objects can be thought of as static actions. In Latin, on the other hand, nouns change to indicate their job in a sentence and word-order is of very little importance, so you need to keep in mind the role of each actor in a sentence in order to fully understand it. This kind of flexible thinking can be tremendously valuable in magic.

Third, many books about magic are written in other languages, and some have never been translated. Even if they have been translated, I have more than once found myself disagreeing with the translator about this or that point. In one case, I found out

that the translator made choices that caused a prayer to seem much more spooky and foreboding than it actually was, if you made other equally valid choices. The scary "ooh, Hecate's gonna getcha!" incantation was the translator's choice, not the author's.

Fourth, learning a language is fun and pleasurable in its own right. I love reading a line of Greek or Latin or Hebrew. I'll often take one of my language books with me when I'm doing work in a coffee shop, and reward myself by doing a bit of study between my more boring editing work. I've almost always got notecards in my pockets, and so I'm never bored standing in line or waiting in a waiting room. I've always got something to read or practice or study.

You Determine Your Own Level of Involvement

You do not need to aspire to fluency in order to benefit from language study. There is no wrong goal in choosing to study a language for your magical practice, and no one will give you a midterm or send home a report card about your progress. You can decide how far you want to take it.

You may wish to know just enough of the language to pronounce it with a passable accent and know what a few particular words of power mean. If you're doing ceremonial magic, you may want to learn enough Hebrew to pronounce the names and know what they mean, and maybe do a little gematria now and then. I call this **Familiarity**, and it's more than acceptable to never go beyond this. In fact, I'd say I'm at the familiarity stage with a few dozen languages. You can achieve familiarity in a couple days, usually, perhaps a few weeks depending how deep you want to go.

On the other hand, you may find yourself getting pretty deep into the Cabala, or very interested in Renaissance magic, and at that point you'll want to get a little further in the language. At this stage, you'll want to be able to pick apart the language given a dictionary and enough time. Maybe you'll want to construct a few simple sentences of your very own. This stage is a far cry from reading and writing fluently, but it's good enough for most magicians. I call this **Faking It**, and again, there's nothing wrong with stopping here. How long it will take you to get to the stage of faking it will depend on the language: for Hebrew or Latin, a few months. For Greek, well, you might as well just learn it. It depends largely on how complicated the grammar is, how regular, and how often words change form. If you read a Greek passage, you're going to get maybe four words in before you hit a word whose form you can't find in the dictionary, because there are complicated and often irregular changes that occur to verbs. In Latin, you might not entirely recognize the word, but it'll look like something you can find in the dictionary, with a few exceptions (a few of the verbs change shape in the perfect tense, and then you've just got to learn them, but often they begin the same way -- the same isn't true of Greek, where a word may often change its initial letters, or even the entire root, in different tenses).

The danger of faking it is thinking that the dictionary is all there is to a language. Of course, that's not the case: on the contrary, the dictionary gives us just the vocabulary of a language. But think about what would happen if you just took a sentence and stacked together English words without thinking about how English grammar works. Take the beginning of the Iliad, and imagine that an ancient Greek speaker was trying to fake it in English by translating each word using just the dictionary:

*rage sing goddess Peleadeo Achilles overwhelming which numberless Achaean
pain put*

Bleh. That's not English. It's just English words strung together. You have to know the grammar of English to some extent to really fake it, even if that means just knowing

what to look up for each grammatical category. Then, you can say, "Okay, 'sing' is imperative, so I form the imperative in English this way, and 'put' is past tense, so I form it this way" and then yield: "Sing, O goddess, of the overwhelming rage of Peleadeus Achilles, who put so many Achaeans in agony . . . "

I see this a lot in the Latin used in spells. Someone will decide they want to write a spell in Latin, so they decide to fake it. Nothing wrong with that at all! But then they get a dictionary and translate each individual word. So, for example, they may want to say "Open the doors of heaven" and they'll translate it "apire ianua caelum." That doesn't mean anything other than something like "to open. doors. sky." You need to know how to change the words to fit the grammar. You need to know that apire must be in the imperative if you're giving a command, and whom are you giving the command to? One being? Several? Let's say you're asking the gods: "apite," then. And "doors" is the object, so it has to be in the accusative: "ianuam." And "heavens" owns the doors, so it has to be in the genitive: caeli. "apite ianuam caeli" is enough to fake it. (And if you know Latin, you're probably going, "wait, ianuam there is singular, not plural, so . . . " But that's why it's called faking it.)

Finally, you may say that you wish to learn the language, really learn it, and get to the point where you can read it and write in it. This goal is admirable, and we'll call it **Fluency**, even though you may never get to that point. It will take you years, and in reality, the rest of your life, to get to the point where you feel perfectly comfortable in the language. But that's fine: it's about the process.

Furthermore, you may find yourself doing very well in your language with some texts, less well with others. For example, I can "sight read" a lot of late Ancient Greek. Give me a page from the Greek New Testament, and I can probably work through it without much difficulty. Any words I don't know, I'll figure out from context, and probably won't really need a dictionary. But give me something more complex -- give me, say, Plato -- and I'll be flipping through my dictionary until the pages fall out. Give me poetry, and I might yank all my hair out.

The goal of Fluency is a life-goal, and it's perfectly okay never to focus on it. But if you do, you'll benefit from some great rewards. For one thing, you'll have a new window to see the world through. For another, you'll have an inexpensive project that you can follow the rest of your life. All of the cognitive and intellectual benefits, not to imagine the imaginative ones, will help you in your magic as well.

Chapter II: Picking a Magical Language

Learn 'em all!

Or, if you lack my linguistic enthusiasm, pick a language to start with. You may already know that you need to learn Hebrew, or want to chant in Latin (gosh, who doesn't? I do it just for fun). If so, then you're good to go.

But if you're wondering where to start, I can give you some pointers.

The number one single most important thing about learning a language is motivation. Sometimes people ask me, "what's the easiest language to learn?" There are two answers to that. The first, is "Esperanto." This is an artificial language invented in the nineteenth century in order to be easily learned (I am not quite fluent in it, but nearly). The second, less snarky answer, is "whatever language you really, really want to learn." Greek is hard, hard, hard. But it's gorgeous, fun, hilarious, weird, and awesome. I would rather study Greek than go to a movie, so for me, while it's still hard, it's easy. Well. Not that easy. But easy to motivate myself to bang my head against. If you are learning a language 'cause you think you *should*, then you just won't. Learn to fake it, or just get familiarity, and that's fine.

You will probably find your motivation in the kind of magic you like to do. If you're a Golden Dawn member, or like that style of magic, you probably want to get Hebrew in your pocket. If, like me, you're interested in ancient Greco-Roman magic and renaissance magic, then you may want Greek and Latin. If you like older stuff, perhaps you're interested in Ancient Egyptian or even Sumerian or Akkadian. Or maybe you're into folk magic or an ethnic magic: your magical language might be German, or Yoruba, or Icelandic, or Spanish. There's no wrong answer.

There are two categories of languages you should be familiar with, because the approach to each is somewhat different. Some languages are living, others dead. A living language is a language learned by children as their day-to-day language somewhere in the world. Living languages include things like English, French, Spanish, Modern Greek, Modern Hebrew, and so on. A dead language is a language learned only by scholars and interested parties, although it may be used in liturgy. Dead languages include things like Latin, Ancient Greek, Biblical Hebrew, Old English, Old Icelandic, Coptic, and Ancient Egyptian. A living language will have people you can talk to, which can be a tremendous benefit in language learning. A dead language, though, will have a smaller vocabulary (no word for "internet"!) and you won't necessarily have to become fluent in speaking it unless you want to. Often, dead languages have living counterparts. For example, Ancient Greek and Modern Greek are obviously related, and a speaker of Modern Greek can usually pick out the meaning of some Ancient Greek. But they're different enough that they might as well be different languages, just as Old English is different enough from English that you would need to study it as a separate language if

you wished to read it.

Once you pick a language, your next job is to figure out your level of involvement. I recommend starting by getting familiarity, and then making a decision whether or pursue it further. You can get enough information to become familiar with a language online, by Googling the language name and the word "learning." Once you weed out ads for language learning software, you will quickly get a sense of the language. Sometimes, Wikipedia pages can be very helpful. Other times, you'll find some very basic online lessons that will give you an idea how the language might work.

Here are a few languages you might choose, and what good they might be. These are all languages with which I have some familiarity. Just because a language isn't listed here doesn't mean it's not worth learning (for example, I have only a vague idea of how Yoruba works, so I can't justify including it in this list).

Dead Languages

"Dead" language is a bit of a misnomer, and some linguists don't even use the term, preferring to refer to languages as "dormant." Others use "dead" to describe languages that we cannot even reconstruct, like -- well, how can you name a language you can't reconstruct? I'm just going to call these languages "dead," because that's the term most mortals who aren't linguists prefer, and it's as good a label as any. Just keep in mind that many of these languages are still learned, taught, and used on a daily basis. I've seen pictures of an ATM in Vatican City with instructions in Latin, and I know people who converse on a daily basis with each other in ancient Greek (I admire that! I could never manage it).

Latin

Latin has a long history in magic because it has a long history as a language of trade and scholarship across most of Europe. The language of the expansive Roman empire, Latin spread across Europe before it began to fragment into the modern Romance languages (Spanish, Italian, French, Portuguese, Romanian, and a few others). Learning Latin, therefore, can give you a bit of a leg up on these modern languages, although that advantage can be a bit overstated. The vast majority of texts from the middle ages and the renaissance were written in Latin, and translations of many of these magical texts are either nonexistent, or woefully slapdash. If you are interested in grimoire magic, Latin is a language you want to at least be able to fake, if not read.

Latin has a few characteristics unfamiliar to people who speak English or other modern Romance languages. These differences may well be areas of difficulty for some learners, but once you get used to them they're not that hard.

The Latin verb system will strike speakers of Spanish or French or Italian as very familiar, and has fewer irregularities than in its daughter languages. One of the downsides is that, for many verbs, you must memorize four basic forms, called the principal parts, in order to fully conjugate the verb. This requirement is less arduous than it seems, because these principal parts tend to follow patterns; you just can't predict which pattern a verb will follow without memorizing it. These principal parts are similar to the English verbs you are familiar with: to know "to go," you have to know "go," "went," and "gone." To know "to run" you have to know "run, ran, ran"; and to know "to know," you need "know, knew, known." Latin principal parts are no harder than that. However, unlike English, there are many more forms of a Latin verb. They are almost all regular, however. There are few completely irregular Latin verbs.

