



lingoLee – NEWSLETTER

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All proverbs from the [Omniglot](#):

Writing cannot express all words, words cannot encompass all ideas.

- Confucius

The limits of my language are the limits of my universe.

- Ludwig Wittgenstein

Words Inspire

The recently completed work of Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz, that is, the [translation of the entire Talmud](#), one of Judaism's most important texts, from Aramaic to Hebrew, can only be described as a feat inspired by words. According to the article, the project, which included also his own explanations as well as references to rules derived from the text, took “45 years of 16-hour work days.” One must assume that this dedication stemmed from his **love for these words**. “In addition to the full Hebrew translation, Steinsaltz has rendered parts of the Talmud into English, Spanish, French, and Russian.”

Actually, it is probably fair to say that most –if not all-- professionals whose work involves verbal forms and expression find words inspiring. I am a firm believer in the **power of words** and, therefore, I'd like to share here some wonderful examples that demonstrate this amazing gift that words can bestow.

For a wonderfully lyrical essay that [analyzes the power of words](#), I recommend reading [Found in Translation](#), by author Michael Cunningham.

Words inspire thought

Or do they? In other words, can there be thought without words? Is there such a thing as a non-verbal thought? The issue is considered from different angles in the following two discourses.

The question [Does Your Language Shape How You Think?](#) isn't exactly the same as examining the possibility of [Life without Language](#). The former article looks at examples when language constraints “routinely force you to be attentive to certain ...aspects of experience, [these are]...habits of speech [that] are cultivated from the earliest age...[and which create]... habits of *mind* that go beyond language itself, affecting your experiences, perceptions, associations, feelings, memories and orientation in the world.” Then the article asks: “**BUT IS THERE** any evidence for this happening in practice?” The author focuses on the example of “geographical languages”: while in these languages spatial relationships are not attached to the perspective of the speaker (as in: to **my** right), the same meaning (or location) can be conveyed using a different set of terms. The author leads us eventually to conclude that it is the culture that shapes the language.



The more languages you know, the more you are a person.
(from Bulgarian: *Čovekăt e tolkova pāti čovek, kolkoto ezika znae.*)

Belladonna, n.: In Italian a beautiful lady; in English a deadly poison. A striking example of the essential identity of the two tongues.

- Ambrose Bierce

The second title is from a blog on neuroanthropology and it presents a fascinating and up-to-date review, by looking at cases of individuals raised entirely without language. There is no outright, clear-cut, single conclusion, but the discussion is inquisitive and intelligent, as are, by the way, some of the comments to the blog.

Words inspire art

This blog post features ["Words," a video poem](#), which is both short and beautiful! What could be better than a pleasant 3 minute pause in your hectic day to muse about words?

Words inspire curiosity

A young translator who was interviewed on a [Spanish language blog](#) was asked to give the readers advice about and insight into the world of a translator. Here's (my translation of) what he said: "Be curious about everything; I think that's the best advice. I read everything, from shampoo containers to car manuals, from inserts in medicine packages to real estate brochures, anything I can get my hands on. I look for unfamiliar words, I watch movies that don't interest me, I read the subtitles of [TV] series...It's a never-ending list, because we never know when a certain word might come in handy. Therefore, all words are useful. The translator has to have a mind like a sponge. Like children, we always have to be asking questions about anything and everything."

The power of words: inspiring unity?

In his [review of the book *Globish*](#), Roy Blout disagrees with the book's author, Robert McCrum, who apparently welcomes the emergence of the new world language, "Globish." As the title of the review tells us, Globish gives us *One World, One Voice*. Blout, for his part, laments the fact that this development also drains words of their power:

"It's easy to see how Globish benefits emerging go-getters abroad and international corporations. That doesn't mean it will be good for readers who value more interesting English. 'Microsoft + Dow Jones = Globish,' McCrum writes. If that sounds promising to him, we are speaking only roughly the same language."

Interestingly, the article [How translation is changing the world](#) looks at the same phenomenon, that is, globalization through the Internet and digital media, and sees a different process developing. Where Blout sees "One world, one voice," Nataly Kelly sees the ability to communicate in, with and despite multiple voices as the key to creating "one world." "Why is translation so important? Information is power, but the amount of information that is currently inaccessible to the world population is mind-boggling. Much like scientists who discover more each day about the mysteries of the human brain, translation enables us to tap into more of our collective repository of human knowledge."