

# FOREIGN LANGUAGE, BEST QUOTES ON

If you talk to a man in a language he understands, that goes to his head. If you talk to him in his language, that goes to his heart.

—Nelson Mandela

Math and science fields are not the only areas where we see the United States lagging behind. Less than 1 percent of American high school students study the critical foreign languages of Arabic, Chinese, Japanese, Korean or Russian, combined.

—Cathy McMorris

I have learned several languages because I refuse to accept any manmade differences between human beings.

--Maya Angelou

The Russian language, which is, as far as I can judge, the richest of all the European family, seems admirably adapted to express the most delicate shades of thought. Possessed of a marvelous conciseness and clearness, it can with a single word call up several ideas, to express which in another tongue whole phrases would be necessary.

—Prosper Mérimée

‘Seize the day’ drains dignity from ‘*Carpe diem.*’

—Willis Goth Regier

Why is it that the United States child whose family can send him to Spain for a year to learn Spanish is a genius, but the little Korean kid who doesn't speak perfect English but already knows a second language has something wrong with him?

--Samuel Betances

You always lose when you translate, but there remains an echo of the original language. I had a professor at *Harvard*, Helen Vendler, who always said, ‘In translation, the music of the language is lost, but the magic of the meaning remains.’ I think an imprint of the language is still there. It's like you're covering an object with a piece of cloth, but you can still feel it. You don't have direct access to it, but you can still feel its shape through that cloth.

--Jean Kwok

With a very few exceptions, every word in the French vocabulary comes straight from the Latin.

--Lytton Strachey

You are fortunate because your language is English. English is a great language; among the world's languages it is perhaps the one that gives the individual the greatest freedom. It is poetic and practical at the same time; it is tremendously rich; it's a sort of all-purpose language....

You are doubly fortunate because your language is American English. English is wonderfully free; American is even freer. It has more scope and more vitality; and it has more of just the thing I am talking about here: elbowroom for the individual speaker and writer.

--Rudolf Flesch

That language is the best which, at every single point, is easiest to the greatest possible number of human beings.

--Otto Jespersen

If you can speak three languages you're trilingual. If you can speak two languages you're bilingual. If you can speak only one language you're an American.

—Unknown

To speakers of modern Greek the Homeric poems of the 7th century B.C. are not written in a foreign language. The Greek language has enjoyed a continuous tradition from earliest times until now. [...]

The only other language which enjoys comparable continuity of tradition is Chinese.

—Robert Browning

According to the United Nations' latest count, of the approximately 3,000 languages spoken in the world today, only some 78 have a literature. Of those 78, a scant five or six enjoy a truly international audience.

—Barry Sanders

Many Americans have long been of the opinion that bilingualism is 'a good thing' if it was acquired via travel (preferably to Paris) or via formal education (preferably at Harvard) but that it is a 'bad thing' if it was acquired from one's immigrant parents or grandparents.

—Joshua Fishman

Knowledge of languages is the gateway to wisdom.

--Roger Bacon

One thing I can say about the French language is that no one in the world loves their language as much as they do. It doesn't matter if you're close—it still sounds terrible to their ears.

—Mads Mikkelsen

I failed world geography, civics, Spanish and English. And when you fail Spanish and English, they do not consider you bilingual. They may call you bi-ignorant because you can't speak any language.

—Tim Scott

Never knew before what eternity was made for. It is to give some of us a chance to learn German.

—Mark Twain

French: why does this language even exist? Everyone there speaks English anyway.

—Meg Cabot

He cared for languages dead long enough that they wouldn't change on him.

—Maggie Stiefvater

Almost any sort of noise that the human vocal apparatus can produce is used in some way in some language.

--H. A. Gleason

Adam was charming and spoke perfect French. Like many anglophones in Montréal, he actually spoke French better than we did. They knew exactly which verbs to use in the same way that people knew which utensils to use while eating at a fancy dinner. It was very proper because they learned it from books. They didn't know slang or how to curse. They didn't know how to do anything other than be proper and reserved. It was state-sponsored, dry-clean-only French.

—Heather O'Neill

We have room but for one Language here and that is the English language, for we intend to see that the crucible turns our people out as Americans of American nationality and not as dwellers in a polyglot boardinghouse.

—Theodore Roosevelt

I speak twelve languages. English is the bestest.

--Stefan Berman

I was gradually coming to have a mysterious and shuddery reverence for this girl; now-a-days whenever she pulled out from the station and got her train fairly started on one of those horizonless transcontinental sentences of hers, it was borne in upon me that I was standing in the awful presence of the Mother of the German Language. I was so impressed with this, that sometimes when she began to empty one of these sentences on me I unconsciously took the very attitude of reverence, and stood uncovered; and if words had been water, I had been drowned, sure. She had exactly the German way: whatever was in her mind to be delivered, whether a mere remark, or a sermon, or a cyclopedia, or the history of a war, she would get it into a single sentence or die. Whenever the literary German dives into a sentence, that is the last you are going to see of him till he emerges on the other side of his Atlantic with his verb in his mouth.

—Mark Twain

My son is a high-school teacher. In one of his classes he mentioned to his students that Latin is a dead language, no longer spoken. One girl raised her hand to challenge my son's claim. 'But what do they speak in Latin America?' she demanded.

—E. D. Hirsch, Jr.

The center of gravity for the English language is no longer Britain. American English is the greatest influence on English everywhere.

--Robert Burchfield

In richness, good sense, and terse convenience, no other of the living languages may be put beside English.

—Jakob Grimm

England and America are two countries separated by the same language.

--George Bernard Shaw

I wish I weren't locked in my own language.

--Carol Burdick Hudson

He who knows the language is at home everywhere.

--Dutch Proverb

Latin is a language,  
Dead as Dead Can Be,  
First it Killed the Romans,  
Now It's Killing Me.

All are dead who spoke it.  
All are dead who wrote it.  
All are dead who learned it,  
Lucky dead, they've earned it.

--Michael Kilgarriff

There are between two thousand and three thousand languages spoken throughout the world, not including that spoken by teenagers.

—Internet Meme

An American who speaks French can only be understood by other Americans who have also just arrived in Paris.

--Fred Allen

Modern man is educated to understand foreign languages and misunderstand foreigners.

--G. K. Chesterton

Language is a steed that carries one into a far country.

--Arab Proverb

To acquire a few tongues is the task of a few years; to be eloquent in one is the labor of a life.

--Charles Caleb Colton

No man should travel until he has learned the language of the country he visits. Otherwise he voluntarily makes himself a great baby,—so helpless and so ridiculous.

--Ralph Waldo Emerson

But oh! the Latin!—Madame, you can really have no idea of what a mess it is. The Romans would never have found time to conquer the world if they had been obliged first to learn Latin. Lucky dogs! they already knew in their cradles the nouns ending in *im*. I on the contrary had to learn it by heart, in the sweat of my brow...

—Heinrich Heine

Colleges teach the dead languages as if they were buried and the living ones as if they were dead.

--Frank Moore Colby

French people hate broken French worse than most of us hate broken English.

--Frank Moore Colby

Whenever I hear French spoken as I approve, I find myself quietly falling in love.

--E. R. Bulwer-Lytton

The sum of human wisdom is not contained in any one language, and no single language is CAPABLE of expressing all forms and degrees of human comprehension.

--Ezra Pound

What is most difficult to render from one language into another is the tempo of its style.

--Nietzsche

The art of translation lies less in knowing the other language than in knowing your own.

--Ned Rorem

It were as wise to cast a violet into a crucible that you might discover the formal principle of its colour and odour, as seek to transfuse from one language into another the creations of a poet.

--Percy Bysshe Shelley

It is by no means always the case that translated terms preserve the original concept; indeed, every nation has some idiomatic expressions that are impossible to render perfectly in the language of another.

--Iamblichus

They spell it Vinci and pronounce it Vinchy; foreigners always spell better than they pronounce.

--Mark Twain

To change your language you must change your life.

--Derek Walcott

A man who knows four languages is worth four men.

--Charles V

Each new form of human speech introduces one into a new world of thought and life.

--Charles V

As a hawk flieth not high with one wing, even so a man reacheth not to excellence with one tongue.

--Roger Ascham

Poetry cannot be translated; and, therefore, it is the poets that preserve the languages; for we would not be at the trouble to learn a language if we could have all that is written in it just as well in a translation. But as the beauties of poetry cannot be preserved in any language except that in which it was originally written, we learn the language.

--Samuel Johnson

There is no tracing the connection of ancient nations but by language; therefore I am always sorry when any language is lost, for languages are the pedigree of nations.

--Samuel Johnson

The proper means of increasing the love we bear to our native country is to reside some time in a foreign one.

--Shenstone

Humour is the first of the gifts to perish in a foreign tongue.

--Virginia Woolf

It is of interest to note that while some dolphins are reported to have learned English—up to fifty words used in correct context—no human being has been reported to have learned dolphinese.

--Carl Sagan

The Romans would never have had time to conquer the world if they had been obliged to learn Latin first of all.

--Heinrich Heine

A gentleman need not know Latin, but he should at least have forgotten it.

--Brander Matthews

Everyone smiles in the same language.

--George Carlin

Travel, in the younger sort, is a part of education; in the elder, a part of experience. He that traveleth into a country, before he hath some entrance into the language, goeth to school, and not to travel.

--Francis Bacon

Nobody can say a word against Greek; it stamps a man at once as an educated gentleman.

--George Bernard Shaw

Please, never despise the translator. He's the mailman of human civilization.

--Alexander Pushkin

To have another language is to possess a second soul.

--Charlemagne

In Paris they simply stared when I spoke to them in French; I never did succeed in making those idiots understand their own language.

--Mark Twain

To communicate through an interpreter is like hacking one's way through a forest with a feather.

--James Evans

German is the most extravagantly ugly language...like someone using a sick-bag on a 747.

--William Rushton

Being bilingual and bicultural is an asset. It is having *twice* as much as most folks. How fortunate can Latinas be?...Latinas can have the best of both worlds as well as a choice of who to be.

--Bettina R. Flores

Germans are flummoxed by humour, the Swiss have no concept of fun, the Spanish think there is nothing at all ridiculous about eating dinner at midnight, and the Italians should never, ever have been let in on the invention of the motor car.

--Bill Bryson

Languages are the pedigree of nations.

--Samuel Johnson

I once heard a Californian student in Heidelberg say, in one of his calmest moods, that he would rather decline two drinks than one German adjective.

--Mark Twain

The Norwegian language has been described as German spoken underwater.

--Unknown

The French language is a piano without a pedal.

--André Gide

Americans have a peculiar sense of humor; Americans find this out when they try to talk to them in French.

--Unknown

All languages are illogical: in French, for example, *feminin* is masculine.

--Unknown

America is the only country left where we teach languages so that no pupil can speak them.

--G. C. Lichtenberg

To many a high school student the greatest accomplishment of the ancient Romans was their ability to speak Latin.

--Unknown

I cannot learn languages; men of ordinary capacity can learn Sanskrit in less time than it takes me to buy a German dictionary.

—George Bernard Shaw

One of the first things you learn when studying a foreign language is that the word *tongue* is feminine.

--Unknown

The most verbal nation (France) on the face of the earth, where language is the Muzak of the mind.

--Joseph Morgenstern

Man is the only animal that hasn't an international language.

--Unknown

You have to live in a country to learn a language deeply, and so much better if you fall in love with someone who speaks it.

--Peter Temes

Boy, those French: they have a different word for everything!

--Steve Martin

French is the language that turns dirt into romance.

--Stephen King

I took an estimated two thousand years of high school French, and when I finally got to France, I discovered that I didn't know one single phrase that was actually useful in a real-life French situation.

--Dave Barry

(Asked how to speak French) You speak it the same way you speak English, you just use different words.

--Gracie Allen

That woman speaks eight languages and can't say 'no' in any of them.

--Dorothy Parker

Hearing a foreign language is like seeing a postcard from some other land, even when you are actually in that other land.

--Ta-Nehisi Coates

*Quidquid latine dictum sit, altum sonatur.* (Whatever is said in Latin sounds profound.)

--Unknown

By the way, the secret of speaking French is confidence. Whether you are right or wrong, you don't hesitate.

--Joseph Epstein

I bet the 'YMCA' dance is a lot harder to do in Chinese.

--Unknown

If you really want to hurt me, talk badly about my language.

--Gloria Anzaldúa

A mother mouse and a baby mouse were walking along, when all of a sudden, a cat attacked them. The mother mouse goes, 'BARK!' and the cat runs away.

'See?' says the mother mouse to her baby. 'Now do you see why it's important to learn a foreign language?'

—Unknown

No man fully capable of his own language ever masters another.

—George Bernard Shaw

I am fluent in three languages...English, sarcasm, and profanity.

—T-Shirt Slogan

An Englishman's way of speaking absolutely classifies him.

—Alan Jay Lerner

English is the easiest language to speak badly.

—George Bernhard Shaw

Never make fun of someone who speaks broken English. It means they know another language.

—H. Jackson Brown, Jr.

The limits of my language stand for the limits of my world.

--Ludwig Wittgenstein

Our vocabulary is derived from the nation's language; and the vocabulary provides a very good indication of the nation's knowledge: by comparing a nation's vocabulary at different times, we can get a pretty good idea of that nation's progress.

--Denis Diderot

The most important book of a nation is the dictionary of its language.

--Constantin comte  
de Volney

The man who knows no foreign language knows nothing of his mother tongue.

--Johanne von Goethe

There are masked words abroad, I say, which nobody understands.

—John Ruskin

A world language is more important for mankind at the present moment than any conceivable advance in television or telephony.

--Lewis Mumford

Here you have a very carefully wrought plan for an international language, capable of very wide transactions of practical business and interchange of ideas.

—Winston Churchill  
(Speech advocating  
Basic English as a  
world tongue,  
September 7, 1943)

The Russian writer Anton Chekhov once told a story about a man who tried to teach a kitten to catch mice. Whenever the kitten refused to give chase, the man beat it. After the animal grew into an adult cat, it always cowered in terror in the presence of a mouse. ‘That,’ said Chekhov, ‘is the man who taught me Latin.’

--Patrick Welsh

We have strong evidence today that studying a foreign language has a ripple effect, helping to improve student performance in other subjects.

—Richard Riley

Foreign language instruction is a good way to introduce children to other cultures—and to stimulate their understanding of geography and history. The question often put to advocates of foreign language instruction is: What language should be taught at the elementary level? It is not surprising that young students in Europe and the USSR learn English; ours is now the primary language of international commerce and diplomacy. But should American students learn Russian, or Spanish, or Urdu? Let’s not become preoccupied with that question. What is important is for students, early on, to ‘break the language barrier’—to grasp the fact that any language, including English, is a way of communicating, of conveying meaning. Young students can use any second language to break out of the monolingual habit. In fact, a number of school districts have begun offering Latin at the elementary level, in some cases using it to help disadvantaged students get a better grip on English. What matters is not so much that students master any specific tongue; what they should learn at the elementary level is that they can learn—that foreign language need not be alien.

—William J. Bennett

John Dewey's Educational Formalism has turned America's schools into academic shopping malls, where students wander aimlessly among a host of competing educational boutiques whose only coherence is their presence under one roof. A pre-law student may know something about civil rights, but he thinks Washington, D.C. is in Washington state. An eighth-grader thinks that Latin is the language of Peru—it's in Latin America, isn't it? Students with this patchwork of cultural information no longer have a common language for the discussion of national issues or the communication of vital ideas.

--Robert Pattison

One attraction of Latin is that you can immerse yourself in the poems of Horace and Catullus without fretting over how to say, 'Have a nice day.'

—Peter Brodie

Time was also (as an infant) I knew no Latin; but this I learned without fear of suffering, by mere observation, amid the caresses of my nursery and jests from friends, smiling and sportively encouraging me. This I learned without any pressure of punishment to urge me on, for my heart urged me to give birth to its conception, which I could only do by learning words not of those who taught but of those who talked with me; in whose care also I gave birth to the thoughts, whatever I conceived. No doubt then, that a free curiosity has more force in our learning these things than a frightful enforcement.

—St. Augustine

My only comfort was the knowledge that I was not alone. Huddled in the hallways and making the most of our pathetic French, my fellow students and I engaged in the sort of conversation commonly overheard in refugee camps.

'Sometime me cry alone at night.'

'That be common for I, also, but be more strong, you. Much work and someday you talk pretty. People start love you soon. Maybe tomorrow, okay.'

—David Sedaris

I was recently on a tour of Latin America, and the only regret I have was that I didn't study Latin harder in school so I could converse with those people.

—Dan Quayle

There are hundreds of languages around the world, but a smile, speaks them all.

—Unknown

Susie: Hi Calvin! Aren't you excited about going to school? Look at all these great school supplies I got! I love having new notebooks and stuff!

Calvin: All I've got to say is they're not making me learn any foreign languages. If English is good enough for me, then by golly, it's good enough for the rest of the world! Everyone should just speak English or shut up, that's what I say!

Susie: You should maybe check the chemical content of your breakfast cereal.  
—Bill Watterson

You're kidding. I thought all geniuses read Latin. Isn't that the international language for smart people?  
—Rachel Caine

A Roman centurion walks into a bar and orders a *martinus*.  
The bartender says, 'Don't you mean a martini?'  
The centurion answers, 'If I wanted a double I would have ordered it.'  
—Harlan Wolff

The difficulty of learning the dead languages does not arise from any superior abstruseness in the languages themselves, but in their being dead, and the pronunciation entirely lost. It would be the same thing with any other language when it becomes dead. The best Greek linguist that now exists does not understand Greek so well as a Grecian plowman did, or a Grecian milkmaid; and the same for the Latin, compared with a plowman or a milkmaid of the Romans; and with respect to pronunciation and idiom, not so well as the cows that she milked. It would therefore be advantageous to the state of learning to abolish the study of the dead languages, and to make learning consist, as it originally did, in scientific knowledge.  
—Thomas Paine

There are some students who fall in love with the tidings of Latin morphology and the exquisite logic of many grammatical instructions, but these same students, when they first confront the nuances and complexities and ambiguities of literary texts ... become frustrated and disappointed: How can a language that makes so much sense be used to make such little sense?  
—Peter L Corrigan

You can say any sort of nonsense in Latin, and our feeble university men will be stunned, or at least profoundly confused. That's how the popes have gotten away with peddling bad religion for so long, they simply say it in Latin.  
—Neal Stephenson

There's nothing quite like Latin for disguising the fact that you're making it up as you go along.

—Ben Aaronovitch

It is almost impossible to translate verbally and well at the same time; for the Latin (a most severe and compendious language) often expresses that in one word which either the barbarity or the narrowness of modern tongues cannot supply in more. ...But since every language is so full of its own proprieties that what is beautiful in one is often barbarous, nay, sometimes nonsense, in another, it would be unreasonable to limit a translator to the narrow compass of his author's words; it is enough if he choose out some expression which does not vitiate the sense.

—John Dryden

It's Latin, which is an excellent language for mischief-making, which is why governments are so fond of it.

—Catherynne M. Valente

There is no better recreation for the mind than the study of the ancient classics. Take any one of them into your hand, be it only for half an hour, and you will feel yourself refreshed, relieved, purified, ennobled, strengthened; just as if you had quenched your thirst at some pure spring. Is this the effect of the old language and its perfect expression, or is it the greatness of the minds whose works remain unharmed and unweakened by the lapse of a thousand years? Perhaps both together. But this I know. If the threatened calamity should ever come, and the ancient languages cease to be taught, a new literature shall arise, of such barbarous, shallow and worthless stuff as never was seen before.

—Arthur Schopenhauer

Languages are like games. You learn the rules for one, and they all work the same way.

