

Economist at the World Bank



Name: **Michael Corlett**

Profession: **Economist**

Number of years in this line of work: **5**

Native Language: **English**

Other Language(s): **Spanish, Portuguese, some French**

1) What languages do you know? How did you learn them? (At home, at school, etc.)
I speak Spanish fluently, Portuguese proficiently, and am currently studying French. I took Spanish for one semester of college, but did not master the language until I took a 6 week intensive course in the summer. I learned Portuguese in Brazil where I took a month long intensive course and then returned to the United States. Upon return to the United States, I enrolled in a once-a-week course to help maintain my skills. I am currently studying French.

2) What is your profession?

I am an economist at the World Bank. I work in the Caribbean region which includes countries such as the Dominican Republic as well as one French speaking (Haiti).

3) Describe a “typical” day as a World Bank Economist.

How do you use your languages in your work?

A typical day as an economist at the World Bank consists of monitoring economic and advising management of any developments which affect our projects. The “macro” work involves lending or advisory work at the World Bank. I also work a lot with economic data in the region and communicate with Government officials regarding project communication with countries with whom we are not currently active in order to provide services if requested.

The principal way I use my languages is to communicate with colleagues in their own languages over the world and have been able to establish close relationships partly because I can understand their cultures. On a more professional level, I speak Spanish to communicate with the Dominican Republic as well as government officials there. I also read Dominican reports in Spanish. Although I am still learning French, I have had to learn to understand macroeconomic reports and data. Fortunately speaking two other languages and taking French courses have given me sufficient French skills to get by.

4) What do you enjoy about it?

I enjoy getting to know people from other countries and especially seeing that look at the world through their mother tongue.

5) What language do you think in?

English and sometimes Spanish

6) What do you think helped you the most in mastering the foreign/second language?

Definitely, living abroad. I have spent 2 years in Ecuador, 1 year in Mexico, and 5 months in Brazil. Learning a language by living abroad. The hard part is to maintain it back home. It’s amazing how you don’t use it, you lose it.

7) What opportunities have knowing another language provided in your career otherwise?

Languages have played a key role in my career. Without speaking a foreign language I would not have been able to graduate school for a Master’s in International Affairs, nor awarded a Fulbright scholarship. I have been qualified for my current position at the World Bank.

8) If you had the time to learn another language now, what language would you choose?

I am currently learning French because it is one of the most important languages for international development, where Africa has taken on increasing importance. On a personal level, I want to learn French because many opportunities will be available to me. On a personal level, I want to learn French because it is one of the most important languages in the world.

9) How do you think your life would have turned out if you had never learned a second language?
Languages have played such an important part of my life that I cannot imagine without them. Without Spanish I would never have met my wife!

10) In your opinion, are there more career opportunities for people who speak a second language?
Absolutely. In order to take part in the globalizing world in which we live, knowing a second language is a great place to start.

11) What do you think you would be doing if you weren't an economist?
I would probably be working in finance or consulting.

12) What advice would you give to somebody who wants to be a World Language professional? Which languages should they learn?

You cannot master a foreign language in the United States. Study/work/volunteer/step. You will gain much more than a second language.

Spanish and French are two important languages for international development. Romanian, will create immeasurable professional opportunities and personal enrichment.