Out from the Shadow of Babel

By Dean J. Scott Miller

HOW DOES THE COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES help people improve their connections with others? Language is a powerful communica-
tion tool, and in this issue of Humanities we celebrate our college legacy of language teach-
ning and research.

We begin with the fabled conflict of the Tower of Babel: a prosperous nation dettes
God, who then confounds their language. The painting on the cover of this issue by Pieter Bruegel the Elder depicts a 16th-century vision of Babel’s Tower, one of nearly a hundred sim-
ilar portrayals created during as many years, when the tower loomed large in the Renaissance consciousness. Most artists capture it midconstruction, with a well-dressed and pampered
ruler in the foreground playing God’s role as he looks approvingly at the busy, or bowing, craftsmen toiling to imitate, even improve upon, God’s handiwork. A few artists focus on what happens after God confounds
human language: weeping and wailing, characters in the foreground strike poses of dismay or confusion, overcome by full-bodied grief. These two snapshots, captured at different points in the tower story, offer con-
trasting interpretations.

The midconstruction view suggests a cau-
tionary tale of human capacity. Before Babel we all spoke the same tongue, allowing us to share ideas and crowd-source ourselves into an architectural habitation that challenged Nature itself: we tried to build our own mountain, to out-create our own Creator, knowledge and cleverness transcending the limits of topogra-
phy and gravity.

The confounded view is a variation on the theme of the Fall, with the great sin being humanity’s defiance of God. After trying to build the tower we are hopelessly divided, iso-
lated into silos of mutually unintelligible lan-
guages whose difference is designed to prevent
us from connecting with one another and wax-
ing too proud for our own good. Both readings of the tower story also offer a kernel of hope:
that is, to learn to make assets of our differences. George Bernard Shaw is credited with the famous quip “America and England are two nations divided by a common tongue,” and in our latter-day world, where we seem globally and linguistically united by the Internet and English, respectively, and build cities and towers like mad, we are nevertheless at risk of falling into mutual misunderstanding. Like those despairing at the base of the tower we can continue to spin in circles,
limited by the provincialism of our own lan-
guage, tribe, and worldview, forever avoiding
and designating those we do not understand.
Ow we can reach out to others and seek to
brace the chasm by learning a second tongue.

If, to paraphrase linguist Derek Bickerton, the consummate miracle of the universe is a baby acquiring language, then as adults we
are truly on sacred ground when we study a
language, tribe, and worldview, forever avoiding
limited by the provincialism of our own lan-
guage, tribe, and worldview, forever avoiding
and designating those we do not understand.
Ow we can reach out to others and seek to
brace the chasm by learning a second tongue.

When we speak the same language and work together in faith and obedience we are nearly
ever theologies: we try to build our own mountain, to
ou-create our own Creator, knowledge and cleverness transcending the limits of topogra-
phy and gravity.

One of the challenges we face today, in a world increasingly polarized by
confused voices, is to learn to make assets of our differences. Like those despairing at the base of the tower we can continue to spin in circles,
limited by the provincialism of our own lan-
guage, tribe, and worldview, forever avoiding
and designating those we do not understand.
Ow we can reach out to others and seek to
brace the chasm by learning a second tongue.

Top: Detail from The Tower of Babel by Pieter
Bruegel the Elder (1563) Bottom: Detail from The
Confusion of Tongues by Gustave Doré (1866)
Writing on the Bones

Inscriptions like this one, incised into the belly shell of a turtle and filled with red cinnabar, represent some of the earliest forms of Chinese writing. Dating from around 1300 BCE, these so-called “oracle bones,” usually ox scapulae (shoulder blades) and sometimes turtle plastrons such as this, have been found by the tens of thousands in pits where they were reverentially discarded after use. During the last few centuries of the ancient Shang dynasty (1776–1122 BCE), shaman kings inscribed paired statements—one positive, one negative (such as “Day X would/would not be auspicious to invade the Qiang barbarians”)—to divine the will of the ancestral spirits. The shaman would apply a hot poker to the text and the resulting crack would signal which statement the spirits endorsed. Oracle-bone writing was first studied in the late 19th century CE when they were discovered for sale in Chinese pharmacies as “dragon bones,” or old bones to be ground up for use in traditional Chinese medicine. Oracle-bone language had a developed grammar and was logographic in nature, meaning that the originally pictographic characters represented words rather than just ideas. Although the characters have evolved through the millennia, some characters, such as “sun” (日), “moon” (月), “bird” (鳥), and “rain” (雨), are still recognizable to readers of Chinese today.
The Brain

This book is specific enough to avoid offering a “brain for dummies” read, yet it is captivating and intelligible to the non-scientific, learned reader. David Eagleman, a neuropsychologist, specializes in the human brain’s perception of space and how these intersect to form each individual’s understanding of the world. Everything we know happens in the brain—no taste, no touch, no smell, no sounds, no visual experience exist without the brain translating and interpreting these signals in its dark perennial cave (the skull). There could be a lot more to Plato’s and Socrates’s myth of the cave than even they may have suspected.

—Köhlein, Associate Professor of Italian

Lune captive dans un œil mort (Captive Moon in a Dead Eye)

What I enjoy about Pascal Garnier’s novel is that it is everything an American or British pulp crime novel is not. Where American mysteries begin with disorder that the hero puts right by the end, this thriller works in the opposite direction. It is set in a gated retirement community in southern France where people live comfortable and peaceful lives. That order slowly unravels, however, leading to an uncomfortable, chaotic, and discordant conclusion. It is a crime novel that works against crime novels—a thriller that waits until the end to grab its readers by the throat.

—Corry Cropper, Professor of French

Arabic Connections

EACH YEAR CLASSROOM LEARNING comes to life as students travel to Jordan to study the Arabic language. In 2015 four of the BYU students who traveled to Jordan received the Arabic Study Award from Qatar Foundation International. Only 26 students in the United States received this award. While in Jordan students develop a personal connection with the language and culture as they converse about topics such as the Arab Spring or the Israeli occupation in Palestine. Above: Rachel Lott, Morgan Ferrell, and Kyle Nichols enjoy a traditional meal in the desert of Wadi Rum.

The Work of Art

In 1994 the city of Bogotá, Colombia—then the most dangerous city in Latin America—elected a new mayor: Antanas Mockus. He made familiar pledges to implement programs designed to curb corruption and promote civic well-being. Naturally. What else was he supposed to do?

What is interesting is how he fulfilled these pledges. Instead of pouring money into law enforcement, Mockus turned over the city to artists. He deployed mimes to direct traffic. He dispatched painters to design stars on the road where pedestrians had died, literally illustrating safety issues. He instituted a periodic “Women’s Night Out” and ordered the men off the streets, thus partly returning to women a city whose violence had largely confined them at home.

What ensued was a period of civic as well as cultural renaissance. Doris Sommer, who recounts this story in her book The Work of Art in the World, remarks that “one important lesson that we learn from Mockus is that without pleasure, social reform and political pragmatic shirvel into short-lived, self-defeating pretensions” (p. 18). But the opposite is also true: art, which grants a unique form of pleasure (touching heart as well as mind), has the power not only to change the perceptions of other artists and devoted students but also to exert a force on everyday life.

How can we better understand the work—the labor—of art? While measuring that influence seems virtually impossible, how can we at least identify the cultural impact proceeding from literature, music, painting, cinema, photography, rhetoric, web design, and all the broadly imagined “arts” disciplines represented in our college? Our BYU Humanities Center has been addressing such questions recently. At the Annual Symposium in November, Caroline Levine of the University of Wisconsin-Madison spoke about her book Forns, in which she makes the powerful case that the structuring principles one finds in a work of fiction—say, the technique of repetition or of binary opposition (e.g., protagonists and antagonists)—also order the world around us. If the kinds of networks that inform the “real world” also structure literature, then literary study becomes a template for recognizing, and perhaps reconceiving, real-world challenges.

