THE BRITISH ISLES:

A Linguist's Playground

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Six weeks in the British Isles—diving into history, language, and culture—transforms students' understanding of language, identity, and connection.

When Americans feign a British accent, they often drop the *r* sound that follows a vowel—in words such as *better* or *Potter*—and might even end their sentences with a triumphant *cheers*. To many Americans, this depiction of British English is all-encompassing; however, the British Isles house numerous varieties of English, with accents differing between neighborhoods and, in some areas, as short a distance as between stores.

Students hear this linguistic variety firsthand on the English Language in British Isles Study Abroad hosted by the Linguistics Department every year. In summer 2024, Associate Professor Jacob Rawlins (Editing and Publishing) codirected the six-week program alongside Associate Professor Chris Rogers (Language Documentation, Linguistic Field Work); Rawlins explains that the program helped undergrads see "how language is preserved as we write it down and as we print it."

For the duration of the program, the group witnessed language preservation and usage in real time, a process Rawlins believes helped "increase students' love of language through their study of publishing." As a result, this program teaches students to value variety in language and editing better than any other study abroad. Most importantly, he says that the program teaches students to prioritize connecting with others and sharing spiritual light.

Photos by Melena Wood (Editing and Publishing '26), Joshua J. Perkey; Map by Adobe Stock

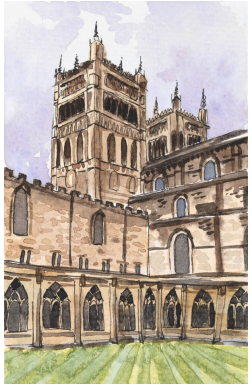
One of a Kind Program, One of a Kind Experience

The courses taught, places visited, and student experiences in each city set this particular study abroad apart from other programs. Unlike most programs based in the United Kingdom, this one takes students to all four nations in the British Isles—England, Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland—and also includes a trip to Ireland. "It's important to go to all five locations, especially when you're looking at the history of English or the varieties of English," Rawlins notes. "Each of those nations represents a different kind of English spoken."

Over the course of the six-week program, students visit a smattering of cities within those nations, such as Belfast, Cardiff, Dublin, Edinburgh, York, and London. Each location provides students unique opportunities to engage with the culture, history, and dialect of the area. For example, they tour Robert Smail's Printing Works in Innerleithen, Scotland, a preserved and operational 19th-century printshop; peruse grand libraries such as the Library of Trinity College Dublin in Ireland; roam Cardiff Castle in Wales; and explore centuries-old walls and architecture throughout York, England.

Experiencing different traditions in the British Isles often taught the students more about language than they could have learned in a textbook. "Language and culture are inextricably linked. You can't study one without the other," Rogers explains. "Instead of learning about language varieties, the students were *immersed* in them."

Durham Castle, England



The tour guide demonstrates vintage printing equipment at Robert Smail's Printing Works in Innerleithen, Scotland.

Battle Abbey, England

Stonehenge, England

Students also study language variations in classes focused on English dialects and the evolution of printing, starting with parchment scrolls and ending with modern-day books. These niche courses make the study abroad optimal for students studying either linguistics or editing and publishing. Rogers notes that the program's biggest benefit for these students lies in its ability to help them "contextualize their 'book learning' with cultural observation and immersion."

As students explore language both inside and outside the classroom, they can hear dialectical differences in real time and develop a more well-rounded understanding of the English language.

Language's Role in Identity

For many of the students in the program, visiting each location highlights more than just language variations between cities and locals. Olivia Kitterman (Editing and Publishing '26), who participated in the summer 2024 program, explains that one experience in particular taught her how language and identity intertwine.

Browsing a cathedral exhibit in Salisbury led Kitterman to meet a woman who spoke with a Geordie accent typical of Northeast England. During their conversation, Kitterman recalls the woman explaining "that she didn't identify with that dialect," despite being born and raised in the area. "That really opened my eyes to the difference between identity and language," Kitterman continues. "It's so much more than just where you're born or what you speak. It's something greater that shows who you are."

This one interaction taught Kitterman that dialect does not equate to identity; each person's story cannot be condensed down to the way they talk—or even the way they write. This realization proved to be a turning point in her studies, helping her develop a deeper compassion for the words or pronunciations speakers use as well as the experiences that make their dialect unique.

