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 communication tool, and in this issue of Humanities we celebrate our college legacy of language teaching and research.

We begin with the fabled conflict of the Tower of Babel: a prosperous nation defies 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 similar portrayals created during as many years, when the tower loomed large in the Renaissance consciousness. Most artists capture its 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 contrasting interpretations.

The midconstruction view suggests a cautionary tale of human capacity. Before Babel we all spoke the same tongue, allowing us to share ideas and crowd-source ourselves into an architectural hubris that challenged Nature itself: we tried to build our own mountain, to out-create our own Creator, knowledge and cleverness transcending the limits of topography 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, isolated into silos of mutually unintelligible languages whose difference is designed to prevent us from connecting with one another and waxing too proud for our own good. Both readings of the tower story also offer a kernel of hope: when we speak the same language and work together in faith and obedience we are nearly divine in our collective abilities; and, despite our confounded diversity, if we humble ourselves and reach out to others we can escape the tower’s segregating shadow.

Abraham’s forefathers fled Babel for Ur, guided away from the incomprehensible multitudes by God. And we have, in the Book of Mormon, a second tale about refugees from the tower upon whom God also smiled: the story of Jared, who is prescient enough to see where the confusion will lead but apparently speaks little if any of God’s language. So he employs his brother—who has achieved fluency in a powerful second language: prayer—to ask God to turn away the curse from immediate family and friends.

Jared’s brother builds a spiritual and linguistic bridge to coherence amid confusion, and the reward is a journey to another promised land. Along the way the brother uses his remarkable proficiency to communicate with deity on Mount Shelem, a tower of God’s making where humanity and divinity meet and converse in the same tongue, face-to-face. From that conversation we receive some of the most sacred truths ever revealed and discover the marvelous metaphor of shining stones, crafted by a man but infused with light by a divine touch that gives them power to pierce Babel’s confounding blackness.

One of the challenges we face today, in a world increasingly polarized by confused voices, 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 language, tribe, and worldview, forever avoiding and denigrating those we do not understand. Or we can reach out to others and seek to bridge 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 second, or a third. Although our conversations begin as simple acts of faith reaching beyond the narrow world of vernacular comfort, and our first forays may involve only basic words and gestures, as we watch others’ reactions and see a hint of recognition in those with whom we speak, we begin to trust in the marvel of communication, eventually reaching the point where we are sharing ideas, feelings, and even lives.

During the course of life’s conversations, as we reach out across communication gaps using whatever languages we can acquire, we will repeatedly experience the amazing gift of tongues. Rather than build impossibly tall towers, we better approach God, and rise to our inner divinity, through the simple act of learning other languages, whereby we bring friendships, communities, and even new worlds into being.
Infographic: A Forest of Languages at BYU
BYU’s linguistic offerings number in the dozens, with enrollments in the thousands.

Bilingual BYU
At BYU, students immerse themselves in one of the best language-learning environments in the world.
By Amanda Kae Fronk

English for the World
The English Language Center imports eager students and exports valuable language skills around the globe.
By Kimberly A. Reid

Language Builder
Dirk Elzinga seeks to both preserve and produce languages.
By Ashley Busby
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.
Lexicon

Waldeinsamkeit /ˈvaltəinzəmkaɪt/ noun. A contemplative solitude in nature

A compound of the German words Wald (“forest”) and Einsamkeit (“aloneness” or “solitude”), Waldeinsamkeit took on the character of a neologism in 1796, when Ludwig Tieck published his iconic romantic novella Blond Eckbert. At a certain point in the story, Tieck’s heroine spends several years in a preternaturally still mountain valley, which she later recollects as a scene of Waldeinsamkeit. In the early 19th century, the poet Joseph von Eichendorff used the term repeatedly to evoke a wistful, infinite desire that one can experience best alone in the woods at dusk. In both cases, Waldeinsamkeit is an outward symbol for an intense interiority that is beautiful as well as vaguely disturbing. Why disturbing? The inner life might be the secret road to the divine reality hidden behind nature (typified by the Wald), but it might also lure us into empty and even dangerous self-referentiality. We can get lost in our own woods, where suppressed things sometimes lie in wait. In any case, the term stuck and has even made its way onto urbandictionary.com, where its meaning has been reduced to “the feeling of being alone in the woods.”