Latin nouns will definitely strike speakers of English as odd. They do something called "declension" in order to indicate their role in a sentence. So, in English, we know a noun is the subject of a sentence because it comes before the verb, while the

object comes after. In Latin, word order matters very little: what determines the subject and object is the form of the noun. In English, "The dog bites the man" is very different from "the man bites the dog." In Latin, however, "canis virum mordit" and "virum canis mordit" and "mordit canis virum" all mean "The dog bites the man." If you want to say "the man bites the dog," you need to change the endings on dog (canis) and man (vir): "Vir canem mordit." Each Latin noun has five basic forms (six, for some nouns), and can be either singular or plural. This means that each noun has ten possible forms. Moreover, each noun has one of three genders -- masculine, feminine, neuter -- which are not always predictable. And so the endings for the nouns of various genders and classes may differ, sometimes significantly. But there's little to worry about because this process is extremely regular. There are very few nouns that have unpredictable forms once you know the nominative (subject) form, the genitive (possessive) form, and the gender of the noun.

Latin pronunciation is a bit of a free-for-all. Classical Latin has a different pronunciation than medieval Latin, and people tend to mix and match according to whim. Classical Latin has ten vowels: five short, five long. Most of the consonants are what you would expect (although v is a w sound). Medieval Latin rarely makes a distinction between long and short vowels, which might sound simpler but tends to obscure some grammar and also force you to memorize the location of the stressed syllable in every word (in classical Latin, the stress is predictable as long as you know which vowels are long and short).

Greek

Greek is Latin's big brother. It, too, has declensions, although it uses them somewhat differently. It also has a verbal system that requires you to memorize, not three, but six principal parts for every verb, and unlike Latin, the patterns of these parts is often very obscure and unpredictable. Moreover, there are literally hundreds of possible forms of every Greek verb, which conjugates for voice (active, passive, middle), tense (past, aorist, present, future), mood (indicative, imperative, subjunctive, optative), aspect (imperfect, perfect, pluperfect), and person (first, second, third). Some of these are quite regular; many, less so. And then, of course, each verb has several infinitives and a full set of participles (which also have tense and voice). Greek verbs are harder to fake, as well, because they not only rely on suffixes, but in the past tenses they use a prefix called an augment, which attaches to the front of the word and sometimes changes the initial vowel. The perfect tense often reduplicates the first part of the word. Also, you may be seeing a different principal part than the one listed in most dictionaries. If you look up ἐφαγον (ephagon) in the dictionary, you're not likely to find it: you'll have to know that it is the aorist of ἐσθίαω, (esthiao) "I eat," so it means "I ate." A good dictionary might tell you that φαγ- (phag-) is the aorist root of ἐσθίαω, (esthiao) but you'll still have to know to remove the augment (the prefix ἔ- [e-]) to find

that.

Greek word order is simpler than Latin's, however, and the existence of definite articles ("the") helps a lot in figuring out a noun phrase. I personally find the endless paradigms and incredible complexity of Greek to be enjoyable and interesting, even if it means I get to spend the rest of my life striving for and never really achieving fluency.

You may think, by the way, that the unfamiliar alphabet is a drawback, but it's really not. You can learn it in an afternoon. It has a few letters whose pronunciation might throw you at first, but you can easily grasp them if you practice. Don't be too concerned with authenticity. As I often say, the most historically accurate pronunciation of ancient Greek is "badly," because for most of its history it was a second, rather than first language throughout the Roman empire.

The number of magical works in Greek is somewhat smaller than in Latin, but they more than make up for it by being so interesting. The Greek Magical Papyri, for example, contains a large number of spells and rituals in Greek, from diverse sources. They have been translated, but I've found it worthwhile to check the translation, not for errors, but for assumptions that the translator may have had that I may not agree with from my more practical perspective. Also, a large number of important philosophical works have been written in Greek, and these have had a huge influence on magical theory. These include the works of Plotinus, the Hermetica, and the surviving fragments of the Chaldean Oracles. Knowing enough Greek to fake it is worthwhile even if you don't wish to read all of Plato in the original.

Be aware, as well, that there are different dialects of Greek. You probably want to start with Attic Greek, which is the dialect spoken around Athens at the time that Plato was writing, because this is the dialect that most other later writers imitate. Moreover, if you learn this it's easy to tack on the Homeric dialect, as well as the very common Koine dialect of late Greek. It's harder to move the other direction, from Koine to Attic Greek, because Koine often gets rid of features present in Attic Greek that you'd then have to learn anew in order to pick up Attic. In general, it's easier to learn a feature (like the optative mood) in Attic Greek, and ignore it in Koine, then to not learn it Koine and try to tack it on later.

Hebrew

Hebrew also has an unfamiliar alphabet, and the seemingly insurmountable issue of not writing its vowels, and just to add to general weirdness, is read from right to left. But these oddities quickly fade; again, you can learn the alphabet in an afternoon, and beginners' books often do indeed write the vowels.

Hebrew verbs are odd from the perspective of a European language. Each verbal root consists of three (usually) consonants, around which you place prefixes, suffixes, and vowels in order to conjugate a word. This is easier than it sounds. ShMR, for example, is the root for "keep," so "I keep" is *eshmor*, and "he kept" is *shamar*. These

patterns are very regular: eCCoC is almost always "I do something," which "CaCaC" is almost always "he did something." There are also ways to modify the root itself, creating shades of meaning and related verbal ideas, which in other languages might be indicated by mood or voice.

Hebrew learning materials are almost always related to the Bible, because they are predominantly used in seminaries. If you're interested in the Cabala, it isn't a bad idea to get a familiarity with Hebrew scripture anyway, so by learning Hebrew you can cover two bases at once: learn the language, and get a little Biblical knowledge.

Hebrew pronunciation might throw a few people, as there are some letters that have pronunciations unfamiliar to English speakers. These letters give Hebrew a reputation as being harsh and guttural, but it's really not. No more than German is, or Russian, which has some similar sounds.

Most materials in Hebrew are Biblical, but there are a number of very important cabalistic texts written in Hebrew, such as the *Sepher HaZohar (The Book of the Splendor)*, and the *Sepher Yetzirah (The Book of Formation)*. It's not hard to get enough Hebrew to fake it with these texts, and that's certainly a valuable thing to do if you intend to explore the authentic tradition of Jewish mysticism rather than the boiled down Cabala sold in paperback form at most bookstores.

Old English

If you want to learn Old English, you probably want to learn it to read the metrical charms, because not too much of magical interest survives in this language. It's a language you can definitely fake. Like Latin and Greek, it has declension. But the verbs are simpler and much of the vocabulary will be familiar from your knowledge of English. The alphabet is similar to Modern English, although it has a few additional letters (three or four, depending on which variety you're reading or if your text has turned all wynn into W's -- otherwise, they look a bit like a lowercase and pointed p, even though they're pronounced /w/).

Old Icelandic

Old Icelandic is a lot like Old English. You have declensions, a typical germanic verbal system (fairly simple, in other words), and some familiar vocabulary. Old Icelandic has diverged a lot less from modern Icelandic, so if you learn one, you get a head start on the other.

Unlike Old English, there's lots to read in Old Icelandic that might be of magical interest, particularly if you're a fan of rune magic. There are also bawdy sagas, some of which are still hilarious to modern sensibility. They also contain considerable poetic beauty. I learned just enough Icelandic to fake it back in grad school, and even laboriously picking through lines of *Grettir's Saga* was worth the effort. Most of the sagas have really good translations, but some of the runic material might be the sort of

stuff you'd want to get first hand.

Ancient Egyptian

The good news: no declensions, simple verbal system (as far as we know), quite a lot of regularity. The bad news: no clear idea how most words were pronounced, and a writing system that will give you a headache. Once you master it, you get to relearn its cursive forms. Endless fun for the language nerd. Ancient Egyptian is written in hieroglyphic, which are the pictures of people and birds you are probably familiar with. Each symbol can represent a single consonant, a series of two or three consonants, a whole word, or a word-part. This is not an alphabet you can learn in an afternoon. Later cursive forms of Ancient Egyptian also exist, and must be learned almost like separate writing systems. Not just one, but two such systems exist. Hieroglyphic is the system you probably think of when you think of Ancient Egyptian. But you also have Hieratic, a cursive form of Hieroglyphic with some simplifications. And then you have Demotic, the system used on a day-to-day basis. I have only ever gotten familiarity with hieroglyphic, and not much of it. I know just enough to realize how often the inscriptions on little tourist trinkets are nonsense.

Most of what is written in Ancient Egyptian is funeral inscriptions, which are interesting but monotonous. There are stories, books, and magical texts. Some of the popular stories, written in cursive Egyptian, have been reprinted in Hieroglyphic, because more people can read that.

Stay away from E. A. W. Budge's works on Egyptian language. They are outdated, use a transliteration system that literally no one else uses or -- as far as I can tell -- ever has, and are riddled with errors. If you learn from Budge, you will have to unlearn it. Trust me, I know: I made that mistake, and it was a waste of time.

Coptic

Coptic is what Ancient Egyptian evolved into, much as Latin became Spanish. I know very little Coptic, but I can tell you that it's a relatively simple language. It has its own alphabet, which is very similar to the Greek one, and it is fairly regular. The verbs are a bit more complex than in Ancient Egyptian, just because the vowels survived, so we can see the complexity, where it's obscured in Hieroglyphic.

Coptic is the liturgical language of the Coptic church, an Egyptian branch of Christianity. It's also the language of a few of the magical writings from late antiquity, as well as a few gnostic scriptures of interest to magicians. Learning materials are a bit more sparse than for some of the other languages on this list, but they do exist if you're willing to dig. If you live in a very large city, local Coptic churches sometimes have classes, although you may need to be a member of the local church.

Living Languages

You might have an image of a magician studying old dusty tomes of forgotten lore in ancient languages, and the preceding section probably did little to disabuse you of that image. But it's also worthwhile to put a living language or two or three under your belt. Why? Because a lot of very important texts on magic have been written in languages other than English, and some of them have not been translated. It's also useful to be able to talk to people from other countries. Yes, many people learn English as a second language now, but it's so arrogant to assume that everyone will speak your language, and let me tell you from personal experience, even a "buenos dias" can go a long way to opening doors in a bodega.

French

If you're interested in cartomancy, it definitely helps to have some French. One of the most important and famous cartomancers of all time, Marie-Anne Lenormand, wrote in French, as have a large number of twentieth century occultists. More than a few grimoires are also in French, as are the writing of a lot of very important nineteenth century occultists, such as Eliphas Levi.