In March, Nicholas Mirzoeff of New York University spoke to us about his innovative work on the ways that art helps train us how to see—and see differently. Mirzoeff made the case that the visual arts teach us to reframe our perception of the life that surrounds us—a principle he puts to poignant effect in discussing cases as diverse as impressionism’s role in shaping our understanding of the changing natural environment and photography’s role in modifying our sense of justice (as is the case, he argued, with the #BlackLivesMatter movement).

We hope these events, in concert with a busy slate of other center activities, collectively underscore the work of art as an act of public as well as personal and, indeed, spiritual significance.

—from Matthew F. Wickman, Founding Director of the Humanities Center

The Humanities Center promotes innovative scholarship and teaching in the languages, literature, thought, culture, and history of the human conversation.
The Language of the Rainforest

BYU LINGUISTICS PROFESSOR Janis Nuckolls has spent 30 years learning, examining, docu-
menting, and preserving Quichua, a dialect of the Quechua language. Most recently, in a
study published in the International Journal of American Linguistics, Nuckolls looks at the use
of Quichua ideophones—words that imitate sensory perceptions.

The study, coauthored with former BYU students Joseph Stanley, Elisabeth Nielsen, and
Roseanna Hopper, reveals that sound-imitative words in Quichua are different from regular
words in this language. Nuckolls’s qualitative field experience was combined with
Stanley’s expertise in digitizing data to detect patterns of sound variation.

Although this study arose out of the BYU Ecuador study abroad program in 2011,
Nuckolls also led study abroad trips to the same location in 2013 and 2015, studying more
and more of the Quichua language and culture.

Natural Perception
Approximately one million people in the Andean mountains of Ecuador, Colombia,
and Peru speak dialects of Quechua, a 2,000-year-
old unwritten language.

“Learning about the culture and lives of its speakers has been very exciting, humbling, and
thought-provoking,” Nuckolls says. “At first I was baffled by their culture. Then I was
intrigued. Now I admire them a lot.”

Her appreciation for the people has been enhanced by her growing understanding of
their connection to the natural environment.

One of the most fascinating experiences
in 2015 was the discovery of how Quichua
people speak about color. Instead of having
stand-alone words for each color, the Quichua
people mostly describe color by speaking of
a specific item that has that color in it. For
example, when describing something that is
blue, they would describe it as the color of a
toucan’s head feather. Nuckolls says she had
always wondered why Quichua has so few
color terms and why the ones they do have are
mostly borrowed from Spanish.

“I get to look through a different lens and expe-
rience the students will never forget, and for
Nuckolls, it’s an experience she wants all of
her students to have. There’s something spe-
cial about being able to immerse yourself in a
field of study, a language, and a people.”

“To me this experience reveals the impor-
tance for Quichua people of carefully observ-
ing what they perceive around them,” Nuckolls
says. “This in turn, helps nurture the special
intelligence they have about nature and how
it works.”

Authentic Immersion
The Ecuador study abroad was an experi-
ence the students will never forget, and for
Nuckolls, it’s an experience she wants all of
her students to have. There’s something spe-
cial about being able to immerse yourself in a
field of study, a language, and a people.

“It’s a lot different from learning in a class-
room,” says Emily Peterson, a linguistic stu-
dent in the 2015 Ecuador program, “because
sometimes in a normal classroom you feel dis-
connected from the material. But here, when
you get to see the lives that the people live who
speak the language that you’re studying, you
get to look through a different lens and expe-
rience their culture in a more authentic way.”

“Language is the Heart of Global Professional Competency”

“Language is the heart of global professional competency,” said Richard
Brecht of the University of Maryland at the Symposium on Global Professional
Competencies at BYU in October. Leaders from the BYU College of Humanities
joined with visiting experts like Brecht to discuss the professional skills students
gain from a humanities education and how those skills apply in a global setting.

That workplace is in a constant state of change, said Scott Miller, dean of the
BYU College of Humanities. Students need skills that will allow them to adapt to
whatever situations they may encounter—skills like flexibility, cultural awareness,
and critical thinking.

“In other words,” Miller said, “what we need are close readers and good writers.
We need people who are multilingual and multicultural.”

Brecht, founding executive director of the University of Maryland’s Center for
Advanced Study of Language, presented a keynote address about “rebranding” lan-
guage acquisition. Advanced language skills, he said, are directly linked to advanced
cognitive abilities, such as creative and critical thinking and tolerance of ambiguity.

Though only 11 percent of employers actively seek language talent in prospective employees,
Brecht suggested that language teachers and learners should “rebrand” language acquisition
by emphasizing the marketplace value of these advanced cognitive abilities students develop
while learning a language.

Individuals who have the language capacity to truly engage the world build global compe-
tence not through information but through intercultural relationships, Brecht said.

He added that because advanced second-
language speakers must switch back and forth
between languages, they are able to intention-
ally inhibit biases. “An educated human with
advanced language will be willing to suspend
what they believe long enough to listen to what
another believes,” said Brecht. “And that’s what
humanities is supposed to be.”

—SAMUEL WRIGHT (’16), KAYLA GOODHO (’17), JULIA CUTLER (’17)

Advanced language
skills are directly linked
to advanced cognitive
abilities, such as creative
and critical thinking and
tolerance of ambiguity.
A Life Among the Basque

as a young graduate student, Jacqueline Thursby was driving to work in Caribou County, Idaho, when the way was blocked by an enormous flock of sheep, numbering nearly 2,000. A city girl herself, she watched, fascinated, as the herd was moved along by men on horseback, calling out orders to the sheep and dogs.

She learned that the men were Basque shepherds, moving their flocks for the coming winter. In search of a thesis topic, Thursby became intrigued and began to learn more about Basque culture. Now a BYU English professor approaching retirement, Thursby delivered the 2015 Wilson Folklore Archives Founders Lecture and shared how her work with the Basque people grew from a graduate thesis to a lifelong pursuit.

The Basque Country straddles the French and Spanish border but has a culture and language all its own, in fact, the Basque language is a genetic language isolate, meaning that it shares nothing in common with any other language on earth. Over the centuries, large groups of Basque people have emigrated from their homeland, often forming communities and finding work abroad as shepherds, like the men who first sparked Thursby’s interest.

Despite their diaspora, the Basque people maintain a strong connection with their homeland and with one another. It is common for Basque Americans to send money back to Europe to maintain important cultural sites. At one time, many Basque hotels existed in the American West for the herders to congregate and speak their own language, many were able to survive in the United States without ever learning English.

In 1999 Thursby published a book, Mother’s Table, Father’s Chair: Cultural Narratives of Basque American Women, detailing her interactions with Basque Americans. “I learned quickly that I had wandered into a population of Americans who strongly valued their ancient homeland, but who were full participants in the American culture,” Thursby said. The people she worked with had found many ways to preserve their cultural identity, including foods, games, dances, celebrations, clubs, and summer camps.

Thursby remarked on the incredible hospitality the Basque people showed her during her time studying them both in the United States and in their homeland. “They don’t want you as an outsider,” she explained. “They want you to really understand the undercurrent and the ancient beliefs of the Basque people.”

“I learned quickly that I had wandered into a population of Americans who strongly valued their ancient homeland, but who were full participants in the American culture.”

—Jacqueline Thursby

Basque dancers celebrate their culture at the Basque Center in Rose, Idaho, in June 2015. Basque Americans maintain strong connections to their European homeland.
**Multilingual Explorations**

Recent Examples of Faculty Research Published in Foreign Languages

**French**

**German**

**Portuguese**

**Spanish**

**Italian**

**Chinese**

**Japanese**

In October 2015 Professor Rob Martinson, Wendy Baker-Smemos, and Dan Dewey (left to right) received the Pimsleur Award from the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages—a top honor from the nation’s largest language teaching organization.