—THOMAS SPENCER, ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF GERMAN

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 neuroscientist, specializes in the human brain’s perception of time and 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.

—ILONA KLEIN, 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

On Site

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.
FROM THE WORLD OF HUMANITIES

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 pragmatism shrivel 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 Forms, 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 reconciling, 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.

—MATTHEW F. WICKMAN, FOUNDING DIRECTOR OF THE HUMANITIES CENTER

Art has the power not only to change the perceptions of other artists and devoted students but also to exert a force on everyday life.

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

—JOHANN WOLFGANG VON GOETHE, Sprüche in Prosa: Maximen und Reflexionen, II

QUOTE

“Wer fremde Sprachen nicht kennt, weiß auch nichts von seiner eigenen.” (“One who has no acquaintance of foreign languages knows nothing of his own.”)
The Language of the Rainforest

BYU LINGUISTICS PROFESSOR Janis Nuckolls has spent 30 years learning, examining, documenting, 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, Elizabeth 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.

“Their rainforest surroundings provide a never-ending source of reverence, stimulation, beauty, danger, and humor.”

—Janis Nuckolls

Professor Janis Nuckolls teaches a Quichua class with the help of native speakers Luisa and Elodia.

Their rainforest surroundings provide a never-ending source of reverence, stimulation, beauty, danger, and humor.”  

—Janis Nuckolls
“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” language 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 competence 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 intentionally 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 GOODSON (’17), SYLVIA CUTLER (’17)
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 oncoming winter. In search of a thesis topic, Thursby was intrigued and began to learn more about the 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 outside observer,” she explained. “They want you to really understand the undercurrent and the ancient beliefs of the Basque people.”

—I. J. W. T. (‘16)

“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 Boise, Idaho, in June 2013. Basque Americans maintain strong connections to their European homeland.
Africa: What It Gave Me, What It Took from Me: Remembrances from My Life as a German Settler in South West Africa
David P. Crandall, Hans-Wilhelm Kelling, and Paul E. Kerry

The Building Accounts of the Savoy Hospital, London, 1512–1520
Charlotte A. Stanford

Kill February
Jeffrey Tucker

My Wife Wants You to Know I’m Happily Married
Joey Franklin

From the Cincinnati Reds to the Mosco Reds: The Memoirs of Irwin Weil
Tony Brown

Statistics for Linguists: A Step-by-Step Guide for Novices
David Eddington

ESL Readers and Writers in Higher Education: Understanding Challenges, Providing Support

Poets of Guinea-Bissau
Frederick G. Williams

Red Vienna, White Socialism, and the Blues: Ann Tzia Leitich’s America
Rob McFarland

The Boxer Codex
George Bryan Souza and Jeffrey S. Turley

Sublime Physick
Patrick Madden

To See Them Run: Great Plains Coyote Coursing
Eric A. Eliason

February 11
English Department Lecture
“Simmering Politics: Manuscript Cookbooks in the Early American Republic”
Mary Eyring, assistant professor of English, BYU

February 11
Linguistics and English Language Department and J. Reuben Clark Law School Lecture
“The Power of Words: Corpus Linguistics and Law”
D. Gordon Smith, Glen L. Farr Professor of Law, BYU

February 18
French and Italian Department Lecture
“Living through World War II: My Family’s Experiences in Ukraine and Nazi-Occupied France”
Maria Tanczak Fiddler
Recent Examples of Faculty Research Published in Foreign Languages

**French**

**German**

**Spanish**

**Portuguese**
Asian and Near Eastern Languages
Keiko Burney and Traci Andreason 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, Steve Riep of the Chinese section. In addition department chair Dana Bourgerie 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 Peek and Martha Peacock are leading the London Centre study abroad program for winter and spring 2016. Heather Belnap 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.

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

German and Russian
Jennifer Bown, 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-Smemoe, with two BYU colleagues (see below), received the Pimsleur Award for best article in foreign language education in 2015.

Philosophy

Spanish and Portuguese

In October 2015 Professors Rob Martinson, Wendy Baker-Smemoe, Jennifer Bown, 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.
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 China 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.

BYRON W. GASSMAN. 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.

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.

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.

JAMES S. TAYLOR. professor emeritus of Spanish, 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.

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.

12 BYU COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES
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.

All foreign languages at BYU are taught in the College of Humanities.

Students can take classes on demand in 96 approved languages. Of those, 63 are taught regularly.

