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Life Through a New Pair of Eyes

Learning another language is not just about being able to understand other people. Nor is it about growing your vocabulary or being able to communicate with locals on a vacation but rather experiencing life from a different viewpoint and seeing things you may have completely missed before. In his article *Why Learn a Second Language?*, Tamim Ansary argues that the words that we use every day are just “things that people have noticed,” and any language can adopt new words it feels are necessary. This fluidity of language allows for unique dialects and words to form over time, like Farsi’s “qukh” that he mentions. He jokes that “no one laughs at the translator,” who childishly removes the meaning of words and phrases by finding their synonyms in another language. But what does he expect? There is not a world, or at least a feasible one, in which everyone can speak every language without significant speaking flaws. While I do agree that people should know at least two languages, for all the reasons that he mentions, I do not agree with his condemnation of translation. I would argue that translation has given us global access to some of humanity’s greatest literary works that were otherwise hidden behind walls of encryption. He admires the contributions that different cultures, such as the Persians, have made to humanity, including “poetry, art, perfume [and] an appreciation of gardens.” But through this celebration of cultural diversity, he once again overlooks the role that translation and communication across different languages played in making that happen. It is not a good idea to praise enlightenment and human knowledge while simultaneously criticizing the

practices that allowed for that to occur. Bilingualism is great for all the reasons he says, but do not blindly agree with all of his criticisms without realizing the impact they have had in making the positive things part of human history. I am bilingual myself, speaking both English and Tamil, and I appreciate the experiences I have had through being a part of two different cultures. I have been able to participate in a variety of cultural and social events that I otherwise could not have. Like Ansary himself says, being bilingual is like having access to two different worlds. I am thankful every day for having the chance to be a part of them and all of the experiences that tie them together. In Spanish this year, I hope to grow my understanding of the third world that I have just barely explored.