**DEPARTMENT NOTES**

Asian and Near Eastern Languages

Keiko Burney and Traci Andresson joined the Japanese section as adjunct faculty members, and Emilie Durand Zuniga came to BYU as a visiting faculty member in the Arabic section. For the ninth consecutive year the Chinese section has received a federal STARTALK grant to carry out an intensive Chinese language summer program for high school students—this time under a new director, Kevin Riep, of the Chinese section. In addition department chair Dana Bourgier was appointed to the editorial board of The Journal of the Chinese Language Teachers Association—US.

Comparative Arts and Letters

James Swensen published Picturing Migrants: The Grapes of Wrath and New Deal Photography. Cecilia Perk and Martha Peacock are leading the London Centre study abroad program for winter and spring 2016. Heathel Bnelup Jensen and Mark Johnson are leading the Europe art history study abroad program for spring 2016. Mike Call will lead the Paris study abroad program in fall 2016. James Swensen’s article “Maynard Dixon and the Forgotten Man” appeared in the recently released anthology Locating American Art: Finding Art’s Meaning in the Museums, Colonial Period to the Present.

English


French and Italian

Marc Olivier was awarded the 2015 Ludwig-Wieber-Heidelberg Professorship, which honors members of the BYU foreign language faculty. Maria Tanczak Fiddler visited campus to lead a lecture in English and French about her experiences in a German labor camp in World War II. Corry Cropper and Robert J. Hudson published “Rétrochronisation à la littérature fan- tastique: Enlightenment Philosophy, Object-Oriented Ontology, and the French Fantastique” in Nineteenth-Century French Studies.

German and Russian

Jennifer Bowen, with three BYU colleagues (see below), received the Pimsleur Award for best article in foreign language education in 2015. Teresa Bell published an article and was elected vice chair of the Teacher Development Special Interest Group for the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL). She was also appointed a member of the National Audit Team for the ACTFL/Council for Accreditation of Education Preparation.

Linguistics and English Language

Dan Dewey and Wendy Baker-Smemos, with two BYU colleagues (see below), received the Pimsleur Award for best article in foreign language education in 2015.

Philosophy


Spanish and Portuguese

FACULTY FAREWELLS

DEATHS

ROBERT W. BLAIR, emeritus professor of linguistics, died Feb. 19, 2015. He was founding chair of BYU’s Linguistics Department, where he specialized in Mayan dialects. He taught English in China from 1980 to 1981, pioneering what became the Chinese teachers program organized by BYU’s Kennedy Center. He also supervised or helped with the translation of the Book of Mormon into many languages.

THOMAS H. BROWN, professor emeritus of French, died Dec. 17, 2015. With a PhD in French literature from the University of Illinois, he became a professor of French at BYU in 1960, serving in many capacities, including department chair and associate dean of the Honors Program. An innovator in pedagogy and its enhancement with technology, he was the first to use tapes for students to better learn language in all its manifestations. Though best known for his language learning advances, Brown continued his scholarship in literature. The last decade of his career was dedicated to the study of francophone literatures.

JAMES S. TAYLOR, professor emeritus of German, died Aug. 4, 2015. He was the chief German translator at LDS Church headquarters and earned a PhD from the University of Kansas. At BYU he taught popular courses in German language, literature, and translation/interpretation. Speidel was also a founding member of the Association for Literary and Linguistic Computing, a natural extension of his research on Kafaka and his own pioneering work in corpus linguistics.

RETIREMENTS

SUSAN HOWE (English) retired in August 2015. After receiving her undergraduate degree in Spanish and French from BYU, she turned her emphasis to creative writing, earning an MA from the University of Utah and a PhD from the University of Denver. Howe is the author of poetry collections Salt (2013) and Stone Spirits (1997), which won the Charles Redd Center Publication Prize and the Association for Mormon Letters Award in Poetry. She has also published plays, essays, and short stories, and her commissioned poem “Utah Five Sacred Lessons” was performed with musical accompaniment by the Utah Symphony in 1999.

DAVID K. HART (Russian) retired in August 2015. After receiving his BA, MA, and PhD, he worked for the U.S. Defense Department before teaching Russian at BYU. He served as department chair and his research interests include cognitive semantics, historical linguistics, and Russian phonology and accentuation.

Robert W. Blair
Byron W. Gassman
Randall L. Jones
Harold Kay Moon
Walter H. Speidel
James S. Taylor
John “Jack” Thomas

A Forest of Languages at BYU

Linguists, who began to unravel connections between world languages in the 18th and 19th centuries, chose a stylized image of a branching tree for their working model. The idea of a “language tree” had an influence on Darwin’s thinking about evolution.

Scholars have identified 141 different language families. The 63 languages taught regularly at BYU group into 20 language families, as shown here.

Of those, 63 are taught regularly at BYU and accepted a teaching position at BYU specializing in neoclassical literature, a position he held until his retirement in 1994.

RANDALL L. JONES, former humanities dean and professor emeritus of German, died Jan. 30, 2016. He earned a PhD in linguistics from Princeton and taught at Cornell University for eight years. He also worked as director of proficiency testing at the CIA Language School in Washington, D.C. Jones then taught German linguistics at BYU for 26 years, during which time he served as director of the Humanities Research Center, dean of the College of Humanities, and associate department chair.

BYRON W. GASMAN, professor emeritus of English, passed away May 17, 2015. He received a PhD from the University of Chicago in 1960 and accepted a teaching position at BYU specializing in neoclassical literature, a position he held until his retirement in 1994.

HAROLD KAY MOON, professor emeritus of Spanish, passed away Feb. 5, 2016. He completed doctoral work at Syracuse University and began a 35-year career at BYU in 1964. Moon published numerous articles, two textbooks, and two scholarly books, and he was actively involved in theatrical productions — writing, producing, directing, and acting in numerous plays. His influence extended well beyond the classroom as he regularly invited students into his home and on travels abroad.

WALTER H. SPEIDEL, professor emeritus of German, died Aug. 4, 2015. He was the chief German translator at LDS Church headquarters and earned a PhD from the University of Kansas. At BYU he taught popular courses in German language, literature, and translation/interpretation. Speidel was also a founding member of the Association for Literary and Linguistic Computing, a natural extension of his research on Kafka and his own pioneering work in corpus linguistics.

DAVID K. HART, professor emeritus of Russian, died Jan. 6, 2016. He earned a PhD from the Ohio State University and taught Spanish, German, and French in the LA city school system. In a 40-year career at BYU, he developed a teacher-training program that has sent language teachers to many states and numerous foreign countries. Taylor also served as director of the BYU Language and Intercultural Research Center and published articles, textbooks, and materials for Spanish teachers. He conducted many workshops in Utah and other western states, served as president of the Utah Foreign Language Association, and was the Utah State World Languages Specialist.

JOHN “JACK” THOMAS, professor emeritus of English, died Dec. 5, 2015. After completing doctoral studies in Renaissance English literature at the University of Maryland, College Park, he joined the BYU English faculty. He presented and published many scholarly papers in the course of his 30-year BYU career.
Bilingual BYU

The BYU College of Humanities teaches more languages at an advanced level than any other university in America,” wrote then dean John R. Rosenberg in 2006. A decade later BYU has increased its language strength, offering classes in more than 60 languages, with enrollments equal to two-thirds of the student population. It is no secret that BYU’s burgeoning population of returned missionaries plays a large role in this diverse and challenging language universe. “[Some returned missionaries] have a general language ability that is on par with language majors graduating from other colleges and universities,” says Ray T. Clifford, director of BYU’s Center for Language Studies. These skilled freshmen and sophomore students have spurred professors to be innovative in developing language certification for student transcripts and creating advanced-level coursework that will push students to higher levels of proficiency.