Since 2012 the college has offered language proficiency certificates; to date more than 1,400 have been awarded to students from more than 127 different BYU majors.

A poll revealed that BYU students speak 126 languages in addition to their native languages. The top five most widely spoken languages—Spanish, Portuguese, French, English, and German—account for 85 percent of multilingual students.

Total enrollments in language classes in 2015: 19,576

Enrollments in upper-division classes: 14,218 or 73 percent

Enrollments in lower-division classes: 5,358 or 27 percent
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 freshman 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 1999 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 American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL)—aka, the group that administers standardized language tests. His career researching the reliability and validity of tests has played a key role in making BYU’s language programs so robust. “Ray is a high-energy leader with a penchant for innovation that inspires us all,” says J. Scott Miller, 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 Nerenz, says that BYU’s research program 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 country to achieve). The three middle categories, from least to most proficient, are intermediate, advanced, and superior. Most returned missionaries test at an advanced level, leaving plenty of room for more development.
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 21,209 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 ics.byu.edu).


THE WORLD IS OUR THEATER

BYU has screened films in 47 languages over the last 43 years.

ARABIC, ASL, BAMBARA, BENGALI, BOSNIAN, BHUTANESE, CANTONESE, CZECH, DANISH, DUTCH, ENGLISH, ESTONIAN, FINNISH, FRENCH, GERMAN, GEORGIAN, HEBREW, HINDI, ICELANDIC, INDONESIAN, INUKTITUT, ITALIAN, JAPANESE, KHMER, KOREAN, LAO, MANDARIN, NEPALESE, NORWEGIAN, PASHTU, PERSIAN, POLISH, PORTUGUESE, ROMANIAN, RUSSIAN, SAMI, SPANISH, SWEDISH, TAGALOG, TAMIL, THAI, TIBETAN, TURKISH, URDU, VIETNAMESE, WOLOF, ZULU
but also enriches students’ understanding of cultural norms.

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 representing 11 different languages. While in their apartments students are allowed to speak only their assigned language, and native speakers 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.

Troy Cox, who heads up the eye-tracking technology research, is gathering data on reading speeds. He notes that English-based learners of languages with non-Roman script (such as Arabic, Cyrillic, and Chinese) read those languages more slowly than Roman script-based languages (such as German, Spanish, or French). He wants to know if the slow pace is a learner issue or merely a characteristic of the script. He is testing native speakers of Arabic, Russian, and Chinese to see if they read slower than native English, Spanish, and French speakers. Dozens of other such projects are in the works. (See page 10 for a larger sampling of language research at BYU.)

BYU’s many returned missionaries and their language skills motivate Cox and other language professors to continue researching foreign language learning and creating better means of teaching. “We are blessed here at BYU because of the many returned missionaries who have experience speaking foreign languages,” says Cox. And perhaps one of the best investments a returned missionary can make at BYU is to improve his or her language.

“It’s kind of like the parable of the talents,” Cox says. “We have opportunities to bless lives with language skills, but we can’t if we don’t keep up with our language.”

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 NOVICE
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.

FOREIGN SERVICE POST: It’s probably best for you to stick around home. But don’t worry—maybe a position at the U.S. Embassy in London will open up!

ONE: INTERMEDIATE
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.

FOREIGN SERVICE POST: You’re not ready for international service yet, but keep practicing. Try reading in your second language or finding a cultural event put on by speakers of your second language.

TWO: ADVANCED
Speakers in this category navigate smoothly through past, present, and future tenses and form paragraph-length utterances. If you’re an advanced speaker, the average native speaker understands your speech most of the time.

FOREIGN SERVICE POST: Congratulations! You’ve been assigned abroad as a custodian. And if that doesn’t excite you, the general clerk position is also available. Living abroad will help you improve your skills and lead to interesting job opportunities.

THREE: SUPERIOR
If you’re a superior speaker, you can defend your opinions and discuss abstract concepts. You can speak extemporaneously on technical and societal issues and discuss specific details and ideas. Native speakers may not even notice your minor flaws!

FOREIGN SERVICE POST: Your smooth talking has garnered you the role of Foreign Service Officer. Whether you’re in charge of agriculture or engineering or health, you can work with other countries’ officers to discuss your assigned position.