—Haruki Murakami

If you want to know a country, read its writers.

—Aminatta Forna

Reading a translation is like looking at a tapestry on the wrong side.

—Cervantes

Pity the poor in spirit who know neither the enchantment nor the beauty of language.

—Muriel Barbery

This question of language was curious. The sound of spoken Spanish was common in Miami, but it was also common in Los Angeles, and Houston, and even in the cities of the northeast. What was unusual about Spanish in Miami was not that it was so often spoken, but that it was so often heard: in, say, Los Angeles, Spanish remained a language only barely registered by the Anglo population, part of the ambient noise, the language spoken by the people who worked in the car wash and came to trim the trees and cleared the tables in restaurants. In Miami Spanish was spoken by the people who ate in the restaurants, the people who owned the cars and the trees, which made, on the socio-auditory scale, a considerable difference. Exiles who felt isolated or declassed by language in New York or Los Angeles thrived in Miami. An entrepreneur who spoke no English could still, in Miami, buy, sell, negotiate, leverage assets, float bonds, and, if he were so inclined, attend galas twice a week, in black tie. 'I have been after the *Herald* ten times to do a story about millionaires in Miami who do not speak more than two words in English,' one prominent exile told me. 'Yes' and 'no.' Those are the two words. They come here with five dollars in their pockets and without speaking another word of English they are millionaires.

—Joan Didion

Service members will only stay on active duty if they can provide for their families—and DOD schools provide a world-class education that has proven time and again to be an incentive for sailors, soldiers, airmen and marines to reenlist. Military dependents that attend DOD schools are highly regarded by prestigious universities the world over for a number of reasons, but there's one that you'd have a hard time replicating in a stateside school system: they've lived overseas, traveled the world, seen and experienced other cultures, learned foreign languages through immersion, and they've gained an understanding of the world that you can't get in a traditional classroom. Add a rigorous curriculum and a long track record of high test scores throughout DOD schools, and it's pretty easy to see why military kids are in such high demand.

—Tucker Elliot

I have a prejudice against people who print things in a foreign language and add no translation. When I am the reader, and the author considers me able to do the translating myself, he pays me quite a nice compliment—but if he would do the translating for me I would try to get along without the compliment.

--Mark Twain

Before long the reading of novels will occupy a niche not much more significant than the one currently occupied by the reading of poems in Latin.

--Philip Roth

Translation is like a woman. If it is beautiful, it is not faithful. If it is faithful, it is most certainly not beautiful.

—Yevgeny Yevtushenko

George Chapman was the first to translate Homer's epics into English....The first portion of the translation was published in 1598, the last in 1616. Until then Englishmen interested in the Homeric tales had to go back to the original Greek, or else to rely on the medieval versions of the tale, as Chaucer and Shakespeare did in their stories of the love of *Troilus and Cressida*. *Chapman's Homer* was by no means an exact translation. In fact, Chapman not only translated Homer into English, but into the Elizabethan idea of English poetry complete with rhymed fourteen-syllable verse and with added moral homilies. Perhaps, for that reason, it proved extremely popular, remaining so even after Alexander Pope, between 1713 and 1726, translated Homer into urbane heroic couplets in equally artificial manner. It wasn't till modern times that more or less literal translations appeared.

—Isaac Asimov

The finest words in the world are only vain sounds, if you cannot comprehend them.

--Anatole France

It lost much of its true worth; and the same happens when people try to translate books of verse into another language.

--Miguel de Cervantes

Reading poetry in translation is like kissing a woman through a veil.

--Chaim Bialik

It is as impossible to translate poetry as it is to translate music.

—Voltaire

Prose can be translated, but poetry can only be transmutilated.

—Unknown

An unalterable and unquestioned law of the musical world required that the German text of French operas sung by Swedish artists should be translated into Italian for the clearer understanding of English-speaking audiences.

--Edith Wharton

I speak Spanish to God, Italian to women, French to men and German to my horse.

—Charles V

Quebec City is the most European of any city in North America; they speak French all the time. There is a part of town called Old Quebec which is really like being in France. The architecture is just gorgeous, food, shopping. I'd say Quebec City is the most beautiful city in North America I've seen.

—Sebastian Bach

The vanishing of languages, like those of living species, is an event that has been repeated many times in history. Localized disasters such as a volcano eruptions, great floods or warfare have played a part, but in the modern era the spread of Europeans--and European diseases--has greatly accelerated the pace of destruction. Local or regional language communities may be overpowered by a dominant metropolitan language, which increases the pressure to neglect the ancestral tongue in favor of the new one and is seen as the key to prospering in the dominant culture. Children may be forbidden to use their mother tongue in the classroom, as has occurred to many groups, including the Welsh, Native Americans and Aboriginal Australians. Speakers of minority languages have been forcibly relocated and combined with speakers of other languages, as happened when Africans were brought to the Americas as slaves. Practices such as these have made Native American languages the most imperiled of any on the earth.

The death of a language is not only a tragedy for those directly involved but also an irretrievable cultural loss for the rest of the world. Through language, each culture expresses a unique worldview. Thus, any effort to preserve linguistic variety implies a deep respect for the positive values of other cultures.

—Rodger Doyle

A different language is a different vision of life.

—Federico Fellini

Those who know nothing of foreign languages, knows nothing of their own.

—Johann von Goethe

The proverbial German phenomenon of the verb-at-the-end about which droll tales of absentminded professors who would begin a sentence, ramble on for an entire lecture, and then finish up by rattling off a string of verbs by which their audience, for whom the stack had long since lost its coherence, would be totally nonplussed, are told, is an excellent example of linguistic recursion.

—Douglas Hofstadter

If we spoke a different language, we would perceive a somewhat different world.

—Ludwig Wittgenstein

How many languages are there in the world? How about 5 billion! Each of us talks, listens, and thinks in his/her own special language that has been shaped by our culture, experiences, profession, personality, mores and attitudes. The chances of us meeting someone else who talks the exact same language is pretty remote.

—Unknown

The American arrives in Paris with a few French phrases he has culled from a conversational guide or picked up from a friend who owns a beret.

—Fred A. Allen

Chinese differs from other languages as much as if it were spoken by the inhabitants of another planet.

—Frederic William  
Farrar

[On Russian] [T]here is the wonderful wealth of the language, which, as a popular tongue, is more flexible, more expressive of thought than any other living tongue I know of.

—Ernst von der Brüngen

It must not be thought, however, that the Chinese language is destitute of ornament. They employ various figures of speech, and in some they excel. Metaphor is frequently to be met with in their writings, and similes are abundant. They are fond of alliteration, and attention to rhythm is with them an essential part of composition. Gradation and climax are sometimes well sustained, while in description and dialogue they seem quite at home. But the most remarkable feature of Chinese composition, is the antithesis. Most of the principal words are classed in pairs, such as *heaven* and *earth*, *beginning* and *end*, *day* and *night*, *hot* and *cold*, etc. From antithetical words, they proceed to contrast phrases and sentences, and draw up whole paragraphs upon the same principle. In these antithetical sentences, the number of words, the class of expressions, the meaning and intonation, together with the whole sentiment, are nicely and exactly balanced, so that the one contributes to the perspicuity and effect of the other. Such a counting of words, and such a mechanical arrangement of sentences, would be intolerable in European composition, but are quite elegant and almost essential in Chinese.

—W. H. Medhurst

[F]or a man whose mother tongue is Russian to speak about political evil is as natural as digestion [...]

—Joseph Brodsky

The longer a language lives, the richer, more diverse and refined it becomes. What happened to Chinese will take place in younger languages in their own time and in their unique and native forms.

An understanding of the history of Chinese language and its impact upon the Chinese mind can be helpful for the students of Western culture because it illustrates an experience beyond the horizon of contemporary speakers of Western languages whose literatures have evolved for only a few hundred years.

—Sharron Gu

Chinese may be called the Latin of the Far East. For, just as Rome through her higher civilisation lent thousands of words to the semi-savages hovering along her borders, so China has furnished all the surrounding peoples with their scientific, legal, philosophical and religious terminology.

—Homer Bezalee Hulbert

Of course when one of these grand mountain ranges goes stretching across the printed page, it adorns and ennobles that literary landscape,—but at the same time it is a great distress to the new student, for it blocks up his way; he cannot crawl under it, or climb over it or tunnel through it. So he resorts to the dictionary for help; but there is no help there. The dictionary must draw the line somewhere,—so it leaves this sort of words out. And it is right, because these long things are hardly legitimate words, but are rather combinations of words, and the inventor of them ought to have been killed.

—Mark Twain

This last summer, when I was on my way back to Vienna from the Appetite-Cure in the mountains, I fell over a cliff in the twilight, and broke some arms and legs and one thing or another, and by good luck was found by some peasants who had lost an ass, and they carried me to the nearest habitation, which was one of those large, low, thatch-roofed farm-houses, with apartments in the garret for the family, and a cunning little porch under the deep gable decorated with boxes of bright colored flowers and cats; on the ground floor a large and light sitting-room, separated from the milch-cattle apartment by a partition; and in the front yard rose stately and fine the wealth and pride of the house, the manure-pile. That sentence is Germanic, and shows that I am acquiring that sort of mastery of the art and spirit of the language which enables a man to travel all day in one sentence without changing cars.

—Mark Twain

The Russian language is undoubtedly the richest of all the European tongues.

—Eugène-Melchior de  
Vogüé

All in all, the language of the Macedones was a distinct and particular form of Greek, resistant to outside influences and conservative in pronunciation. It remained so until the fourth century when it was almost totally submerged by the flood tide of standardized Greek.

—Nicholas Geoffrey  
Lemprière  
Hammond

It is a rather curious thing, that Russia, which has never had a parliamentary government, and where political history has been very little influenced by the spoken word, should have so much finer an instrument of expression than England, where matters of the greatest importance have been settled by open and public speech for nearly three hundred years. One would think that the constant use of the language in the national forum for purposes of argument and persuasion would help to make it flexible and subtle; and that the almost total absence of such employment would tend toward narrowness and rigidity. In this instance exactly the contrary is the case. If we may trust the testimony of those who know, we are forced to the conclusion that the English language, compared with the Russian, is nothing but an awkward dialect. Compared with Russian, the English language is decidedly weak in synonyms, and in the various shades of meaning that make for precision. Indeed, with the exception of Polish, Russian is probably the greatest language in the world, in richness, variety, definiteness, and elegance. It is also capable of saying much in little, and saying it with tremendous force.

—W. L. Phelps

Yiddish was a rich, living language, the chattering tongue of an urban population. It had the limitations of its origins. There were few Yiddish words for animals and birds. It had virtually no military vocabulary. Such voids were filled by borrowing from German, Polish and Russian. Yiddish was particularly good at borrowing: from Arabic, from Hebrew, from Aramaic and from anything with which it intersected. On the other hand, it contributed: English - American. Its chief virtue lay in its internal subtlety, particularly in its characterization of human types and emotions. It was the language of street wisdom, of the clever underdog, of pathos, resignation and suffering, all of which it palliated by humor, intense irony and superstition. It has been said the Yiddish is the only language never spoken by anyone in power.

—Paul Johnson

[The translator] has done his cleverest and best with this that follows, but you might as well seek to translate a violet into verse as seek to render in language other than its own the delicate sentiment, the exquisite rhythm, of the... original.

—William Cleaver  
Wilkinson

To me the Yiddish language and the conduct of those who spoke it are identical. One can find in the Yiddish tongue and in the Yiddish spirit expressions of pious joy, lust for life, longing for the Messiah, patience and deep appreciation of human individuality. There is a quiet humor in Yiddish and a gratitude for every day of life, every crumb of success, each encounter of love. The Yiddish mentality is not haughty. It does not take victory for granted. It does not demand and command but it muddles through, sneaks by, smuggles itself amidst the powers of destruction, knowing somewhere that God's plan for Creation is still at the very beginning. [...] Yiddish has not yet said its last word. It contains treasures that have not been revealed to the eyes of the world. It was the tongue of martyrs and saints, of dreamers and Cabalists - rich in humor and in memories that mankind may never forget. In a figurative way, Yiddish is the wise and humble language of us all, the idiom of frightened and hopeful Humanity.

—Isaac Bashevis Singer

The Russian language is able to express by means of one pitiless word the idea of a certain widespread defect for which the other three European languages I happen to know possess no special term. The absence of a particular expression in the vocabulary of a nation does not necessarily coincide with the absence of the corresponding notion but it certainly impairs the fullness and readiness of the latter's perception.

—Vladimir Nabokov

People ask me often, 'Why do you write in a dying language?' [...] I like to write ghost stories and nothing fits a ghost better than a dying language. The deader the language the more alive is the ghost. Ghosts love Yiddish and as far as I know, they all speak it.

Secondly, not only do I believe in ghosts, but also in resurrection. I am sure that millions of Yiddish speaking corpses will rise from their graves one day and their first question will be: 'Is there any new Yiddish book to read?' For them Yiddish will not be dead. [...] Yiddish may be a dying language but it is the only language I know well. Yiddish is my mother language and a mother is never really dead.

—Isaac Bashevis Singer

It is the task of the translator to release in his own language that pure language that is under the spell of another, to liberate the language imprisoned in a work in his re-creation of that work.

—Walter Benjamin

One can translate an editorial but not a poem. For one can go across the border naked but not without one's skin; for, unlike clothes, one cannot get a new skin.

—Karl Kraus

A poem sings with a bad accent in any language not its own.

—Austin O'Malley

Mrs. Howitt knew German and even Swedish much better than she knew Danish, and very often she commits ludicrous blunders which would be the ruin of the average translator nowadays, but nobody ever caught the spirit of Andersen as she has done, and she is loyally literal or fearlessly free according as the occasion demands it.

—R. Nisbet Bain

Some translators turn an author's words from gold to stone, others from stone to gold.

—Terri Guillemets

A translation of a poem is like a plaster cast of a statue or a photograph of a painting; and the better the translation the poorer the original poem.

—Austin O'Malley

True translation is transparent: it does not obscure the original, does not stand in its light, but rather allows pure language, as if strengthened by its own medium, to shine even more fully on the original.

—Walter Benjamin

He swore at us in German (which I should judge to be a singularly effective language for that purpose).

—Jerome K. Jerome

Any man who does not make himself proficient in at least two languages other than his own is a fool. Such men have the quaint habit of discovering things fifty years after all the world knows about them — because they read only their own language.

—Martin H. Fischer

'If you can't say something nice, say it in French,' my mother advised.

—Vicki Linder

If I had a phrase-book of a really satisfactory sort I would study it, and not give all my free time to undictionarial readings, but there is no such work on the market. The existing phrase-books are inadequate. They are well enough as far as they go, but when you fall down and skin your leg they don't tell you what to say.

—Mark Twain

Learn a new language and get a new soul.

—Czech Proverb

One language sets you in a corridor for life. Two languages open every door along the way.

—Frank Smith

Language is the blood of the soul into which thoughts run and out of which they grow.

—Oliver Wendell Holmes

Learning a foreign language, and the culture that goes with it, is one of the most useful things we can do to broaden the empathy and imaginative sympathy and cultural outlook of children.

—Michael Gove

Parents should conduct their arguments in quiet, respectful tones, but in a foreign language. You'd be surprised what an inducement that is to the education of children.

—Judith Martin

There is a slam-dunk case for extending foreign language teaching to children aged five. Just as some people have taken a perverse pride in not understanding mathematics, so we have taken a perverse pride in the fact that we do not speak foreign languages, and we just need to speak louder in English.

—Michael Gove

Every high school and college graduate in America should, I think, have some familiarity with statistics, economics and a foreign language such as Spanish. Religion may not be as indispensable, but the humanities should be a part of our repertory. They may not enrich our wallets, but they do enrich our lives. They civilize us. They provide context.

—Nicholas Kristof

It's important to me to work in my own language now and then. I love English, but you can never learn to master a foreign language if you're not brought up with it.

—Max von Sydow

BELLADONNA, n. In Italian a beautiful lady; in English a deadly poison. A striking example of the essential identity of the two tongues.

—Ambrose Bierce

The conquest of learning is achieved through the knowledge of languages.

—Roger Bacon

People think that other international languages are smarter and more business wise. But they have to understand that we have to preserve our culture.

—Enock Maregesi

We Americans are reluctant to learn a foreign language of our own species, let alone another species. But imagine the possibilities. Imagine the access we would have to different perspectives, the things we might see through other eyes, the wisdom that surrounds us. We don't have to figure out everything by ourselves: there are intelligences other than our own, teachers all around us. Imagine how much less lonely the world would be.

—Robin Wall Kimmerer

A complicated structure? Undoubtedly. But after all, the cathedral of Milan is complicated too, and you still look at it with awe.

—Kató Lomb

It seems the British are born to hoist their flag over every nation where the sun rises and never learn their language.

—Chloe Thurlow

A man who knows two languages is worth two men.

—French Proverb

The gospel of the glory of Christ spreads better and flourishes more because of 6,500 languages, not in spite of them.

—John Piper

In Japanese and Italian, the response to ['How are you?'] is 'I'm fine, and you?' In German it's answered with a sigh and a slight pause, followed by 'Not so good'.

—David Sedaris

Language is the road map of a culture. It tells you where its people come from and where they are going.

—Rita Mae Brown

You live a new life for every new language you speak. If you know only one language, you live only once.

—Czech Proverb

Change your language and you change your thoughts.

—Karl Albrecht

Americans who travel abroad for the first time are often shocked to discover that, despite all the progress that has been made in the last 30 years, many foreign people still speak in foreign languages.

—Dave Barry

To learn a language is to have one more window from which to look at the world.

—Chinese Proverb

Learning a foreign language not only reveals how other societies think and feel, what they have experienced and value, and how they express themselves, it also provides a cultural mirror in which we can more clearly see our own society.

—Edward Lee Gorsuch

Learning a new language is like starting a new life.

—Michel Bouhot

It is literally the case that learning languages makes you smarter. The neural networks in the brain strengthen as a result of language learning.

—Michael Gove

The most intimate temper of a people, its deepest soul, is above all in its language.

— Jules Michelet

The man who does not know other languages, unless he is a man of genius, necessarily has deficiencies in his ideas.

—Victor Hugo

Learning is a treasure that will follow its owner everywhere.

—Chinese Proverb

Language is to the mind more than light is to the eye.

—William Gibson

Own only what you can always carry with you: know languages, know countries, know people. Let your memory be your travel bag.

—Aleksandr  
Solzhenitsyn

There is the fear, common to all English-only speakers, that the chief purpose of foreign languages is to make fun of us. Otherwise, you know, why not just come out and say it?

—Barbara Ehrenreich

If I'm selling to you, I speak your language. If I'm buying, *dann müssen Sie Deutsch sprechen*.

—Willy Brandt

We die. That may be the meaning of life. But we do language. That may be the measure of our lives.

—Toni Morrison

The more languages you know, the more human you are.

—Tomáš Garrigue  
Masaryk

Obviously no language is innate. Take any kid from any race, bring them up in any culture and they will learn the language equally quickly. So no particular language is in the genes. But what might be in the genes is the ability to acquire language.

—Steven Pinker

There is no such thing as an ugly language. Today I hear every language as if it were the only one, and when I hear of one that is dying, it overwhelms me as though it were the death of the earth.

—Elias Canetti

To rescue from oblivion even a fragment of a language which men have used and which is in danger of being lost—that is to say, one of the elements, whether good or bad, which have shaped and complicated civilization—is to extend the scope of social observation and to serve civilization.

—Victor Hugo

There is in every child a painstaking teacher, so skillful that he obtains identical results in all children in all parts of the world. The only language men ever speak perfectly is the one they learn in babyhood, when no one can teach them anything!