French's verbal system is easier than Latin's, and its nouns do not decline. The pronunciation is mildly frustrating at first, for English speakers, but you quickly get used to it. The vocabulary of French, as well, is what linguists call "analytic," meaning that you learn a relatively small number of words and string them together to express concepts, rather than having to learn many words with tiny shades of meaning. Finally, because English was so influenced by Norman French, a very large number of French words will already be familiar to you.

The cultural benefits of French, of course, are also considerable: you open up a new window on food, wine, music, and culture that mustn't be discounted. The ability to watch French movies and get the nuances the subtitles abandon is enough of a reason. The opening of cultural doors is a benefit of all living languages, of course.

German

I have comparatively little knowledge of German, although I'm working on fixing that. I can tell you that English is a Germanic language, but don't take that to the bank yet. German retains a lot of the grammatical complexity that English dropped early. You'll have a subjunctive mood, for example, which you must learn, because while we have it in English it's mostly extinct. The Germans, though, use it routinely. You'll also have to memorize the plural of most nouns along with the singular: there are far more patterns for making nouns plural than there are in English. Finally, nouns do decline, although slightly, and they have three genders -- male, female, neuter -- much like Latin and Greek.

Verbs are relatively simple: there are few irregular ones, and you need learn only

three principal parts, the same number as in English. The stem-changing verbs that form their past tense by shifting the vowel in the verb -- such as "sing" and "sang" in English -- are more numerous but also more predictable and regular. One slightly tricky thing is that some verbs have two parts, and part of the verb splits off and hangs out at the end of the sentence, sometimes quite some distance from the verb. But we do this in English too: "I *gathered* all the scattered books *up*."

The weirdest thing in German is probably the adjective system, because that's where they put all the complexity. Adjectives agree in Gender (there are three of them -- masculine, feminine, neuter, and they're very unpredictable) with the nouns they modify if they come before the noun. Otherwise, they just have a basic form. If they come before the noun, you also have to check to see if there's an article. If the definite article (one of the sixteen possible forms of "the") is there, the adjective will have one set of endings. If the indefinite article (one of the similarly numerous forms of "a") is there, you have a different set of endings. And finally, if you've got no article at all, and nothing that acts like an article, then you have another, separate set of endings. It's surprisingly intuitive once you get your mind around it, but it was certainly a stumbling block in my early studies of the language, and once in a while I still have to stop to think.

Several important books are written in German, and if you're interested in a more scholarly approach to ancient magic, you'll definitely want to get some German. A lot of the scholarship on such things is, to this day, published only in German, and it's rarely translated into any other language.

Spanish

Spanish is an old friend. It's the first language I learned other than English, and while it's a never-ending source of playful frustration, I've always been glad I did. A very large number of books on cartomancy and Santeria are written in Spanish, and almost never translated into English. Furthermore, if you have interest in folk magic, and you live in an urban area, Spanish will open doors.

Spanish verbs seem complex at first, but are actually quite manageable. A large number of them have a stem change, which means you must learn several principal parts, but it's not an arduous task and you get a feel for it after a while. Spanish nouns are simplicity itself. The plural is perfectly regular for all nouns, and gender is almost always predictable from endings (although not always -- *dia*, "day," which looks feminine, is masculine, for example). Spanish spelling and pronunciation are also pleasantly regular and simple to grasp with some practice.

It's famously difficult for English speakers to understand spoken Spanish, because it sounds faster than it actually is (there are reasons for this: Spanish words average more syllables than English ones, so they seem to be going by faster, and Spanish does not pause between words that end in a vowel, instead running them together in a way that wouldn't work in English). I've been studying Spanish, on and off, since I was

sixteen, and to this day I can't understand a lot of spoken Spanish. But you will find it easy to read, and if you find someone to practice with, you will quickly be able to carry on a conversation.

Chapter III. Getting Familiarity and Faking It

Whatever language you pick, your first step is getting familiarity with it. Even if you want to become fluent and chat in Latin with your friends, you have to get some idea of what's going on in Latin. What are you in for if you're going to study Hebrew? How far down the rabbit hole of Greek do you want to go?

Whatever you do, do not get discouraged in this stage. It's very easy to pick up a complete reference grammar of the language and go "Oh my god." This is especially true of language like Latin and Greek, which look profoundly technical. I'm going to break down what you need to know to get started, and also give you some tricks in this chapter for identifying what does and does not need to be learned.

You need to start by understanding the bones that make up the skeleton of every language on Earth: the parts of speech. I suspect you already know this to some degree, so I'll make this brief. The parts of speech of most languages, in order of usual complexity, are verbs, nouns, adjectives, adverbs, articles, pronouns, prepositions, and particles. Each of them has its own little peculiarities, and your first job in getting a feel for a language is to figure out what sorts of peculiarities it has in each of the parts of speech. That will help you see where to focus your attention.

Particular grammatical ideas tend to get marked on particular parts of speech. For example, there are vanishingly few languages that put the marker for tense (when something happened) on the nouns. If you know what sorts of grammatical information you'll have to learn to read or speak a language, you'll get a sense of where to focus your attention.

But first, you will want to get a sense of how the language sounds.

Pronunciation

The inside of your mouth is a space, a tiny cave with little landmarks, like your teeth, or the alveolar ridge just behind your front teeth, or the spot where the hard palate gives way to the soft on the roof of your mouth. When we make speech sounds, we do so by controlling how air moves over and around those landmarks. We mostly do this with our tongue, whose Latin name -- *lingua* -- gives us the name of the science of language, linguistics.

You can make a few sounds without the use of your tongue. You can open and close the glottis, that flap of flesh that prevents you from choking when you eat and breathe at the same time. You do this, if you're an English speaker, when you cough or say "uh-oh." For some languages, that little cough is a speech sound. You can also use your lips without the help of your tongue, closing them completely and then popping them open for p- and b-sounds, or closing them and forcing air up through your nose for an m-sound. You can also curl your lip behind your top row of teeth and let air hiss out to make a f-sound or a v-sound.

When you get your tongue involved, you can make a lot more sounds, because the tongue is surprisingly large and flexible. At the back of the tongue, you can stop the airflow against your soft palate and make a k-sound or a g-sound. Or you can drop the tongue just enough to let some air through, and you'll get a kh-sound such as in German *ach*.

Linguists classify speech sounds according to three main descriptors. First, we identify where the airflow is restricted or controlled. If it's near the alveolar ridge, we call the sound alveolar, such as s-sounds and d-sounds. If it's between the teeth, we call it interdental, such as when we make th-sounds. If it's on the hard palate, we call it palatal, and if on the soft palate, velar. If it's in the voicebox itself, we call it glottal, such as the h-sound and the glottal stop I talked about above.

We also classify sounds according to how the air is restricted. If the air is stopped completely, such as with p, t, b, k, and so on, then we call those *stops*. If the air is allowed to hiss through with some friction, we call that a *fricative*. And if it is barely restricted at all, we call that an *approximant*. These are sounds like y and w.

Finally, linguists classify sounds according to voicing, which means are our vocal cords vibrating when we speak that sound. If you put your hand on your throat and say *ssssss*, and then switch it to *zzzzzz*, you'll find that your tongue and mouth don't move at all, but that your throat starts to vibrate under your hand. This is the distinction between p and b, t and d, and many other pairs of sounds in English.

I've mostly talked about consonants, but vowels are also made by shaping the mouth. If the tongue is bunched up in the front of the mouth and the jaw is held up to minimize the space in the mouth, you get high front vowels like *eeeeee*. If you drop the jaw and relax the tongue, you can low back vowels like *aaaaah*. All the other vowels

are in-between, and factors like whether or not the lips are rounded determine additional characteristics of their sounds. For example, the French *u* in *tu* is an *eeee*-sound with the lips pursed as if to make an *oooo*-sound. This is a very different sound than the *oooh* in *vous*.

Linguists have developed a very precise way of not only identifying sounds, but learning how to make them. This tool is called the IPA -- the international phonetic alphabet. I strongly suggest you familiarize yourself with it, because if you learn it, you can find an unfamiliar sound in a language, identify it, and shape your mouth to make that sound without having to rely on fuzzy descriptions like "a bit like the *h* in 'hello' but harsher." This kind of description fills how-to-speak-such-and-such-a-language books, but it's too vague to be helpful. What does *harsh* mean for a sound, precisely? It probably means that the sound is more of a fricative than an approximant, as *h* is for many English speakers. Hold your vocal cords closer together so the air hisses through, and you'll make that sound, whereas if you just try to be "harsh," you may or may not stumble on it. You can use the description of any sound in the IPA chart to determine how to pronounce it. Moreover, there are many websites that will have recordings of people making those sounds so you can get used to them.

Learning the pronunciation of a foreign language begins in the ear. You have to first hear the distinctions before you can produce them, and some languages make distinctions that others don't. Hindi, for example, makes a distinction between an aspirated and unaspirated consonant. We aspirate any unvoiced stop that comes alone at the beginning of a word, like "pick." But we don't really hear that, as English speakers. If you do that in Hindi, you'll have worse than a bad accent: no one will be able to understand you at all. It'd be like mixing up *b*-sounds and *p*-sounds in English.

Of course, if you're learning a dead language, pronunciation becomes less important. We have reconstructed the ancient classical pronunciation of Latin and the Attic pronunciation of Ancient Greek. The Attic pronunciation of Ancient Greek is a bit weird, and hard for English speakers to adopt, so most people just pronounce Greek according to one or more models, some based on later Koine pronunciation and some based on the way English people pronounced the language when they learned it as a dead language. Sometimes people will argue about the quality of people's pronunciation of dead languages. Such people are tiresome and bizarre: I suspect they're trying to come off as erudite and clever, but there's little point in arguing for a particular pronunciation of a dead language, other than whatever pronunciation helps you learn and distinguish between words as you learn. On the other hand, there is one place where you may wish to learn a carefully reconstructed pronunciation for a dead language, and that's what reading poetry so that you can get the full effect.

For a living language, you need to learn the pronunciation of the dialect that you think you'll be speaking most often. For some languages, there is a standard dialect that you learn in schools, but if you intend to live in another country for a while, it's a good

idea to learn some local dialect as well. For example, if you wish to learn Spanish in order to learn more about Santeria, you probably wouldn't want to rely entirely on the dialect spoken in Spain. You'll want to pick up some South American pronunciations and vocabulary, as a sign of respect if nothing else.