FOUR: DISTINGUISHED
This category is for the most eloquent of speakers. Some native speakers might not even achieve this status! To receive a distinguished rating, you must be able to change your language to match difficult and nuanced situations. If you’re ready to take on a Crossfire-style TV host and answer antagonistic questions with both grace and firmness, you’re ready for this rating.

FOREIGN SERVICE POST: You’ve reached the pinnacle of foreign service: you’re a diplomat! You are in charge of handling sensitive meetings in which every word matters.

*corresponding rank on ACTFL scale
BYU’s English Language Center imports eager students and exports valuable language skills around the globe.

FROM THE MONGOLIAN STEPPE TO CENTRAL AMERICAN RAINFORESTS 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 NEW ABILITIES TO HELP OTHERS.

“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

BY KIMBERLY A. REID • PHOTOGRAPHS BY BRADLEY SLADE
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 getting 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. “They’re focused on personal needs here,” explains William Cordova, a native Spanish 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.”
BYU’s Dirk Elzinga seeks to both preserve and produce languages.

“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

Translation Challenge

To get an idea of what constructed languages look like, translate the message below that Professor Dirk Elzinga created in Lāmankatóa, one of the two languages he constructed for the Book of Mormon film. Below the message are stems, prefixes, and suffixes—with their translations or grammatical functions—that may be helpful in your work. Good luck! To check your answer, go to http://bit.ly/translation-challenge.

ta tsǎw mekhōškāy in tanóšiwat mekmāq in senín mečtitānwik itan

Stems
- hōš eye
- in (determiner)
- itan at the place
- kāy hear
- māq give, donate
- meč know
- ōš write
- senín quantity of gold sufficient to purchase a measure of grain
- ta if
- tsǎw good, truly

Prefixes
- k- it (direct object)
- me- you (subject)
- tan- (indefinite nonhuman direct object)

Suffixes
- -iwa (passive)
- -tān place of
- -ti (causative)
- -t (noun)
- -wik for
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 been a hobby for Elzinga for most of his life. In high school he read *The Lord of the Rings* and was fascinated by the Elvish languages J.R.R. Tolkien created for the books. After that he began reading about constructed languages and even made up a few of his own.

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 from the native languages he studies, he also took 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 1800s 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.

Elzinga has dedicated his research at BYU to learning about native languages so that he can help to preserve them.
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. Barraclough, 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 of hospital administration (MHA) program. The MHA gave me the specific management, strategic planning, organizational development, and administrative skills needed to run a health-care facility or program. However, the broad yet comprehensive training received in the BYU College of Humanities provided me with an in-depth understanding of organizational and human dynamics—skills without which I would have been much less prepared to do the work I would be assigned and expected to complete over a 45-year career in the field. BYU truly became the foundation upon which I was able to build a wonderful life with my family and so many wonderful children of Father in Heaven.

The BYU College of Humanities provided me with an in-depth understanding of organizational and human dynamics.

The Complete Package

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 relations as interest grew in our efforts. I landed a $10,000 grant to help us secure the facility for our school—even though I had never 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 requested. 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, having 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.

I will forever hold in my heart a love of all things beautiful.

Humanities and Philanthropy
David J. Smith, Spanish Fork, Utah

My BYU education was a profound, meaningful, 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 three majors, each of which was in the College of Humanities. My mind was expanded, my perspectives were enhanced, and my heart was filled with an appreciation of the arts and the role they play in the gospel. I was excited to go to class, where I was taught about literature, music, art, architecture, critical thinking, editing, drama, and many more beautiful forms of expression and communication. My professors were passionate about the topics they tirelessly taught, and they inspired me greatly.

For 14 years, I have worked for the Church with LDS Philanthropies, the department responsible for raising money outside of tithing and fast offerings. My humanities background has helped me immensely in this profession as I relate to people, which is what fundraising is all about. This job also entails a great deal of writing, editing, marketing, communicating, analyzing processes and strategies, innovating, and thinking ahead—all humanities-related skills. Those skills have helped us teach both donors and beneficiaries the value of philanthropy, or literally, “the love of mankind.”

Most important, I will forever hold in my heart a love of all things beautiful. As a father of five children, I try to pass this love to them. We work to expose them to different forms of art. It brings them and us joy. Yes, indeed, my humanities education is something I will always cherish.
**Calm after the Storm**
*Dathan J. Young, Harrisonburg, Va.*

Early in the fall semester of 2001, German professor James K. Lyon, who excelled at helping his students navigate the nuances of a poem’s richness, had already made a favorable impression 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 navigating the intersection of national tragedy and personal suffering. Professor Lyon tenderly 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 personal 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.