—Maria Montessori

I don't know what it is about the French language, it seems to be scared of coming out of the mouth so it comes out the nose instead.

—P. D. Q. Bach

Language is not an abstract construction of the learned, or of dictionary makers, but is something arising out of the work, needs, ties, joys, affections, tastes, of long generations of humanity, and has its bases broad and low, close to the ground.

—Noah Webster

He showed the words ‘chocolate cake’ to a group of Americans and recorded their word associations. ‘Guilt’ was the top response. If that strikes you as unexceptional, consider the response of French eaters to the same prompt: ‘celebration.’

—Michael Pollan

The English language is like London: proudly barbaric yet deeply civilised, too, common yet royal, vulgar yet processional, sacred yet profane. Each sentence we produce, whether we know it or not, is a mongrel mouthful of Chaucerian, Shakespearean, Miltonic, Johnsonian, Dickensian and American. Military, naval, legal, corporate, criminal, jazz, rap and ghetto discourses are mingled at every turn. The French language, like Paris, has attempted, through its Academy, to retain its purity, to fight the advancing tides of Franglais and international prefabrication. English, by comparison, is a shameless whore.

—Stephen Fry

I have not been able to discover whether there exists a precise French equivalent for the common Anglo-American expression ‘killing time.’ It’s a very crass and breezy expression, when you ponder it for a moment, considering that time, after all, is killing us.

—Christopher Hitchens

I think we are wise, we English speakers, to savor accents. They teach us things about our own tongue.

—Anne Rice

You will do well to take advantage of Madame’s short residence to get up your French a little... You will be glad of this, my dear, when you have reached France, where you will find they speak nothing else.

—J. Sheridan Le Fanu

What is the French word for rain? Le rain? La rain? Is the rain masculine or feminine? It’s such a bother that it must be masculine.

—Libba Bray

Birds are sensitive to mispronunciation, even more sensitive than the French.

—Alan Powers

People in France have a phrase: ‘Spirit of the Stairway.’ In French: *Esprit de l’escalier*. It means that moment when you find the answer, but it’s too late. Say you’re at a party and someone insults you. You have to say something. So under pressure, with everybody watching, you say something lame. But the moment you leave the party...

As you start down the stairway, then -- magic. You come up with the perfect thing you should’ve said. The perfect crippling put-down.

That’s the Spirit of the Stairway.

The trouble is even the French don’t have a phrase for the stupid things you actually do say under pressure. Those stupid, desperate things you actually think or do.

Some deeds are too low to even get a name. Too low to even get talked about.

—Chuck Palahniuk

*Je suis désolé*, he said. You had to wonder about the French, how they could make a simple ‘sorry’ sound so extreme and forlorn.

—Kate Atkinson

The true structure of the Welsh grammar will be revealed only when we look at sentences slightly more complicated than its basic VSO pattern. Welsh is no different from the rest of the world: it does involve an extra step, but even that isn’t all that unusual. Welsh is like Shakespearean English on acid: the verb always—not just in questions—moves to the beginning. Alternatively, it can be viewed as taking the French grammar a step further. While the verb stops at tense in French, it moves further in Welsh to a position that traditional grammarians call the complementizer (don’t ask).

—Charles Yang

I said, ‘Je parle français.’ Indira gave me a weird look. Or a look that said I was weird. Whichever. The point is, I don’t really speak French, but it’s a useful phrase for confusing people you don’t wish to speak with. However, it’s apparently more useful in Europe, where no one enjoys speaking to the French.

—Tucker Elliot

‘Delight is *délice*, *délict* is a misdemeanour’

‘Well, it’s bloody close...’

‘Well, they often are....’

—Alan Hollinghurst

Occasionally, merely for the pleasure of being cruel, we put unoffending Frenchmen on the rack with questions framed in the incomprehensible jargon of their native language, and while they writhed, we impaled them, we peppered them, we scarified them, with their own vile verbs and participles.

—Mark Twain

Tuesday—we had school for the first time. Madame O'Malley had a moment of silence at the beginning of French class, a class that was always punctuated with long moments of silence, and then asked us how we were feeling.

'Awful,' a girl said.

'En français,' Madame O'Malley replied. 'En français.'

—John Green

You can never understand one language until you understand at least two.

—Geoffrey Willans

I started going over the lines in my head for this French play I'm in at school. I play a rabbit called Janot Lapin, who's the leader of a group of farm animals. It's not the most interesting play in the universe, but we only know three verb tenses so far so we didn't have a lot of choices. There's this one scene where I'm really hungry because the landowners aren't feeding us, and I keep saying, 'J'ai faim.' In case you don't know, that means 'I'm hungry,' but it really means 'I have hunger.' That's what real French people say. I think it's neat how French people have hunger, but they aren't hungry like Americans are. I mean, it's a lot easier to try not to have something than to try not to be it.

—Lori Gottlieb

It was not the way Curve smelled that Colin liked—not exactly. It was the way the air smelled just as Lindsey began to jog away from him. The smell of perfume left behind. There's not a word for that in English, but Colin knew the French word: *sillage*. What Colin liked about Curve was not its smell on the skin but its *sillage*, the fruity sweet smell of its leaving.

—John Green

There is nothing intrinsic in the English language that made it attain such prominence. It is far from easy to learn. (A recent study found that it takes much longer for an infant to learn English than, for example, Spanish; the world would indeed have been better off if Spanish had become the universal language.)

—Minae Mizumura

For *Sayonara*, literally translated, ‘Since it must be so,’ of all the good-bys I have heard is the most beautiful. Unlike the *Auf Wiedersehens* and *Au revoirs*, it does not try to cheat itself by any bravado ‘Till we meet again,’ any sedative to postpone the pain of separation. It does not evade the issue like the sturdy blinking *Farewell*. *Farewell* is a father’s good-by. It is—‘Go out in the world and do well, my son.’ It is encouragement and admonition. It is hope and faith. But it passes over the

significance of the moment; of parting it says nothing. It hides its emotion. It says too little. While *Good-by* (‘God be with you’) and *Adios* say too much. They try to bridge the distance, almost to deny it. *Good-by* is a prayer, a ringing cry. ‘You must not go—I cannot bear to have you go! But you shall not go alone, unwatched. God will be with you. God’s hand will over you’ and even—underneath, hidden, but it is there, incorrigible—‘I will be with you; I will watch you—always.’ It is a mother’s good-by. But *Sayonara* says neither too much nor too little. It is a simple acceptance of fact. All understanding of life lies in its limits. All emotion, smoldering, is banked up behind it. But it says nothing. It is really the unspoken good-by, the pressure of a hand, ‘Sayonara’

—Anne Morrow  
Lindbergh

‘I said I kicked a French chicken in the stomach once.’ ‘Huh?’ ‘It said, ‘Oeuf.’ ‘What is that?’ ‘It’s a joke. Do you want to hear another, or have you already had *un oeuf*?’

—Jonathan Safran Foer

The genius of the French language, descended from its single Latin stock, has triumphed most in the contrary direction - in simplicity, in unity, in clarity, and in restraint.

—Lytton Strachey

You get the feeling that many of my guests feel that the French language gives them entry into a more cultivated, more intelligent world, more highly civilised too, with rules.

—Bernard Pivot

Spanish—how shall I say this?—is like Portuguese spoken with a speech impediment.

—Sol Luckman

Spanish is a feeling-based language that comes first from the heart, just as English is a thinking-based language that comes first from the head.

—Victor Villaseñor

When I took part in European leaders summits, it was sometimes unpleasant for me to hear Romanian, Polish, Portuguese, and Italian friends speak English, although I admit that on an informal basis, first contacts can be made in this language. Nevertheless, I will defend everywhere the use of the French language.  
—Francois Hollande

To achieve the very pinnacle of good taste, the neoclassicists wrote their plays entirely in Alexandrine verse, a rarefied meter that is uniquely tailored to the French language and fits no other.

—Florence King

Both French and Latin are involved with nationalistic and religious implications which could not be entirely shaken off, and so, while they seemed for a long time to have solved the international language problem up to a certain point, they did not really do so in spirit.

—Edward Sapir

English, once accepted as an international language, is no more secure than French has proved to be as the one and only accepted language of diplomacy or as Latin has proved to be as the international language of science.

—Edward Sapir

CONJUGATE THIS:

I cut class, you cut class, he, she, it cuts class. We cut class, they cut class. We all cut class. I cannot say this in Spanish because I did not go to Spanish today.

*Gracias a dios. Hasta luego.*

—Laurie Halse Anderson

Then I speak to her in a language she has never heard, I speak to her in Spanish, in the tongue of the long, crepuscular verses of Díaz Casanueva; in that language in which Joaquín Edwards preaches nationalism. My discourse is profound; I speak with eloquence and seduction; my words, more than from me, issue from the warm nights, from the many solitary nights on the Red Sea, and when the tiny dancer puts her arm around my neck, I understand that she understands. Magnificent language!

—Pablo Neruda

I studied French in high school and German in college and I once took a 24-hour Italian crash course. English has by far the most words in it of any other language. Our money might not be worth anything anymore, but the language is.

—Roy Blount Jr.

*Mochó* was a Spanish word that meant maimed or referred to something that had been lopped off like a stump. To call Homer *el mochó* was, essentially, to call him ‘Stumpy’ or ‘the maimed one.’

It doesn’t sound particularly flattering, but among Spanish speakers the giving of nicknames is tantamount to a declaration of love. Things that would sound insulting outright in English were tokens of deep affection when said in Spanish.

—Gwen Cooper

English was such a dense, tight language. So many hard letters, like miniature walls. Not open with vowels the way Spanish was. Our throats open, our mouths open, our hearts open. In English, the sounds were closed. They thudded to the floor. And yet, there was something magnificent about it. Profesora Shields explained that in English there was no *usted*, no *tu*. There was only one word—you. It applied to all people. No one more distant or more familiar. You. They. Me. I. Us. We. There were no words that changed from feminine to masculine and back again depending on the speaker. A person was from New York. Not a woman from New York, not a man from New York. Simply a person.

—Cristina Henríquez

The Spaniards are good at many things, but not at making war. All foreigners are alike appalled by their inefficiency, above all their maddening unpunctuality. The one word that no foreigner can avoid learning is *mañana*.

—George Orwell

The Actor, noticing a closed bookshop, dismounted from the horse which he tied to a street lamp. He woke up the bookseller and bought a Spanish grammar and dictionary. He set out again across town marveling at the way that the words of the foreign language were freshly gathered fruits and not old and dry. They touched the senses marvelously, new like young beggars who accost you, not yet words but the every things they designate, happily running naked before being clothed again in abstraction.

—Georges Limbour

We’re afraid the others will think we’re *agringadas* because we don’t speak Chicano Spanish. We oppress each other trying to out-Chicano each other, vying to be ‘real’ Chicanas, to speak like Chicanos. There is no one Chicano language just as there is no one Chicano experience.

—Gloria E. Anzaldúa

The English language was carefully, carefully cobbled together by three blind dudes and a German dictionary.

—Dave Kellett

I grew up speaking Spanish and English. My mother can speak Spanish, English, French and Italian, and she's pretty good at faking Portuguese. I wish that I spoke more languages than I do.

—Sebastian Arcelus

Spanish and English aren't different languages, only extreme dialects of Latin. It's almost possible to translate word for word. Translation from a language unrelated to English is nothing to do with equivalent words. Whenever I'd tried to do that in Chinese I'd come out with unbroken nonsense. I had to forget the English, hang the meaning up in a well-lit gallery, stare at it hard, then describe it afresh.

—Natasha Pulley

In German, a young lady [*das Mädchen*] has no sex, but a turnip [*die Rübe*] has.

—Mark Twain

The German language speaks being, while all the others merely speak of being.

—Martin Heidegger.

Life is too short to learn German.

—Oscar Wilde

I remember learning German—so beautiful, so strange—at school in Australia on the other side of the earth. My family was nonplussed about me learning such an odd, ugly language and, though of course too sophisticated to say it, the language of the enemy. But I liked the *sticklebrick* nature of it, building long supple words by putting short ones together. Things could be brought into being that had no name in English—*Weltanschauung*, *Schadenfreude*, *sippenhaft*, *Sonderweg*, *Scheissfreundlichkeit*, *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*. Her words that don't have English counterparts? 'view of the world', 'joy at another's misery', 'collective responsibility', 'special path', 'crap friendship' and 'coming to terms with the past'.

—Anna Funder

Though unmusical, German is the most expressive of all languages.

—Arthur Conan Doyle

If you've never studied German before or think you know nothing about it, you might be in for a little surprise. You already know many German words. And you have the advantage of being an English speaker, which means that your knowledge of that language will be a helpful tool for learning German efficiently and comfortably.

—Edward Swick

When one is polite in German, one lies.

—Johann Wolfgang von  
Goethe

The German language is so sonorous, isn't it? Beautiful language...the language of poetry. Angry, angry poetry.

—John Oliver

Only the language of civilized people may be spoken, thus no German.

—Anne Frank

My philological studies have satisfied me that a gifted person ought to learn English (barring spelling and pronouncing) in thirty hours, French in thirty days, and German in thirty years. It seems manifest, then, that the latter tongue ought to be trimmed down and repaired. If it is to remain as it is, it ought to be gently and reverently set aside among the dead languages, for only the dead have time to learn it.

—Mark Twain

It is easier for a cannibal to enter the Kingdom of Heaven through the eye of a rich man's needle than it is for any other foreigner to read the terrible German script.

—Mark Twain

The circumstances and the atmosphere always have so much to do in directing a conversation, especially a German conversation, which is only a kind of an insurrection, anyway.

—Mark Twain

A dog is 'der Hund'; a woman is 'die Frau'; a horse is 'das Pferd'; now you put that dog in the genitive case, and is he the same dog he was before? No, sir; he is 'des Hundes'; put him in the dative case and what is he? Why, he is 'dem Hund.' Now you snatch him into the accusative case and how is it with him? Why, he is 'den Hunden.' But suppose he happens to be twins and you have to pluralize him- what then? Why, they'll swat that twin dog around through the 4 cases until he'll think he's an entire international dog-show all in his own person. I don't like dogs, but I wouldn't treat a dog like that—I wouldn't even treat a borrowed dog that way. Well, it's just the same with a cat. They start her in at the nominative singular in good health and fair to look upon, and they sweat her through all the 4 cases and the 16 *the's* and when she limps out through the accusative plural you wouldn't recognize her for the same being. Yes, sir, once the German language gets hold of a cat, it's goodbye cat. That's about the amount of it.

—Mark Twain

A dream...I was trying to explain to St. Peter, and was doing it in the German tongue, because I didn't want to be too explicit.

—Mark Twain

In early times some sufferer had to sit up with a toothache, and he put in the time inventing the German language.

—Mark Twain

I don't believe there is anything in the whole earth that you can't learn in Berlin except the German language.

—Mark Twain

It's awful undermining to the intellect, German is; you want to take it in small doses, or first you know your brains all run together, and you feel them flapping around in your head same as so much drawn butter.

—Mark Twain

I can understand German as well as the maniac that invented it, but I talk it best through an interpreter.

—Mark Twain

It is not like studying German, where you mull along, in a groping, uncertain way, for thirty years; and at last, just as you think you've got it, they spring the subjunctive on you, and there you are. No- and I see now plainly enough, that the great pity about the German language is, that you can't fall off it and hurt yourself. There is nothing like that feature to make you attend strictly to business.

—Mark Twain

[On Dutch] It is too smooth and blubbery; it reads like butter-milk gurgling from a jug.

—Mark Twain

The Germans have an inhuman way of cutting up their verbs. Now a verb has a hard time enough of it in this world when it's all together. It's downright inhuman to split it up. But that's just what those Germans do. They take part of a verb and put it down here, like a stake, and they take the other part of it and put it away over yonder like another stake, and between these two limits they just shovel in German.

—Mark Twain

I don't speak German well but several experts have assured me that I write it like an angel. Maybe so, maybe so- I don't know. I've not yet made any acquaintances among the angels. That comes later, whenever it please the Deity. I'm not in any hurry.

—Mark Twain

'The Indians are the Italians of Asia', Didier pronounced with a sage and mischievous grin. 'It can be said, certainly, with equal justice, that the Italians are the Indians of Europe, but you do understand me, I think. There is so much Italian in the Indians, and so much Indians in the Italians. They are both people of the Madonna - they demand a goddess, even if the religion does not provide one. Every man in both countries is a singer when he is happy, and every woman is a dancer when she walks to the shop at the corner. For them, food is music inside the body, and music is food inside the heart. The Language of India and the language of Italy, they make every man a poet, and make something beautiful from every banalite. They are nations where love—*amore, pyaar*—makes a cavalier of a Borsalino on a street corner, and makes a princess of a peasant girl, if only for the second that her eyes meet yours.'

—Gregory David Roberts

She decided that day to study Russian, the language of violence, terror, and absurdity. She knew she would never be bored.

—Natalie Standiford

[English] fails me utterly when I attempt to describe what I love about Greek, that language innocent of all quirks and cranks; a language obsessed with action, and with the joy of seeing action multiply from action, action marching relentlessly ahead and with yet more actions filing in from either side to fall into neat step at the rear, in a long straight rank of cause and effect toward what will be inevitable, the only possible end.

—Donna Tartt

'How do we define 'normal?' Quite literally it comes from the Latin *norma* meaning 'carpenter's square.' Straight. And 'abnormal?' That's from the Greek *anomalos*, and the Latin *abnormis* meaning 'monstrosity.'

—Matt Fraction

Greek is a wonderfully rich and expressive language, which makes it one of the harder of the European tongues to learn. The active vocabulary is much bigger than other European languages. The constructions and the different endings are not easy to master, especially if you are an English speaker.

—John Mole

The word *ecology* is derived from the Greek *oikos*, the word for home.

—Robin Wall Kimmerer

Light means knowledge in the Greek language. It can also be translated as illumination, knowledge, insight, understanding and wisdom.

—Sunday Adelaja

The original text of the *Bible* was perhaps written in Hebrew and Aramaic and later translated into Greek.

—Sudhir Ahluwalia

If you look up ‘atheism’ in the dictionary, you will probably find it defined as the belief that there is no God. Certainly many people understand atheism in this way. Yet many atheists do not, and this is not what the term means if one considers it from the point of view of its Greek roots. In Greek ‘a’ means ‘without’ or ‘not’ and ‘theos’ means ‘god.’ From this standpoint an atheist would simply be someone without a belief in God, not necessarily someone who believes that God does not exist. According to its Greek roots, then, atheism is a negative view, characterized by the absence of belief in God.

—Michael Martin

Everyone has to learn Greek, because it is through Greek that one can understand one’s own language.

—Jacqueline de Romilly

The knowledge of the Greek language is an indispensable foundation for someone who wishes to achieve a high cultural level.

—Marianne McDonald

The Greek language for me is a cosmogony. It is not just a language.

—Luis José Navarro

If the violin is the most perfect musical instrument, the Greek language is the violin of the human thought.

—Helen Keller

If the Gods speak, they will surely use the language of the Greeks.

—Marcus Tullius Cicero

The Greek language with its mathematical structure is the language of Information Technology and the new generation of advanced computers, because only in the Greek language there are no limits.

—Bill Gates

It is amazing to see how much we still rely on the Greek language, in order to talk about entities and events which are at the heart of modern life.

—Professor David  
Crystal

In Greek there is vertigo of words, because only this (language) recorded and analysed the innermost procedures of speech and language, like no other language.

