

Language dilemma for native English speakers

In an article in The Guardian, Agnès Poirier argued that, to understand the world better, Britons need to be freed from what she calls “their monolingual misery”. The following two letters comment on this.

While agreeing with the spirit of Agnès Poirier's call for multilingualism (The high road to decadence, December 20), I am not convinced that knowing lots of languages necessarily produces model world-citizens. For one thing, it is perfectly possible to learn a language without gaining a greater understanding of its native speakers and socio-cultural heritage.

Having taught English in several European countries over the past 10 years, I noticed how few of those I taught, in some cases to a highly competent level, knew about or cared for the culture of any English-speaking country. For such students, English opens the gate to international business. And being involved in international business does not necessarily lead to "richer cultural exchanges and lasting peace".

Then there is the problem of which languages native English speakers should learn. If you're from France or Slovakia, you can (and do) learn a couple of foreign languages (English plus one other) and operate quite happily in the globalised world. But which languages do you learn if you're a native English speaker? For there to be true multilingual equity across Europe, British teenagers would have to be fed a drastic diet of 30-odd

languages. And therein lies the problem. Even if we're learning say, Spanish, Russian, Japanese, German, Italian or French, we're not learning Portuguese, Gaelic, Polish, Swahili or Romanian... The rather tragic result is that language tuition fails to meet the criterion of usefulness.

Stuart Wrigley

Egham, Surrey

The excuses for British monolingualism are less persuasive than ever. Being an island is no longer a hindrance. It is snobbery on the part of many Britons that the many foreign languages most regularly encountered - Polish, Punjabi, Gujarati - are not those they would encourage their children to learn.

Despite being statistically one of the most cosmopolitan countries in western Europe, Britain has a relatively closed culture and arguably the most parochial media. As a nation, Britons have an historic responsibility for the English language. If it is not to become some kind of global, cultural bleach, it must remain open to the influences of foreign languages, and all of the resources for this are on our doorstep.

Nicoló Milanese

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Tekst 2 Language dilemma for native English speakers

Hieronder staan zes uitspraken. Drie ervan geven een opvatting weer ófwel van Stuart Wrigley ófwel van Nicoló Milanese.

De andere drie uitspraken geven opvattingen weer die **niet** overeenstemmen met de opvattingen van genoemde personen.

- 1 As most foreigners speak English, there is no need for Britons to speak a foreign language.
- 2 Britons are notoriously incapable of speaking other languages than their own.
- 3 Foreign linguistic influences can only enrich the English language.
- 4 Learning a foreign language does not automatically lead to insight into the cultural aspects of that language.
- 5 The sheer number of foreign languages defeats the purpose of learning a foreign language as a tool for cultural understanding.
- 6 Upper-class Britons tend to look down on foreign immigrants with a poor command of English.

- 3p **2** Noteer het nummer van elke uitspraak, gevolgd door de naam van de persoon aan wie de betreffende uitspraak moet worden toegeschreven. Schrijf “geen van beiden” op, wanneer de betreffende uitspraak aan geen van de twee genoemde personen kan worden toegeschreven.

Bronvermelding

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