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**Light Your Candle**
*Rebekah Lynn Johnson Craig, Canton, Ga.*

I just got off the phone with an elderly neighbor, 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.

“I 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.

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**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 good 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 of a folk hero on campus and beyond because of his disregard of convention (this was the ’70s after all) and due to his loving but sharp jabs at elements of Mormon culture—critiques rooted in powerful insights into the fundamentals of the restored gospel.

One such insight touches upon the theme of this issue of Humanities. While some on campus were debating whether Adam and Eve were historical figures, and, if so, how they had come to be, Nibley pointed to something deeper and more important about the multiple accounts of their 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 Satan’s signature through history. He divides us by gender, race, religion, nationality, wealth—and the list goes on. Wherever we see such division, Nibley taught, we should suspect that 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 1:1–2; Mosiah 1:12).

Learning another’s 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 90:11, 15). There is missionary work to be done, after all. But learning another’s 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. Eggington 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] linguistic and cultural ways. We are most comfortable when we are with ‘our people.’” But this is not the Lord’s way, Eggington reminds us. 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 impulse of the disciple is not division, but at-one-ment. The impulse of the disciple is to reach out to the stranger.

Thomas B. Griffith, a BYU humanities graduate, is a judge on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the D.C. Circuit. He served as BYU general counsel and as legal counsel for the U.S. Senate.
Word Play

By Fred Piscop

ACROSS
1 Hawaiian garland
4 Subjective, objective, or possessive
8 ___-cone, good on a hot summer day
11 Something with a meaning, in semiotics
12 ___Sea (shrinking Asian lake)
13 Cat’s call
14 “Blushing crow” for “crushing blow,” for example
16 Muscat’s land
17 Lacrosse team complement
18 Potpie spheroids
19 What you do on reading days
20 Brigham Young's alphabet
23 Brotherly makers of O Brother, Where Art Thou?
24 ___ dialect (attention-getting nonstandard spelling)
25 “Alive,” in Hebrew
27 End of a cue stick
30 Part of an act
33 Old English letter
34 Elephant suffix
35 Russian news org.
36 Break apart grammatically
37 Electrical adapter letters
38 Antonym, abbr.
39 Madame Curie
40 Mexican coins
41 “The Raven” poet
42 Unrefined metals
43 ___-Magnon man
44 Mob scene
46 Smallest phonetic unit
50 Atlas Shrugged author
51 Second person in prayer
53 Air Force One is one
54 Jukebox selection
55 Manner of speaking distinctive of a particular group
58 Cast a ballot
59 Folksy Guthrie
60 “Dirty” Cajun dish
61 Ear, prefix
62 In the proper manner
63 Play a part

DOWN
1 Serengeti cats
2 Sense of self
3 Rustic stopover
4 Insertion mark
5 Diva’s delivery
6 Teen talk
7 “Slippery” tree
8 Study of words and their meanings
9 Linguist Chomsky
10 Hold title to
11 Graf ___ (WWII battleship)
13 Greedy one’s cry
14 Benchmark, abbr.
15 Blunted sword
19 Invent, as a word
21 Nightfalls, to poets
22 Reuben bread
23 Be concerned
25 Fire hydrant attachment
28 ___-European (language family)
29 Chest muscles, for short
30 Glottal ___, common Utah consonantal sound
31 Guitarist’s accessory
32 Zamenhof’s constructed language
33 Deli scale button
36 Go separate ways
37 Age of time
39 Indicative, imperative, subjunctive, or infinitive
40 Tennis or golf instructor
41 Carp family fish
45 Picnic playwright
46 N’awlins sandwich
47 Bail out of a plane
48 ___ out (allot)
49 Old English letter
50 Word from which other words are derived
51 Drive-___ window
52 Sledding spot
54 English sentence structure, abbr.
55 Bummed out
56 Middle name of “Canada’s Brigham Young,” founder of Cardston
57 Driver’s ID

To check your answers, visit us online at humanities.byu.edu/magazine.
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 1,000 bone-china reproductions of actual London stores, with derelict shops at the bottom and high-end boutiques at the top.