A LANGUAGE CENTER FOR BYU AND THE NATION

Founded in 1990 and located in the College of Humanities, the Center for Language Studies drives research on improving proficiency and administering and validating exams. Clifford directs the center and brings with him a wealth of experience, such as serving as president for a handful of national language organizations, including two terms over the last decade as the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL)—aka, the group that administers standardized language tests. His current dean of the college.

The center and its research have captured the attention of some of the nation’s top language publications and organizations. The discipline’s most prestigious journal, Foreign Language Annals, consistently publishes work from BYU faculty. Noting the “careful, sustained, and thoughtful series of articles” of BYU language researchers, the journal’s editor, Anne Grundstrom Nereva, says that the BYU team is one of the most productive and influential in the country.

ACTFL has looked to BYU to answer its own set of problems. The association has used research-validated oral and writing tests for many years but has not had tests for listening and writing, and it has recently contracted BYU to develop listening and reading tests, using computer-adaptive algorithms, to add to the ACTFL battery of foreign-language examinations. That means BYU will create the standardized foreign-language listening and reading tests that will be used in the United States and other countries.

Even the U.S. government wants in on BYU’s research for its own language-training facilities. “The government has been trying to validate their proficiency testing procedures for half a century,” says Clifford, so they turned to BYU for help. BYU’s connection with government organizations is nothing new. The government has long recruited BYU alums as Foreign Service officers. Though numbers are not tracked, Clifford remembers one interaction with a visiting ambassador to BYU: “I asked, ‘What percentage of the Foreign Service officers are BYU graduates?’ And she said, ‘We don’t track that data. I have no way of knowing, but I do know I have never been in a U.S. embassy where there wasn’t a BYU graduate.’”

Indeed, the College of Humanities has become an exemplar for other institutions looking to advance their own programs. In the early 2000s, a presidentially mandated review of U.S. foreign language capabilities noted, “One heartening exception to this national norm of mediocrity is Brigham Young University.”

CERTIFIED LANGUAGE ACES

A commonly held belief is that missionaries return home highly fluent in their mission language. “Those perceptions [are] often held by the missionaries themselves,” Clifford says with a smile. While their language skills—conversational abilities in particular—may be higher than most American college students, testing has found that missionaries are not nearly as fluent as they might think. ACTFL ranks language proficiency—or aptitude in speaking, writing, hearing, or reading language—into five categories, from novice (for those dependent upon memorized vocabulary) to distinguished (which takes an average of 17 years in countries to achieve). The three middle categories, from least to most proficient, are intermediate, advanced, and superior. Most returned mission- ary test at an advanced level, leaving plenty of room for more development. Professional

STUDENTS IMMERSE THEMSELVES in one of the world’s PREMIER LANGUAGE-LEARNING environments.
THE WORLD IS OUR THEATER

BYU's International Cinema (IC) was created in 1973 and is one of the longest-running university film programs of its kind in the United States. The IC theater acts as an extension to BYU foreign language and humanities classes by showing contemporary and classic films from world cinema, cinematic adaptations of literature, and other important works from the history of the moving image. Over the past 43 years, IC has shown close to 2,000 films in 47 languages—plus some silent films—to tens of thousands of students, professors, and members of the community. In the past two years the IC program has continued to grow, welcoming 21,029 spectators to 616 screenings of 158 films. Students can now sign up for an International Cinema class in which they discuss the week's IC films, and they can also minor in International Cinema studies (see its.byu.edu).


BYU has screened films in 47 languages over the last 45 years.

ARABIC, ASI, BAMBIA, BENGALI, BHOSHI, BHUTANESE, CANTONESE, CEZ, DANISH, DUTCH, ENGLISH, ESTONIAN, FRENCH, FRENCH, GERMAN, GEORGIAN, HEBREW, HINDI, HUNGARIAN, INDOGUJAR, INDOJAPANESE, IRISH, ITALIAN, KOREAN, KOREAN, LAO, MANDARIN, NEPALI, NORWEGIAN, POLISH, PORTUGUESE, PUSHTO, QUICHUA, RUKHAN, RUSSIAN, SANSKIRT, SANTHAL, SERBIAN, SLOVAK, TAMIL, THAI, TIBETAN, TURKISH, URDU, VIETNAMESE, WOLOF, ZULU

Languages of the International Cinema

WHERE WOULD YOU WORK AT A U.S. EMBASSY?

Before sending people abroad, the government tests future employees for language capability, using a scale from zero to four. Where would your language skills get you?

ZERO

Are you great at saying bonjour or ni hao but not really good at saying much else? Your forte is found in memorized words and phrases.

NOVICE

Those with skills at level one are in the survival category. Intermediate speakers can compose sentences within familiar circumstances—like ordering food at a restaurant or asking for simple directions—but they are usually only understood by those who are comfortable with non-native speech.

ONE INTERMEDIATE

For students who cannot spend time abroad, the center offers an immersive language experience on campus. The Foreign Language Student Residence places second-language learners with native speakers in apartments interpreting different languages. While in their apartments students are allowed to speak only their assigned language. BYU students provide regular language-building activities for the residents.

OPTICAL READER

A large part of BYU’s and the college’s success in language teaching has come through rigorous research. More than 80 professors of foreign language and another 20 professors of linguistics provide the college with depth and variety in its research. Some of these experts are using new technologies to expand understanding of how language learning works.

Take the college’s brand-new eye-tracking machine, for example. The machine uses infrared light to track where a reader’s pupils are on a computer screen. This enables researchers to see more precisely how language learners go about learning to read a new language—for instance, by having to go back and reread segments for further understanding.

TWO ADVANCED

For students who cannot spend time abroad, the center offers an immersive language experience on campus. The Foreign Language Student Residence places second-language learners with native speakers in apartments interpreting different languages. While in their apartments students are allowed to speak only their assigned language. BYU students provide regular language-building activities for the residents.

OPTICAL READER

A large part of BYU’s and the college’s success in language teaching has come through rigorous research. More than 80 professors of foreign language and another 20 professors of linguistics provide the college with depth and variety in its research. Some of these experts are using new technologies to expand understanding of how language learning works.

Take the college’s brand-new eye-tracking machine, for example. The machine uses infrared light to track where a reader’s pupils are on a computer screen. This enables researchers to see more precisely how language learners go about learning to read a new language—for instance, by having to go back and reread segments for further understanding.

TWO ADVANCED

For students who cannot spend time abroad, the center offers an immersive language experience on campus. The Foreign Language Student Residence places second-language learners with native speakers in apartments interpreting different languages. While in their apartments students are allowed to speak only their assigned language. BYU students provide regular language-building activities for the residents.

OPTICAL READER

A large part of BYU’s and the college’s success in language teaching has come through rigorous research. More than 80 professors of foreign language and another 20 professors of linguistics provide the college with depth and variety in its research. Some of these experts are using new technologies to expand understanding of how language learning works.

Take the college’s brand-new eye-tracking machine, for example. The machine uses infrared light to track where a reader’s pupils are on a computer screen. This enables researchers to see more precisely how language learners go about learning to read a new language—for instance, by having to go back and reread segments for further understanding.

TWO ADVANCED

For students who cannot spend time abroad, the center offers an immersive language experience on campus. The Foreign Language Student Residence places second-language learners with native speakers in apartments interpreting different languages. While in their apartments students are allowed to speak only their assigned language. BYU students provide regular language-building activities for the residents.

OPTICAL READER

A large part of BYU’s and the college’s success in language teaching has come through rigorous research. More than 80 professors of foreign language and another 20 professors of linguistics provide the college with depth and variety in its research. Some of these experts are using new technologies to expand understanding of how language learning works.

Take the college’s brand-new eye-tracking machine, for example. The machine uses infrared light to track where a reader’s pupils are on a computer screen. This enables researchers to see more precisely how language learners go about learning to read a new language—for instance, by having to go back and reread segments for further understanding.