—Zach Lacarrier

The Greek language has homogeneity like the German language, however, it is richer. It has the clarity of French, but it has greater punctiliousness. It is more flexible than Italian and more harmonic than Spanish. In other words it has what is needed to be considered the most beautiful language of Europe.

—Karolos Foriel

The Chinese use two brush strokes to write the word ‘crisis.’ One brush stroke stands for danger; the other for opportunity. In a crisis, be aware of the danger—but recognize the opportunity.

—John F. Kennedy

Travel provided many interesting experiences, but perhaps the most useful lesson I learned was that I really had no proficiency for learning the thousands of characters of the written Chinese language.

—Eric Allin Cornell

Without Greek studies there is no education.

—Leon Tolstoy

Chinese language tends to be quick, economical. To know what people are saying, you always need to know what the context is.

—Gish Jen

It is a cultural slavery for an independent nation to have education and official work in some foreign language.

—Walter Channing

A country that does not take pride in its language and literature can never progress.

—Dr. Rajendra Prasad

Hindi has always been such a language that it never boycotted any word only because it's of foreign origin.

—Dr. Rajendra Prasad

We need a president who's fluent in at least one language.

—Buck Henry

To speak a language is to take on a world, a culture.

—Frantz Fanon

The world is a book, and those who do not travel, read only a page.

--Saint Augustine

Once you have traveled, the voyage never ends, but is played out over and over again in the quietest chambers, that the mind can never break off from the journey.

—Pat Conroy

I thought that foreign children  
Lived far across the sea,  
Until I got a letter from a boy in Italy.  
'Dear little foreign friend,' it said  
As plainly as could be.  
Now I wonder who is 'foreign'—  
The other child or me?

--Ethel Blair Jordan

We have learned that we cannot live alone, in peace; that our own well-being is dependent on the well-being of other nations, far away.... We have learned to be citizens of the world, members of the human community.

--Franklin D. Roosevelt

*Heimat*. The word means home in German, the place where one was born. But the term also conveys a subtler nuance, a certain tenderness. One's *Heimat* is not merely a matter of geography; it is where one's heart lies.

—Jenna Blum

My country is the world, and my religion is to do good.

--Thomas Paine

I am not an Athenian nor a Greek, but a citizen of the world.

--Socrates

A man's feet should be planted in his country, but his eyes should survey the world.

--George Santayana

Clasp the hands and know the thoughts of men in other lands.

--John Masefield

A wise man's country is the world.

--Aristippus

People have prejudices against a nation in which they have no acquaintance.

--Philip Hamerton

A foreigner can photograph the exteriors of a nation, but I think that is as far as he can get. No foreigner can report its interior—its soul, its life, its speech, its thought.

--Mark Twain

As the traveler who has once been from home is wiser than he who has never left his own doorstep, so a knowledge of one other culture should sharpen our ability to scrutinize more steadily, to appreciate more lovingly, our own.

--Margaret Mead

Our country is the world—our countrymen are all mankind.

--William Lloyd Garrison

Those who go overseas find a change of climate, not a change of soul.

—Horace

He that travels much knows much.

--Thomas Fuller

He who never leaves his own country is full of prejudices.

—Carlo Goldoni

‘You remember the Latin?’

‘Of course. *Vir prudens non contra venom mingit.*’ I couldn’t see his face. Cease of the hood, but it could tell by the tone of his voice that he was completely serious. Or at least trying to be. I wrinkled my forehead as I attempted to translate.

‘Wait a second,’ Seth said, pulling back his hood to demonstrate his utter confusion. ‘I thought their greeting was *Non ducor, duco.* ‘I am not led, I lead.’”

Liam’s shoulders began shaking just as I finished my rough translation. ‘A wise man does not urinate against the wind?’ I pulled down my hood and looked at Liam. He winked at me, and it was pretty much the most beautiful thing I’d ever seen in my life. Normally, I’m very anti-wink when it comes to guys, but in this case it was a wink of absolution. It was a wink that meant Liam and I were actually going to be okay.

‘You’ve been planning that all night, haven’t you?’ I reached over and squeezed his arm. It was the first time I had touched him in at least twenty-four hours, and his strong forearm felt so good beneath my fingertips. When he grabbed my hand and quickly brought my palm to his lips, I felt all the air leave my body. As much as I hated to admit it, for fear of sounding like a ridiculous, boy-crazed damsel in distress, it felt good to have my boyfriend back.

Taylor whipped back her hood, her blue eyes icy. ‘I’m so glad this is such a joke to you,’ she spat, clearly not in the mood for games.

Liam dropped my hand and sat up a little straighter. ‘Sorry T., I’ve got it *non ducor, duco.* Don’t worry.’

—Lisa Roecker

A knowledge of Greek thought and life, and of the arts in which the Greeks expressed their thought and sentiment, is essential to high culture. A man may know everything else, but without this knowledge he remains ignorant of the best intellectual and moral achievements of his own race.

--Charles Eliot Norton

Greek was very much a live language, and a language still unconscious of grammar, not, like ours, dominated by definitions and trained upon dictionaries.

—Gilbert Murray

To become an American citizen, we require people to read, write and speak in English. That is to help them to assimilate in our melting pot, truly to become Americans. We mock that when the cherished right to vote does not involve English any more.

—Ernest Istook

*Veni, Vidi, Velcro.* I came, I saw, I stuck around.

—Unknown

In the area of linguistics, there are major language groups: Japanese, Chinese, Spanish, English, Portuguese, Greek, German, French, and so on. Most of us grow up learning the language of our parents and siblings, which becomes our primary or native tongue. Later, we may learn additional languages but usually with much more effort. These become our secondary languages. We speak and understand best our native language. We feel most comfortable speaking that language. The more we use a secondary language, the more comfortable we become conversing in it. If we speak only our primary language and encounter someone else who speaks only his or her primary language, which is different from ours, our communication will be limited. We must rely on pointing, grunting, drawing pictures, or acting out our ideas. We can communicate, but it is awkward. Language differences are part and parcel of human culture. If we are to communicate effectively across cultural lines, we must learn the language of those with whom we wish to communicate. In the area of love, it is similar. Your emotional love language and the language of your spouse may be as different as Chinese from English. No matter how hard you try to express love in English, if your spouse understands only Chinese, you will never understand how to love each other. My friend on the plane was speaking the language of 'Affirming Words' to his third wife when he said, 'I told her how beautiful she was. I told her I loved her. I told her how proud I was to be her husband.' He was speaking love, and he was sincere, but she did not understand his language.

Perhaps she was looking for love in his behavior and didn't see it. Being sincere is not enough. We must be willing to learn our spouse's primary love language if we are to be effective communicators of love.

—Gary Chapman

Keep your language. Love its sounds, its modulation, its rhythm. But try to march together with men of different languages, remote from your own, who wish like you for a more just and human world.

--Hélder Câmara

You can't speak a language fluently until you find out who you are in that language, and that has as much to do with your body as it does with vocabulary and grammar.

—Fred Frith

Research at the *University of Birmingham in England* found that bilingual speakers were better at maintaining focus and attention than monolinguals. *Muy bien!*

—Ken Budd

The human face is powered, depending on how you count them, by between 23 and 43 muscles, many of which attach to the skin, serving no obvious function for survival. An alien examining a human specimen in isolation wouldn't know what to make of them. Tugging on the forehead, eyebrows, lips and cheeks, the muscles broadcast a wealth of information about our emotional state, level of interest and alertness. It is a remarkably efficient means of communication—almost instantaneous, usually accurate, transcending most language and cultural barriers.

—Jerry Adler

It is naive to suppose that something that has been expressed in one form can be expressed in another without significantly changing its meaning, texture or value. Much prose translates fairly well from one language to another, but we know that poetry does not; we may get a rough idea of the sense of a translated poem but usually everything else is lost, especially that which makes it an object of beauty. The translation makes it into something it was not.

--Neil Postman

Shakespeare's bitter play [*Troilus and Cressida*] is therefore a dramatization of a part of a translation into English of the French translation of a Latin imitation of an old French expansion of a Latin epitome of a Greek romance.

--Gilbert Highet

It's too late to be studying Hebrew; it's more important to understand even the slang of today.

--Henry David Thoreau

Years later—long after I had failed, in high school, to master the math courses that would have allowed me to go on to study calculus—my father would occasionally remark that it was too bad, because it's impossible to see the world clearly if you don't know calculus...Years after all this, whenever my father made this comment... I'd invariably reply by saying that you couldn't really see the world clearly without having read the Aeneid in Latin, either. And then he'd make that little grimace that we all knew, half a smile, half a frown, twisting his face, and we'd laugh a sour little laugh, and retreat to our corners.

—Daniel Mendelsohn

I was worried people would laugh at me when I started to talk the language, but they were just pleasantly surprised that I could. The sense of humour here is great—once I could have a giggle, I settled down.

—Parminder Nagra

The Greek language with its mathematical structure is the language of Information Technology and the new generation of advanced computers, because only in the Greek language there are no limits.

—Bill Gates

I liked Latin, I like languages, I liked all the myths, and the Roman tales that we were required to translate in Latin, and all these interesting people who were never quite what they thought they would be or seemed to be.

—Suzanne Farrell

Botany is the art of insulting flowers in Greek and Latin.

--Alphonse Karr

In the United States, having a French or German accent is to be considered cultured, educated. But if you have a Spanish accent you are ignored, even if you are a Ph.D.

--Hugo Piñeda

Garbo had something behind the eyes that you couldn't see until you photographed it in close-up. You could see thought. If she had to look at one person with jealousy, and another with love, she didn't have to change her expression. You could see it in her eyes as she looked from one to the other. And nobody else has been able to do that on the screen. Garbo did it without the command of the English language.

--Clarence Brown

Television? No good will come of this device. The word is half Greek and half Latin.

—Unknown

Just learning to think in another language allows you to see your own culture in a better viewpoint.

—Gates McFadden

I bought a new Japanese car. I turned on the radio...I don't understand a word they're saying.

--Rodney Dangerfield

The teacher, in French hour, asked 'What is the difference between 'madame' and 'mademoiselle'?'

The hopeful student answered 'monsieur.'

—Bennett Cerf

English distinguishes between the definite article ‘the,’ the indefinite article ‘a,’ and the demonstratives ‘this’ and ‘that.’ Some languages have no articles. Japanese is one such language. It has three demonstratives, however, corresponding to ‘this here,’ ‘that over there near you,’ and ‘that over there near neither of us.’...My wife’s first language is Japanese. She has been speaking English since she was a child, but she still occasionally misses a ‘the’ or inserts one where a native speaker would know it doesn’t belong, e.g., ‘Shall we hike the Diamond Head?’

—M. Thomas  
Gammarino

Like other Romance languages, French has two definite articles, *le* (masculine) and *la* (feminine), as well as *les* for plurals. Some words change meaning entirely if gender-swapped; Compare *le barde* (poet) and *la barde* (bacon wrapped around meat), *le boum* (explosion) and *la boum* (party), *le mari* (husband) and *la mari* (marijuana), *le merci* (thanks) and *la merci* (mercy), *le souris* (smile) and *la souris* (mouse.).

—M. Thomas  
Gammarino

My roommates and their classmates are burning & sacrificing an animal cracker to pray for their Greek final to be canceled. A snackrifice.

—Anna Borges

Myths can’t be translated as they did in their ancient soil. We can only find our own meaning in our own time.

—Margaret Atwood

Student goes back to Latin *studium*, zeal or eagerness—a misnomer if there was one.

—Francis Griffith

The only trouble with this country [Mexico] is, the Verbs have too many endings.

—Will Rogers

Give your mind a chance to travel through foreign languages.

--Neil Simon

Reading in a foreign language is the most intimate way of reading.

—Jhumpa Lahiri

Being able to read a book in another language is a source of ego-stroking pride.

—Emily O’Beirne

English is a great language, and you never realize how great a language it is until you leave it behind and you try to write in another. A number of my Paraguayan friends who are poets and write in Spanish are very conscious of this, because the official dictionary of the Spanish Academy is really very small when compared, say, to the *New English Dictionary*. Spanish is a language which is not very rich in words, but in that respect, English is a tremendous language. There are almost 500,000 words in *Webster's Third New International Dictionary*, which demonstrates that English is absolutely unsurpassable. There isn't a language in the world that has the lexical riches that English has, but you would never know it by the way many people behave with it. They act as if it were a national patrimony to be locked up in Fort Knox, and the only two words you can withdraw at one time are 'like' and 'I mean.' And all those other millions of words sitting in there, gathering dust.

—Bruce Cutler

The gift of a common tongue is a priceless inheritance and it may well someday become the foundation of a common citizenship. I like to think of British and Americans moving about freely over each other's wide estates with hardly a sense of being foreigners to one another.

—Winston Churchill

What most helps someone learn a language is when they're immersed in a situation and they're struggling to speak.

—Geoff Stead

Apps aren't likely to soon overcome the two essential advantages of a human teacher: the ability to hold a student's attention, and to continually tailor a lesson to the individual's progress, difficulties, and interest. There are all kinds of contextual factors in language learning. It would be hard for an app to take them all into account.

—Tom Roesper

All languages travel at the speed of sound, but sign language travels at the speed of light.

--*theChive*

Learning a new language is like downloading an expansion pack that allows you to interact with new characters.

--*theChive*

Lucky indeed is the writer who has grown up in Ireland, for the English spoken there is so amusing and musical.

—Kurt Vonnegut

There's this girl at my school, she speaks French. So it's like people actually think she's stupid in a way—the students use her as a clown. They go, 'What? Can you say that again?' The teachers, I think they notice it, but they feel they can't control the kids.

—Middle School Student  
Amelia as quoted  
by Kathleen  
Cushman & Laura  
Rogers

When I was young I was amazed at Plutarch's statement that the elder Cato began at the age of eighty to learn Greek. I am amazed no longer. Old age is ready to undertake tasks that youth shirked because they would take too long.

--W. Somerset Maugham

Code is the world's most dominant language.

—Kathy Einhorn and  
Clark Merkle

What is the least spoken language in the world? Sign.

—*theChive*

Language is the most defining feature of human intelligence.

--William Calvin

Can't bear French; it's such a slippery, silly sort of language.

—Louisa May Alcott

[Claudia] Quesada, 31, who immigrated to the U.S. with members of her family in 2003, is preparing for a role in 'A Xmas Cuento Remix,' a modern-day take on 'A Christmas Carol'....And although she's aware that her accent may be the cause of missed acting opportunities, she's staying positive. She said that thinking about how her accent is going to come across in auditions puts limits on her and her economic possibilities. 'I'm aware that it could be an obstacle, but for me, being an immigrant, I embrace who I am,' she said. 'I spent half my life in Cuba. You either love me for who I am or you don't'

—Darcel Rockett

Poesy is of so subtle a spirit, that in the pouring out of one language into another it will evaporate.

—Sir John Denham

Students of Latin see examples of aphorisms from 2,000 years ago, such as *ubi concordia, ibi victoria*, ‘where there is unity, there is victory.’ Usually, these sayings involve some keen insight put into memorable wording. They are little triumphs of rhetoric, in the old and positive sense of the word.

—Ward Farnsworth

Prediction: The Universal Translator will make learning a foreign language obsolete. Outcome: *No lo creo* (I don’t think so) Like most new things in tech, the first generations of these translators are still pretty awful. I don’t think foreign language departments or language immersion schools have much to worry about... yet. However, my guess is that people who worked for Blockbuster thought similar things about Netflix and Redbox...and we know how that ended. Not very bueno.

—Carl Hooker

If you can’t think of a word say, ‘I forget the English word for it.’ That way people will think you’re bilingual instead of an idiot.

—<https://ifunny.co>

All translations are made up. Languages are different for a reason. You can’t move ideas between them without losing something.

—G. Willow Wilson

I dream of lost vocabularies that might express some of what we no longer can.

—Jack Gilbert

When a language dies, a way of understanding the world dies with it, a way of looking at the world.

—George Steiner

Just remember, when someone has an accent, it means that he knows one more language than you do.

—Sidney Sheldon

Mastery of language affords one remarkable opportunities.

—Alexandre Dumas

It's a common mistake for vacationing Americans to assume that everyone around them is French and therefore speaks no English whatsoever. [...] An experienced traveler could have told by looking at my shoes that I wasn't French. And even if I were French, it's not as if English is some mysterious tribal dialect spoken only by anthropologists and a small population of cannibals.

—David Sedaris

Two languages in one brain? No one can live at that speed!

—Eddie Izzard

No two languages are ever sufficiently similar to be considered as representing the same social reality. The worlds in which different societies live are distinct worlds, not merely the same world with different labels attached.

—Amy Tan

I don't understand why people never say what they mean. It's like the immigrants who come to a country and learn the language but are completely baffled by idioms. (Seriously, how could anyone who isn't a native English speaker 'get the picture,' so to speak, and not assume it has something to do with a photo or a painting?).

—Jodi Picoult

A language is something infinitely greater than grammar and philology. It is the poetic testament of the genius of a race and a culture, and the living embodiment of the thoughts and fancies that have moulded them.

—Jawaharlal Nehru

Translation is the art of failure.

—Umberto Eco

It is up to us to keep building bridges to bring the world closer together, and not destroy them to divide us further apart. We can pave new roads towards peace simply by understanding other cultures. This can be achieved through traveling, learning other languages, and interacting with others from outside our borders. Only then will one truly discover how we are more alike than different. Never allow language or cultural traditions to come between brothers and sisters.

—Suzy Kassem

It [discovering Finnish] was like discovering a wine-cellar filled with bottles of amazing wine of a kind and flavour never tasted before. It quite intoxicated me.

—J. R. R. Tolkien

We breathe in our first language, and swim in our second.

—Adam Gopnik

Isn't language loss a good thing, because fewer languages mean easier communication among the world's people? Perhaps, but it's a bad thing in other respects.

Languages differ in structure and vocabulary, in how they express causation and feelings and personal responsibility, hence in how they shape our thoughts. There's no single purpose 'best' language; instead, different languages are better suited for different purposes. For instance, it may not have been an accident that Plato and Aristotle wrote in Greek, while Kant wrote in German. The grammatical particles of those two languages, plus their ease in forming compound words, may have helped make them the preeminent languages of western philosophy. Another example, familiar to all of us who studied Latin, is that highly inflected languages (ones in which word endings suffice to indicate sentence structure) can use variations of word order to convey nuances impossible with English. Our English word order is severely constrained by having to serve as the main clue to sentence structure. If English becomes a world language, that won't be because English was necessarily the best language for diplomacy.

—Jared Diamond

Why the Egyptian, Arabic, Abyssinian, Choctaw? Well, what tongue does the wind talk? What nationality is a storm? What country do rains come from? What color is lightning? Where does thunder go when it dies?

—Ray Bradbury

English is so hierarchical. In Cree, we don't have animate-inanimate comparisons between things. Animals have souls that are equal to ours. Rocks have souls, trees have souls. Trees are 'who,' not 'what.'

—Tomson Highway

Sign is a live, contemporaneous, visual-gestural language and consists of hand shapes, hand positioning, facial expressions, and body movements. Simply put, it is for me the most beautiful, immediate, and expressive of languages, because it incorporates the entire human body.

—Myron Uhlberg

Furniture or gold can be taken away from you, but knowledge and a new language can easily be taken from one place to the other, and nobody can take them away from you.

—David Schwarzer

He came to realize that learning a language was perhaps the most profound thing a man could do. Not only did it require wrapping different sounds around the very movement of your soul, it involved learning things somehow already known, as though much of what he was somehow existed apart from him. A kind of enlightenment accompanied these first lessons, a deeper understanding of self.

—R. Scott Bakker

I love my work as a translator. Translation is a journey over a sea from one shore to the other. Sometimes I think of myself as a smuggler: I cross the frontier of language with my booty of words, ideas, images, and metaphors.

