

Teaching  
English  
to  
Refugees

Robert Radin

*ibidem*

Robert Radin

## **Teaching English to Refugees**



Robert Radin

TEACHING ENGLISH TO  
REFUGEES

*ibidem*  
Verlag

## **Bibliografische Information der Deutschen Nationalbibliothek**

Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek verzeichnet diese Publikation in der Deutschen Nationalbibliografie; detaillierte bibliografische Daten sind im Internet über <http://dnb.d-nb.de> abrufbar.

Bibliographic information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek

Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data are available in the Internet at <http://dnb.d-nb.de>.

ISBN-13: 978-3-8382-7502-4

© *ibidem*-Verlag, Stuttgart 2021

Alle Rechte vorbehalten

Das Werk einschließlich aller seiner Teile ist urheberrechtlich geschützt. Jede Verwertung außerhalb der engen Grenzen des Urheberrechtsgesetzes ist ohne Zustimmung des Verlages unzulässig und strafbar. Dies gilt insbesondere für Vervielfältigungen, Übersetzungen, Mikroverfilmungen und elektronische Speicherformen sowie die Einspeicherung und Verarbeitung in elektronischen Systemen.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in or introduced into a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form, or by any means (electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise) without the prior written permission of the publisher. Any person who does any unauthorized act in relation to this publication may be liable to criminal prosecution and civil claims for damages.

*For Amy and Max*



# Table of Contents

<b>Part One: The Color Blue .....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Part Two: Springfield 2011.....</b>	<b>39</b>
<b>Part Three: Rapture of the Deep .....</b>	<b>65</b>
<b>Credits.....</b>	<b>121</b>
<b>Acknowledgements.....</b>	<b>123</b>



# **Part One: The Color Blue**



# 1. The Picture Dictionary

Sabeen came to class early. She said she couldn't understand English.

But I understand you, she said.

This was what she meant: Americans talked so fast. Even when she got the gist of it she couldn't respond. In her head all she heard were the words of her first language.

I'm from California, I said. People speak slower in California.

I was exaggerating a bit. Native Californians did speak a slower, less inflected form of English, but I was trying to make a broader point about regional differences the world over. I reminded her that people in southern Iraq didn't speak the same as people in the north, but my efforts were in vain: Now she wanted to move to California.

When everyone arrived I gave them a copy of a page from the picture dictionary. It was a drawing of three cooks in a restaurant kitchen. One was peeling potatoes, another was rolling out a pie crust, and another was opening a can.

The cooks were surrounded by utensils. Each utensil had a number that corresponded to a list of words at the bottom of the page. If Sabeen wanted to know the word for what she used to drain pasta she looked for the number next to that

item and found the word on the list. Then she said the word to herself. *Colander*.

The picture dictionary was based on a common assumption: To learn a language was to learn the names native speakers gave to different things. It could be something concrete, like *colander*, or abstract, like *hunger*.

It was an old idea. Plato articulated a version of it in the *Cratylus*:

*The name, like the picture, is an imitation.*

The picture dictionary wasn't just positing a theory of language acquisition—it was positing a theory of meaning. A word *meant* what it referred to. If I didn't have a colander in front of me, I could close my eyes and see the image of one in my head.

I turned on the document camera and projected the page on the board. I pointed to the colander and asked them what it was and they said the word *colander*. Then they took out their phones and translated the word into their languages:

مصفاة

ကစိတ်

kichujio

shaandho

फिल्टर