

## “Why Learn a Second Language?” Reflection

In the article “Why Learn a Second Language?” by Tamim Ansary, the author describes why they believe that everyone should know more than one language. Ansary states, “Every language is a lens” (1). Thus, learning a new language is more about exploring a new culture and diverse perspectives rather than memorizing vocabulary. I agree with this view: I remember reading an article about how language truly impacts every aspect of our life. It not only affects how we communicate ideas, but how we perceive them ourselves. MIT researchers found that certain populations that spoke a language that used the same word to describe blue and green categorized the hues differently than populations that have several words for each color, like in the US. The side-effect of exploring a new culture through language, is you become more open-minded and accepting of others and their perspectives. Attempting to explore others’ viewpoints builds respect and a love for diversity. The author also argues that several words can’t be translated without losing their true meaning. I agree with this. Every word has a connotation and a feeling that surrounds it that is lost when it’s translated. The beauty in songs and poetry isn’t always conveyed in translation because the sounds and feelings that words evoke are lost. I can recall many instances when I have asked my mom to explain a Tamil word’s meaning, but she would simply shake her head and say that it wouldn’t do the word justice. The “direct translation” is often nonsensical and untrue without the cultural context. For example, one insult in Tamil directly translates to “bag of rice”. This doesn’t necessarily seem rude because the context has been lost in translation. One would no longer be able to tell that the word means “lazy” or “useless”. I have also found that the subtitles when watching Tamil movies are helpful for more practical sentences and understanding the gist of the plot, but they’re unable to communicate the rhyming in

songs or the alliteration in puns. It's impossible to get a true understanding without undergoing the difficult, but necessary, process of learning the language. Thus, learning a new language can be a difficult endeavor, but it's a beneficial way of exposing yourself to new cultural perspectives and practices.