

Languages Increase Our Brain Power

-by Brenda Rishea

I've always believed that learning a second language (or more) benefits the learner in many practical ways. If one learns, for example, one of the Romance languages, or their root, Latin, one can learn the other languages in that group more readily. Having learned French at school growing up in Quebec, I found it helped me immensely when I visited Italy, where Italian is spoken, and Romania, where Romanian is spoken, and Mexico, where Spanish is used. I managed to pick up smatterings of each lingo, and was able to understand far more than I could speak.

Another benefit to studying other languages is to discover the root meanings of words, which helps to improve our vocabulary. Did you know that "*jargon*" comes from Old French, and means *specialised vocabulary of a particular group*? (Or, also *unintelligible talk*.) If one is cooking, one might *braise* the meat in the pan. *Braise* is a French word and means *to brown meat or vegetables by sautéing* (now there's another one!) *in fat*. Many of our culinary terms come from French, such as *julienne, poach, fry, boil, stew, roast, broil, mince, soufflé, biscuit, bain-marie, fruit, vegetable*, and many more. One can't prepare food without using these words! The roots of other words used in English today do not all come from Latin alone. We also use words from Danish, Dutch, Afrikaans, Friesian, Gaelic, German, Greek, Hebrew, Hungarian, Swedish, Frankish, Norwegian, Persian, Saxon, Slavonic, Polish, Russian, Sanskrit, Turkish, and more. The English language is so multi-cultural.

Another language helps us to identify with other cultural groups, broadening our horizons and enabling the user to be an effective witness for Christ. Missionaries discover that knowing the local language enables them to fit in with the people they came to evangelize. It helps the user in Bible translation as well. "Though the capacity to speak is universal, men do not inherit language as a dimension of their biological organism but must create it...Because they possess a language, men are able to do more than make reflexive and instinctive responses to what is going on around them."¹ In other words, we are sentient beings, with a capacity to do more than just react to our surroundings; we relate to one another through language and culture. A missionary can be more effective to his audience by making the effort to learn the local tongue. One can always study later in life while at a Bible college, for instance, but it would be far easier on the student if he/she learned at least a little bit while young. It is said that the younger the student is, the easier to learn another language and get the accent right. As the brain ages, memorization becomes more difficult. The public schools introduce French at the grade-four level, but if one or both of the teaching parents can speak another language, it would be easier to introduce that language at an age as young as possible.

Knowing the original languages of the Bible is immensely helpful in gleaning the true meaning or intent of the subject. The Bible was written in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek, and although these languages do not use our alphabet, nevertheless, they can be mastered enough by the student to be at least able to decipher a word and then to check its meaning in a dictionary. One can do a fascinating study of the names of God throughout the Old Testament. From Genesis 1:1 we find the word *Elohim*, which means *The Creator*, which indeed was what God was doing in that verse. But it goes deeper than that. The word can be broken down into its components to glean more meaning: *El* is the name of God, *-im* is the plural form of *El*, properly translating the word really as *Gods*, but because it is conjugated with a singular verb, *bara* (created), it thereby proves the triune nature of God. It just

doesn't come through clearly when it is written in English, in spite of the best efforts of Bible translators. *El Shaddai* is another name for God which means *The All-Sufficient One*. *El*, as we have just learned, is the name of God. *Shad* means *full-breasted one, or, provider*, and *dai* means *enough, or sufficient*. Put it all together, and *El Shaddai* means *God who provides enough, or, sufficient needs*. The name *Jesus* is the New Testament Greek form of the Old Testament name *Joshua, or, Yeshua*, which means *saviour*. *(Note: there is no letter "j" in the Hebrew alphabet). Studying the original languages of the Bible can bring one closer to God, in a more meaningful relationship.

An easy way to expose your students to other languages is to invite a speaker of another language to live in your home for a while, or for the student to live temporarily with a family that speaks another language. This method is called immersion, where the student does not speak his/her native tongue so that he/she can learn the new one faster. Some families send their children for the summer months to grandparents or relatives who live overseas in an effort to "immerse" them in the new language and culture. One summer, we had two Mexican students stay with us through a program called "EF" Language Schools, where they came to Canada for 5-6 weeks in the summer to study and practice English, but we learned some Spanish and even how to cook Mexican-style! We enjoyed it so much, the following two summers we had two Mexican girls, then two Korean boys, and we learned from them how to cook Korean-style. We were paid a weekly compensation (more than enough to cover their food) and my children got to accompany the group whenever they visited the tourist sites around southern Ontario. We built lasting friendships and had great fun together! Today, EF offers educational tours² for teachers and students to travel to destinations throughout the world including Europe, Mexico, Brazil, China, Egypt, the South Pacific, Africa, Thailand, Australia, and North America. Adults travel FREE when they take just six students on tour. That could easily be worked out by just 2 or 3 home schooling families. A friend of mine who used to teach in public high school went twice to Italy and Greece, once to Spain, France and England as a chaperone through such a program. Their prices include everything, and can be as low as half the cost of planning such a trip oneself.

Other languages enrich our lives in so many ways. Most importantly, it can help us to fulfil the great commission, as told to us by Jesus Himself, in Matthew 28: 19, 20: "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you; and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen." As we witness to others for Christ, we can relate to them through their language the love of the Lord, and the message of eternal salvation.

¹James B. McKee, *Introduction to Sociology* (Holt, Rhinehart, and Winston, 1969) pp 60, 61

² EF Educational Tours, 60 Bloor St. W., #405, Toronto, ON M4W 3B8, Tel: 1-800-387-1460, 1-800-263-2806 (français), Fax: 1-800-556-6046, Email: edtravel@ef.com Website: eftours.ca

Information kits available.

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