TWO ADVANCED

For students who cannot spend time abroad, the center offers an immersive language experience on campus. The Foreign Language Student Residence places second-language learners with native speakers in apartments interpreting different languages. While in their apartments students are allowed to speak only their assigned language. BYU students provide regular language-building activities for the residents.

OPTICAL READER

A large part of BYU’s and the college’s success in language teaching has come through rigorous research. More than 80 professors of foreign language and another 20 professors of linguistics provide the college with depth and variety in its research. Some of these experts are using new technologies to expand understanding of how language learning works.

Take the college’s brand-new eye-tracking machine, for example. The machine uses infrared light to track where a reader’s pupils are on a computer screen. This enables researchers to see more precisely how language learners go about learning to read a new language—for instance, by having to go back and reread segments for further understanding.

TWO ADVANCED

For students who cannot spend time abroad, the center offers an immersive language experience on campus. The Foreign Language Student Residence places second-language learners with native speakers in apartments interpreting different languages. While in their apartments students are allowed to speak only their assigned language. BYU students provide regular language-building activities for the residents.

OPTICAL READER

A large part of BYU’s and the college’s success in language teaching has come through rigorous research. More than 80 professors of foreign language and another 20 professors of linguistics provide the college with depth and variety in its research. Some of these experts are using new technologies to expand understanding of how language learning works.

Take the college’s brand-new eye-tracking machine, for example. The machine uses infrared light to track where a reader’s pupils are on a computer screen. This enables researchers to see more precisely how language learners go about learning to read a new language—for instance, by having to go back and reread segments for further understanding.

TWO ADVANCED

For students who cannot spend time abroad, the center offers an immersive language experience on campus. The Foreign Language Student Residence places second-language learners with native speakers in apartments interpreting different languages. While in their apartments students are allowed to speak only their assigned language. BYU students provide regular language-building activities for the residents.

OPTICAL READER

A large part of BYU’s and the college’s success in language teaching has come through rigorous research. More than 80 professors of foreign language and another 20 professors of linguistics provide the college with depth and variety in its research. Some of these experts are using new technologies to expand understanding of how language learning works.

Take the college’s brand-new eye-tracking machine, for example. The machine uses infrared light to track where a reader’s pupils are on a computer screen. This enables researchers to see more precisely how language learners go about learning to read a new language—for instance, by having to go back and reread segments for further understanding.

TWO ADVANCED

For students who cannot spend time abroad, the center offers an immersive language experience on campus. The Foreign Language Student Residence places second-language learners with native speakers in apartments interpreting different languages. While in their apartments students are allowed to speak only their assigned language. BYU students provide regular language-building activities for the residents.

OPTICAL READER

A large part of BYU’s and the college’s success in language teaching has come through rigorous research. More than 80 professors of foreign language and another 20 professors of linguistics provide the college with depth and variety in its research. Some of these experts are using new technologies to expand understanding of how language learning works.

Take the college’s brand-new eye-tracking machine, for example. The machine uses infrared light to track where a reader’s pupils are on a computer screen. This enables researchers to see more precisely how language learners go about learning to read a new language—for instance, by having to go back and reread segments for further understanding.

TWO ADVANCED

For students who cannot spend time abroad, the center offers an immersive language experience on campus. The Foreign Language Student Residence places second-language learners with native speakers in apartments interpreting different languages. While in their apartments students are allowed to speak only their assigned language. BYU students provide regular language-building activities for the residents.

OPTICAL READER

A large part of BYU’s and the college’s success in language teaching has come through rigorous research. More than 80 professors of foreign language and another 20 professors of linguistics provide the college with depth and variety in its research. Some of these experts are using new technologies to expand understanding of how language learning works.

Take the college’s brand-new eye-tracking machine, for example. The machine uses infrared light to track where a reader’s pupils are on a computer screen. This enables researchers to see more precisely how language learners go about learning to read a new language—for instance, by having to go back and reread segments for further understanding.

TWO ADVANCED

For students who cannot spend time abroad, the center offers an immersive language experience on campus. The Foreign Language Student Residence places second-language learners with native speakers in apartments interpreting different languages. While in their apartments students are allowed to speak only their assigned language. BYU students provide regular language-building activities for the residents.

OPTICAL READER

A large part of BYU’s and the college’s success in language teaching has come through rigorous research. More than 80 professors of foreign language and another 20 professors of linguistics provide the college with depth and variety in its research. Some of these experts are using new technologies to expand understanding of how language learning works.

Take the college’s brand-new eye-tracking machine, for example. The machine uses infrared light to track where a reader’s pupils are on a computer screen. This enables researchers to see more precisely how language learners go about learning to read a new language—for instance, by having to go back and reread segments for further understanding.

TWO ADVANCED

For students who cannot spend time abroad, the center offers an immersive language experience on campus. The Foreign Language Student Residence places second-language learners with native speakers in apartments interpreting different languages. While in their apartments students are allowed to speak only their assigned language. BYU students provide regular language-building activities for the residents.

OPTICAL READER

A large part of BYU’s and the college’s success in language teaching has come through rigorous research. More than 80 professors of foreign language and another 20 professors of linguistics provide the college with depth and variety in its research. Some of these experts are using new technologies to expand understanding of how language learning works.

Take the college’s brand-new eye-tracking machine, for example. The machine uses infrared light to track where a reader’s pupils are on a computer screen. This enables researchers to see more precisely how language learners go about learning to read a new language—for instance, by having to go back and reread segments for further understanding.
ENGLISH FOR THE WORLD

BY KIMBERLY A. REID • PHOTOGRAPHS BY BRADLEY SLADE

FROM THE MONGOLIAN STEPPE TO CENTRAL AMERICAN RAIN FORESTS TO THE AFRICAN SAVANNA, BYU’S ENGLISH LANGUAGE CENTER (ELC) HAS BLESSED THOUSANDS OF LIVES WORLDWIDE SINCE IT OPENED ITS DOORS IN 1989. IN AN UNASSUMING BRICK BUILDING IN A CORNER OF THE LAVELL EDWARDS STADIUM PARKING LOT, BYU STUDENTS LEARN TO TEACH ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE (ESL), STUDENTS FROM SOME 104 COUNTRIES GAIN ENGLISH SKILLS TO PREPARE THEM FOR STUDY AT AN ENGLISH-MEDIUM UNIVERSITY OR FOR BUSINESS SUCCESS BACK HOME, AND GENERAL AUTHORITIES BRUSH UP ON THEIR ENGLISH BEFORE GENERAL CONFERENCE. THEN THOSE PEOPLE STEP OUT OF THE ELC DOORS AND USE THEIR SKILLS AROUND THE GLOBE.

BYU’S ENGLISH LANGUAGE CENTER IMPORTS EAGER STUDENTS AND EXPORTS VALUABLE LANGUAGE SKILLS AROUND THE GLOBE.

AS THEY LEAVE, THEY TAKE THE VERY BEST THINGS THAT WE’RE DOING HERE AND EXPORT THEM—TAKE THEM WITH THEM AND IMPLEMENT THEM IN OTHER PLACES AROUND THE WORLD,” SAYS JAMES HARTSHORN, THE CENTER’S PROGRAM COORDINATOR. “I THINK THAT THEIR EXPERIENCE HERE RIVALS, IF NOT SURPASSES, ANY KIND OF PROGRAM LIKE THIS IN THE WORLD.”

MONGOLIAN VOLUNTEERS

NOW ANOTHER GROUP CAN BE CONSIDERED AMONG THE ELC’S NEWEST BENEFICIARIES: ENGLISH-SPEAKING VOLUNTEERS BOUND FOR MONGOLIA—AND THE PEOPLE THEY TEACH WHEN THEY ARRIVE IN THAT COUNTRY.