—Amara Lakhous

You can't see other's point of view when you have only one language.

—Frank Smith

'Buenos dias,' she said in response to Hernandez's soft greeting. They had a pact to speak only Spanish to each other, with the result that their conversation never got beyond hello and good-bye.

—Wallace Stegner

When somebody speaks a language that we don't know, we often imagine that some important things are being said!

—Mehmet Murat ildan

Teachers were powerful enough to kill the indigenous languages: they are not powerful enough to bring them back to life.

—Andrew Dalby

If two thousand five hundred languages are to be lost in the course of the twenty-first century, don't be in any doubt about what that means for us: in each of those two thousand five hundreds cases a culture will be lost.

—Andrew Dalby

We can only think in a language that we master.

—don Jose Ruiz

I became a chameleon. My color didn't change, but I could change your perception of my color. If you spoke to me in Zulu, I replied to you in Zulu. If you spoke to me in Tswana, I replied to you in Tswana. Maybe I didn't look like you, but if I spoke like you, I was you.

—Trevor Noah

Each language is a unique repository of facts and knowledge about the world that we can ill afford to lose, or, at the least, facts and knowledge about some history and people that have their place in the understanding of mankind. Every language is a treasury of human experience....Therefore it broadens your thinking, enriches your ability to understand the world—to deal with reality and experience.

—Michael Krauss

Knowledge travels in the baggage of languages.

—Unknown

Languages are not only languages. They're also worldviews—and therefore, to some extent, untranslatable.

—Nancy Huston

The Germans had a word for everything—a word that could be very focused, very specific, because it could be constructed for a precise set of circumstances. They even had a word, it was said, for the feeling of envy experienced when one sees the tasty dishes ordered by others in a restaurant and it is too late to change one's own order.

—Alexander McCall  
Smith

English, unlike Arabic, was not a poetic language. English had been cobbled together by too many unknown parents, too many unsure users. English lacked the single word that differentiated an attacking lion from one at rest. Nor did English have the capacity to relay the succinct, linguistic separation of a maternal uncle from a paternal one. English was not a thoughtful language.

—Aminah Mae Safi

When a language dies, so much more than words are lost. Language is the dwelling place of ideas that do not exist anywhere else. It is a prism through which to see the world.

—Robin Wall Kimmerer

There is no denying, for Icelanders at least, language is an immense source of joy. Everything wise and wonderful about this quirky little nation flows from its language. The formal Icelandic reading is 'komdu saell,' which translates literally as 'come happy'. When Icelanders part, they say 'vertu saell,' 'go happy'. I like that one a lot. It's much better than 'take care' or 'catch you later'.

—Eric Weiner

Emigration is a kind of partial suicide. You don't die, but a great deal dies within you. Not least, the language.

—Theodor Kallifatides

If you want to be heard, learn the language of your listeners.

—Jeffrey G. Duarte

I miss Latin. So much fun—all those exciting verbs that don't come until the end of the sentence. It's like a movie trailer for language.

—Libba Bray

We tried to joke but neither could make any sense. We realized that puns are present in every language, though not shared by any of them.

—Marshall Ramsay

Japanese is written in columns starting at the top right-hand corner of the page and continues to the left-hand side of the page. Newspapers, books and magazines are read from the back page to the front page.

—Peter Hanami

The joy of knowing a foreign language is inexpressible. I find it really difficult to express such joy in my mother tongue.

—Munia Khan

When you make the effort to speak someone else's language, even if it's just basic phrases here and there, you are saying to them, 'I understand that you have a culture and identity that exists beyond me. I see you as a human being.'

—Trevor Noah

Swedish is one of the few languages on this Earth that I enjoy the sound of. That and Japanese. French is all right, Italian is tolerable depending on who's speaking it. Everything else makes me cringe. Even English with some accents is bad. Australian? Spare me.

—Caspar Vega

The Hawaiian language is quite unusual because when the original Polynesians came in their canoes, most of their consonants were washed overboard in a storm, and they arrived here with almost nothing but vowels. All the streets have names like *Kal'ia'iou'amaa'aaa'eiou*, and many street signs spontaneously generate new syllables during the night.

—Dave Barry

As you speak I swear I can hear words being selected, one after another, from the word-box you carry around with you, and slotted into place. That is not how a true native speaks, one who is born into a language.'

'How does a native speak?'

'From the heart. Words well up within and he sings them, sings along with them. So to speak.'

—J. M. Coetzee

I have always wanted to go to Trieste because it sounds like *tristesse*, which is a light-hearted word, even though in French it means sadness. In Spanish it is *tristeza*, which is heavier than French sadness, more of a groan than a whisper.

—Deborah Levy

Why is English so widespread today, and not Danish?

—Yuval Noah Harari

Sanskrit has different words to describe love for a brother or sister, love for a teacher, love for a partner, love for one's friends, love of nature, and so on. English has only one word, which leads to never-ending confusion.

—Sharon Salzberg

An accurate accent is powerful because it is the ultimate gesture of empathy. It connects you to another person's culture in a way that words never can, because you have bent your body as well as your mind to match that person's culture. Anyone can learn 'bawn-JURE' in a few seconds. To learn how *bonjour* fits your companion's mouth and tongue; to learn how to manipulate the muscles, the folds, and even the texture of your throat and lips to match your companion's—this is an unmistakable, undeniable, and irresistible gesture of care.

—Gabriel Wyner

One's thought patterns become different, he said, when forced into the confines of a rigid and unfamiliar tongue. Certain common ideas become inexpressible; other, previously undreamt-of ones spring to life, finding miraculous new articulation.

—Donna Tartt

Children who are exposed to multiple languages—perhaps because...they were raised in a country far from where they were born—are better able to understand an adult's perspective, and they may go on to become better communicators overall.

—Olga Khazan

Cleopatra spoke as many as a dozen languages and was educated in mathematics, philosophy, oratory, and astronomy.

— Emma Taggart

The two billion people who speak English these days live mainly in countries where they've learned English as a foreign language. There are only around 400 million mother-tongue speakers—chiefly living in the UK, Ireland, USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, and the countries of the Caribbean. This means that for every one native speaker of English there are now five non-native speakers. The centre of gravity in the use of English has shifted, therefore. Once upon a time, it would have been possible to say, in terms of number of speakers, that the British 'owned' English. Then it was the turn of the Americans. Today, it's the turn of those who have learned English as a foreign language, who form the vast majority of users. Everyone who has taken the trouble to learn English can be said to 'own' it now, and they all have a say in its future. So, if most of them say such things as informations and advices, it seems inevitable that one day some of these usages will become part of international standard English, and influence the way people speak in the 'home' countries. Those with a nostalgia for linguistic days of old may not like it, but it will not be possible to stop such international trends.

—David Crystal

In very great poetry the music often comes through even when one doesn't know the language. I loved Dante passionately before I knew a word of Italian.

—Donna Tartt

Her mastery of the language was a blissful expression of the spirit to her, like playing a musical instrument.

—Amy Tan

You can control people if you know their language. You can shut them up.

—Tanaz Bhathena

There can not be a native language in the strict sense of the word. In my vision, the native language is a language in which you can enjoy the power of deeper thinking, it is more natural to express your inner thoughts, to improve yourself. This can not be mandatory, no external condition can automatically determine which one should be your native language. It should be the object of free choice, and only you can choose it, simply because the language is an internal phenomenon, but not external. Only your brain can determine which language is best for expressing your thoughts. Be yourself, ignore all external factors, get freedom to choose your native language, which suits you best.

—Elmar Hussein

There was something about speaking in a foreign language that made her feel like she'd been around a lot.

—Carson McCullers

All possible human languages are very similar; a Martian scientist observing humans might conclude that there is just a single language, with minor variants. The reason is that the particular aspect of human nature that underlies the growth of language allows very restricted options. Is this limiting? Of course. Is it liberating? Also of course. It is these very restrictions that make it possible for a rich and intricate system of expression of thought to develop in similar ways on the basis of very rudimentary, scattered, and varied experience.

—Noam Chomsky

In Farsi we ask: *Haal-e shomaa chetoreh?* It is the same: how are you? But when I answer, when I am little, my father never let me say *good* or *okay*. Because he says he is asking about the feeling, you know... like, *how is your heart?* 'My heart is happy,' I say, 'Happy you called.'

—Clare Atkins

This may come as a surprise to generations of Irish pupils, but the Irish language wasn't invented just to infuriate people forced to learn it at school.

—Darach Ó Séaghdha

Think about any foreign language you've learned (or attempted to). What's the first thing you learn? Usually how to say 'Hello, my name is [Kory]. How are you?' You don't learn the word for 'name,' and the learn the conjugation of 'be' (and good thing, too, because it is stubbornly irregular in most languages). You don't learn the interrogative 'how' and the various declensions of the second-person pronoun. All that comes later when you have a little something to hand that information on. You learn two complete, if rudimentary, sentences, and that gives you the confidence to keep moving forward—until you reach the subjunctive, anyway.

—Kory Stamper

The most satisfying of languages, Latin.

—Donna Tartt

Language is a key.  
I felt so many doors were opening to me.

—Ann Clare LeZotte

English, although the official language of Nigeria, was a formal language with which strangers and non-relatives addressed you. It had the potency of digging craters between you and your friends or relatives if one of you switched to using it.

—Chigozie Obioma

In talking a foreign language, even fluently, one says half the time not what one wants to but what one can?

—Edith Wharton

The Hebrews admit no Present tense in their language;  
While we are speaking the word, it is already the Past.

—Henry Wadsworth  
Longfellow

Sanskrit is a beautiful contextual language. It is called 'Dev Bhasha' the language of the soul. Here, meanings of the words must come from the heart, from direct experience—dictionary meanings or static meanings have not much value. Meanings of the words vary depending on mind-set, time, location and culture. The words are made to expand the possibilities of the mind.

—Amit Ray

Anyone who believes Chinese characters to be a superior system of writing that can function as a universal script is condemned to complete the task of rendering the whole of Lincoln's Gettysburg Address into *Singlish*.

— John DeFrancis

I was pretty good at picking up new languages when I was little, but it's not like I had superpowers or anything. Kids just have an easier time with words.

—Brian K. Vaughan

Every man who knows anything of languages, knows that it is impossible to translate from one language into another, not only without losing a great part of the original, but frequently of mistaking the sense.

—Thomas Paine

Languages are less like apples — neat and discrete — and more like oatmeal. It's always been oatmeal in India, and all the varieties of oatmeal continue to merge, despite political pressures to name them as if they were marbles.

—Michael Erard

Learning languages is an act of joining society. There's no motive, no separable 'will to plasticity' that's distinct from what it means to be a part of that society.

—Michael Erard

One of the first things to understand was how people knew what language to speak to whom. Where I've lived in the American Southwest, choosing to speak English or Spanish based on how someone looks is risky. If you try English and they don't speak it, you can switch to Spanish if you know it. But if you start with Spanish, you might offend: 'You don't think I speak English?' This can be the case if you're Anglo, even if you speak Spanish very well and just heard the other person speaking Spanish. When I described such a scenario to Indians, they couldn't relate—to them, choosing the wrong language wasn't embarrassing or politically charged. Or so they said.

—Michael Erard

When you're in love, you want to live forever. You want the emotion, the excitement you feel to last. Reading in Italian arouses a similar longing in me. I don't want to die, because my death would mean the end of my discovery of the language. Because every day there will be a new word to learn. Thus true love can represent eternity.

—Jhumpa Lahiri

A translator must, of course, be an interpreter of cultures.

—Philip Zaleski

Fidelity is surely our highest aim, but a translation is not made with tracing paper. It is an act of critical interpretation. Let me insist on the obvious: Languages trail immense, individual histories behind them, and no two languages, with all their accretions of tradition and culture, ever dovetail perfectly. They can be linked by translation, as a photograph can link movement and stasis, but it is disingenuous to assume that either translation or photography, or acting for that matter, are representational in any narrow sense of the term. Fidelity is our noble purpose, but it does not have much, if anything, to do with what is called literal meaning. A translation can be faithful to tone and intention, to meaning. It can rarely be faithful to words or syntax, for these are peculiar to specific languages and are not transferable.

—Edith Grossman

I don't pick up languages. If anything, I roll around in them gracelessly and pray that something sticks.

—Elizabeth Little

We thought speaking in English meant you were more intelligent. We were wrong of course. It does not matter what language you choose, the important thing is the words you use to express yourself.

— Malala Yousafzai

‘Je suis désolé,’ he said. You had to wonder about the French, how they could make a simple ‘sorry’ sound so extreme and forlorn.

—Kate Atkinson

Facing a language you don’t know is like returning to your infancy when your mother tongue used to be a foreign language to you.

—Munia Khan

The Russian commands sound like the name of the camp commandant. *Shishtvanyanov*: a gnashing and spluttering collection of ch, sh, tch, shch. We can’t understand the actual words, but we sense the contempt. You get used to contempt. After a while the commands just sound like a constant clearing of the throat—coughing, sneezing, nose blowing, hacking up mucus. Trudi Pelikan said: Russian is a language that’s caught a cold.

—Herta Müller

If we spoke a different language, we would perceive a somewhat different world.

—Ludwig Wittgenstein

Welsh is like Shakespearean English on acid: the verb always—not just in questions—moves to the beginning. Alternatively, it can be viewed as taking the French grammar a step further. While the verb stops at tense in French, it moves further in Welsh to a position that traditional grammarians call the complementizer (don’t ask).

—Charles Yang

The geniuses of all ages and of all lands speak different languages but the same flame burns in them all. Oh, if you only knew what unearthly happiness my soul feels now from being able to understand them.

—Anton Chekhov

My parents would not permit ugly language in the house, which was okay with me. I didn’t want to learn German anyway.

—Alex Bosworth

You can lie in any language on earth, and body language is no exception.

—Nenia Campbell

In the Arab world, gratitude is a language unto itself. 'May Allah bless the hands that give me this gift'; 'Beauty is in the eyes that find me pretty'; 'May Allah never deny your prayer'; and so on, an infinite string of prayerful appreciation. Coming from such a culture, I have always found a mere 'thank you' an insufficient expression that makes my voice sound miserly and ungrateful.

—Susan Abulhawa

Every language has its own word for the sun, but the sun is always the same.

—Marty Rubin

Do you know, by the way, that German is the only language in the world that has a word for 'pleasure derived from the misfortune of others'? Schadenfreude.

—John Dolan

Sometimes we speak different languages, but our hearts are the same.

—Mykyta Isagulov

All our tongues and cultures are constant shoplifters from other tongues and cultures.

—Amos Oz

German is a much more precise language than English. Americans throw the word love around for everything: I love my wife! I love all my friends! I love rock music! I love the rain! I love comic books! I love peanut butter!

The word you use to describe your feelings for your wife should not be the same word you use to describe your feelings for peanut butter. In German, there are a dozen different words that describe varying degrees of liking something a lot. Germans almost never use the word love, unless they mean a deep romantic love. I have never told my parents I love them, because it would sound melodramatic, inappropriate, and almost incestuous. In German, you tell your mother that you hold her very dear, not that you are in love with her.

—Oliver Markus Malloy

The Latin word for sausage was *botulus*, from which English gets two words. One of them is the lovely *botuliform*, which means sausage-shaped and is a more useful word than you might think. The other word is *botulism*.

—Mark Forsyth

The fisherman of the Colombian coast must be learned doctors of ethics and morality, for they invented the word *sentipensante*, or ‘feeling-thinking’ to define language that speaks the truth.

—Rob Breznsy

What he had not learned from Latin or Greek he was learning from the people of New South Wales. It was this: you did not learn a language without entering into a relationship with the people who spoke it with you.

—Kate Grenville

A smile or a tear has not nationality; joy and sorrow speak alike to all nations, and they, above all the confusion of tongues, proclaim the brotherhood of man.

—Frederick Douglass

That one of history’s greatest brains struggled with *amo, amas, amat* should be consolation to anyone who has ever tried to learn a second language.

—Ross King

Can you shew me any English woman who speaks English as it should be spoken? Only foreigners who have been taught to speak it speak it well.

—George Bernard Shaw

My French was neither good nor bad. I had enough to understand what people said to me, but speaking was difficult, and there were times when no words came to my lips, when I struggled to say even the simplest things. There was a certain pleasure in this, I believe—to experience language as a collection of sounds, to be forced to the surface of words where meanings vanish—but it was also quite wearing, and it had the effect of shutting me up in my thoughts.

—Paul Auster

With languages, you are at home anywhere.

—Edward DeWall

Not everyone who knows two languages can be a translator.

—Nataly Kelly

Poetry translation is like playing a piano sonata on a trombone.

—Nataly Kelly

To speak only one language is to do yourself a great injustice.

—Michel Templet

Of the 193 recognized countries in the world, only politically isolated North Korea is considered monolingual.

—Nataly Kelly

If Germans do have systematic minds, this is just as likely to be because their exceedingly erratic mother tongue has exhausted their brains' capacity to cope with any further irregularity.

—Guy Deutscher

You think your language is the best language? That's because you were born and your parents babbled to you in this tongue. That it is the best language to speak? How small is your mind.

—Jeff Wheeler

The French Navy must by law speak English, as English is the international maritime language of the sea.

—Tim Fitzhigham

He who does not know foreign languages does not know anything about his own.

—Johann Wolfgang von  
Goethe

Bilingualism and multilingualism are more the norm than the exception throughout the...world. Policies in the European Union promote plurilingualism—high levels of proficiency in at least two languages and skills 'as needed' in additional languages. Most importantly, plurilingualism embeds intercultural competencies as well as an awareness of the role of language in society.

—Myriam Met

Students need to be prepared to be the best global citizens possible. Clearly, global citizenry requires the language and cultural skills to interact effectively across language and cultural borders.

—Thomas Friedman

There's plenty of research to back up that foreign language taught at an earlier age is more beneficial than when taught at a later age.

—Superintendent Diane  
Cody

In the United States, we still have a long way to go if we are just teaching foreign languages in high school, in getting the students up to a proficient level.

—Nancy C. Rhodes

English has two words—‘monument’ and ‘memorial’—to describe a structure meant to remind viewers of a person or an event. The two are used so interchangeably that it’s hard to describe the difference....German has several words for memorials. An *Ehrenmal* is a monument built to honor its subject (*ehren* means ‘to honor’). A *Denkmal* commemorates an event, like a battle, while *Gedenkstätte* is a place of reflection and contemplation. Both of those words contain the root *denken*, ‘to think.’ Some monuments are also called *Mahnmal*s—warning signs or admonitions never to repeat a horrendous part of history. The Dachau concentration camp is one of many sites throughout Germany that now stands in this spirit.

—Carol Schaeffer

What does it say about America that we are the only industrialized nation that routinely graduates high school students who speak only one language? Frankly, it says that if you want talk to us—to do business with us, negotiate peace with us, learn from or teach us, or even just pal around with us—you’d better speak English. The fact that we’re woefully behind in world language skills has long registered somewhere between, ‘Hmmm,’ and ‘Yeah, so?’ on the national priority gauge. (Compare that to our panicky responses to indicators that we’re not on top in math and science.)

—Amanda Litvinov

...in Paris as a 12-year-old. There, at the foot of the Eiffel Tower, was my school. As one of only four Americans, I was very aware I was the foreigner, the one who needed to decode the language and the priorities of this sophisticated place. Slowly, the words, the accent, and the norms of French life came into focus. By the end of the year, I could even fool shopkeepers into thinking that I was a Parisian boy, a thrill I will never forget....One thing became clear...on that continent, people typically spoke several languages. I remember a tulip seller in an open market in Amsterdam who conversed with my mother in nearly fluent English and then turned to help a customer in German, followed by an exchange in French so rapid and filled with vernacular that I could have sworn I was back in Paris.

