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Why Learn a Second Language Reflection

In *Why Learn a Second Language* by Tamim Ansary, he discusses the necessity of learning a second language. A second language brings a new perspective to the learner because languages are not one to one translations of each other. A language brings assumptions and understandings embedded within itself, that cannot be understood without learning the language. Each word in one language does not perfectly represent a word in another. There are words in other languages that may take sentences to define in another. The author uses the example of “qukh” which means the itchy feeling on your skin after wet fabric clings to your body and is removed. There is no word in English that matches this word in Farsi. Learning another language is like gaining a new perspective. Words that exist in some languages represent cultures and history unique to that language. Words that come with a language such as English are adopted because English speakers found it useful in some situation. Farsi speakers found a need for the word qukh in their language. This makes language bound with literature and conversation, and full meaning can not be gained from only a translated version. Furthermore, some languages have genders associated with nouns, while others do not. Tamim Ansary uses the example of French as many objects or nouns have gender, such as a bicycle, which is difficult for someone does not know the language to comprehend: “What do fluent speakers of this language see? I have trouble imagining.” Many languages have special properties that world views, and perspectives are imbedded within, and translation without these frames of ind will lead to

misunderstanding. Fluency in a second language is the only way to bridge the gap between two cultural perspectives, and then they can begin to build a new common understanding.

I agree with almost all of his points to an extent. Much of everyday communication is done without many of the historical and cultural assumptions embedded within them. If I were to travel to another country, I would be able to order lunch or purchase water with the use of a translator. For basic day to day use a translator will function nicely, but if I wanted to form a relationship or do anything more complex, I completely agree with the author. Especially when forming relationships, I would not want to be unknowing of the assumptions of a different language, as misunderstandings would be very common. The quality of the relationship would be affected heavily by this. I agree that languages come with perspectives and frames of mind, that if ignored will cause a lack of depth in communication. If I am going to communicate with you for more than five sentences, then the likelihood of misinterpreting their words or just losing out on some meaning is very likely. As the author said, words in one language can be used in ways that would make no sense in another. If I say that I am rusty, it means that I am out of practice and have not done something for a while. Direct translation of that word using a program, that did not take into account cultural significance would not work, as its meaning is not literal rust. This hinders communication heavily because every word is not always literal in its meaning. Learning English would teach one the meaning behind these words and allow these perspectives and assumptions to be understood. Therefore, in order to understand a person and one must speak their language. To learn the perspectives that they communicate with every word they say is necessary to forming strong bonds that can last a very long time.