IN JUNE 2010 MONGOLIA ASKED THAT VOLUNTEERS ENTERING THE COUNTRY TO TEACH CONVERSATIONAL ENGLISH BE CERTIFIED IN TEACHING ENGLISH. NORMAN EVANS, NOW THE CHAIR OF BYU’S DEPARTMENT OF LINGUISTICS AND ENGLISH LANGUAGE, AND HIS COLLEAGUE NEIL ANDERSON, DIRECTOR OF THE CENTER FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING AT BYU–HAWAII, WERE CONTACTED BY BYU’S INTERNATIONAL VICE PRESIDENT SANDRA ROGERS, WHO ASKED IF THEY MIGHT BE ABLE TO HELP.

WHEN THEY CONSIDERED THE QUESTION, IT DAWNED ON THEM: “WE’VE GOT THIS REALLY POWERFUL, INTENSIVE ENGLISH PROGRAM,” SAYS EVANS OF THE BYU ELC. “WHY DON’T WE PUT THE VOLUNTEERS DOWN THERE AT THE ELC, HAVE THEM OBSERVE CLASSES, HAVE THEM TEACH CLASSES, HAVE THEM DEVELOP LESSONS, AND [HAVE THEM] GO THROUGH THOSE LESSON PLANS WITH A MASTER TEACHER?”

OVER THE LAST COUPLE OF YEARS THE TRAINING PROCESS HAS EVOLVED. IT CURRENTLY CONSISTS OF TWO PARTS: AN ONLINE TRAINING COMPONENT AND A PRACTICUM EXPERIENCE THAT THE VOLUNTEERS COMPLETE AT THE ELC BEFORE HEADING OFF TO MONGOLIA. ONCE IN COUNTRY, THEY TYPICALLY TEACH ENGLISH FOR 12 HOURS A WEEK IN A VARIETY OF CONTEXTS SUCH AS PUBLIC SCHOOLS, PRIVATE SCHOOLS, IT PARKS, OR LANGUAGE INSTITUTES.

THE FIRST ROUND OF VOLUNTEERS WHO WENT TO MONGOLIA WITH THE ELC TRAINING UNDER THEIR BELTS ARE STARTING TO COME BACK—SOME OF THEM WITH THE DESIRE TO TEACH ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE FOR THEIR CAREERS. “ONE IS NOW BACK AT BYU–HAWAII GIVING A BACHELOR’S DEGREE IN TESOL [TEACHING ENGLISH TO STUDENTS OF OTHER LANGUAGES],” SAYS EVANS, “AND THERE HAVE BEEN SEVERAL WHO HAVE SAID, ‘I THINK I MIGHT COME BACK TO THIS MA PROGRAM WHEN I GET THROUGH.’ I HOPE THEY DO.”

A PERSONAL FOCUS

THE INTERNATIONAL IMPACT OF THE ELC, HOWEVER, IS NOT A NEW PHENOMENON. HARTSHORN SAYS BOTH THE GRADUATE STUDENTS WHO TEACH THERE AND THE LANGUAGE-LEARNERS THEMSELVES GO ALL OVER THE WORLD, FROM SOUTH AMERICA AND ASIA TO UNIVERSITIES IN THE UNITED STATES AND QATAR. THE PROGRAM AND ITS CURRICULUM ARE DESIGNED TO EMPower STUDENTS TO SUCCEED ANYWHERE.

WHILE MOST ESL PROGRAMS FOCUS ON THE STUDENTS LEARNING ENGLISH, EVANS SAYS BYU’S PROGRAM HAS TWO MORE EMPHASES: FIRST, PREPARE BYU STUDENTS TO BECOME TEACHERS, AND SECOND, SHARE THEIR RESEARCH WITH THE WORLD. “I’VE SEEN MANY INTENSIVE ENGLISH PROGRAMS, AND THERE’S NOTHING QUITE LIKE THIS. THIS IS A LAB SCHOOL. WE’RE TRAINING OUR STUDENTS TO BE TEACHERS,” SAYS EVANS. “IT DOES IMPACT PEOPLE’S LIVES THROUGHOUT THIS COMMUNITY AND THROUGHOUT THE WORLD.”

BECAUSE THE BYU STUDENT TEACHERS IN THE CENTER ARE INVESTED IN THEIR OWN EDUCATION, THEIR ENTHUSIASM RUBS OFF ON THE ENGLISH-LANGUAGE LEARNERS. “THEM’S THEIR FOCUS ON PERSONAL NEEDS HERE,” EXPLAINS WILLIAM CORDOVA, AN ATOMIC SPEAKER STUDYING ENGLISH AT THE CENTER. “THEY ACTUALLY BASE THE TEACHING ON PEOPLE AND ON STUDENTS.”

Cordova, who comes from a rural area in El Salvador, had dreamed of learning English and one day studying at BYU. “When I found out about the ELC and I realized it was a part of BYU—and that it was based on Church principles—it caught my attention immediately.”

Now finishing up his last semester in the academic program, a track designed for students hoping to attend an English-medium university, Cordova recently submitted his application to BYU and plans to complete a degree in computer science. Eventually he would like to fulfill his lifelong dream of working for the U.S. embassy in his home country. “They’re always helping the country’s development,” says Cordova. “They’re involved in the community as well, so I want to be a part of it. I want to help as much as I can—to help my country and my community there.”

Lin Zhang, a second-semester ELC student from China, also wanted to study English because she recognized the power it could have in her life. After completing her studies at a university in China, she worked for a small art gallery, where she met visitors from around the world. Without her rudimentary English skills and a trusty English dictionary, she would not have been able to communicate with many of the patrons. She hopes that her English will improve enough to go to a university and get a master’s degree in business or public administration. “Even though every country has their language, we both use English to talk,” Zhang says.

Hartshorn has been involved in teaching English as a second language for 30 years. As program coordinator of the ELC, he works hard to maintain a positive atmosphere in the center for the students he has invested in. “We have people that have made great sacrifices financially to come to America, where it’s so expensive to live, and yet their lives change. They learn English, they help their communities and neighbors, [and] they are able to go back to their country and help their people because of the education that they get. English allows them to do things that they couldn’t do otherwise.”

SPRING 2016 19
BYU’s Dirk Elzinga seeks to both preserve and produce languages.

By Ashley Busby

I grew up basically in a Dutch-speaking household in the middle of Taylorsville, Utah,” recalls Dirk Elzinga, a professor in the Department of Linguistics and English Language at BYU. Although his parents spoke Dutch to him, Elzinga didn’t actually learn to speak it until he was a foreign-exchange student.

How did Elzinga grow up in a Dutch-speaking home and yet not learn to speak Dutch? As soon as he was old enough to go to school, he says, he realized that other kids didn’t speak Dutch, so he started speaking exclusively in English and he lost what little Dutch he had.

“That is kind of the same situation that a lot of these families are in,” says Elzinga, speaking of Native Americans living in Utah. “It’s not enough to just speak it at home. There need to be places in the community—and the larger public sphere—where the language can and will be used.”

Utah has a rich Native American presence. Five American Indian tribes live in Utah—Ute, Paiute, Goshute, Navajo, and Shoshone—each with its own culture and language. Several of the languages also have variations within the tribes.

But the languages in these Native American cultures are starting to die out as it becomes more difficult to teach the languages in the home. “It doesn’t matter if you have 5,000 speakers now, if they are all over the age of 40, the language is going to die out,” says Elzinga.

Elzinga has dedicated his research at BYU to learning about these native languages so that he can help to preserve them. He frequently takes trips to study the languages of these tribes, recording native speakers saying certain words or phrases and making phonetic notations of the sounds they use.

With the passing generations, the number of people speaking these native languages in Utah has dropped dramatically. The Ute language in all its varieties has around 1,000 people who can speak it. The Goshute language has even fewer—around 200 to 300.

