

Atharv Joshi

Madame Wildfong

Advanced French

August 14th 2025

A Summary and Opinion on *Why Learn a Second Language?* by Tamim Ansary

*Why Learn a Second Language?* written by Tamim Ansary details the importance of learning a second language. Ansary begins by playing devil's advocate, stating that learning a second language isn't necessary to get by because English does the job just as well. However, Ansary quickly pivots, establishing that one doesn't necessarily need to learn a second language for its utility like one would expect, but rather for the different view one gains on the world. "... learning a second language isn't merely about ordering a meal in a foreign country," Ansary says. "It's about perspective. Every language is a lens." At first, I didn't really understand what this meant. How could a language be a lens? Ansary answers by writing a story from his childhood where he learned this truth firsthand.

Tamim and his family, just like mine, use both English and his mother tongue indiscriminately when speaking at home. My mom will tell me to take out the trash in English and proceed to lecture me on the importance of good posture in Marathi.

Ansary recounts a story where he learns a new word from one of his Afghan cousins, "qukh", which doesn't really have a corresponding word for it in English. The word explains a common feeling in Afghanistan, and there simply isn't a reason for the word to exist in English. As Ansary observes, "...words denote things people have noticed." Thinking back to my own language, there are various instances of this happening as well. For example, there is a word for

the bitter/sticky liquid that is found in mangoes where the fruit is cut from the plant pronounced 'dink'.

Furthermore, confusion between languages is even greater when it comes to figurative language, as Ansary proclaims that every language has assigned certain feelings and connotations towards words and names that evoke a different feeling compared to reading the same thing in another language. Thus, even a perfect translation doesn't capture the true feeling.

His final argument details the differences in the structure of each language. How in Finnish one may write 'Juoksentelisinkohan' whereas in English it would be necessary to write 'I wonder if I should run about aimlessly.' Marathi also has an interesting sentence structure that is more similar to French than English.

By the end of the passage, I was convinced, not only because of the arguments that Ansary makes, but after some reflection I found that I can connect my own experiences to this topic as well. As a Marathi speaking immigrant from Goa, India, I've had my fair share of similar experiences as described here.

This year in French, I hope to learn a new language not just because I have to or because I want to be able to speak in Paris, but to gain another perspective on the world. To have access to another culture, another way of thinking, seems very interesting to me, and I hope to gain some more knowledge of that this year.