There are longstanding notions that foreign words have power and that the specific pronunciation of those words matters. For example, the four letter name of God in Cabala is unpronounceable because we do not know the vowels, but legend ascribes many magical effects to its pronunciation. In language as it lives on the ground, though, pronunciation is a slippery beast. Remember that your mouth is a room, not a spreadsheet. Everyone's tongue is different, and everyone's mouth is a different size. My t-sound might be a little further forward on the alveolar ridge than yours, or my h-sound may have a slightly more tense glottis. These individual variations of language are called idiolects, and they're how we have a voice that our friends can recognize, how we speak to express our personality. An accent is just an idiolect in a foreign language. If you're understandable, an accent is just a charming quirk of your personality. So don't worry about getting rid of your accent: think instead about being understood and understanding those who speak to you in your target language. And if you're learning a dead language, don't worry about living up to some reconstructed standard unless you want to.

Now that you have a grasp of how a language sounds, it's time to start getting familiar with the different parts of speech.

Verbs

The first thing you're going to want to know about the verb is "how many principal parts must I learn?" The principal parts are the forms you have to know in order to derive all other forms of the verb. If you're learning Latin, the answer is "four," Greek "six," and German and English "three." For example, if you're speaking English, you know the verb "eat," but you need to also memorize "ate" and "eaten" in order to form all of the other parts of that verb. If you're studying Latin, you might know the verb *facio*, "to do or make" which has the principal parts *facio, facere, feci, factum*. The first two principal parts tell you how to form the present tenses. The third tells you how to form the "perfect" tense (more on that in a moment). The last part tells you how to use the verb as an adjective: if I want to say "the work is done," I say "*opus factum est*."

One of the things I loathe about many introductory books on language is that they don't actually tell you what principal parts are, or how many you have to learn, until fairly late. So you get through chapter after chapter of an introductory Latin text, thinking you're learning a verb when you've learned the first or the first two principal parts, only to find out that you have to start all over again. It's even worse in Greek textbooks, which almost always spring the whole list of the principal parts on you very late in the course. It's demoralizing and obnoxious to have to go back and relearn verbs you thought you knew. If you start off knowing it's a job you'll have to do, you can start working on it right away..

The next thing you'll want to figure out is how many irregular verbs there are, because these are the verbs you will want to memorize first. They're almost always the most common verbs in a language, which means they're relatively easy to learn even if they're bizarre (like the English verb, "to be: am is are was were be being been") because you'll get a lot of practice. An irregular verb means that you can't derive all the forms from the principal parts alone. For example, "be, was, been" won't get you to "is" or "were." You have to memorize all those forms separately. Modern languages often have many irregular verbs, while ancient languages have relatively few. Latin only has a handful, and Greek only has a few (although the principal parts of Greek are often irregular).

You'll also want to know how many patterns you'll need to memorize, so you can begin getting those straight in your head. There are two basic patterns to German and English verbs -- often called "strong" and "weak." Weak verbs in these languages form their past tense by suffixing something to them. Strong ones change the vowel. "Talk/talked" is weak, while "speak/spoke" is strong. Latin, on the other hand, has four basic patterns, -are, -ere, -re, -ire. You know which pattern a verb falls into from its second principal part, so you automatically know which set of endings to attach to it. Greek verbs only have two main patterns, -o and -mi.

Depending on the language, verbs can encode person (I do, you do, he does, they

do), tense (I do, I did, I will do), aspect (I have done, I am doing), mood (If I were to do . . . , do!), voice (it is done), and other things as well. This list includes the most common things a verb might indicate, but not every language indicates all of them.

Person is simply the identity of the verb's subject. Is it the speaker? That's first person. Is it the person you're talking to who does the action of the verb? That's the second person. Is it someone else? That's the third person. And then, of course, there can be more than one subject, so that "we" is the first person plural. Some languages make a distinction between first person plural inclusive ("we including you") and first person plural exclusive ("we -- that is, I and he, but not you"). Other languages also mark the gender on the verb, which gives rise to that old saying about Hebrew: "You have know the sex of the dog before you can tell it to stop biting you." The way the verb changes to reflect person might seem overwhelming, because English has a very simple system (namely, for the third person singular present tense, add an -s to the first principal part, otherwise, leave it alone). These endings do quickly become second nature, and can be a big help in deciphering a text. You might even grow to love them, as you're picking your way through something complicated, for the trail of breadcrumbs they leave behind.

Tense is when the verb's action occurs. You may have learned tense somewhat differently if you studied English in an American school, for which I am heartily sorry. In attempting to simplify tense, they folded it into aspect, which has confused many a foreign language student since. Tense is simply about location in time, not how long the action lasted. So in English, we have three and only three tenses: present, past, and future. Other languages have more, and some tenses do get folded into aspect in those languages too.

Aspect is the action's extension in time. For example, in English, if we say "I have gone," that's present tense, but perfect aspect: it means that in the present time (tense), I am in a state of having gone, but no longer going. "I will be fishing" is future tense, but continuous aspect: it means that at some future time from now, I'll fish continuously.

Tense and aspect relate differently in different languages. In Latin, the "ordinary" past tense (built on the first principal part) is the "imperfect," meaning an action that continued for a while in the past: "*me monebat*," "he was warning me." This implies that the warning continued for some time, or was repeated. If I say that in the perfect, however, "*me monuit*," it means "he warned me once and that was done." Greek has a similar distinction, but typical of Greek they tease out some fine details. One form of the verb, the aorist, means a discrete action that occurs once, usually in the past, but it can also occur in imperative and other forms as well. If say "come here," in the regular imperative, it means "be on the way to coming here," but if I say "come here" using the aorist imperative, it means "get over here now once and for all." Greek also has a perfect, which is used somewhat differently. While the aorist means a discrete, separate action, the perfect means an action that finished at some point in the past. It means "to be

in a state of having done a thing." So "I die" is ἀποθάνω, (apothano) but "I am dead" is the perfect form of that same verb: "τέθνηκα" (tethneka) (and yes, those are the same verb! That's how much Greek verbs can change in between forms).

Mood is a hard one for English speakers to grasp. Mood is used to indicate how real or probable the action of the verb seems to the speaker. That sounds kind of esoteric, but think of it this way, with English. "You will go to the store" is in the indicative future: I think this will happen. But "go to the store" is in the imperative mood: I want you to make it such that it happens, but I don't think it will unless I order you to do it. Other moods include the subjunctive (which barely survives in English), the optative and others. Most other languages that you might study have at least a subjunctive, which indicates an action contrary to fact or dependent upon another action. You often see them in wishes or if-statements, like "If I were a pirate, I'd wear an eyepatch." The form "were" doesn't work for the first person present tense in English, unless it's being used as the subjunctive. But most people don't know that, and would just say "If I was a pirate, I'd wear an eyepatch." That's fine for English, but other languages are not so fast and loose. The optative is like the subjunctive, but is used in different kinds of conditional clauses. It occurs in Greek, and usually is used in a conditional clauses whose main clause uses a past tense or aorist verb. Mood can quickly turn into a quicksand for English speakers, so be aware that you'll have to give it special attention and not skip over it because it's confusing at first.

Finally, verbs can change for "voice," which in English is done by using a verb of being and changing the verb into the past participial principal part. "I am loved" is the passive voice version of "someone loves me." In passive voice, the object of the verb's action becomes the subject of the sentence. In Latin and Greek, this is done by putting the verb in a whole new form, a rather more elegant system in my opinion. "*amatur*" is "I am loved" in Latin, while "*me amat*" is "he loves me." Greek throws another layer of complexity into the mix (surprise) by adding a "middle" voice, which means that the action of the verb is done for the benefit of the subject. It's an ill-defined term, and often it just means that the middle form of the verb has some related meaning. For example, "I educate my children" in the active voice means that I sit down with them and teach them something. "I educate my children" in the middle voice means that I do something so that my children get educated: hire a tutor or something. To be extra annoying, the Greek middle voice in some tenses is identical to the passive form; only context distinguishes them.

Latin, Greek, English, German, and so on are all Indo-European languages, so they're related to each other very distantly. Languages like Hebrew might mark the same grammatical information, but in ways that are very different. For example, most of the information indicated by mood or voice comes about in Hebrew through modification of the stem of the verb itself according to set paradigms. This might take some getting used to at first, so it's worth being aware that you'll have to think about verbs somewhat

differently.

Nouns

In some languages, nouns are simple. In Spanish, nouns are a breeze. In German they're a little harder: you have to learn two different forms for singular and plural (same in Arabic, I'm told), and then also remember that they have slightly different forms in some situations. Usually, nouns are marked for gender, number, and case.

Gender isn't like sex. English nouns don't have gender, so sometimes we have that misconception. But when a Spanish speaker refers to the table as "*ella*," "she," that doesn't mean that the speaker of that language actually thinks of the table in terms of having a sex difference. In fact, gender can be completely unrelated to sex: some languages mark noun for animate/inanimate distinctions. Others have three rather than two genders (Latin, Greek, and German all have masculine, feminine, and neuter genders). Gender can seem annoying to English speakers, but it can be really handy: changing the gender of something can be used to derive a whole new word. Also, gender helps with agreement, which I'll get to in a moment.

Most languages have some way of marking a noun as plural (some don't, but even then, there's almost always some way of indicating that you mean more than one, even if it's by saying "many" before the noun). Sometimes this is simple, such as attaching an -s to the end of the word, as in Spanish. Sometimes it's really complicated, such as using a whole new set of endings for the word when it's plural (as in Latin or Greek). Some languages also have a dual form, used when there are only two of a thing.

Finally, many ancient languages -- Latin, Greek, Old English, Old Icelandic -- and some modern ones mark nouns for case. Case is an indication of a noun's function in a sentence. English has only two cases for most nouns: absolute, and possessive. The possessive case is marked with an apostrophe and the letter *s*. It is used only when one thing owns another, and grows out of the Old English genitive case. Our pronouns have three cases: possessive, nominative, and accusative (or "subjective" and "objective" in some grammar books). Other languages have many more: nominative, vocative, accusative, genitive, dative, and ablative being the most common. Not all languages have all of them.

The nominative case is usually used for the subject of a sentence, or when the word stands alone. The vocative, on the other hand, is used when calling out to the noun or addressing it directly ("O, my heart!"). The accusative is when the noun is the object of the verb (but not all verbs "govern" the accusative as their objects; you'll have to keep an eye out depending on the language). The genitive indicates possession, but it can also be used to separate a part from a group ("six of the boys") or to indicate movement away. Dative is usually used for the indirect object of the noun ("he gave the book *to them*"). Finally, in some languages like Latin, ablative is used to indicate movement away from, or to indicate location, or to indicate the use of the noun in accomplishing something else, or as a sort of catch-all. Keep a close eye on how the

language you're studying uses case, and don't gloss over it just because it may be unfamiliar and hard to wrap your mind around at first. Once you do, you'll wonder how English gets by with so few cases.