“I have been lucky to be able to get in touch with people who are sympathetic to what I am trying to do,” says Elzinga. “They see the value in having their language documented and that is why they do it.”

Maker of Tongues

But Elzinga doesn’t just study and preserve languages; he also creates his own.

When people think of languages, they often think only of naturally occurring languages, such as French or Chinese. However, there are thousands of languages that have been created for specific purposes, from fictional entertainment to enabling world peace. These languages are called constructed languages.

Constructed languages have become popular in recent years due to their rising usage in books, movies, television shows, and even video games. Elzinga was approached by a film production company that was looking to make a movie based on Book of Mormon characters and events. In order to give the film authenticity, the writers wanted to incorporate scenes spoken in the languages of the Nephites and the Lamanites. Their original idea was to use Hebrew for the Nephites and Mayan for the Lamanites.

But Elzinga had a better idea rather than guessing which language these peoples might have used, why not design languages for them?

“To portray the complexity of the Nephites’ background, Elzinga pulled inspiration from a number of languages. He not only drew words and sounds from Hebrew languages. “It was important in the film—and I think it’s important in any Book of Mormon film—that we acknowledge the debt that the Nephites felt they had toward Hebrew-Israelite language and culture.”

Creating each Book of Mormon language took Elzinga 40 hours of work just to build the language structure. Since then he has continued to add vocabulary.

Elzinga says that constructing a full language can take a lifetime. “Think of Tolkien. He was creating Elvish his whole life. Some of his last writings were about Elvish.”

But not everyone who creates languages does so to support a fictional story. The most successful constructed language is Esperanto, created in the late 1800’s by a Polish physician who spoke multiple languages. He thought it was silly to have to speak so many languages to communicate; he created Esperanto as a language everyone could learn as a second language.

After reading The Lord of the Rings in high school, Dirk Elzinga became fascinated with constructed languages and even created his own.
For the past 50 years, the College of Humanities has been instructing students in language, literature, art, and communication. As we reflect on this legacy, the college asked alumni to submit stories to humanities50.byu.edu about how their fluency in the human conversation has influenced and blessed their lives and the lives of their families, friends, and communities.

### The Complete Package

**Roy E. Barracough**, Orem, Utah

When I finished at BYU in 1969 with degrees in German and international administration, I had planned to enter the U.S. diplomatic corps. The subsequent vetting process with the government, however, revealed previously unknown aspects of such a career that were not completely compatible with how my wife and I wanted to live and raise our children. This was very disappointing at the time because it seemed to suggest that the education I had just acquired would be only partially applicable to whatever substitute career might present itself for consideration.

As we contemplated our future, I began to consider the health-care field as it included both human service and technological elements I knew would be important to my career satisfaction. Accordingly I enrolled in a master’s degree program in health administration from the BYU College of Humanities provided me with an in-depth understanding of organizational and human dynamics—a health-care facility or program. However, the BYU MHA gave me the specific management, leadership, and research skills needed to run a health-care facility or program. Although some chose to cancel classes out of concern for their students, Professor Lyn L. Huggins held an optional class session precisely at the 11th day of September. This day was filled with an appreciation of the arts and the beauty of expression and communication. My pro- fessors were passionate about the topics they tirelessly taught, and they inspired me greatly.

### Founding a School

**Marjanna Davidson Hulet**, Pocatello, Idaho

When my oldest son started kindergarten, I became involved in a group starting a charter school. I ended up leading that group, in large part because of my communications abilities. I had the writing skills to draft the school charter and to handle the press rela- tions as interest grew in our efforts. I landed a $10,000 grant to help us secure the facilities for our school—even though I had never before written a grant proposal before. I treated it like an assignment from one of my professors and made sure I addressed all the components the granting agency required. In addition, my hours of delving into the stacks and documents for research papers in my classes gave me the research skills needed to complete our charter proposal. My ability to read difficult documents was a great help as we grappled to understand the newly passed law allowing charter schools in Idaho. This school is now in its 16th year, hav- ing educated hundreds of students in grades K through 8. It is recognized as one of our city’s top schools, with an enrollment of 344 students and another 120 on the waiting list. I can truly credit my undergraduate work at BYU with giving me the skills I needed to help make our efforts a success.

### Humanities and Philanthropy

**David J. Smith**, Spanish Fork, Utah

My BYU education was a profound, meaning- ful, and life-changing experience that blessed me as a student and continues to bless me as an alumnus, professional, husband, father, and member of the Church. I absolutely loved my BYU education. The BYU College of Humanities provided me with the research skills needed to complete our charter proposal. My ability to read difficult documents was a great help as we grappled to understand the newly passed law allowing charter schools in Idaho. This school is now in its 16th year, hav- ing educated hundreds of students in grades K through 8. It is recognized as one of our city’s top schools, with an enrollment of 344 students and another 120 on the waiting list. I can truly credit my undergraduate work at BYU with giving me the skills I needed to help make our efforts a success.

### Calm after the Storm

**Dathan J. Young**, Harrisonburg, Va.

Early in the fall semester of 2001, German pro- fessor James K. Lyon, who excelled at helping his students navigate the nuances of a poem’s richness, had already made a favorable impres- sion on me. Then the towers in New York City fell that perplexing 11th day of September. Although some chose to cancel classes out of concern for their students, Professor Lyon held an optional class session precisely because he cared. No, we didn’t cover anything from our syllabus; instead, we discussed navi- gating the intersection of national tragedy and personal suffering. Professor Lyon tenuously shared what helped him overcome grief in the wake of losing a child in an auto accident, acknowledging that others might find different solutions. Then he invited the free sharing of any thoughts or feelings we had in reaction to the recent horrific events. That day I was reminded of the ability of words, shared in a type of sacred space, to allow for reconciliation and forgiveness and healing. Though I had suffered no direct per- sonal loss, I was warmed by the efforts of one wise mentor to lovingly tend to his academic flock. We didn’t discuss poetry that day, but not unlike doing so, we, in our communing, attempted for a moment to see the world through different lenses and to discover new meanings on our way to become better human beings.

### Light Your Candle

**Beckahly Lynn Johnson Craig**, Canton, Ga.

I just got off the phone with an elderly neigh- bor, Brad, who wanted help spelling some words for a letter to his father. An hour and 20 minutes ago I was helping my son construct sentences for his book review. Yesterday I helped my husband decipher an awkwardly worded question for the online course he is taking. I also wrote up another listing for my temple paintings that I sell online. Right now I am writing my story to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the BYU College of Humanities. “Do you ever use your major?” Brad asked. I smiled. When do I not use my major? I am constantly reading, writing, or interpreting language around me. I love to watch Korean dramas, partially because I am reading the subtitles and comparing them to the exotic sounds I am hearing from the actors’ mouths. When a children’s choir sang in Korean at a recent general conference, I understood. I think that is what I love most about being a humanities major: the understanding and confidence in communication I have received and can share with the world around me.

### An Avenue to the Soul

**Julia Toone Manning**, Mesa, Ariz.

I began my BYU education the semester that the new humanities building was dedicated. I still remember showing up to the Marriott Center very early to get a seat when President Gordon B. Hinckley came for the dedicatory prayer. I treated that building like it was my own. Because I knew from my first day of college that the humanities was where I belonged, I embraced everything about it. Each class was a joy and nearly every humanities professor was the best teacher I’d ever had. My knowledge and testimony of the Savior and His power and love increased as I studied His hand in many of the beautiful people and cultures and works of art in our world. We can reach and touch people in a unique and important way via the arts, reaching into the depths of our souls, where artistry truly begins.

I cherish my days of learning and studying arts and culture. I hope that my children can learn to appreciate the humanities; it is such a vital part of society, an avenue to the soul, and a way to draw closer to our Savior.
An Act of At-one-ment

Language study helps reconcile those who have been divided by the social constructs of our fallen world.