—Steven Jay Gross

Unlike Europeans or Asians, Americans seem to view learning new languages as a luxury or somehow off target. Because this regrettable attitude harms Americans’ ability to engage effectively with others around the world, it is everyone’s business.

—Steven Jay Gross

During the late 19th century and into the 20th century, the study of a second or third language became a routine expectation for those who attended secondary school in many countries. However, practice in the United States differed markedly from that in the rest of the world. In spite of two world wars and growing internationalization, educational policy-makers in the United States failed to recognize the importance of foreign language study. In the second half of the 20th century, attention to and support for the study of foreign languages rose and declined.

—Joyce Stone, Myriam  
Met, June K.  
Phillips

Languages and communication are at the heart of the human experience. The United States must educate students who are linguistically and culturally equipped to communicate successfully in a pluralistic American society and abroad. This imperative envisions a future in which ALL students will develop and maintain proficiency in English and at least one other language, modern or classical. Children who come to school from non-English backgrounds should also have opportunities to develop further proficiency in their first language.

—*Standards for Foreign  
Language  
Learning in the  
21st Century  
(1996)*

The student's basic, natural motivation for choosing to learn a foreign language has not changed during my half century as a foreign language professional. The beginning student hopes to learn to speak the language and is curious to learn what it is like to be a part of another culture. Unfortunately, all too often many of our students have lost their natural motivation because they were kept on the sidelines, where they had to drill and practice without a chance to play in the authentic communication game.

—Janice B. Paulsen

The most effective way to maintain and improve oral proficiency [in a foreign language] is to live and study abroad. Principals should encourage their foreign language teachers to participate in such programs by arranging a system of CRU or CEU credits. By prior arrangement with colleges or universities, teachers can also earn some credit for studying abroad.

—Lorraine A. Strasheim  
and Robert C.  
Lafayette

Language is a badge of identity, the heart and soul of any culture. But learning another language builds a bridge, because we're willing to make that effort to relate to another people....The world is becoming so interrelated, if we don't teach our young other languages and cultural values, we are denying them access to the new world. It is just plain and simple. If we continue to view language learning as for the elite, for the 'smart ones,' or for the family who can afford to pay for it, we are really widening the gap.

—Shuhan Wang

Foreign languages can play an important role in preparing students for local global citizenship. Discussions of educational reform have ignored the critical need for proficiency in other languages and knowledge of other cultures. Languages is inextricably bound to culture and thought. When we require that all our contact with other countries be conducted in our language, English, we force others to share our culture, world view, and way of looking at the world. Too often, students learn only about other cultures without learning to communicate directly with them. This may be an inadvertent form of cultural, ethnocentric arrogance, looking upon other cultures from arm's length. If we really want students to participate as global citizens, they need to be able to speak and understand those with whom we share this planet.

—Myriam Met and  
Eileen Lorenz

Foreign language immersion is a method of foreign language instruction in which the regular school curriculum is taught in another language. It is the most effective form of foreign language instruction ever implemented in a school setting. Studies have shown that immersion students develop near-native skills in understanding and reading a foreign language, and high levels of proficiency in speaking and writing it. These skills develop at no detriment to students' long-term achievement in English reading, language arts, or other subject matter. English-speaking immersion students develop more positive attitudes toward speakers of the foreign language than do monolingual educated English speakers. Because immersion teachers conduct the regular elementary program in a foreign language, replacing English-speaking teachers, no additional staff is needed for immersion, making it extremely cost-effective as well as instructionally effective. Foreign language immersion is an administrator's dream: Immersion is a demonstrated means of developing high levels of foreign language proficiency, high levels of academic achievement in English, and positive attitudes toward other cultures at a very low cost.

—Myriam Met and  
Eileen Lorenz

It is a sad commentary on our schools that a subject best begun at the elementary school level is one least likely to be found there: only one of every five American children has the opportunity to begin foreign language study, despite clear evidence that early foreign language instruction benefits students cognitively and academically, contributes to the achievement of schools' multicultural goals, and can help to meet the future needs of the nation.

—Myriam Met and  
Eileen Lorenz

There are...cognitive benefits to knowledge of a second language. Research on elementary school children shows a positive relationship between the students' nonverbal reasoning ability, mental flexibility, and metalinguistic ability. Other studies have shown higher scores on measures of divergent thinking and cognitive flexibility in children who have taken a foreign language in elementary school. Students who acquire second-language skills during childhood score better on tests of cognitive functioning than do monolingual students.

—Myriam Met and  
Eileen Lorenz

Studying other languages improves the students' ability to use their own language and heightens their sensitivity to their own culture.

—Rudolph Masciantonio

Knowledge of another language is essential in over 60 occupations, from law enforcement to health care, from education to business, from vocational to technological fields.

—Waunita Kinoshita

In the past, you would have a list of words giving you the names of vegetables and their translations. Now, you get questions such as, 'You're in a grocery store and need to find something, so what do you say and how do you say it?' It's all about learning to use the language effectively.

—Valerie Egan

It used to be enough to do two or three years of foreign language for college entrance, but now it's needed for jobs. And the demand will only increase over time. There's a huge mountain to move here in America, but it's up to school administrators to work together to move it. In 20 years, many of these students will have become bi- or trilingual. That is if schools give them the resources to get there.

—Paula Patrick

Few people have had pleasant experiences with foreign languages. That is unfortunate because it's such a wonderful experience for students to learn what people who speak another language think. It's those multiple perspectives that are needed to solve the many challenges our world is facing today.

—Martha Semmer

All beginning students have the same opportunity to succeed in foreign language. No history of failures. Everybody is new to the subject.

—Waunita Kinoshita

Why don't we wait until 6th grade for math instruction? We start it early because we know that if we start early, kids can learn it more readily. It's the same with languages.

—Nancy Rhodes

If you start at an earlier age and get children proficient in one other language, their brains become wired for learning languages. You are teaching them not just the language but language proficiency, and that make learning a third language easier [because] you can take that ability with you.

—Mary Bastiani

Researchers in France have been building up an international network of student e-mail exchanges to encourage the use of technology to boost foreign language and cultural communication at the peer level. When even very young children use the Internet and other technologies in conjunction with learning the language and culture of another country, it bolsters their communication and written language skills in both that language and their own language. Student e-mail exchanges include anything from questions about the school day, community life, holidays, and local customs, to poems and original art.

—John Franklin

Whether via e-mail or Web sites, the Internet's strength for teaching foreign languages lies in its use as a repository and channel for reading and hearing authentic language, say experts. With its millions of foreign language media sites, video clips, Web logs, and language learning sites, the Internet has become a technological resource that most foreign language teachers turn to.

—John Franklin

While German used to be taken by science-oriented people, the feeling now is, if something worthwhile is not done in English, it will be translated into English.

—Charles W. Stansfield

We know that we need lots of speakers of Mandarin, Arabic, and other languages, but we also know that there aren't enough teachers to develop those programs.

—Anne Tollefson

Nine out of ten Americans cannot speak, read, or understand any language but English.

—Jacqueline Benevento

The problems of language incompetence in U.S. international business are...disturbing. Stories abound, which although amusing, point out our ineptness with foreign languages. For example, in advertising for General Motors cars in Belgium, 'body by Fisher' was translated into Flemish as 'corpse by Fisher,' which did not help sales. 'Come alive with Pepsi' almost appeared in the Chinese edition of *Reader's Digest* as 'Pepsi brings your ancestors back from the grave.' In Germany, the same ad slogan came out in translation as 'Come alive out of the grave.' The Chevrolet Nova didn't sell well in Latin America until its name was changed to Caribe, which isn't too surprising since 'no va' in Spanish means 'it doesn't go.'

—Jacqueline Benevento

The public has some very serious misconceptions about what can be accomplished in a foreign language course. Two years of a foreign language doesn't prepare you for any kind of usefulness any more than two years of math would prepare you to be an engineer.

—Myriam Met

We talk about high culture and culture with a small 'c.' High culture is representative samples of the civilization, whether it's a work by Goethe or a novel by André Malreaux. However, not only are we looking at the literary masterpieces as a cultural representation, but we're also talking about the little things that people are interested in, the everyday commonplaces—what makes living in Germany different from living in North Carolina? And teachers have to be aware that you can't present all the varieties of Spanish culture (as the same). Whether it's Argentina versus Colombia versus Spain, there are different patterns and practices and perspectives within each country's culture, and we see that even in the choice of language words that are used; for example, the word turkey is said one way in Mexico—*guajalote*—and *pavo* in many other countries. You also don't say that this is better than that. That kind of comparison went out a long time ago.

—Paul A. Garcia

I am for the same calendar for the whole world, as I am for the same currency for all the people and a world auxiliary language like the Esperanto for all the people.

— Gandhi

The key for a common language, lost in the Tower of Babel, can only be found in the use of Esperanto.

—Jules Verne

My advice to all who have the time or inclination to concern themselves with the international language movement would be: ‘Back Esperanto loyally.’

—J. R. R. Tolkein

I found the volapük very complicated and, on the contrary, very simple Esperanto. It is so easy that having received, six years ago, a grammar, a dictionary and articles of this idiom, I could arrive, at the end of two early hours, if not to write it, at least with usually reading the language. The sacrifices which any man of our European world will make, by devoting some time to his study are so small, and the results which can result from this so immense, that one cannot refuse to carry out this test.

—Leon Tolstoi (1894)

Would you like to learn the ‘secret’ underground language of the world? There are actually hundreds of thousands of people who speak a language, you have probably never heard. This is the language your mother didn’t tell you about! Esperanto is an easy to learn, totally regular, international language, so we can better understand everyone and their mom.

—Chuck Smith

It is very probable that a neutral language would be more useful like means of communication between the various nations of the world. The Esperanto is already for a long time one of the principal candidates for this function.

—Robert Kennedy

One Chinese Esperanto speaker described Esperanto as a linguistic handshake. When two people shake hands they both reach out halfway. When two people speak Esperanto they have both made the effort to learn a relatively easy, neutral language instead of one person making the huge effort to learn the other person’s difficult national language and the other person making no effort at all except to correct his/her interlocutor’s errors.

—Sylvan Aft

Ultimately Zamenhof’s language [Esperanto] was and is more than a proposed solution to the language problem: it is an attempt to confront the spirit of inequality, of intolerance, of hatred that is tearing apart our beautiful world.

—Sylvan Zaft

Esperanto is very popular in Hungary, Estonia, Finland, Japan, China, Vietnam... The current [1995-1998] president of the Universal Esperanto Association is a Korean university professor of Economics. The most attended international meeting in 5000 years of Chinese history was the 1986 Universal Congress of Esperanto in Beijing, being the largest both by the number of delegates and the number of countries represented.

—Chuck Smith

It was just as the 1914 War burst on me that I made the discovery that ‘legends’ depend on the language to which they belong; but a living language depends equally on the ‘legends’ which it conveys by tradition....Volapuk, Esperanto, Ido, Novial, etc. are dead, far deader than ancient unused languages, because their authors never invented any Esperanto legends.

—J. R. R. Tolkien

What kind of a world do we live in that has room for dog yoga but not for Esperanto?

—Arika Okrent

The subject matter of Latin is the very roots of Western civilization. Latin is not, therefore, just another foreign language. To live intellectually only one’s own time is as provincial and misleading as to live intellectually only in one’s own culture.

—William Riley Parker

Latin and Greek words at least 2,000 years old come from even earlier Indo-European tongues!

—Tony Randall

Students learning English often need to be encouraged to speak to peers who don’t speak their native language. Educators have found that promoting computer-related activities in the classroom provides an effective way to make that happen. ‘When they’re in front of a computer, students are so captivated by the task at hand that language becomes secondary and inhibitions about speaking fall away,’ explains Michael Hoy, principal of San Juan Elementary School in San Juan Capistrano, California.

—Elizabeth Weal

The distinct social or political orientation of most Latin literature gives it permanent relevance.

—William Riley Parker

## LATIN LINGO

‘Latin...yuck, that’s a DEAD language,’ would probably be a middle schooler’s response when the teacher announces that the next unit of study will be Latin derivatives. How can the teacher revive a ‘dead’ language in a meaningful way for students? Based upon Emersons’ belief that ‘behind every dead word was once a great picture,’ Latin Lingo offers a way to motivate students to learn Latin roots. Picture this—a large, muscular man is lifting weights and beneath him is the caption ‘Magnus the Great.’ Keeping the picture and slogan in mind, think of some words that are derived from the Latin root *magnus*. If you thought of magnify, magnate, magnum, magnificent or magnanimous, congratulations! You used Latin Lingo!....As traditional thinkers, young adolescents benefit from concrete explanations. By providing mental images for verbal concepts, Latin Lingo adds concreteness to the teaching of root word meanings. With its simple and often humorous pictures, Latin Lingo is highly motivating for students. Moreover, giving students the opportunity design their own mnemonic devices encourages student creativity. Since research indicates that student involvement in vocabulary instruction promotes higher achievement than rote memorization, the use of Latin Lingo is more likely to result in higher achievement gains than methods which stress memorization.

—Patricia H. Phelps and  
Susan Peterson

Proficiency in Latin, it emerges, is the ability to read what the ancient Romans wrote for and about themselves, on they walls and funerary monuments as well as in their literature, with an understanding of the life experiences and values exemplified in and by the materials read and of the import of the messages in the materials throughout time and for life today and in the foreseeable future. Proficiency-oriented instruction demands that students learn Roman culture through their Latin readings or, at the very least, through Latin literature in translation.

—Lorraine A. Strasheim

Studying classical languages, such as Latin and Greek, can boost academic achievement. Knowing Latin may not enable students to communicate with other people in the world, but it gives them a fundamental understanding of the structure of language and can be a stepping-stone for learning other languages. Studying Latin can also enhance students’ understanding of the humanities because the language is linked to the Greco-Roman society.

—Robert Pamos

What French students might accomplish by the beginning of their second year, it might take a Japanese student three years to reach.

—Carol Bond

While Latin conversational skills are in no way goals of instruction in Latin, teachers, especially in Level One, must develop some limited speaking and listening skills, perhaps through Latin-to-Latin question-answer drills, to help students internalize the patterns of the language in context, to provide needed reinforcement, and to address students' varied learning styles and perceptual strengths.

—Lorraine A. Strasheim

Proficiency is a central concept in language study. Proficiency means the ability to use language to do things, to use language in social situations, in short, to communicate. This emphasis on communication means that foreign language programs must include proficiency objectives.

—Jacqueline Benevento

From its three separate writing systems to its 1,850 standard kanji characters, Japanese poses a challenge to even the best language students....The three separate but essential writing systems present difficulties for American students because they bear no relationship to the alphabet system American children learn. Students must learn 46 basic hiragana and 46 katakana syllabaries. Kanji, or Chinese characters, represent one or several ideas, and may require up to 25 strokes in a precise order to write accurately. Because a student of Japanese will find no similar 'cognate' to help decipher a word's meaning, there are no familiar hooks to hang anything on....With Japanese, everyone starts at zero.

—John O'Neil

When Paul, a second-year Japanese student, received a reply from his e-pal in Japan, he discovered that teens there are interested in American rock music and were eager to know more about his alternative rock band. Similarly, Evan, an avid baseball fan who keeps tabs on his favorite Japanese player...learned that Japanese students follow...a host of...American athletes. Meanwhile, Anne found out that some of her favorite Japanese anime cartoons are even more popular in Japan, and she got the inside scoop on ones she didn't know about. For these students, learning that teens in Japan share similarities with them, as well as differences, is an eye-opening first step toward developing a global consciousness.

—Michael Van Krey

The push for Chinese, whether you're in Massachusetts, Illinois or California, came inevitably from the parents, who had the same vision as we did, that China is one-fourth of the world, and we need to learn the language.

—Scott McVay

In Alaska, students are calling their teacher ‘lao shi.’ In Illinois, they’re learning that one plus one equals ‘er.’ And in western Massachusetts, kindergarten students who can sing their ABCs will soon start honing Mandarin accents. As China’s economic power grows, Chinese is becoming the new language of the future....‘It’s about jobs and the world economy,’ said Richard Alcorn. ‘There are unbelievable opportunities to do business in China, so there’s a need for Americans to learn the language so we’re not left out.

—Adam Gorlick

Not everyone believes that teaching Chinese to legions of American schoolchildren is worth the investment. With more than 200 million Chinese students learning English, critics say the two countries already have a common tongue. And Chinese takes, on average, three times longer to learn than French or Spanish.

—Ed Finkel

Chinese is a category 4 language—a designation developed by the Foreign Service Institute—which means it can take an English-speaking American as much as four times longer to learn than a Romance language such as Spanish or French.

The standardized form of spoken Chinese is Mandarin, which is based on the Beijing dialect. Standard Mandarin is the official language of mainland China and Taiwan, as well as one of four official languages of Singapore.

The language is based on characters, not letters, which must be memorized. While an educated person might recognize 7,000 characters, the language has more than 50,000. And spoken Chinese does not differentiate according to gender or number or tense—though written Chinese does. The most difficult aspect of learning Chinese may be understanding the tones; In Chinese, the same word might be pronounced four different ways, each with a different meaning. Depending on which tone is used, for example, the Chinese word that we might pronounce as ‘ma’ could mean ‘mother’ or it could mean ‘horse.’

There are two writing systems deployed in the Chinese-speaking world. Traditional characters are used in Taiwan and Hong Kong, whereas simplified characters are used in mainland China, Singapore, and Malaysia.

—Christopher Hann

Andrew Corcoran, head of the Chinese American International School, started learning Chinese...two years before he took the job at CAIS. He continues to study, although he has far from mastered it. ‘I started to learn it in my mid-50s, and I consider myself a testament to why you need to start at a young age,’ Corcoran says. ‘I’ve been here for six years, and my students and my teachers tell me I’m at about a second-grade level.

—Christopher Hann

Anyone who reads the newspaper realizes that you can't ignore Asia anymore. American education has always been Euro-centric, and now we're realizing how inadequate our perspective on Asia has been.

—Shuhan Wang

There's an increasing effort to look at the African diaspora across all continents. The general public and, indeed, many African Americans, are unaware that there are a lot of people of African descent who speak Spanish, French, and Italian in countries throughout the world. Large numbers of African descendants live in Latin America—Columbia, Ecuador, Panama—all countries that are generally not known as having African populations have African populations that speak the native languages. The African countries that were postcolonial and have long used Spanish, French, and Italian are not depicted in [foreign language] textbooks commonly used in the United States. So, we have the two-fold problem of African American students being discouraged from studying language and of not seeing themselves represented within a language curriculum....Without that meaning, you can't see yourself becoming a proficient user of a language, and you certainly don't see that language as a building block of your identity. You've got to have that vision—otherwise, you take the language as just another school subject.

—Theresa Austin

Understanding and promoting the participation in foreign languages for students of African American descent is key to increasing the diversity within the foreign language learning population. Traditionally, many schools did not track African American students into foreign language classes. Sometimes these students are told, 'You're not doing well in any other courses, so why are you taking foreign languages?' Foreign languages are not seen as essential, nor are they seen as courses that might even increase a student's motivation and interest in other content areas. We're concerned with not only making instruction more culturally sensitive to African American students, but also encouraging these student to go into teaching foreign languages.

—Theresa Austin

It takes seven to nine years of intensive instruction—four years in high school and college and three to five years of additional training—to become adept at translation, conversation, interpretations and negotiation in any foreign language. It takes even longer to produce experts in intelligence, defense, and international business who can 'read between the lines' and discern language complexities such as irony, allusion, intention, and subtle threats.

