

## A force of mind

Bilingualism is a state of mind. It affects the way one thinks; it affects the way one moves through the world. When one attains complete fluency in multiple languages, one feels transported to a different level of understanding. It is no wonder that throughout history, humans have frequently learned—out of necessity, or simply out of pure inspiration—to speak new languages: such a learning process confers an extraordinary sense of pride and well-being to anyone who goes through it. Bilingualism is not just about advantage and privilege; it is also about belonging, and a feeling of uplifting understanding.

One of the most important aspects of bilingualism, for me, has to be the community. Or rather, as I should put it, the communities. When one speaks one language, one is forever trapped inside one mentality—one way of thought. One takes for granted one's thought processes, without realizing their own restrictive limits. The result is a state of unknowing complacency that dulls one's life experience without one even realizing it. Bilingualism has, over the years, given me so much insight every problem, every situation I have encountered in our new world culture of diversity and multi-culturalism. As a reader of both French and English newspapers, I have built a strong sense of critical thought, since the exposure I have to information and interactions in both languages has never ceased to broaden my horizons in sometimes contradictory ways.

For people think differently depending on their language they are speaking—and so they understand each other differently in different languages. When one speaks two languages, one can better understand both points of view, both mentalities. Bilingualism is an opening towards biculturalism; in fact, it is hard to disassociate them, for they are inextricably linked. I have learned much about France and its people, though I have always

lived in the United States, because I grew up reading French novels, thereby accessing the personal experience of the French-speaking world. Studying literature in both English and French has brought me farther on the path of intellectual enlightenment than either corpus could have brought me alone, for one begins to perceive the universality of the human condition and the problems we all face as individuals marooned on the personal island that is life. Only by reaching out to each other, and learning to understand each other, can we achieve ultimate happiness, transcending the sea of barriers—mental and physical—which divide us. Learning another language is the least of steps one can take to part those waters.

I therefore contend that bilingualism is not just a state of mind, but also indicates a force of mind. It is bound with critical thought and broad horizons, but also with the possibility to break down the walls which separate humanity into isolated communities, and isolated individuals. Unable to clearly each other through the mirage of division, we can be scared. But I am not, for I can understand. Join me, if you dare...