By Thomas B. Griffith

Hugh Nibley was the first hyperpolyglot I ever met. Rumor has it that he was skilled in Classical Latin, Ancient Greek, Hebrew, Egyptian, Coptic, Arabic, German, French, English, Italian, Spanish, and Old Norse, and that he studied Dutch, Russian, Old English, and even Old Bulgarian. I lacked the moral courage to take a class from him—that I had my eye on admission to a competitive law school had many an ill-effect on my education—but I tried to attend as many of his speaking events as I could. Nibley’s erudition was breathtaking, and he became something deeper and more important about the multiple accounts of his story in the books of Genesis and Moses and in the temple. Nibley saw in that familiar but strange narrative layers of meaning about the human condition in this lone and dreary world. I believe that one of his interpretations of their story has profound implications for the study of languages at BYU.

Notice Satan’s tactic in the Garden of Eden story, Nibley taught. Satan was trying to divide Adam and Eve from each other. Dividing people from one another has been a folk hero on campus and beyond because of his disregard of convention (this was the work of at-one-ment). The work of at-one-ment is the hard work of reconciling those who have been divided by the social constructs on which much of our fallen world has been built. In a 2011 devotional address, BYU linguistics professor William G. Egginton pointed out a radically new feature of our time. Because of increased mobility, never before in history have people of such diverse backgrounds lived in such proximity to one another. This proximity presents vexing challenges and unprecedented opportunities. Some will recoil from the challenge and retreat “to spend time with people who share their tastes, perspectives, and sensibilities.”

The impulse of the disciple is not retreat “to spend time with people who share their tastes, perspectives, and sensibilities.” The impulse of the disciple is not to worry about our differences in language, but to be concerned. By contrast, Satan is involved. By contrast, the work of Christ is reconciliation, at-one-ment. Wherever we see efforts to bridge differences, we are likely seeing Christ at work. And is there anything we can do to bridge divides that is quite as effective as learning another’s language? And by language, I don’t mean simply the vocabulary, grammar, and syntax of another tongue. I mean more broadly the culture and worldviews of another person. According to Nibley, this is what Lehi and Benjamin had in mind when teaching language to their children (see 1 Nephi 11:2–12; Mosiah 14).

Learning another language is an act of at-one-ment. It is an effort to understand, as best we can, how others experience life. There is a pragmatic component to the Lord’s charge that we are to learn languages (see D&C 90:13, 15). There is missionary work to be done, after all. But learning another language doesn’t merely facilitate our ability to tell someone what we want them to know. Learning another’s language changes us for the better. It compels us to work hard at trying to understand others. Learning another’s language wrenches us out of the comfortable and safe world we have created: a world filled with people just like us who share our tastes, perspectives, and sensibilities.

The impulse of the disciple is not division, but at-one-ment. The impulse of the disciple is to reach out to the stranger.

The work of at-one-ment is the hard work of reconciling those who have been divided by the social constructs on which much of our fallen world has been built. In a 2011 devotional address, BYU linguistics professor William G. Egginton pointed out a radically new feature of our time. Because of increased mobility, never before in history have people of such diverse backgrounds lived in such proximity to one another. This proximity presents vexing challenges and unprecedented opportunities. Some will recoil from the challenge and retreat “to spend time with people who share their tastes, perspectives, and sensibilities.”

The impulse of the disciple is not retreat “to spend time with people who share their tastes, perspectives, and sensibilities.” The impulse of the disciple is not to worry about our differences in language, but to be concerned. By contrast, Satan is involved. By contrast, the work of Christ is reconciliation, at-one-ment. Wherever we see efforts to bridge differences, we are likely seeing Christ at work. And is there anything we can do to bridge divides that is quite as effective as learning another’s language? And by language, I don’t mean simply the vocabulary, grammar, and syntax of another tongue. I mean more broadly the culture and worldviews of another person. According to Nibley, this is what Lehi and Benjamin had in mind when teaching language to their children (see 1 Nephi 11:2–12; Mosiah 14).

Learning another language is an act of at-one-ment. It is an effort to understand, as best we can, how others experience life. There is a pragmatic component to the Lord’s charge that we are to learn languages (see D&C 90:13, 15). There is missionary work to be done, after all. But learning another language doesn’t merely facilitate our ability to tell someone what we want them to know. Learning another’s language changes us for the better. It compels us to work hard at trying to understand others. Learning another’s language wrenches us out of the comfortable and safe world we have created: a world filled with people just like us who share our tastes, perspectives, and sensibilities.

The work of at-one-ment is the hard work of reconciling those who have been divided by the social constructs on which much of our fallen world has been built. In a 2011 devotional address, BYU linguistics professor William G. Egginton pointed out a radically new feature of our time. Because of increased mobility, never before in history have people of such diverse backgrounds lived in such proximity to one another. This proximity presents vexing challenges and unprecedented opportunities. Some will recoil from the challenge and retreat “to spend time with people who share their tastes, perspectives, and sensibilities.”

The impulse of the disciple is not division, but at-one-ment. The impulse of the disciple is to reach out to the stranger.

The work of at-one-ment is the hard work of reconciling those who have been divided by the social constructs on which much of our fallen world has been built. In a 2011 devotional address, BYU linguistics professor William G. Egginton pointed out a radically new feature of our time. Because of increased mobility, never before in history have people of such diverse backgrounds lived in such proximity to one another. This proximity presents vexing challenges and unprecedented opportunities. Some will recoil from the challenge and retreat “to spend time with people who share their tastes, perspectives, and sensibilities.”

The impulse of the disciple is not division, but at-one-ment. The impulse of the disciple is to reach out to the stranger.

The work of at-one-ment is the hard work of reconciling those who have been divided by the social constructs on which much of our fallen world has been built. In a 2011 devotional address, BYU linguistics professor William G. Egginton pointed out a radically new feature of our time. Because of increased mobility, never before in history have people of such diverse backgrounds lived in such proximity to one another. This proximity presents vexing challenges and unprecedented opportunities. Some will recoil from the challenge and retreat “to spend time with people who share their tastes, perspectives, and sensibilities.”

The impulse of the disciple is not division, but at-one-ment. The impulse of the disciple is to reach out to the stranger.

The work of at-one-ment is the hard work of reconciling those who have been divided by the social constructs on which much of our fallen world has been built. In a 2011 devotional address, BYU linguistics professor William G. Egginton pointed out a radically new feature of our time. Because of increased mobility, never before in history have people of such diverse backgrounds lived in such proximity to one another. This proximity presents vexing challenges and unprecedented opportunities. Some will recoil from the challenge and retreat “to spend time with people who share their tastes, perspectives, and sensibilities.”

The impulse of the disciple is not division, but at-one-ment. The impulse of the disciple is to reach out to the stranger.
The Tower over Time

Over the centuries, the Tower of Babel has appeared in a variety of interesting—and sometimes provocative—artistic incarnations in various media.

A. Mosaic from the Basilica Cattedrale di Santa Maria Nuova in Monreale, Sicily, ca. 1200.


C. The Tower of Babel, by Pieter Bruegel the Elder, oil on panel, 1563. Bruegel painted three versions of the tower: the first was a miniature that was lost; this is the second and is about twice the size (in the original) of the third, which is pictured on the front cover.

D. The Confusion of Tongues, by Gustave Doré, engraving, 1866. This engraving was one of 241 that Doré created for a new edition of the French translation of the Bible, La Grande Bible de Tours.

E. Still image from Metropolis, a silent film by Fritz Lang, 1927. The story of the Tower of Babel plays a central role in the film.

F. The Tower of Babel, by Barnaby Barford, created for the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, displayed in fall 2015. In this representation the tower is nearly 20 feet high and composed of 3,000 bone-china reproductions of actual London stores, with derelict shops at the bottom and high-end boutiques at the top.