Cases allow free word order, so that you can string together words in almost any order you like in a sentence. That might seem obnoxiously complicated to an English speaker, but it can be a delight. Latin authors especially love to hide an important word at the end of a sentence, so that you go "ooooh" as you finish. Most of the stuff in Latin and Greek about magic is written in late versions of those languages, which tend to be sadly less creative in terms of word-order. Happily, that makes it easier to read. Still, you've got to geek out over a language that allows you to say:

1. vir puellam agricolae amat
2. amat vir puellam agricolae
3. amat vir agricolae puellam
4. amat puellam agricolae vir

And mean, by all of those, "the man loves the farmer's girl." Or, with more nuance, something like:

1. The man (you know him) loves the farmer's girl.
2. A certain man loves the farmer's girl.
3. A certain man loves the *farmer's* girl.
4. A man *loves* the farmer's girl.

You'll notice that sometimes I use "the" and sometimes "a" above. This is because Latin lacks articles, so often word-order fills the role of articles in English. Still, even languages with articles (like Greek, which has lots of ways of saying "the" depending on case, gender, and number) makes good use of word-order for emphasis or nuance.

If a language has case, you will have to know two things to fully understand a noun: its nominative, and its stem. For Latin and Greek, the stem is built off of the genitive, which isn't always predictable. For example, the Latin word *grex* means "herd." *Grex* is the nominative, but what if I want to use "herd" as an object of a verb, like in the sentence "he rules the herd." "He rules" is *regit*. But I can't say *grex regit*, because that means "the herd rules." How do I make it an object rather than a subject? I put it in the accusative. So I first have to find the stem. If I really know this word, I'll know its genitive form is *gregis*. The *-is* is the genitive ending, and you find the stem by cutting off the genitive ending, so the stem of *grex* is *greg-*. The accusative ending of a masculine noun (which *grex* is) is *-em*. So *gregem* is herd in the accusative: *regit gregem*. To really use a noun in a declining language like this, you have to know its nominative, its stem (usually from the genitive), and its gender.

Adjectives and adverbs

These little words modify nouns and verbs respectively, and they're often a sigh of relief. Adjectives tend to work a bit like nouns, but simpler. Usually, there are fewer patterns. Adverbs tend to be even simpler, formed from an adjective by modifying it in some way. One complexity of adverbs and adjectives is comparative and superlative forms.

English has a weird system for comparing. Some of our adjectives and adverbs -- the smaller ones inherited from Old English -- tend to make the comparative with -er and the superlative with -est. I say "tend" because that's not always the case; some use the other system, attaching separate words, "more" and "most" to the adjective phrase. Others are irregular, like "good" and "better" and "best." Most languages have simpler systems, but not all. The Latin system is a fairly regular set of suffixes. The Greek system has regular suffixes too, but in typical Greek fashion it sometimes seems that, having stumbled across a regularity, they immediately got rid of it and invented lots of irregular forms.

I've already discussed the German adjective, which is a thing of beauty, which considering my taste, means an absolute headache. *Der Mann ist gut.* "The man is good." *Der gute Mann ist hier.* "The good man is here." *Ein guter Mann ist hier.* "A good man is here." gut, gute, guter -- all mean "good," and the choice of which to use depends entirely upon the gender of the noun, its case, and what other words come along with it.

Articles and Pronouns

We already talked about articles briefly under nouns -- these are the ways of saying "the" and "a." Many languages have none at all, like Latin. Others, like Greek, have a full set of "the" but no "a." Sometimes, these are simple, like in Hebrew (prefix a *heh* to the noun, and you're done). Other times, they decline for case, number, and gender, as in Greek. This complex system of articles can sometimes be a benefit, though: if you see a weird noun and don't know what case or number it's in, you might get a hint from the article.

Pronouns also tend to be fairly simple. They're almost always irregular, and often you'll have a situation, like in Latin, where you've got a lot of different set of pronouns to memorize ("he" can be expressed, in Latin, as *is*, *ille*, *iste*, or not at all, each meaning something slightly different). If you're studying Hebrew, you can have the delight of the pronoun system, where "he" (*hu*) is pronounced like "who," "who" (*mi*) is pronounced like "me", and "she" (*hi*) is pronounced like "he." You'll also get the delight, and that's not sarcasm, of the pronominal suffix. Hebrew comes with a full set of suffixes that serve the functions of pronouns. They can be attached to nouns to create possessives (sus, "horse," susi, "my horse"), verbs as objects (shamar, "he kept", shamari, "he kept me"), and prepositions as objects (l- "to", li "to me"). I love these things; they're one of the delightful things you learn in studying language that give a sense of wonder.

Some languages, like Spanish and Latin, are prodrop languages, which mean you don't need the subject pronoun. You can leave it off if there's no reason to emphasize it. *Hablo*, "I speak", is a complete sentence in Spanish. Usually, prodrop languages conjugate verbs more than English does, but even languages that conjugate verbs fully sometimes still require pronouns (such as German).

Prepositions

I wish I could say prepositions, those little words that indicate relationship in space or time, were always easy, but they're not. For one thing, they're not always prepositions. Sometimes, they're postpositions, which means they come after the object. This happens sometimes in Latin and Greek. "*ambula mecum*" literally means "walk me-with." In other languages, like Hebrew, they're fairly simple prefixes. But in some, like Greek, they can actually change their meaning depending on the case of the noun. If I'm turning you off of studying Greek, I don't mean to -- just be aware that anything that can be hard in a language, is in Greek.

One way to get a grip on prepositions as you learn a language is to draw lots of pictures and label the parts. "Inside the house," "beside the house," "near the house," and so on. You really have to get a spacial sense of prepositions to understand them. Unfortunately, they're also often used metaphorically, just as we do in English, when we say "I cut the grass with the mower." I didn't literally cut the grass alongside the mower: I used it as a tool, but the metaphor is so old that we don't even think about it. When you learn another language, you need to think about those metaphors that native speakers don't even consider anymore.

Particles

Particles are simple. They almost never change form, there's no irregularity, and they're usually simple to use. They're just not always simple to translate. Take, for example, the particle $\delta\acute{\eta}$ in Greek, pronounced approximately like *dey*. You could translate it as "really" or "truly" or "indeed," but it's often ironic as it is straightforward. You're better off just giving a little emphasis to the word it follows and not translating it at all. That one's actually fairly easy; there's also the pair of particles $\mu\acute{\epsilon}\nu$. . . $\delta\acute{\epsilon}$, (men . . . deh) which are used to set up opposing pairs of things. You could translate them "on the one hand, but on the other hand" but doing so gets tiresome quickly, because the Greeks loved setting up opposing pairs of things.

Some languages have only a few particles of any importance, such as the Hebrew particle "*et*," which comes before direct object if that direct object is definite (has the heh prefix, or a possessive suffix, or is a proper name). It's totally untranslated and untranslatable in English. You still have to know what it means and what it does, though, to really understand the language.

Faking It

The above is enough to get you familiar with the language, but if your goal is just to fake it, then all you need to know is how to look up this information. For some languages, faking it is fairly easy. If you know the basic patterns of a language, can identify which patterns apply to which words, then you can easily just look it up and work it out word by word, by brute force. You don't want to do this for more than just a sentence or two, because it's time-consuming and won't always work. But it's sometimes enough, especially if your only goal is to design a magical motto or figure out a phrase in a spell.

Latin is easier to fake than Greek, and Hebrew is about as easy to fake as Latin. Keep in mind that the term "faking it" isn't a value judgement, nor does it imply that you can or should pretend to knowledge you don't have. But it can still be useful to have just enough knowledge to be dangerous. Speaking of which, don't fake it if you're planning on tattooing your body. I once walked up to a guy at a wedding and said, "hey, I read Greek, but I can't make out your tattoo." I couldn't make out his tattoo because he misspelled a word on it. That was an awkward moment, and taught me a lesson.

Let's imagine you want a phrase for a spell, and you want it in Latin 'cause -- well, Latin is easy for me to type and you to read. Let's say you want to say "open the doors of heaven, you gods." Neat! Sounds dramatic! Let's fake it.

Get out your handy-dandy Latin dictionary. It's helpful to find one that marks long and short vowels, but not absolutely necessary; Google isn't quite what you want for this, and while you can use Google translate to help, just keep in mind that's almost always wrong in one or more subtle ways. Faking it can help you check their translation, too.

So let's look up our first word, keeping in mind that these might not come in the same order in my translation: The first word is "open," so I find *aperio*. Since this is a verb, I have to look at all the principal parts: *aperio aperire, aperui, apertum*. I want to make it a command, which is the imperative mood. Since I'm addressing more than one god, it should be in the plural imperative. That's built on the first principal part. Looking that up in my tables, I find that it's *aperite*.

Now, we need "the doors." We know that since Latin doesn't have a "the," I can ignore it. I find that I get lots of choices for "door," among them *foris*, *ianua*, and *ostium*. Often, when this happens there are slightly different shades of meaning. Do I think of the heavens as an enclosure that I'm outside of? That's probably a *foris*, then, or an *ostium*. Or is it a wall with gates, whether fully enclosed or not? That's probably a *ianua* or an *ostium*. Sometimes, the differences can be vanishingly subtle; other times, quite significant. If you want to translate "magician," you might run across the word *veneficus*. Look it up in the Latin-English part of the dictionary before using it, and you'll find out that "magician" is only its secondary meaning; it usually means

"poisoner!" Let's say we go with *ianua*.

I need to know three things to decline a Latin noun, remember: its genitive form (so I can get the stem), the gender, and the nominative. The nominative is *ianua*, and my dictionary tells me its gender is f. (feminine). The genitive is *ianuae*, so I can identify which class it belongs to and look it up in my charts. I am asking that more than one door be opened, and the doors are the object of "open," so its plural accusative: *ianuas*. I find this by looking down the appropriate column and lines of my paradigm chart. Mine says that -a, -ae, feminine is first declension. The example they give is *puella*, *puellae*, which in the plural accusative is *puellas*. I just chop off the *puell-* part, and move the rest to the *ianu-* part.