Her conversation with the woman in Salisbury also prompted Kitterman to continually consider the many assumptions she makes

regarding language. With her future career in mind, Kitterman can use this newfound understanding of language and identity to improve her work as an editor: "This study abroad means, for me, the difference between studying editing in my own dialect and being an editor for every variety out there."

Connecting with Cultures and History

For Sydney Simpson (Editing and Publishing '25), the study abroad experience prompted her to reflect on the power of connection. From planned meetings to serendipitous run-ins, Simpson believes that recognizing the individuality of accents facilitates the creation of strong and meaningful relationships. "If you can pick up on someone's dialect," she explains, "you instantly form a connection with them because they want to talk about who they are, and they want to talk about where they're from, and they want to share that with you. We all need to connect with people, no matter what we do for our work."

Students learned the importance of building relationships by connecting with the nations and peoples they visited. Undergrads conducted interviews with locals to hear and study different dialects, and in each nation, they dove into the history. These activities provided undergraduates with a more complete view of regional language through the study of English dialects and accents as they exist today and as they existed over the centuries.

Old-town York, with many of its buildings erected hundreds of years ago—some even a thousand years ago—offered the group unique insights on language development. "You can see this history that's just surrounding you in the woodwork, in the walls, in the stones," Rawlins shares. "As far as the language, you see it in the names of the streets and in the slang and the words that people use." For example, street names such as *The Shambles* and *Nedellergate* pay homage to the city's Anglo-Saxon roots and describe the businesses that were once housed there.

Though only in York for a couple of days, the students had time to roam the city's walls, admire street signs, and tour many historic buildings in the area. These interactive learning opportunities taught students in ways traditional classroom study never could: "It's something that we can't bring into the classroom in Provo, not with the same weight as when you go and stand where the Roman emperor walked," Rawlins says, "or go to the cathedral that was built a thousand years ago and is still under construction in some places."

Saint Patrick's Cathedral, Ireland

(TOP LEFT) High tea, York, England

(TOP RIGHT) Students interview locals to learn more about their native dialects in York, England.

(LEFT) Salisbury Cathedral, England

Spiritually Enriched in All Things Temporal

The places and people visited on the trip took up a sizable portion of the program's itinerary; however, it only represents a fraction of the learning and light students acquired. The study abroad taught students to have greater compassion and understanding for those who sound different than they do. For many who attended, these growing experiences also came much more personally.

Rawlins witnessed how deep students' personal experiences were during a testimony meeting held on the group's final night abroad. There, students and faculty shared the most impactful moments of the trip. "This was a powerful spiritual experience at the end of six weeks together, where we shared how we'd grown in light together as a group," he says.

Testimony-building experiences from the 2024 trip came in the form of spiritual support and guidance for Natalie Davis (Linguistics '25)—not just as she traveled from city to city but also as she made plans for the future. "I had numerous experiences where God answered my questions and validated my fears and told me that I was doing the right thing and that I was on the right path."

"As we travel together, we go through hardships together; we give blessings; we pray together; we eat together—all these things that a family does, we do on a study abroad."

—JACOB RAWLINS

Rogers believes that this type of enlightenment comes in large part because of students' willingness to learn and care about new people, cultures, and experiences. "Seeing the world is a spiritually strengthening experience," he says, explaining that his testimony of the Savior's love has grown by traveling and experiencing a new way of living.

One Unit, Countless Memories

Traveling in a group—especially one made up of students and professors—proves to be another source of light. Rawlins explains, "One of my favorite things about a study abroad experience is the community it creates between the students and the faculty. Students and professors become as close as family. As we travel together, we go through hardships together; we give blessings; we pray together; we eat together—all these things that a family does, we do on a study abroad."

The English Language in British Isles program is one of many study abroad opportunities the College of Humanities offers to students; the program's unique ability to intertwine culture, language, and identity while providing undergraduates with valuable skills and experience qualified it to be one of the College's Beacons of Light. "Through this program, you can see how the different people who are there relate to each other, what their history is, and why they use language in the way that they do," Rawlins continues. The program creates opportunities for students to share "not just educational experiences but also important spiritual experiences that can help students *and* professors grow in light and knowledge together."

Watch this Beacons of Light video to see how a student's life was changed by this study abroad experience.

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The Irish countryside