

WHAT NORTHSIDE TEACHES STUDENTS ABOUT FOREIGN LANGUAGES

Since spoken and written communications are both activities of God, students are functioning in His image when they use these skills. Learning to speak and write a second language is an extension of learning the mother tongue properly, and it counteracts one of the effects of the sin at Babel.

- Studying a second language forces the student to learn the grammar of his own language. Unless the student has the rare opportunity to immerse himself in the second language for an extended period of time, he will have to transfer knowledge of the mother tongue in order to understand the target language. One of the principal difficulties in teaching a student a second language is the lack of understanding of his own grammar, which will improve as he learns the new language.
- Studying a second language introduces the student to the fact that many things he assumes are the only way to say or do something are simply cultural conventions. He will broaden his worldview as he discovers there many acceptable ways to express and accomplish things. Eskimos have a much richer choice of words to describe “snow” than Pacific Islanders would need, while these may have a comparably broad vocabulary for various kinds of rainfall.
- Studying a second language should pique the student’s interest in the spiritual needs of people in other parts of the world. In non-English-speaking countries, there is almost always a miniscule number of Christian workers ministering to the people who speak the target language. The proportion is that roughly 90% of Christian workers minister to 10% of the world’s population. This realization may grow into God’s call to missionary work in the countries where the language is spoken.
- Learning to write and speak a second language opens the door for missionary service to other countries. It is almost universally true that the greatest and most enduring challenge to effective and efficient ministry in another country is the difficulty in mastering the language. The earlier the study begins, the greater the likelihood of attaining fluency. With the current influx of non-English speaking immigrants, fluency in a second language provides many opportunities for service here at home in the United States. Truly some mission fields have come to us.
- Writing and speaking a second language is a source of lifelong enjoyment and satisfaction. There will be continued opportunity to use the language, and there will be works of literature to enjoy, none of which can be fully appreciated in translation, notably drama and poetry, not to discount highly stylistic prose.
- Studying a second language makes the student sensitive to the truth that translation is a very difficult task, part art, part science, and that truly there no exact equivalent renderings possible for even a single sentence from one language to another. Connotations of vocabulary and nuances of syntax are the two major obstacles to be addressed. The student will come to appreciate that the debate between the relative merits of formal or dynamic equivalency translations is infinitely complex.
- Studying a second language should allow him to experience both the effects of the curse of Babel as well as the anticipated bliss of Heaven.