Now, how do I say "of heaven?" An amateur mistake is to look up "of," but remember -- languages with case make a lot less use of prepositions than languages like English. Instead, think: is there a case that does the job of "of" here, and of course there is. Heaven owns the doors, so that should make you think of the genitive case. Looking up "heaven" I again see lots of options, but I go with *caelum*, which is n. (neuter), and the genitive is *caeli*. Since I'm looking for the genitive, I don't need to do much else: I just put down *caeli*.

Finally, how do I say "oh you gods." Well, "oh" is easy: *o*. You gods is in the vocative, so I need to figure out how to say "gods" in the vocative. All plural nouns have the same form in the vocative and the nominative, so that's easy. Now I just have to figure out how to pluralize "god." I find out that god is *deus*, m. (masculine), *dei*. This one happens to be slightly irregular in the plural (the vocative isn't **dei*, but *di*). But I'm an equal opportunity pagan, so what about the goddesses? Masculine plural nouns are considered to contain the feminine, but I can also add "goddesses" to the list. "Goddess" is *dea*, f., *deae*, and again the plural nominative is the same ending as the genitive singular (it isn't always, but that happens in -us and -a nouns). *Deae* is the vocative plural "you goddesses." But now I want to join them together -- what's "and"? I get several choices. The easiest is *et*.

Aperite ianuas caeli, o di et deae!

That's some good faking!

Of course, if you have more than a "faking it" understanding of the language, you may recognize that as correct but stylistically bleh. Instead, you'd probably be inclined to say something like "*o di deaque, aperite ianuas caeli*."

But that's moving beyond faking it, and getting into actually learning the language.

Chapter IV: Learning a Language for Magic

The first thing you need to ask yourself is why you're choosing to learn a language. Motivation is the number one determiner in language-learning success: those who have strong motivation tend to succeed. That's perhaps obvious: after all, learning a language is a long-term project that requires some daily commitment. If you're not motivated, you're not going to do that. But what's less obvious is the secret of motivation: it doesn't matter what your motivation is, as long as it's strong. You could learn a language because your girlfriend speaks it, or because you want to be an interpreter, or because you want to move to another country -- it doesn't matter the reason as long as it's a strong reason.

In this case, I assume your motivation is that you intend to use this language in your magic, either as a magical language or as a research tool or, as in my case, both.

The next step is to narrow down your goal. Learning a language isn't one thing: it's actually four different skills: oral and written, comprehension and production. There are two basic skills in knowing a language: comprehension and production. In other words, if you know a language, you'll understand what people are saying and be able to speak, yourself, in that language. But these two skills are separate, and it's extremely common, perhaps even inevitable, that you will develop skills in either of these at different rates. It's pretty common, but hardly universal, that skill in comprehension tends to be higher than production (I can understand ancient Greek a heck of a lot better than I can write in it, but my understanding of spoken Spanish is much less than my ability to speak it). Moreover, there isn't just one channel of communication in language. There's oral and written language, and you will have different skills in each. For example, it's extremely common for people learning an ancient language to have extremely high written comprehension skills, but absolutely no skill in oral comprehension. On the other hand, it's common for learners of Mandarin to speak before they ever learn to read, because the writing system is fiendishly difficult.

If your goal is to speak the language, extemporaneous, in ritual, then you want a high level of oral production skill. But if you want to read pre-written rituals in the target language and understand them, then you'll want a high skill in written comprehension. You may also want to write your own rituals in the language, but not speak it spontaneously: that will require a high written production skill. As you can see, where you aim depends a lot on your ultimate goal.

If you are like me, your first reaction to the above is, "no way, I want to learn the whole language, all four skills, equally!" Great! You can do that, but it's important to keep in mind that, no matter what, one skill will lag behind, and one skill will advance faster. It's the nature of the brain, and you can't avoid it, so you might as well take advantage of it. And you certainly don't want to get stressed out over it, or discouraged.

Whichever skills you wish to develop will determine your learning strategy. If you want to read eldritch books of lore, then you need to create a learning strategy that focuses on reading the language. If you want to speak it, then you need to speak it aloud. If you want to understand it when other people speak it, which for modern languages you will probably want to do, then you need to listen to people -- ideally, native speakers -- speaking it. It's that simple.

In this chapter, I'll lay out some strategies for accomplishing these things, as well as some techniques, but first the single, number one, most important rule of all when learning a new language:

Every Day Practice

You must practice your language every day. Every day. Ideally, without fail, although to be honest few people ever live up to that ideal. Still, try to practice the language every day.

The good news is, you don't have to practice hours and hours and hours to maintain the every-day schedule. Yes, especially in early stages, you'll need to devote lots of time to the language and it's better to do an hour every day rather than seven hours one day and nothing for the other six. But if you crawl home from work on Monday and the last damn thing you can do is devote an hour to Latin, sit down and write out a paradigm or study some vocabulary for fifteen minutes. That's all it takes to keep the chain intact.

If, however, you are doing this every day, and never spending longer than fifteen minutes on the language, you may want to check your motivation. It might be cool to *have* learned Latin, but you need to think that it's cool to learn Latin. Even if that means paradigms drills.

But what do you do with your practice? You apply a technique chosen to improve your eventual goal.

Grammar Drills

You have to learn the grammar of the language. That doesn't mean you need to do worksheets or such things, because those kill souls. But you need to know, without thinking about it and without "figuring it out," that a noun in a particular shape is a plural ablative neuter, or that a verb is in the indicative passive aorist middle. You get to that stage by systematically studying the language's grammar. To do this, you need a grammar book.

These come in two flavors: learning grammars and reference grammars. Let me lay out the general differences and advantages to each type. If you pick up a learning grammar, you'll know it because it'll have exercises (these may or may not be useful), and the treatment of any particular grammatical category will be spread throughout the book. So you'll have, say Chapter 1: Nouns I, first declension. Chapter 4: Nouns II, second declension. And so forth. On the other hand, a reference grammar will be organized by parts of speech in a systematic way: Chapter 1: Nouns. Chapter 2: Verbs. Perhaps, in extremely complex languages like Ancient Greek, you'll have Chapter 2: Verbs, Present Tense Stems. Chapter 3: Verbs, Aorist Stem. And so forth. But everything will be clustered together in related clumps, not spread throughout the book.

Some serious language learners disdain the learning grammars, unfairly I think, and some beginning language learners end up with a reference grammar and have no idea what to do with it. Ideally, it's nice to have both. If you have to pick just one, go with the learning grammar, if it has an index (almost all of them do). You can use it as a cumbersome and awkward reference grammar if need be, and you may find the separation of topics helpful and exercises useful.

What do you do with the grammar to learn the language? You don't just read it as a novel. You sit down with it and you do work, but what kind of work? With a learning grammar, doing the exercises may help. But you don't need to do this to get benefit from a grammar.

The grammar drill I do most often is paradigm practice. So, for example, if I'm going to practice Latin, I choose a paradigm I'm less comfortable with (let's say, i-stem neuter nouns, sup wit dose?) and I make a quick little list of four or five words that fall into that pattern. Then, I drill, by writing out the entire paradigm for those words.

Do this for *no more* than ten minutes, then take a break, come back, and start over, doing it again for ten minutes, and so on until you're done for the day. Set a timer. Seriously, ten minutes, ten minute break, ten minutes, over and over, is a lot more beneficial than grinding through a whole hour. Your brain will retain more. The goal is not speed, either, nor is it to build up muscle memory. Muscle memory is nearly useless for this kind of work. You're trying to build neural connections, which means you need to stay mindful. It's hard to stay mindful for more than ten minutes, particularly when copying out paradigms from memory.

So let's say I'm working on Latin. And I want to work on feminine nouns with e-stems. So I select one of them -- *spes*, meaning "hope" -- and get to work.

	singular	plural
nominative	<i>spes</i>	<i>spes</i>
vocative	<i>spes</i>	<i>spes</i>
accusative	<i>spem</i>	<i>spes</i>
genitive	<i>spei</i>	<i>sperum</i>
ablative	<i>spei</i>	<i>spebus</i>
dative	<i>spe</i>	<i>spebus</i>

Now, I write this out again, thinking, as I do, about what I'm doing. So I might think -- or even say aloud -- "*spes*, nominative. In most nouns not ending in -us, the nominative is the same as the vocative, so *spes*, vocative. *Spes* is feminine, so the accusative will end in -em. *Spem*, accusative. The genitive of *spei* I already have memorized because you always memorize the genitive of a noun, so it's *spei*. The ablative ends in -i, so the ablative is also *spei*. The dative is *spe*; that's a weird one, pay attention to it. The plural ending is -es, so *spes* in the nominative, and here the nominative, vocative, and accusative are all the same. All genitive plurals end in -um, so *sperum*, and plural ablative and dative are almost always the same, so *spebus*, *spebus*."

Do not just copy mindlessly, but work out and recite the reasoning to yourself, every single time you copy it out.

For nouns, you can do a whole paradigm in one sitting with most languages. But a Latin verb has many forms, as do Greek, Spanish, and Hebrew verbs. So you'll need to break these up and practice just a part. You might practice just the preterite in Spanish, or just the aorist stem forms in Greek. But again, go slow, work for only about ten minutes at a time before taking a ten minute break, and speak and reason aloud about why the words have the forms they do.

Scriptorium Practice

I take this method from one of my favorite polyglots, Professor Arguelles, who describes it on his Youtube channel. This technique is a simple practice that you can begin right from the beginning of your language study. It requires paper, a writing implement, and a book with sentences in the target language. This book can be anything: I've done scriptorium practice with lists of proverbs, poetry, and connected texts.

Begin by selecting a sentence. First, work through the sentence word by word making sure you understand the meaning and function of each word in the sentence. You don't need fluency to do this: here's one way you can bridge from faking it to knowing a language. Now, read the sentence aloud, slowly. Yes, you must read aloud. Then, write the sentence on your paper, very, very slowly -- no, you're going too fast -- syllable by syllable, saying each syllable as you write it. Once you finish the sentence, read it aloud again.

This method improves your pronunciation, vocabulary, fluent reading, and writing all at once. It's tremendously valuable at all stages, including advanced intermediate. You don't want to do it for more than about ten or fifteen minutes at a sitting, but it makes a wonderful warmup for studying. And if you're trying to work through a particular text, you may want to use this method early on to become familiar with that text's vocabulary.

Vocabulary

Learning vocabulary is a slog. To know a language, in addition to all the grammar, you need thousands upon thousands of words. Some languages have bigger lexicons -- collections of all words -- than others. Latin is fairly small in terms of necessary vocabulary. Modern languages tend to be larger. English is huge, French a bit more manageable, and Spanish somewhere in the middle. You can find lists of the most common words in a language, and learn, for example, that 80% of a language consists of only 1000 words or something like that. Don't get too enthusiastic about such lists. Learning those thousand words is certainly necessary, but it won't give you a shortcut to fluency. Take the first sentence of this paragraph and imagine just the most common words are all that you know:

Learning ??? is a ???.

