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May 8th 2021 edition

Johnson

The real reasons some languages are harder to learn

They slice up the messy reality of life differently from your own



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WHEN CONSIDERING which foreign languages to study, some people shy away from those that use a different alphabet. Those random-looking squiggles seem to symbolise the impenetrability of the language, the difficulty of the task ahead.

So it can be surprising to hear devotees of Russian say the alphabet is the easiest part of the job. The Cyrillic script, like the Roman one, has its origins in the Greek alphabet. As a result, some letters look the same and are used near identically. Others look the same but have different pronunciations, like the *р* in Cyrillic, which stands for an *r*-sound. For Russian, that cuts the task down to only about 20 entirely new characters. These can comfortably be learned in a week, and soon mastered to the point that they present little trouble. An

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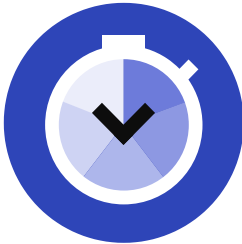
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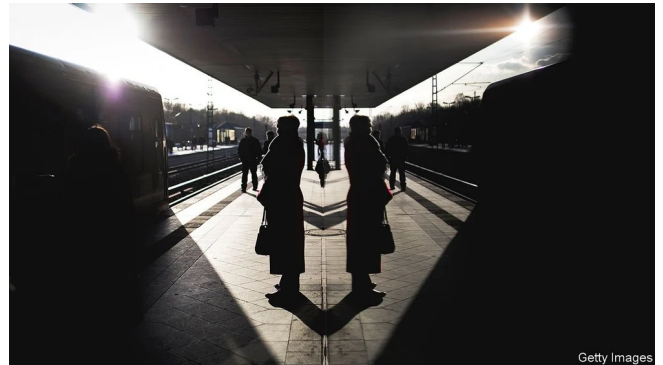
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