TECHNOLOGY

Gateway Languages Database

OVERVIEW

Background

There are some situations when fast language acquisition skills are needed, such as when a company has a newfound economic interest, a humanitarian organization identifies a crisis, or a defense contractor wishes to fill a critical capabilities gap. Even when time is not an issue, there is a need to be able to identify the likely degree of ease or difficulty of acquiring a specific foreign language for individuals based on their current language skills. This could be useful for high school or college counselors trying to help students make the right decisions, or for language learning systems.

Innovative Technology

Researchers at the University of Maryland have developed the Gateway Languages Database, a tool designed to identify likely ease or difficulty in acquiring foreign language skills based on a person's current language skills. The database also provides additional linguistic information on the countries where the languages are used, such as the languages used in government or higher education. The tool calculates cross-linguistic distance for languages based on writing system, phonology, lexicon, word order, word classes, and morphology, among other factors.

Advantages

·Detailed information on over one hundred world languages and almost two hundred countries

Applications

·Assessing likely difficulty learning a foreign language based on current language skills
·Identifying languages required and/or acceptable in a particular country or region
·Identifying best cross-training opportunities

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Additional Information

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EXTERNAL RESOURCES

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