That's not helpful, is it?

Here's the good news, though. If you decide, at the intermediate stage, to read something in your target language -- Plotinus in Greek, say, or Giordano Bruno's magical works in Latin -- you will be stymied on the first page. But keep with it, and soon you'll begin to become familiar with the vocabulary of that author and that text. As you do, you'll go back to the dictionary less and less frequently.

As far as dictionaries go, as soon as you reach an intermediate stage in the language and know the most common words, try to get a dictionary in the target language rather than an English-Whatever dictionary. The more you think of the words in terms of their own linguistic context, the better. If you're learning Spanish, in other words, you want a dictionary that gives you definitions in Spanish, not in English.

Of course, you may not find such a thing (a lot of ancient languages lack dictionaries in that language, all being bilingual). You can do the next best thing, and practice the words in the target language.

Everyone knows how to make flashcards, so I'm not going to be tedious and explain it. But instead of writing, on the flashcard, something like "*verbum, verbi*, n. = 'word,'" write a definition in the target language, like so: "*verbum, verbi*, n. = *quod homo dicit*." Now, "what a person says" isn't a very good definition for "word," but it will prod your memory enough to remember what "verbum" means. It'll also give you practice in writing in the language, and more importantly, thinking in it as well.

If you are a beginner in the language and don't know enough basic grammar and vocabulary to write definitions on the cards at all, then draw pictures. You can use English -- in fact, it can be beneficial to compare and contrast things with English. But the eventually goal is to shift into the target language.

When you drill the card, drill it both directions: recognize the word's meaning, and then try to come up with the word when given the meaning. If you just want reading proficiency, go from word-to-meaning more frequently than the other way around. But if

you ever think you might want to write or speak in the language, or if you just want to retain more of it for longer, spend some time going from meaning-to-word as well.

You can drill flashcards using the three-pile method. Go through a whole stack, as quickly as you can, sorting it into three piles. Pile A is "cards I knew immediately without having to think." Pile B is "cards I knew, but had to think about; or, cards I came close to but screwed something up (I got the nominative, for example, but not the genitive)." Pile C is "I had no idea and just gave up." Carry Pile C in your pocket and practice it every opportunity you can: grocery store line, waiting for the bus, dentist's office. Aim to get through Pile C at least three times a day. Go through the cards in Pile B at least once a day. Go through cards in Pile A once a week, or, as the pile gets longer, once a month.

Move cards between piles every day. So, if you practice Pile C at least three times a day, some or all of it might end up in Pile B by the end of the day. Similarly, but less often, cards in Pile A may end up back in Pile B or even -- unlikely, but it happens -- Pile C.

Memory Tricks

What do you do when you drill a new word? You could just repeat it to yourself over and over again, and for some people that works, but usually that's the hard way.

Instead, you want to create an association with the word that somehow helps you recall its meaning and form. Let's say I'm trying to learn the word βάλλω in Greek. Pronounced "bahl-lo" this word means "to throw." Its future form is βαλῶ (balo), aorist form is ἔβαλον (ebalon), βέβληκα (bebleka) is its perfect active. The perfect passive is βέβλημαι (beblemai), and its aorist passive is ἐβλήθην (eblethen). These are the six principal parts I have to know to know a Greek verb. So when I see this word, I need to somehow associate it with "throw," and also get a clue to every one of its parts. So I think of "throwing" a ball-o. My plan is to "throw away" a lambda from the word in the future, and once I've done so, I've thrown away that lambda so when I add the past tense prefix ἐ- it's already gone. I'm not satisfied. To make it *perfect*, I want to "throw" away more, getting rid of the alpha, leaving me with a stem of βλη (ble). The βε- (be-) prefix and the -κα (-ka) suffix are regular, so I don't need to worry about them. So is the -μαι (-mai) in the passive form, and once I have βλη (ble) the aorist passive is also regular. Of course, that's Greek (and not every verb requires so many changes through all its principal parts; for a lot of them you can just remember the usual pattern and apply it). Other languages may require less complex mnemonics, and a few may require more.

The real point of the mnemonic is to get you just enough memory to get from Pile C to Pile B to Pile A. Once you're in Pile A, you're no longer thinking about your mnemonic device. When I see the Latin word *conor*, I no longer think "I am going to to try to *con* someone" to remember that it means "try, attempt." I just see it and immediately know it means that, because it's firmly in my Pile A. However, if I have to learn a new word in Latin -- let's say, the word *amnis*, m. -is, meaning "torrent" -- I will start by coming up with a mnemonic to trigger my memory. (In this case, I might think of an entire church flooding into the streets, like a torrent of people, all singing "amen" at the same time -- and in fact, they're all monks, which will help me remember the word's gender as well. Or I think of a man, to get me the gender, giving birth -- out comes a torrent of amniotic fluid! There's an example of where your knowledge of English can help, as well.)

Dictionary Work

You will have to use a dictionary, and probably one made out of paper. I'm not dissing electronic dictionaries. Electronic dictionaries are actually wonderful. I use a number of dictionary apps on my iPad all the time for translation work. They save lots of time, and can even help you figure out the roots of very odd or unfamiliar forms. But there's a lot to be said for a paper dictionary. They're slow, but you can get some mileage out of them by marking them up.

Every time you look up a word when you're doing reading, make a note of it in your dictionary by putting a dot next to it. If you look up a word, and there's a dot next to it, that means you need to memorize that word immediately. Will you eventually memorize the whole dictionary? Nope. You don't need to.

Your first reaction to an unfamiliar word, however, should not be the dictionary. You should restrain yourself at first, and try to guess what the word means by context, and only then look it up. Often, you'll be right, but even if you're not, the process of guessing will focus your attention and you will rarely find yourself having to look up a word twice.

One other advantage of the paper dictionary is that you can often see related words that derive from the word you're looking up. If, for example, you're looking up "love" in an English dictionary, you're also going to see "lover." I find it productive to browse in this way when doing dictionary work, because often you can get three or four words for the price of one.

Chapter V: Intermediate Practice

Once you get to the point where you can recognize a few thousand words, recognize the declension of a noun or the conjugation of even an unfamiliar verb at a glance, and put together the syntax of a sentence so that you know, for example, which adjectives go with which nouns, then you're ready to begin extensive reading in the language.

Extensive reading is a technique whereby you find (or, in early stages, prepare) a text to read.

Select a text at a level you can read with some skill -- say, you can figure out 50-75% of the vocabulary and grammar you encounter (although, to be honest, 80% of the vocabulary and 90% of the grammar is better). It can be short; a hundred words is sufficient. Now go through and for every grammatical point or vocabulary word you don't know, look it up and make a note in your notebook. Write a definition (ideally, if you can manage it, in the target language) next to each word in your notebook, and an explanation for each grammatical point. Once you do that, read it over and then set aside. Go back to the target text, and now read it as quickly as you can, trying to see how much of it you understand. The important point is this: try as hard as you can not to translate the text into your native language as you read. In other words, don't see:

δοκῶ μοι περὶ ὧν πυνθάνεσθε οὐκ ἀμελέτητος εἶναι. (doko moi peri on punthanesthe ouk ameletetos einai)

and think

I seem . . . to myself . . . about, concerning . . . of which . . . you inquire . . . not . . . unprepared, unskilled . . . to be.

Instead, read it and understand its meaning ("I consider myself not unsuitable to answer the questions you ask") as a whole.

Do not, in other words, translate the text. This urge to translate is very strong, especially if you've tried to learn languages in academic settings, because translation is an easy way to "test" understanding. But it's not what one does when one processes a language. If I say "Hey, pass me the salt" you don't think about each individual word's meaning, then parse them together into a sentence in your head. You know immediately what I want. The more you do this reading without translating, the more you will internalize the language and learn to think in it, which is one of the things that leads to spoken and literary fluency.

If you can find texts where you know nearly all the words and all the grammar, then you can deepen this practice by forgoing the first step. In other words, you can just pick up and read. If you hit a word you don't know, you should be able to figure it out from context. Look it up only if you cannot figure it out. There are also texts available that offer facing-page notes or even translations. Even with these, I recommend writing out the unfamiliar words and grammatical points in your notebook. It will help cement

them in your mind and you'll have them all in one place when you wish to review.

It's also worthwhile to try to write in the language as much as you can. This practice is harder, but you can do the same sort of exercise. Decide you're going to describe your day, make a vocabulary list of words and grammatical points you'll likely need to do that, and then write a hundred word essay in the target language as quickly and fluently as you can. If you missed an important grammatical point (Oh, damn, what's the aorist of that verb?), do not stop at that point. Instead, find some way around it (Well, I guess I can't say I "devoured" the pizza, but I can say I "ate" it, I guess). Later, look up the word you didn't know and make it part of your next vocabulary drill.

If you're learning an ancient language, you'll have to do a bit of circumlocution (finding another way of saying something than the way you originally intended) when you write. For example, Ancient Greek doesn't really have a word for "pizza." So you can just borrow from English and transliterate it, assigning it a gender or even a declension that seems to make sense, although you could also treat it as indeclinable, which is what the Greeks themselves often did when they borrowed a word: ἡ πίτσα.

At the advanced intermediate level, when you can read simple texts with few or no notes, then you can begin trying your hand at more complex work. Often, poetry is harder than prose, so you can go there, or you can try stuff written in a different dialect or a different era (Medieval Latin, for example, uses grammatical constructions never seen in Classical Latin, and Ionic Greek is different from Attic Greek, which are both quite different from Koine). You can even enjoy some novels that have been translated into other languages. Used bookstores sometime can be treasure troves of such things. I've seen a copy of Stephen King's *Es* (*It*, in German), and the number of self-help books I've seen translated into Spanish is remarkable (*El Secreto!*) If you've already read the book in English, it can be even more helpful to read a translation, because much of your preliminary work has been done already.

If you're learning a dead language, like Latin or Greek, you might think that this particular avenue is closed off to you. But tell that to *Winni Ille Pu*, the Latin translation of *Winnie the Poo*. Or tell it to *APEIOΣ ΠΟΤΗΡ καί ἡ τοῦ φιλοσόφου λίθος*, (Areios Poter kai he tou philosophou lithos) or *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, translated into Ancient Greek.

If you're just starting out in learning the language, and you can manage to find books written for children, you will often find it very easy. I have a whole stack of picture books in various languages, all geared to five or six year old children, because they're wonderful ways to get practice in reading even at early stages of learning the language.