—Everette Jordan

What's the most widely spoken language in the world? It depends on who you ask—and whether they're counting native speakers or secondary speakers (those who use a language every though it's not their native tongue). And some count both.

Most appear to agree, however, that Mandarin Chinese is spoken by more people than any other language. English comes second...followed...by Hindustani.

Only about 6 percent of the world's population speaks English as its primary language. Add those who speak English as a second or third language with some degree of competence and the figure is about 25 percent.

English is widespread, however; it's an official language in some 52 countries and many small colonies and territories.

—Dennis O'Neil

Resolving how long students should study foreign language in schools may depend on accepting that people study language for a variety of reasons. Students who intend to become translators, foreign language teachers, or urban social workers, who intend to work intensively overseas, or who discover a personal love for and enjoyment in the foreign language may commit themselves to extensive language study in order to reach the required proficiency. But is it a waste of time for the student who does not intend to pursue language study in depth to study a language for only one year?

No. Students can and do learn a great deal during a year of language study. They will not exit the course as native speakers, but then native proficiency may not be appropriate for every student. Limited knowledge of foreign language may be an acceptable goal.

—Linda M.  
Crawford-Lange

Rather than telling prospective students that they must study it for many years, foreign language educators should be saying:

'Yes, for you to be able to speak, read, write, and understand this language just like a native, as well as be perfectly at home in its culture, it will take a lot of practice over a long period of time. But, after taking this course for one year, you will be able, among other tasks, to carry on a simple conversation about your daily life; get and follow information, such as travel directions, from people in the foreign language; fill out forms, such as a medical history or driver's license application; and write short letters in the foreign language. As you learn to perform these tasks, you will also learn about the culture that surrounds them. Perhaps even more important, you will learn how to learn a foreign language so that, if you find yourself faced with a language problem in the future, you will have a place to begin to solve it.

—Linda M.  
Crawford-Lange

## **WHY FOREIGN LANGUAGES?**

Research shows that students who study foreign languages...

- score higher on the SATs;
- develop greater cultural sensitivity toward others;
- have larger vocabularies;
- perform better on tests of reading and math;
- have higher developed listening and retention skills;
- are more creative;
- display more highly developed thinking skills;
- possess skills critical to the national defense;
- will be better prepared to contribute to the ability of local, state, and national economies to compete in the global economy.

—Robert E. Robison

The study of foreign language provides valuable insight into one's primary tongue. One's own language can only be fully appreciated when it is compared and contrasted to another language. Often, a full appreciation of the nuances of one's native language is a direct result of foreign language study.

—J. Henry

Travel and study programs, of course, provide students with the very best way to learn the language and the culture of another nation. Language students who have studied abroad show strong characteristics in understanding other cultures, as well as an increased international awareness. Other studies report that students who have studied abroad are less materialistic, more adaptable, more independent in their thinking, more aware of their home country and culture, and better able to communicate with others and to think critically.

—Linda Robertson and  
Randy C. Gilliam

## **COMMUNICATIVE TOPICS USING AUTHENTIC MATERIALS**

The use of authentic materials and activity-oriented instruction, where students use their target language in real situations, can greatly enhance the teaching of the language and improve student achievement in language study.

- Personal identification
- Family life
- House and home

- Education
- Community and neighborhood
- Meals
- Shopping
- Health and welfare
- Physical environment
- Earning a living
- Leisure
- Public and private services
- Travel

—Rosmarie Haigh,  
Patricia Lennon,  
and Hohn D.  
Thyen

A large mother mouse was leading her young ones on a tour of the comfortable, well-stocked kitchen of the house in which they lived. A hungry grey cat surprised the mouse family. Mother mouse calmly approached the cat and in her loudest, fiercest voice growled, ‘Woof, woof!’ The cat recoiled in horror and retreated, not to be seen again. The mother mouse turned to her frightened little ones and said, ‘I told you that knowing a second language would be necessary to you someday.’

—Linda Robertson and  
Randy C. Gilliam

It takes seven to nine years of intensive instruction—four years in high school and college and three to five years of additional training—to become adept at translation, conversation, interpretation, and negotiation in any foreign language. It takes even longer to produce experts in intelligence, defense, and international business who can ‘read between the lines’ and discern language complexities such as irony, allusion, intention, and subtle threats.

—Everette Jordan

Success in learning a foreign language is contingent on a certain degree of maturity in the native language. The child can transfer to the new language the system of meanings he already possesses in his own. The reverse is also true—the child learns to see his language as one particular system among many, to view its phenomena under more general categories, and this leads to awareness of his linguistic operations. Goethe said with truth that ‘he who knows no foreign language does not truly know his own.’

—L. S. Vygotsky

## HOW TO EVALUATE A LANGUAGE PROGRAM

With proficiency and culture as cornerstones of the program evaluation, the evaluator can begin to ask the following questions.

- Does the program reflect the proficiencies suggested as appropriate for that level in all four of the proficiency areas?
- Are the teachers trained to interview students as a means of proficiency evaluation?
- Are a variety of teaching methodologies used to meet the goals of the proficiency guidelines?
- Do students have an opportunity to say and do the culturally acceptable thing in an ordinary social situation?
- Do students know why certain behaviors are important to members of the culture, and how these behaviors and customs fit into the culture's system of values?
- Are students able to interpret the visual elements of the culture (signs, symbols, objects, environmental factors, and nonverbal behavior?)
- Are students able to evaluate generalizations made by and about the members of the target culture?
- Are all four of the learning outcomes of speaking, listening, reading, and writing appropriately stressed?
- Do students have an opportunity to keep informed on current events in the target language countries?
- Do students have an opportunity to learn about the sociopolitical status, historical events, contemporary facts, daily life, tourist situations, and an appreciation of literary and artistic heritage?

—Linda Robertson

When one learns another language, one adopts certain cultural behaviors of the speakers of that language. In the typical foreign language setting in the United States, where students rarely interact with significant numbers of native speakers, the most commonly adopted cultural behavior is imitation of pronunciation patterns. Students attempt, on a daily basis, to sound like those who speak the language. And research confirms that these target cultural behaviors, students' pronunciation skills, are linked, among other factors, to their empathy with native speakers of the language. Thus, if students do not respect those who speak the language, the likelihood of their adopting (or even attempting) authentic pronunciation patterns measurably decreases.

—Corinne  
Mantle-Bromley

Students cannot master a language until they've mastered the cultural contexts in which the language occurs.

—Elizabeth Peterson

My favorite thing about Americans is that when faced with a language barrier the solution is always to just SPEAK ENGLISH LOUDER.

—*theChive*

Language-learning is long-term, serious, and difficult.

—David Edwards

Mastering one foreign language makes it easier and faster to learn a second or even a third.

—Myriam Met

The world of the language classroom truly has grown smaller and smaller. Students have complete access to information on any topic in almost any language. Certainly, the Internet is helping to preserve many languages. Speakers of indigenous languages in the United States and other parts of the world who want to interact with fellow speakers of that language can do so in chat rooms, where just about every language left on the planet is being preserved by scholars and speakers. In addition, the Internet has freed students from having to study languages in classrooms or according to school offerings. They can go online and begin to study in their own way, as well as interact directly with speakers of almost any language in the world.

—Christine Brown

The following reasons were cited most frequently for more students not enrolling in foreign language programs;

- The subject matter of foreign language is perceived as too difficult and/or involving too much hard work.
- Foreign language study is seen as irrelevant to career or personal goals.
- Foreign language classes compete poorly with other available courses and other demands on students' time.

—Linda M.  
Crawford-Lange

Some countries, including the Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Germany, and Netherlands, require that students study two foreign languages.

—Susan Black

When you study our language you begin to understand our culture in a way that study of no other subject can do. When you know our language, you understand us better. We still may speak together in English, but you will understand our cultural values, our samenesses and differences, and have an appreciation for them.

—Peter Hubrich

By far, Spanish and French top the list of foreign languages taught in K-12 schools, followed by German, Italian, Japanese, and Russian. Only a few schools teach Chinese, Arabic, Farsi, Hindi, and other languages the federal government...labeled 'critical' for national defense and economic security.

The U.S. Department of State says 'deficits in foreign language learning and teaching' hamper security, diplomacy, law enforcement, intelligence, and cultural understanding. And the Committee for Economic Development, a policy group of business leaders and university presidents, warns that 'strong foreign language programs at the elementary, high school, and college levels' are necessary to maintain competitiveness in global markets.'

—Susan Black

The research on foreign languages in schools is clear: Teach kids new languages early and often. In fact, cognitive neuroscientists say, children should learn foreign languages during a window of opportunity that is open widest until about age 10. After that, the window closes on the speech sounds of a new language, and it becomes more difficult to acquire native or near-native speech while learning a foreign language....Introducing children to foreign languages in kindergarten isn't too early, foreign language specialists say. For one thing, young children pick up a foreign language quickly and easily make the switch from learning lessons in English to learning in another language, such as Spanish or Japanese. For another, children who learn a foreign language early in their schooling do better in other subjects, such as reading, language arts, and mathematics.

—Susan Black

Too often educators view learners whose first language is not English or 'standard' English as disadvantaged, yet these learners have the ability to perceive the importance of language in a personal and visceral way. They understand the isolation and pain that the lack of language proficiency inflicts. Learners of English are disadvantaged only if we treat linguistic diversity as a liability in our educational system and our society. Labeling and neglecting these learners denies them the inclusion that language can provide.

—Patricia O. Richards

Since English has always borrowed words from other languages, I suggest we borrow one more—*svaha*. This American Indian word denotes the time between seeing the lightning and hearing the thunder.

*Svaha* gives clarity to a variety of modern circumstances: waiting for political promises to be fulfilled, for a heavily hyped movie to be released, or for seeing whether the latest medical miracle really works. It is the time between the acceptance letter and the payment.

The word fills a conceptual gap in our language, helping us to distinguish pure noise from actual events. In an age when being put on hold is common, *svaha* is a necessary word.

—Elissa Treuer

As a child I was surrounded by many languages. Besides English, my grandparents spoke Polish, Italian, Spanish, and a little French. When the conversation was for everyone, my grandparents spoke English. Otherwise, they slipped into their native tongues. As children, my brothers and cousins and I delighted in discovering the meaning of some of those foreign phrases, particularly the venial profanities that made our parents wince and our grandparents chuckle when we repeated them. Knowing such words was a right of passage, an entrée into the adult world. I learned early that language was about access, participation, and power....Perhaps those Americans who have not experienced linguistic diversity in their own families or who have never attempted to learn a second language are the disadvantaged ones. Without striving to express themselves in a foreign tongue, they miss understanding the essence of language as a means of knowledge, access, power, and participation. Language-proficient citizens, especially bilingual ones, can more fully participate in our multilingual world. As a nation, we must exert our energy and resources in order to share our language with all our citizens.

—Patricia O. Richards

Whether you're still in school or you head up a corporation, the better command you have of words, the better chance you have of saying exactly what you mean, of understanding what others mean—and of getting what you want in the world. English is the richest language—with the largest vocabulary on earth. Over 1,000,000 words!

You can express shades of meaning that aren't even possible in other languages. (For example, you can differentiate between 'sky' and 'heaven.' The French, Italians and Spanish cannot.)

Yet, the average adult has a vocabulary of only 34,000 to 60,000 words. Imagine what we're missing!

—Tony Randall

Alphabetic writing, the most highly developed and widespread system of writing in the world today, has proved to be much more convenient and adaptable to spoken language than has syllabic writing. Based on the notion that the separate speech sounds of a language, its phonemes, constitute the units that written symbols represent, alphabetic writing would, ideally, have a distinct symbol for each sound. A spoken language with forty speech sounds, for example, would have an alphabet of forty characters. The simplicity, adaptability, and suitability of alphabetic writing has secured its place as the predominant method of writing in the world today. The alphabet that was derived from the ancient Hebrews, Greeks, and Romans is now used not only in English but in French, Italian, German, Spanish, Turkish, Polish, Dutch, and Hungarian—to name a few of the languages that employ essentially the same alphabetic characters.

—Richard E. Hodges

While all of us in America might agree that we share the English language, we also recognize that we hear among ourselves many different dialects. Our friends from Boston and Dallas do not sound alike, and that is because they speak different dialects. A dialect is a subgroup within a language, one dialect differing from another in three particular ways: vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar. Speakers of two different dialects of the same language should be able to understand one another, while speakers of two different languages most often cannot.

For example, a man speaking the dialect we generally call Standard American English (SAE) might say that ‘my friends and I went to a movie,’ while his Australian acquaintance would say that ‘my mates and I took in a cinema.’ In addition to carrying different meanings, the word *mates* is pronounced differently by the American and the Australian, the Australian pronouncing the vowel less like long A and closer to long I. Such differences in vocabulary, pronunciation and usage will not prevent communication between the two English speakers. But when their German friend says, ‘Ich bin mit meiner Freunden ins Kino gegangen,’ neither one knows what he means.

—Steven Fox

A...reason that English spelling appears to stray from its alphabetic base stems from the fact that the language has borrowed many words from other languages, sometimes retaining both the spelling and the pronunciation of the borrowed words, as in *parfait* and *sabotage* from the French, and in other cases changing the spelling and/or the pronunciation to fit English patterns, as in *medicine* from the Latin, *gymnasium* from the Greek, *volcano* from the Italian, and *mosquito* from the Spanish. Thus, as a result of these and other historical forces, present-day English spelling reflects an erosion of its alphabetic base.

—Richard E. Hodges

The average active vocabulary of an adult English speaker is around 20,000 words, while his passive vocabulary is around 40,000 words.

—Susie Dent

Word study can go far beyond the meanings, structures, and spellings of words. It can be an entrée into the social and political history of the English-speaking world. The richness and diversity of the language are in large part the result of contacts with other cultures and societies from whom we have borrowed concepts and material goods, along with their names. These ‘loan’ words (actually on permanent loan!) permeate the language. Sometimes the original spelling is maintained; in other cases, the word is adapted to English spelling.

Here...is a sampling of words borrowed from other languages that illustrates how in every language contact the potential exists for adding words to the English vocabulary. Here, then is a ‘hodgepodge’ of borrowed words.

Russian: tundra, czar

Portuguese: molasses, fetish

German: strafe, kindergarten

Spanish: bonanza, rodeo

Italian: virtuoso, carnival

Hindi: shampoo, chit

Japanese: hibachi, tycoon

Chinese: tea, serge

Hebrew: sabbath, jubilee

Persian/Iranian: azure, shawl

Yiddish: kibitzer, phooey

Afrikaans: trek, commando

Arabic: safari, zero

Malay: amok (amuk), gingham

Polynesian: atoll, tattoo, bamboo

Louisiana Creole: lagniappe

—Richard E. Hodges

Over many generations, the native tongue of the [Hawaiian] islands had been systematically eliminated from everyday life, and even the...schools weren't able to bring it back. Part of it was a lack of interest—students seemed to prefer learning Japanese, Spanish or French. But more important, Hawaii's educators generally hadn't yet figured out how to teach Hawaiian vocabulary and grammar, or give eager youngsters...opportunities to immerse themselves in Hawaiian speech.

—Alia Wong

All our languages are works of art.

—Jean Jacques Rousseau

The Jewish star (of David) is also referred to as a Magen David. All letters of the Hebrew alphabet are found in a Magen David (Star of David). There is no such thing in any other language.

Rabbi Perl at <https://www.chabadmineola.com/>

When I was a kid, my parents would always say, ‘Excuse my French’ just after a swear word...I’ll never forget my first day at school when my teacher asked if any of us knew any French.

—ifunny.co

Aren’t we [translators] simply the humble, anonymous handmaids-and-men of literature, the grateful, ever-obsequious servants of the publishing industry? In the most resounding yet decorous terms I can muster, the answer is no, for the most fundamental description of what translators do is that we write—or perhaps rewrite—in language B a work of literature originally composed in language A, hoping that readers of the second language [...] will perceive the text, emotionally and artistically, in a manner that parallels and corresponds to the esthetic experience of its first readers.

—Edith Grossman

She...spoke fluent French, no English, and beginner Spanish. My friend and I spoke English, some Spanish, and not a lick of French....Spanish was the shoddy suspension bridge between both sides; it did its job, though there were many missing planks and weathered ropes. There was an understanding, through the eyes and friendly mannerisms, that we were all amiable people with much to say to one another, but it was a night plagued by trailing sentences and grasping hand gestures. In the end, we communicated primarily through the international language of *charades* which is, you guessed it, a French word.

—Griffin Suber

We all know the word charades. Just like we know haiku from Japanese and schmooze from Hebrew. Like these words, translators make the foreign feel familiar. The cultural exchange of ideas that is translation broadens the horizons of not just literature, but language itself. Even if Japanese or Hebrew are as alien to you as Martian would have been to H. G. Wells, every story that is translated brings us closer to universal understanding of one another.

—Griffin Suber

Translation is that which transforms everything so that nothing changes.

—Günter Grass

In some Native languages the term for plants translates to ‘those who take care of us.’

—Robin Wall Kimmerer

Language is the fiber that binds us to our cultural identity.

—University of Hawaii  
Website

If I were a French student and I were 10 years old, I think it would be more important for me to learn coding than English. I’m not telling people not to learn English in some form—but I think you understand what I am saying is that this is a language that you can [use to] express yourself to 7 billion people in the world. I think that coding should be required in every public school in the world.

—*Apple* CEO Tim Cook

English is difficult to learn. It can be taught through tough thorough thought—though.

—Internet Meme

By being so long in the lowest form I gained an immense advantage over the cleverer boys. They all went on to learn Latin and Greek and splendid things like that. But I was taught English. We were considered such dunces that we could learn only English. Mr. Somervell—a most delightful man, to whom my debt is great—was charged with the duty of teaching the stupidest boys the most disregarded thing—namely, to write mere English. He knew how to do it. He taught it as no one else has ever taught it. Not only did we learn English parsing thoroughly, but we also practised continually English analysis. . . . Thus I got into my bones the essential structure of the ordinary British sentence—which is a noble thing. And when in after years my schoolfellows who had won prizes and distinction for writing such beautiful Latin poetry and pithy Greek epigrams had to come down again to common English, to earn their living or make their way, I did not feel myself at any disadvantage. Naturally I am biased in favour of boys learning English. I would make them all learn English: and then I would let the clever ones learn Latin as an honour, and Greek as a treat. But the only thing I would whip them for would be not knowing English. I would whip them hard for that.

—Winston Churchill

If you'd teach me to swear in Russian, I might have a new appreciation for it.  
—Richelle Mead

If dolphins tasted good, we wouldn't even know about their language.  
—Lorrie Moore

Students are most likely to become fluent in a foreign language if they begin studying it in elementary school and continue studying it for 6 to 8 years. Although older students may learn foreign languages faster than younger ones, students who start early are likely to become more proficient and to speak with a near-native accent....If...foreign language requirements are really to improve students' language competence, experience has shown that schools will need to:

- find qualified teachers,
- set consistent goals,
- select appropriate materials, and
- continue a coherent program of instruction from elementary to junior to senior high school.

—*U.S. Department of  
Education—What  
Works*

Every immigrant who comes here should be required within five years to learn English or leave the country.

—Theodore Roosevelt

Everyone has learning difficulties, because learning to speak French or understanding relativity is difficult.

—Mark Haddon

You can eat strudel, speak fluent German, adapt to local culture, but many will still say of you *Er hat einen deutschen Pass*—'He has a German passport.' No one starts calling you German.

—Shadi Hamid

In 1891, Carnegie congratulated the graduates of the *Pierce College of Business* for being fully occupied in obtaining a knowledge of shorthand and typewriting rather than wasting time upon dead languages.

