

UDC 378

REASONS TO LEARN LANGUAGES

ПОЧЕМУ ВАЖНО УЧИТЬ ЯЗЫКИ

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ABSTRACT

NATIVE LANGUAGE, FOREIGN LANGUAGE, COMMUNICATION, CHANNEL, ENVIRONMENT, LANGUAGE DIVERSITY, WORLDVIEW

The paper discusses importance of learning foreign languages for several reasons. The author focuses on language diversity and necessity to communicate culture through language as a code system. Native speakers with their own worldviews can be understood only through expressing their thoughts by means of native language.

АННОТАЦИЯ

РОДНОЙ ЯЗЫК, ИНОСТРАННЫЙ ЯЗЫК, ОБЩЕНИЕ, ТРАНСЛИРОВАТЬ, СРЕДА ОБЩЕНИЯ, ЯЗЫКОВОЕ МНОГООБРАЗИЕ, КАРТИНА МИРА

В статье рассмотрены некоторые причины необходимости изучать иностранные языки. Уделено внимание языковому многообразию и передаче культурных явлений посредством языка как кодифицированной системы. Рассмотрен процесс формирования картины мира и её передача средствами родного языка.

Being able to communicate in other languages is not just important for work, it also offers many more opportunities than if we were monolingual. Languages help us make friends across the globe and learn about other countries and cultures. Foreign travel becomes more rewarding and we are able to experience things that would otherwise not be possible.

Given that languages are a highly valued skill, it is worrying that we lag far behind Europe when it comes to learning languages in school. We need to acknowledge our lack of foreign language skills and start promoting language study in schools as soon as possible. We must give young people the opportunities they need to compete in a global jobs market – fluency in a foreign language should be another asset our school leavers and graduates are able to boast.

English is on its way to becoming the world's universal language, for better or for worse. Let's face it, it's the language of the internet, it's the language of finance, it's the language of air traffic control, of popular music, diplomacy – English is everywhere.

Now, Mandarin Chinese is spoken by more people, but more Chinese people are learning

English than English speakers are learning Chinese. Recently, there are two dozen universities in China teaching all in English. English is taking over.

And in addition to that, it's been predicted that at the end of the century almost all of the languages that exist now – there are about 6,000 – will no longer be spoken. There will only be some hundreds left. And on top of that, it's at the point where instant translation of live speech is not only possible, but it gets better every year.

The reason of reciting those things is that we're getting to the point where a question is going to start being asked, which is: Why should we learn foreign languages – other than if English happens to be foreign to one? Why bother to learn another one when it's getting to the point where almost everybody in the world will be able to communicate in one?

There might be a lot of reasons, but first let's address the one that is most likely to have been heard of, because actually it's more dangerous than it seems to be. And that is the idea that a language channels our thoughts, that the vocabulary and the grammar of different languages give everybody a different kind of acid trip, so to speak. That is a marvelously enticing idea, but it's kind of fraught.

So it's not that it's untrue completely. So for example, in French and Spanish the word for table is, for some reason, marked as feminine. So, "la table," "la mesa," a speaker just has to deal with it. It has been shown that if you are a speaker of one of those languages and you happen to be asked how you would imagine a table talking, then much more often than could possibly be an accident, a French or a Spanish speaker says that the table would talk with a high and feminine voice. So if you're French or Spanish, to you, a table is kind of a girl, as opposed to if you are an English speaker.

It's hard not to love data like that, and many people will say that that means that there's a worldview that they have if they speak one of those languages. But we have to watch out, because imagine if somebody put us under the microscope, the us being those of us who speak English natively. What is the worldview from English?

So for example, let's take an English speaker. Her Majesty the Queen. She speaks English. Of course, she has a worldview. Now, that is Donald Trump. In his way, he speaks English as well.

And here is Mrs. Michelle Obama, and she is an English speaker, too. So here are three speakers of the English language. What worldview do those three people have in common? What worldview is shaped through the English language that unites them? It's a highly fraught concept. And so gradual consensus is becoming that language can shape thought, but it tends to be in rather darling, obscure psychological flutters. It's not a matter of giving you a different pair of glasses on the world.

Now, if that's the case, then why learn languages? If it isn't going to change the way we think, what would the other reasons be? There are some. One of them is that if we want to imbibe a culture, if we want to drink it in, if we want to become part of it, then whether

or not the language channels the culture – and that seems doubtful – if we want to imbibe the culture, we have to control to some degree the language that the culture happens to be conducted in. There's no other way.

There's an interesting illustration of this. I have to go slightly obscure, but really you should seek it out. People are vibrant, funny, passionate, and interesting while speaking their native languages. Once they happen to be in English-speaking environment. Now, they speak English but it's not their native language, they'd rather not speak English. And they speak it more slowly, they have accents, they're not idiomatic. Suddenly these lively people become husks of themselves, they're shadows of themselves.

To go into a culture and to only ever process people through that kind of scrim curtain is to never truly get the culture. And so to the extent that hundreds of languages will be left, one reason to learn them is because they are tickets to being able to participate in the culture of the people who speak them, just by virtue of the fact that it is their code. So that's one reason.

Second reason: it's been shown that if you speak two languages, dementia is less likely to set in, and that you are probably a better multitasker. And these are factors that set in early, and so that ought to give you some sense of when to give junior or juniorette lessons in another language. Bilingualism is healthy.

And then, third – languages are just an awful lot of fun. Much more fun than we're often told. Or languages have different word orders. Learning how to speak with different word order is like driving on the different side of a street if you go to certain country, or the feeling that you get when you put Witch Hazel around your eyes and you feel the tingle. A language can do that to you.

So for example, "The Cat in the Hat Comes Back," a book that we all often return to, like "Moby Dick." One phrase in it is, "Do you know where I found him? Do you know where he was? He was eating cake in the tub, Yes he was!" Fine. Now, if you learn that in Mandarin Chinese, then you have to master, "You can know, I did where him find? He was tub inside gorging cake, No mistake gorging chewing!" That just feels good. Imagine being able to do that for years and years at a time.

Or, have you ever learned any Cambodian? If someone did, they would get to roll around in their mouth not some baker's dozen of vowels like English has, but a good 30 different vowels scooching and oozing around in the Cambodian mouth like bees in a hive. That is what a language can get us.

And more to the point, we live in an era when it's never been easier to teach yourself another language. It used to be that you had to go to a classroom, and there would be some diligent teacher – some genius teacher in there – but that person was only in there at certain times and you had to go then, and then was not most times. You had to go to class. If you didn't have that, you had something called a record. There was only so much data on a record, or a cassette, or even that antique object known as a CD. Other than that you had books that

didn't work, that's just the way it was.

Today sings are much better and easier. People can teach themselves any language that they want to with wonderful sets such as Rosetta Stone, Glossika, Doulingo, Linguae, etc. We can do it any time, therefore we can do it more and better. Couldn't have done it 20 years ago when the idea of having any language you wanted in your pocket, coming from your phone, would have sounded like science fiction to very sophisticated people.

So, it's highly recommended that we teach ourselves languages other than the one that we're speaking as native speakers, because there's never been a better time to do it. It's an awful lot of fun. It won't change our mind, but it will most certainly blow our mind.