Chapter VI: Using the Language in Magic

You don't need to speak any other language to do magic. But there's a reason I've written this little booklet: it can be quite effective to use another language for various reasons, not all of them immediately obvious.

First, speaking another language shifts the way your mind works, especially if you're not translating in your head but really speaking the language. There's some scientific evidence that the language we speak changes our thoughts (and some scientific evidence that it doesn't, so the jury is out). But any magician who has muttered a few words in Latin knows that it just feels more elevated, more important, and more significant. In the words of the bumper sticker, *quidquid Latine dictum sit altum videtur*, "Whatever is said in Latin seems profound." This effect isn't necessarily one to sneer at.

Second, obviously, is the purpose of research, which I've already discussed. But let me point out that anyone who wishes to get an advanced degree (Masters or Ph.D.), in most programs, must show that they know another language well enough to read in it. Some programs even require fluency (mine didn't, thank goodness, but I had to show that I could read and understand long passages of Spanish with limited use of the dictionary). This requirement isn't just a flaming hoop; it serves a valuable purpose, because not everything worth saying has been said in English, and much of it is never translated. This is especially true in the field of magic, where actual academics are doing actual academic research -- and not, as one might think, with the intent to debunk magic or prove that it exists -- and because there are so few of them, much of this research never ends up in English.

Third, there are some magical paths that do require you to learn a language. If you're going to pursue Santeria, I'd hope that you'd pick up at least a little Spanish. If you want to learn Qabala, you better at least know the Hebrew alphabet, at the very minimum. And if you really want to get deep into runes, you might want to learn some Icelandic and German. A lot of my magic is based on a postmodern re-imagining of Renaissance and late Roman neoplatonic magic. Knowing Greek and Latin goes a long way in that kind of study, since not everything has been translated and often what has been translated is -- let's just say, not the way I would have translated it. Even if I do a ritual in English, which I mostly do, I often base that English on my own translation of ancient rituals.

Fourth, there's something to be said for secrecy in some environments. Conducting a ritual or incantation in another language can offer that secrecy, even if it would be just as effective in your native language. It certainly makes you seem all mysterious and ooooh if you can utter something in Latin at a public ritual, but that's not really much of a benefit. Rather, in some cases, you may have techniques or utterances that were given to

you under oath or with the expectation that you wouldn't share them, either by human teachers or by spirits, and couching them in a language that possible hearers don't know is one way of assuring that.

Finally, a lot of rituals are conducted, in whole or in part, in other languages, and knowing what those rituals mean is a lot easier if you know the language. The Golden Dawn's Lesser Banishing Ritual of the Pentagrams is a good example: you can just memorize what the Hebrew words mean, or you can internalize an understanding of Hebrew so that they don't just stand as code-words but as actual living units of meaning. Which do you imagine is likely to be more effective?

Chapter VII: Resources

Where do you start? With good resources.

Skip Rosetta Stone and other overpriced programs, unless you really want to spend hundreds of dollars for what is essentially a set of electronic flashcards. Your bare minimum to begin is the following:

- A grammar of the language, ideally a learning grammar, but a reference grammar will work if you're willing to make it work. The *Teach Yourself* series varies between excellent and not so good, depending on language. One easy way to test it is to look at the glossary and index. That'll tell you what you'll learn with this grammar. Another good test is to look at the answer key for the last chapter (if it has an answer key -- if not, that's a definite strike against it but not necessarily a reason not to use it); what does the English answer key look like? If it looks like fairly sophisticated English, that's the level the book will bring you to in the target language. If it reads like "I should like to find the bus. Where is the bus? Is the bus coming?" then you have a glorified phrasebook and you should put it back.
- A dictionary of the grammar; you can easily find one online. Look up the word "love" in the English part, and see what it says. If it says something like "Love, n. amor; Love, v. amare" then you're okay. If it just gives you a single word, get a different dictionary. Then look up whatever word it assigns to "love" in the target language, and see what it says. If it includes an example sentence, that's a good dictionary and you should take it. If not, you will want to upgrade sooner rather than later, if you buy it. Example sentences are really handy in constructing your own flashcards.
- One or more texts in the target language. These can come later, and they can be as simple as newspapers (in fact, newspapers are kind of perfect for modern languages) or children's books. But you want something to aspire to, and if you work diligently, you will need them sooner than you think.
- A notebook. Don't spend lots of money on this; you'll fill it quickly and need another. I have a stack of spiral notebooks filled with Greek.
- Ideally, recordings of the language. These often come with the learning grammar, so you might have that base covered. You can also find them online for free, in the form of news, radio shows, podcasts, YouTube videos, and so on. If you're learning a dead language, you can still find people willing to talk in it on YouTube.

You may also want some supplementary materials:

- Phrasebooks are garbage when trying to learn a language's grammar, but they have another purpose, and that's as a source of useful example sentences to do your

scriptorium practice with. Some phrasebooks, the best of them, also have a summary of grammar in the back. This can be handy for grocery-store-line studying, although it's never enough for actually learning the language.

- Media in the target language. I have such a stack of books in Ancient Greek that I may or may not ever get around to reading. Why? They act as inspiration and as a palliative to that excuse "well, I could work on my languages, but I don't have anything new to read." Don't be caught up in books alone, though, especially if you're studying a modern language. Other media can be very useful.
- Inspirational kludge. The human mind is a silly thing, and if you begin to think in terms of the culture of your language, and decorate your study environment in those terms, you will quickly find yourself more motivated to study and work at the language. For some languages, this is easy: it's not hard for me to find Ancient Greek and Roman statuary in my home. But for others, you may need to dig up that Indonesian Batik that reminds you of why you find Indonesian magic and folklore so fascinating, or that Chinese lacquer-work vase that inspires you to memorize your characters for the day.
- A study buddy, ideally one who is a native speaker in the language you're learning. Of course, if it's a dead language, that's hard to come by. But sharing your knowledge of your native language with speakers of your target language is an easy, fun, and deeply satisfying way to explore and learn. I particularly like Rhinospike, a website where you can request native speakers correct and read texts that you have written in your target language. I also like iTalki, a very friendly site where you can hire one-on-one tutors fairly inexpensively to talk to you online.

Chapter VIII: Using Magic to Learn

Obviously, if you're going to learn a language to help you in your magical practice, it stands to reason that you probably do magic. Just as learning a language can help you in your magic, so can magic help you in learning a language. This book is much more about how to select and learn a language you wish to use in your magic than it is using magic to learn a language, but I would be remiss if I didn't mention a few things you might try.

There are several traditional methods for learning a language magically. *The Goetia* lists demons -- Renove and Forneus particularly -- who aid in learning languages, although I would not recommend the Goetic approach for something so personal. In the *Greater Key of Solomon*, a spell for learning anything one wishes to know is laid out in Chapter XIII, involving a white rug and the inhalation of some incense. It's not clear if this is merely a method of divination or a more permanent means of learning new skills. The *Ars Notoria*, a book containing elaborate diagrams to be studied and prayed over, offers means of learning languages as well. These diagrams look very much like grammatical diagrams, and perhaps were meant to be used as a mnemonic device.

If you're less interested in combing the grimoires for old and dusty spells and unnerving demonic evocations, you can always go the folk magic route. If you have an interest in Hoodoo, for example, you may wish to use King Solomon Wisdom products -- powders, candles, and oils -- to encourage your intellect. Alternately, if you're more of a ceremonial bent, as I am, you may call on Mercury. Names to invoke for Mercurial aid in learning languages include the God name, Elohim Tzabaoth. The Archangel is Raphael (though a lot of people would say Michael), and the angelic choir is the Beni Elohim, the Sons of the Gods.

You could easily employ this Cabalistic technique by imagining yourself inhaling orange mist, while you recite the four names in order, before you begin to study your language. Of course, the key there is that you must study the language. Merely doing the spell, any spell, won't be enough to learn a language, but it might speed it up.

You can also begin to use your language in your magic. If you translate your daily work into your target language, you'll find that you keep it foremost in your mind. Of course, that assumes you do magic daily. If you don't have a daily practice, you might develop one, just so you can make use of your language.

A daily practice of meditation and contemplation will also help, not just with language learning, but with all intellectual endeavors. I recommend a simple mindfulness meditation. Sit comfortably, back straight, but relaxed. Inhale and exhale normally, not trying to control your breath. Simply focus your mind on your breathing. When your mind inevitably wanders, bring it back to your breath. Don't get frustrated when you must do this over and over again. Simply accept your mind's tendency to wander, but also firmly and gently bring it back to the breath. Doing this for even five or

ten minutes before beginning your day, or practicing your language, can help clear and focus your mind.

Finally, if you wish to employ a rather postmodern practice, you can invoke the spirit of the language itself. Create a sigil of the language's name by writing it as a monogram, so that the letters become an abstract design. Create a name for the spirit of the language, either through inspiration (contemplating the sigil until a name arises) or through a cipher technique like athbash, where you split the alphabet in two and "fold" it to create a simple substitution cipher. So, for instance, the English alphabet would look like this:

a -- z
b -- y
c -- x
d -- w
e -- v
f -- u
g -- t
h -- s
i -- r
j -- q
k -- p
l -- o
m -- n

Thus, the spirit of "English" would be Vmtrhsh. You can add vowels to make it more pronounceable. "Vemtorhes" perhaps.

The invocation itself is fairly simple. You contemplate the sigil daily, and repeat the name, until you receive some impression in your mind of the spirit itself. This may take several days or weeks. At that point, you can ask the spirit to help you learn the language. You might light a candle to the spirit to help you understand a particularly tricky part of the language, or draw the sigil of the spirit in the flyleaf of your grammar to "charge" your books with its power.

Ultimately, though, keep in mind that whatever you do to boost your efforts magically, you must match that action with good old fashioned study. Praying to Hermes will help you get your car unstuck, but only if you help push.

Conclusion

Learning a language for magic is a lot of work, but it's rewarding, even enjoyable work. You will probably find that you always struggle a bit with your chosen language, so don't feel bad if you always feel like you're playing catchup. And if you take some time off and feel like you've "lost" the language, don't despair. Just a little practice will refresh your memory.

A language, even an obscure one, is a gift you give your future self. There are few magical acts as powerful and rewarding as improving your own mind, and few things that will do it more readily and enjoyably as exploring the world of another language. If you choose to learn another language to help you in your magical practice, whatever it may be, I wish you good luck, bonam fortunam, agathen tykhen, buena suerte, viel Glück.