What Does It Really Say? Hints for Deciphering Foreign Language Records

Records in Other Languages
What keeps us from wanting to look at these records?
−**Fear**

> **That we won't know what we are looking at**
> **That we won't understand what we are looking at**
> **That we'll miss something**

Difficulties with Foreign Language Documents
We may ask ourselves:

> **What language is it?**
> **Is more than one language involved?**
> **Can I read the writing?**
> **What is the document really saying?**
> **What are the important pieces I need to pick out?**

There are Some Answers

> **Look for key words to determine what language a document is in and what kind of document it is**
> **Use a vocabulary list (www.familysearch.org) to pick out key words**
> **Translate only the key words to get the basic information you want**
> **You can go back later and get the rest of the translation**

What About That Writing?

> **Look at the writing long enough**
> **Find similar letters or words**
> **Use alphabet templates (eg. Fraktur or Old English) and spell out letter by letter**
> **Put different combinations in translation tools**
> **Work backwards**

−**Translate from English to language using what you think translation might be**

Translation Tools
Some internet resources
−**www.familysearch.org (has word lists in many languages)**
−**http://translate.google.com/?hl=en&tab=wT#**
−**http://babelfish.yahoo.com/translate_txt**
−**http://frengly.com**
−**http://freetranslation.com**
−**http://translate.google.com/#**
−**http://www.translation-guide.com/free_online_translators.php?from=English&to=Latin**

Dictionaries

Translators
–**Friends or acquaintances who speak the language**
–**Paid translators**

Some Similarities in Foreign Language Documents
Many times the year is written out in text
Abbreviations are routinely used
–**Common abbreviation for dates:**

       7bre = September
       8bre = October
       9bre = November
       10bre = December

         𝒿₀   **= Symbol commonly used**
              for "ditto"

Latin
    Latin is the mother language for many modern European languages, including Spanish, French, Italian, Romanian, Portuguese
       –**These other languages are called Romance languages**
    Many words in these languages or English resemble Latin words and have the same or similar meanings
    The Latin used in British records has more abbreviations than the Latin used in European records

Common Characteristics of Latin and Other Romance Languages
Persons, places and things (nouns) are classified as masculine or feminine or neuter (if Latin)
–**They have different endings to denote gender**
–**Example: -o denotes male; -a denotes female**
–**In Latin, some words have both a male (*-us*) and female (*-a*) form**
–**Example: -us denotes male; -a denotes female**
–**Spanish and French adjectives are also masculine or feminine**
Plurals
–**Latin = end in –i, -ae, or –es**
– **Example: alumna becomes alumnae**
–**Spanish = add "s" to noun as well as article and adjective**
– **Example: la casa bonita becomes las casas bonitas**
–**French = add "s" or "x"**
– **Example: château becomes châteaux**
Tense
–**Latin = noun endings are different as to whether subject or object in sentence**
–**All romance language verb endings depend on who is doing the action and whether it is past, present or future**

Another French Characteristic
- **Le (masculine form of the) is used with masculine words. La (feminine form of the) is used with feminine words**
- **But l' is used with either if the word begins with a vowel**
    - **Example: enfant means child or infant, either masculine or feminine**
        - **But l'enfant est né (the child is born) is used with a male child, and l'enfant est née with a female**

Latin and Other Romance Languages
Spelling
–Latin:

        i **and** *j*; *u* **and** *v* **used interchangeably**

        e **used for** *ae* **and** *oe*; *c* **used for** *qu*

–Spanish:

        ch **used for** *c*; *e* **for** *i*; *j* **for** *g, x,* **or** *i*; *y* **for** *i*

        h **might be added or removed**

        letters are sometimes doubled

–French:

        Bv **used for** *v*; *c* **for** *ss*; *ct* **for** *t*; *es* **for** *e´*; *i* **for** *j*; *o* **for** *ou*; *t* **for** *tt*; *y* **for** *i*; *z for* **s**

Latin
In which records do you see Latin?
–Catholic church records
–Some Protestant church records
–Some civil records, particularly early English records
Records can be a combination of Latin and another language
Latin words can sometimes be guessed at because many English words came from Latin

German
German words for persons, places and things (nouns) are always capitalized
All nouns are classified as masculine, feminine or neuter
The gender of a noun is indicated by *der* **(masculine),** *die* **(feminine), and** *das* **(neuter), which translates as "***the***"**
Adjectives have masculine, feminine or neuter endings
Word endings may vary, depending on the way the words are used in the sentence
Many words are formed by joining two or more words
    Look up each part of the word separately
        Example: *hausfrau* **comes from** *haus* **meaning** *house* **and** *frau* **meaning** *wife*;
        therefore *hausfrau = housewife*
Plurals
    Are formed by adding *–er, -en,* **or** *–e*
        Example: *Katze* **becomes** *Katzen*

Spelling

p used for *b*; *a* for *e*; *t* for *d* or *dt*; *s* for *z*; *ck* for *k*; *y* for *i* or *j*; *v* for *w* or *f*; *k* for *g*;   *tz* for *z*; *ig* for *isch* or *ich*; *t* for *th*; *u* for *i*

- *Examples:*
  - *Freytag for Freitag*
  - *Burckhart for Burkhard*
  - *Waldpurga for Waldburga*
  - *undt for und*

German Script

Black letter is a typeface that was used in several variations from the 16th century until about 1940

Examples include: Gotik, Schwaber, and Fraktur

Wrap Up

First, identify language

Second, seek to understand the writing (if necessary)

Third, use a vocabulary list to identify words

Fourth, translate individual words

Fifth, translate blocks of words

Sixth, put clues together to discover other information

We may not understand the language but we can understand the records!

Example of Genealogy Words for Translations

English	Latin	Spanish	French	German
Surname	cognomen	nombre/apellido	nom	zuname
Given Name	nomen	nombre de pila	prenom	vorname
Born	nati	nacido(a)	naissance/ne/nee	geboren
Baptzed	baptismi	bautismo	bapteme	taufen
Legitimate	legitimatus	legitimo	legitime	ehelich
Marriage	matrimonium	matrimonio	mariage	heiraten
Single/Unmarried	solutus	soltero/solo	celibataire	ledig
Widow/Widower	vidua/viduus	viudaviudo	veuve/veuf	relicta/relictus
Death	mortuus	difunto(a)	deces/mort/defunt	tote
Buriel	sepulti	sepultado(a)	sepulture	beerdigungen
Father	pater	padre	pere	vater
Mother	mater	madre	mere	mutter
Godfather	compater	padrino	parrain	pate
Godmother	commater	madrina	marraine	paten
Son	filius	hijo/nino	fils	sohn
Daughter	filia	hija/nina	fille	tochter
Husband	maritus/conjux	espouso	mari/epoux	gatte/mann
Wife	marita/conjux	espousa	femme/mariee/epouse	gattin/frau