

VOYAGES OF MUTUAL DISCOVERY FOR MODERN ADVENTURERS

Synopsis

Students of languages of radically different worlds can experience remarkable benefits from their exposure to remarkably new friendships, perspectives, and sounds

The Emperor Charlamagne famously asserted that “to speak a second language is to have a second soul”. Supposedly, he himself was familiar with four languages. Historically, monks and teachers assiduously passed down the treasures of antiquity by teaching Greek and Latin from generation to generation. In modern times, exploration, colonization, industrialization, and technology have gradually made English the lingua franca or working language of international relations. According to some estimates, almost 80 percent of English speakers in the world are non-native speakers.

“No man is an island”

While this leveling down of communication has yielded many benefits, the concurrent lack of interest or knowledge by native English speakers in learning other tongues, especially in the United States, has unfortunately contributed to a lack of understanding of other cultures,

especially those of non-European origin. Many of these inherently foreign assumptions and concepts cannot be translated easily or faithfully. And, thus, we are left facing the paradox that our dazzling contemporary ability to instantly communicate with anyone around the world may be inherently compromised by the blind spots of our unexamined linguistic limitations.

In addition to the threat of these cultural misperceptions, those native English speakers who fail to seek working knowledge or fluency in any other language limit themselves in another way by not enhancing their cognitive, decision-making, emotional, and mental health capabilities, according to a number of academic studies. They also curtail the number and scope of their international contacts, friendships, and perspectives. With regards to the United States, as less Americans cultivate foreign language learning, we risk becoming prisoners of our own cultural silo at a moment when there are abundant artificial intelligence, pedagogical, and travel tools available to facilitate ever greater understanding of other societies.

From the supposed “civilized” to “pre-civilized” worlds

Therefore, it is certainly meritorious and a sign of intellectual maturity for highly educated persons to make the effort to learn other languages of what we term the “civilized” world.

THE ADVANTAGES OF LEARNING INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES

Depending upon one's origin, it can be as challenging to learn English as it is to learn Arabic, Bengali, Farsi, Greek, Hebrew, Hindi, Japanese, Mandarin, the Romance languages or the Slavic languages. What we might consider the linguistic "lands of discovery" today are the many languages of the so-called "pre-civilized" or "pre-colonized" world.

Another fascinating dimension of this area of learning lies in the languages of the Original Peoples of Canada and the United States of America. Slowly over time, these communities have been increasingly successful in safeguarding and promoting their languages that have been long under siege, most recently all their well-funded tools of modern pedagogy including apps, artificial technology, and virtual reality.

Of particular interest to the North American Educational Initiatives Foundation and in harmony with that of academics, the indigenous communities, as well as the Mexican government are the languages of the Original Peoples of Mexico, many of which have long been in the process of gradual extinction. Unlike their northern neighbors, these communities do not have independent means of support and only recently have been the object of academic, governmental, and social attention. *Perhaps there might be a way for Americans and Canadians to expand their minds, their hearts, and their friendships by engaging in introductory lessons in these endangered languages.* It would certainly be most ironic if the "discovered" peoples might help the so-called "discoverers" to discover themselves and a more important meaning to their lives.

Charm and curiosity conquer the cat

Our foundation first became interested in this topic when we partnered with the public indigenous university of the provincial Mazahua community in the summers of 2005 and 2007 on the occasion of our North American Leadership Institute. We brought two professors from that university to a private university in Mexico City to give several introductory classes on culture and language to our college participants in the weeks prior to the final “capstone” week of immersion on site. Fortunately, our lead teacher had developed the first manual for the language. He conducted remarkable sessions showing us how to speak in unimaginable ways. As we basked in these remarkable and to a certain extent unthinkable phonetic and phonological properties, we were reminded of their Asiatic roots. All of our students were enchanted by these introductory classes and their visit as evidenced by the fulsome evaluations on our website.

During these two programs, we observed that the enthusiastic interest of the American and Canadian students had a salutary effect on their Mexican hosts who may have had little previous interest in their indigenous neighbors. These hosts may have experienced a form of contagious affirmation and curiosity about indigenous people who had previously existed merely in the shadow of their awareness. Perhaps they felt a subconscious urge to imitate

their companions from the north who oftentimes have set the standard for cultural values in modern Mexico.

A single soul dwelling in two bodies

Recalling Charlamagne's admonition "to speak a second language is to have a second soul", it is worthwhile considering Aristotle's observation, "What is a friend? A single soul dwelling in two bodies". To bravely cross the linguistic bridge into the Amerindian consciousness is to recognize their common humanity and potential for harmonic relationship. Therefore, the basis for interactions would be on a level playing field as opposed to the traditional uneven platform implying native subservience.

The North American Educational Initiatives Foundation strongly recommends that higher educational institutions in Canada and the United States explore and develop introductory programs with Mexican universities including universities for the indigenous that bring North American students together to learn, **to recognize the innate value of**, and to possibly contribute to the preservation and promotion of the cultures and languages of their Original Peoples.

THE ADVANTAGES OF LEARNING INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES

Given that we are living in the United Nations' "International Decade of Indigenous Languages" for the period 2022–2032, whose main objective is “the empowerment of indigenous language speakers”, we envision such an educational activity as a means to honor and, in a small yet potent way, promote endangered cultures.

We would like to emphasize that the most significant beneficiaries of such mutual adventuresome learning exercises would be the students from the wealthiest and most solitary environments due to their aforementioned cognitive, cultural, emotional, mental, linguistic, and social needs.