—Chris Hedges

*Heimat*. The word means home in German, the place where one was born. But the term also conveys a subtler nuance, a certain tenderness. One's *Heimat* is not merely a matter of geography; it is where one's heart lies.

—Jenna Blum

All around me I hear the pleasant chortle of Dutch. It sounds vaguely familiar, though I can't imagine why. Then it dawns on me. Dutch sounds exactly like English spoken backward! ...

I wonder if I recorded someone speaking Dutch and played that backward, it would sound like regular English!

—Eric Weiner

The Moldovans have amassed a repertoire of expressions to blunt their despair or at least explain it away. One of the more popular is 'ca la Moldova': 'This is Moldova.' It's usually said plaintively, palms open. That and its companion 'ce sa fac'—'What can I do?'—are employed when the bus breaks down, again, or the landlord demands an extra forty dollars a month in rent, just because.

—Eric Weiner

*Amethyst* is Greek for 'not intoxicated' because the stone was once thought to protect the owner from substance abuse.

—*theChive*

The Chinese language itself is remarkably concrete. There is no word for 'size,' for example. If you want to fit someone for shoes, you ask them for the 'big-small' of their feet. There is no suffix equivalent to 'ness' in Chinese. So there is no 'whiteness'—only the white of the swan and the white of the snow. The Chinese are disinclined to use precisely defined terms or categories in any arena, but instead use expressive, metaphoric language.

—Richard E. Nisbett

The Scots language has 421 words for snow.

—*factourism.com*

Sign languages are not the same worldwide. Each country generally has its own native sign language, and some have more than one.

—*theChive*

When will you learn that there isn't a word for everything?

—Nicole Krauss

If you drew a map of Europe based on languages it would bear scant resemblance to a conventional map. Switzerland would disappear, becoming part of the surrounding dominions of French, Italian, and German but for a few tiny pockets for *Romansh* (or *Rumantsch* or *Rhaeto-Romanic* as it is variously called), which is spoken as a native language by about half the people in the Graubünden district (or Grisons district—almost everything has two names in Switzerland) at the country's eastern edge. This steep and beautiful area, which takes in the ski resorts of St. Moritz, Davos, and Klosters, was once effectively isolated from the rest of the world by its harsh winters and forbidding geography. Indeed, the isolation was such that even people in neighboring valleys began to speak different versions of the language, so that *Romansh* is not so much one language as five fragmented and not always mutually intelligible dialects. A person from the valley around Sutselva will say, 'Vagned nà qua' for 'Come here,' while in the next valley he will say, 'Vegni neu cheu'....In other places people will speak the language in the same way but spell it differently depending on whether they are Catholic or Protestant.

—Bill Bryson

Simplify the French language and abolish irregular verbs—a measure that would have rescued countless schoolchildren from the despotism of pernicky pedagogues.

—Graham Robb

A highly codified and formal foreign language known as French—a language which, according to many French-speakers, almost no one speaks correctly. In the land of a thousand tongues, monolingualism became the mark of the educated person.

—Graham Robb

Learning a foreign language: You can think about the words all you want, but you'll never be able to speak it until you suck up your courage and say them out loud.

—Dan Wells

Overheard at a grocery store by someone waiting in line behind a woman speaking on her cellphone in another language. Ahead of her was a white man. After the woman hangs up, he speaks up.

Man: 'I didn't want to say anything while you were on the phone, but you're in America now. You need to speak English.'

Woman: 'Excuse me?'

Man: *\*very slow\** 'If you want to speak Mexican, go back to Mexico. In America, we speak English.'

Woman: 'Sir, I was speaking Navajo. If you want to speak English, go back to England.'

—ifunny.co

Has anyone talked to the salad? How do they know it's Greek?

—Internet Meme

I don't understand German myself. I learned it at school, but forgot every word of it two years after I had left, and have felt much better ever since.

— Jerome K. Jerome

Teaching high school students to speak Spanish by requiring them to use the language in classroom conversation is more authentic than instructing them to recite stock Spanish sentences from a text. Similarly, learning Spanish by using the language during an internship in Spain is more authentic than using it in classroom conversation. The fact that learning a language by living with native speakers is the most effective way to learn Spanish does not make using the language in classroom conversation a poor alternative.

—John F. Cronin

I bought one of those tapes to teach you Spanish in your sleep. During the night, the tape skipped. Now I can only stutter in Spanish.

—Steven Wright

Try to travel, otherwise  
you may become racist,  
and you may end up believing  
that your skin is the only one  
to be right,  
that your language  
is the most romantic  
and that you were the first  
to be the first.

Travel,  
because if you don't travel then  
your thoughts won't be strengthened,  
won't get filled with ideas.

Your dreams will be born with fragile legs and then you end up believing in  
tv-shows, and in those who invent enemies  
that fit perfectly with your nightmares  
to make you live in terror.

Travel,  
because travel teaches  
to say good morning to everyone  
regardless of which sun we come from.

Travel,  
because travel teaches  
to say goodnight to everyone  
regardless of the darkness  
that we carry inside  
Travel,  
because traveling teaches to resist,  
not to depend,  
to accept others, not just for who they are  
but also for what they can never be.  
To know what we are capable of,  
to feel part of a family  
beyond borders,  
beyond traditions and culture.  
Traveling teaches us to be beyond.  
Travel,  
otherwise you end up believing  
that you are made only for a panorama  
and instead inside you  
there are wonderful landscapes  
still to visit.

—Gio Evan

When you speak a new language you must see if you can translate all of the poetry  
of your old language into the new one.

—Dana Scott

That's the glory of foreign travel, as far as I am concerned. I don't want to know  
what people are talking about. I can't think of anything that excites a greater  
sense of childlike wonder than to be in a country where you are ignorant of almost  
everything. Suddenly you are five years old again. You can't read anything, you  
have only the most rudimentary sense of how things work, you can't even reliably  
cross a street without endangering your life. Your whole existence becomes a series  
of interesting guesses.

—Bill Bryson

If you're going to another country then take time to...learn to say hello, goodbye,  
please and thank you. You can get along way on just those four words if the local  
population see you're making an effort to respect them.

—*theChive*

Humor is the first of the gifts to perish in a foreign tongue.

—Virginia Woolf

In the *Book of Genesis*, we are told that the descendants of Noah built a great city in the land of Shinar. They built a tower ‘with the top in the heavens’ to ‘make a name’ for themselves. God was offended by the hubris of humanity and said:

Look, they are one people, and they have all one language; and this is only the beginning of what they will do; nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them. Come, let us go down, and confuse their language there, so that they will not understand one another’s speech.

—Jonathan Haidt

I very much wish that some day or other you may have time to learn Greek, because that language is an idea. Even a little of it is like manure to the soil of the mind, it makes it bear finer flowers.

—Sara Coleridge (1836)

I stand and listen to people speaking French in the stores and in the street. It’s such a pert, crisp language, elegant as rustling taffeta.

—Belva Plain

Basque is one of the world’s most alarming languages. Only a handful of adult foreigners, they say, have ever managed to learn it.

—Jan Morris

Basque has been ranked as one of the hardest languages to learn, alongside Finnish, Hungarian, Polish, Japanese and some other languages....It is believed that Basques have the gift of acquiring new languages very easily, maybe due to their natural capacity for uttering tangled sounds.

—Oihana Guillan

All languages have their origin somewhere, sometimes we do not know where. But...Euskera came from nowhere else; it was already there at the time other languages arrived. So considered, Euskera is the oldest language in Europe. The rest are foreign languages coming from the East along with powerful peoples that imposed their ways of speaking on native peoples. [...] Euskera is the only survivor of a European language family.

—Theo Vennemann

There never was a single language in Europe but rather a multiplicity of related dialects of which Euskera could be the only survivor. This makes it the only linguistic link with the peoples living in Old Europe. In spite of the efforts made by many a researcher to cast light on the origins of Euskera, the mystery remains unsolved. For this reason, linguists say Euskera is a language isolate, meaning it bears no relation to any other known language or that its connections with other languages are still to be found.

—Bizkaia Talent

Basque seems to pre-date Latin, but its origins are relatively unknown. It is unique in that it does not seem to be related to any other language in the area. No one is really sure how it developed or where it came from, and it is cherished by the Basque culture for its uniqueness. It has miraculously thrived despite attempts by the Spanish dictator Gen Francisco Franco to have the language banned during his rule in the 1960s. There was a time when Basque could only be spoken in the home because you could be arrested for speaking it in public. This attempt to eradicate the language failed, however, and it continued to be used and preserved.

—<https://akorbi.com>

Desi is from the Sanskrit 'deśá,' and it literally means 'from the land.' In some circles, it comprises work and culture from India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh.

—Jenny Bhatt

[In my book] I was very focused on not italicizing the so-called 'foreign words' because they're not foreign to me. And if you're going to read my book where the title of the book is a so-called foreign word, I think you need to start understanding that the world is way bigger than what you thought it was. And how about you jump in with me?

—Madhushree Ghosh

There is no liberal education for the under-languaged.

—Agnes Repplier

The perfect classroom is Paris.

—Leticia Baldrige

[In the Philippines] Eighty dialects and languages are spoken; we are a fragmented nation of loyal believers, divided by blood feuds and controlled by the Church.

—Jessica Hagedorn

There is Indian time and white man's time. Indian time means never looking at the clock....There is not even a word for time in our language.

—Mary Brave Bird

The translator, a lonely sort of acrobat, becomes confused in a labyrinth of paradox, or climbs a pyramid of dependent clauses and has to invent a way down from it in his own language.

—Lydia Davis

The translator [is a]...peculiar outcast, ghost in the world of literature, recreating in another form something already created, creating and not creating, writing words that are his own and not his own.

—Lydia Davis

By learning a new language, students also explore another culture, which helps dispel misconceptions and introduces them to new ideas.

—Shingo Satsutani

Finnish people are silent—small talk doesn't exist. Don't speak unless spoken to or don't invade other people's personal space. It's seen as a sign of disrespect.

—*BuzzFeed.com*

The word 'Mamihlapinatapai' is thought to be one of the most difficult words to translate. Derived from Yaghan, an indigenous language of Tierra del Fuego, it's listed in *The Guinness Book of World Records* as the 'most succinct word,' and refers to 'a look shared by two people, each wishing that the other would initiate something that they both desire but which neither wants to begin.'

—<https://en.wikipedia.org>

There are thousands of idioms that exist in basically the same form across different languages, but no one is entirely sure how or why they became so widespread. To 'get on someone's nerves' and to 'shed crocodile tears' are each used in at least 45 European languages, with the latter also appearing in Arabic, Swahili, Persian, Chinese, Mongolian and more.

—Alexia Underwood

Just saw a job ad for a Latin teacher. Ad specified that successful applicant must be a native speaker of the language.

Good luck with that.

—Dr. Emma Louise  
Barlow

Uptalk is not a characteristic unique to Valley Girl speech, let alone American English....It's actually been documented in at least 14 types of English (including Pacific, Mexican, South African, and Indian Englishes) and 11 non-English languages (including German, Spanish, Japanese, and Arabic. Thanks to cross-linguistic comparisons, it's clear that the social perception of uptalk depends on the particular speech community in question.

—Victoria Vouloumanos

Mine [in 1942] was a traditional school that claimed old-fashioned standards; today that might be regarded as archaic. Four years of Latin were required, and a choice between French and German. There seemed no need for Spanish.

—Cynthia Ozick

[In German] the ubiquitous *ch* was particularly difficult for American tongues. It was this offensive consonant, placed somewhere between phlegm and a sibilant, that was mocked in anti-Nazi wartime movies.

—Cynthia Ozick

Every tongue guards its personal habits. Latin is seductive—the consummate logic of its syntactical cases, the mercurial dance of the ablative absolute. It retains muscle in its ruins (Cicero) and tragic beauty in its posthumous throes (Virgil). The subtleties of the Greek middle voice, neither active nor passive, roam through *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*. And Hebrew, an ancient yet living language newly revived, has the elastic trinity of its three-letter root, which, when prefixes and suffixes are attached, can alter past and future, perspectives and relationships.

—Cynthia Ozick

But what of German? Its compound words—noun hooked to noun, concept to concept—contain, romantically, unnamable emotions, wisps of unidentifiable yearning, literary implications, philosophical hints: *Fernweh*, *Weltanschauung*, *Bildungsroman*, *Doppelgänger*, *Weltschmerz*. Mark Twain satirized these multisyllabic paired ideas as ‘alphabetical processions...marching majestically across the page.’ A latter-day addition to such expressively linked constructions—for instance, *Volksschädlingsverordnung*, literally ‘Decree Against Folk Pests’—flourished as Nazi lingo.

—Cynthia Ozick

German scramble must be wild.

—*theChive*

The Japanese word ‘karaoke’ means ‘empty orchestra.’

—*theChive*

Of all the iconic scenes from the hit 1997 biopic of Selena Quintanilla Pérez, there are two that stick out to me: when there is concern of her performing in Mexico because she doesn’t speak Spanish, and when her father, played by Edward James Olmos, explains why it feels risky for them to go. ‘Down there, you got to speak perfectly, or the press will eat you up and spit you out alive,’ he says. ‘We got to prove to the Mexicans how Mexican we are.’

—Jordan Mendoza

As I got older, I started to realize I was missing out. I couldn’t be involved in conversations. I couldn’t understand Mexican pop culture and jokes that everyone found funny left me confused. I avoided all conversations that could be in Spanish because I wanted to avoid looking like a fool.... I can’t count the number of times I’ve been met with negative reactions from others for saying ‘no hablo español’ or responding in English. Sadly, there are derogatory terms for people like me. I know I’m not as Mexican or Hispanic as I could be, and I’m trying to teach myself to be okay with it; what I lack in language, I make up in pride and knowledge.

—Jordan Mendoza

97% of Latinx immigrant parents speak to their children in Spanish, but that drops to 71% among U.S. born second-generation Latinx parents.

—*Pew Research Center*

Three decades ago, finding opportunities to learn Cantonese in San Francisco wasn’t hard. But today in the city that’s drawn Cantonese speakers from South China for over 150 years, there’s fear that political and social upheaval are diminishing a language that is a cultural touchstone. The Chinese government’s push for wider use of Mandarin—already the national language, spoken by 1 billion people—along with the country’s changing migration patterns have contributed to an undeniable shift away from Cantonese....There’s worry among native and second-generation Cantonese speakers about preserving the language, spoken by some 85 million people worldwide. They fear their children can’t communicate with elderly relatives. Or worse, the Cantonese language and culture won’t survive another generation.

—Terry Tang, Haven  
Daley and Sylvia  
Hui

Cantonese can be especially challenging to learn. In writing, Mandarin and Cantonese use the same Chinese characters. But spoken, the tonal languages—where even the subtlest word inflection can change the meaning—are not similar or interchangeable. Mandarin has four basic tones. Cantonese has nine, which can be difficult to differentiate.

—Terry Tang, Haven  
Daley and Sylvia  
Hui

Becoming a fluent speaker of a second language is a task that becomes increasingly difficult the longer it is delayed, and one that is almost never achieved with only piecemeal instruction and infrequent practice.

—Deborah Kelemen

My favorite emotion word is German: *kummerspeck*, the extra weight we gain from emotional overeating when we're sad. The literal translation of that one: 'grief bacon.'

—Adam M. Grant

The Jahai language contains features linguists once thought did not exist: specific words with meanings like 'to have a stinging smell' or 'to smell of human urine.' The Jahai smell lexicon is understandably rich in tiger vocab, including a verb for 'to have a bloody smell which attracts tigers.'

—Abigail Tucker

Yes, you do have an accent. If you think you don't because you 'read words exactly as they're written, without any kind of regional flair,' you're mistaken about that. There's no such thing. Speaking without an accent would be like typing without a font. An accent is just a method of pronouncing your language—everyone has one!

—*BuzzFeed.com*  
Contributor

A man is in general better pleased when he has a good dinner upon his table, than when his wife talks Greek.

--Samuel Johnson

Some consider Martin Van Buren to be the first true American president. Van Buren was born in New York in 1782, making him the first president who was born in the United States. Despite this, Van Buren was the first and, so far, only president for whom English was his second language. He grew up speaking Dutch.

—Madison McGee

The French drink more red wine than the English but live longer. The Japanese eat more fish than the English but drink less wine and live longer. The Germans eat more red meat than the English, and drink more beer and they live longer too. You know the moral of this story?

‘No’

‘It’s not what you eat or drink—it’s speaking English that kills you.’

—Peter James

In 1987, [Linda] Ronstadt returned to her family roots with the Spanish-language album *Canciones de Mi Padre*, still the biggest selling non-English language album in the U.S.

—Ernesto Lechner (2022)

A really nasty woman sitting next to me in a diner on the UWS, called over our waitress (rudely) and said, I don’t know what kind of ruse you’re trying to perpetuate. I’ve had *soup du jour* before, and (points to bowl), this isn’t it.

—Amy Selwyn

Greek has the distinction of being one of the oldest languages of the world. The Greek alphabet was invented at the beginning of the 8th century B.C.E. A lot of important works and seminal texts such as poems of *Illiad*, works of Aristotle and Plato were originally written in Greek. The Greek language is said to be a source of Latin, Armenian, Coptic, and Cyrillic systems of writing. The Greek letters were also the first alphabet script in history to have well-defined letters for vowels.

—Michael Bullier

German...seems to carry an authority.

—Don DeLillo

The Inuit Literatures website, under auspices of the *University of Quebec* at Montreal, is a compilation of Inuit writers and their work. The website lists individual biographies of writers who are Inuit and also lists and links to books and shorter works by folks who identify as Inuit. ‘Inuit themselves have been writing for two centuries in Inuktut (with variations depending on the territory), Danish, English and French. Their texts, from within the Arctic, are often little known, but they allow us to hear the voices of those who live in the Inuit world,’ says the website, noting that for centuries we have only heard the voices of those who were explorers or missionaries or scientists. These stories, say the authors of the website, are ‘outsider’ stories, whereas the stories highlighted at Inuit Literatures are ‘insider stories.’

—Yi Shun Lai

The decline of cursive: writing is a technology, I must add that it's an art form too, a thing of beauty regardless of skill level or perfection of form. It's a wondrous visual reminder of individuality and adds an element of artistry and humanness to everyday life.

Recently, I was scribing gift notes at a retailer in New York City and a teenage boy watched over my shoulder curiously as I used an oblique dip pen and inkwell. I was shocked when he asked what language I was writing in: I realized that to kids who haven't learned script, I may as well have been writing in cuneiform.

—Rita Polidori O'Brien

Yes, English can be weird. It can be understood through tough, thorough, thought, though.

—David Burge

I think about the many sounds in my home language of Taiwanese and how hard it is to replicate those sounds in English.... I think about how I struggle sometimes to find English equivalents to Taiwanese expressions.

—David Nandi Odhiambo

Going back to the stories my mom used to tell us, the narration was always in English, but the most interesting thing and the rich[est] part of the [Nigerian] stories were always the songs, the folk songs that accompany the stories, and they were always in Igbo. There are all these rich metaphors and allegories. I honestly think it is a superior language to English because there is a richness of imagery and visuals and metaphors that's just commonplace in Igbo. You don't need to have like a fancy degree or need to take anything to be able to understand it.

—Chiedozié Dike

The assault on education began more than a century ago by industrialists and capitalists such as Andrew Carnegie. In 1891, Carnegie congratulated the graduates of the *Pierce College of Business* for being fully occupied in obtaining a knowledge of shorthand and typewriting rather than wasting time upon dead languages.

—Chris Hedges



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