

AUGUST 2010

◆ Babel, Babylon & Babbling! ◆



The Tower of Babel by Peter Breughel the Elder, 1563

The tale of the Tower of Babel -- in Hebrew: מגדל בבל *Migdal Bavel* and in Arabic: برج بابل *Burj Babil* -- from the Book of Genesis is an "explanation" of why there are so many different languages, as supposedly God created what has been called "a confusion of tongues" at this tower.

Some archaeologists believed they may even have found the foundation of the original Tower of Babel. We do know that Babylonians built great towers called ziggurats in a circular fashion, and this one had a 7-stage stepped ascending staircase (towards communicating with God, perhaps), terminating in a shrine at the top, around which are written the signs of the zodiac.

The Tower of Babel is now merely a figure of speech (not just to linguists!), but it is appropriate precisely because the so-called miraculous confusion of tongues at Babel might provide a meaningful explanation for the phenomena of (so many) human languages in the world, which is why we're in business to serve you. And we know them all at Translation Aces!

◆ **FEATURE** ◆ Lingua Quiz!

- 1 Which foreign language has won the most Oscars?  
(a) Italian (b) French (c) Chinese
- 2 Which Native American language is spoken by the largest US population?  
(a) Cherokee (b) Navajo (c) Cheyenne
- 3 How many of these 6 countries have a predominant language named something other than after the country's name?  
United States, Israel, India, Canada, Cuba, Sri Lanka (Ceylon)

ANSWERS:

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| 1 | (a) 12 Oscars were awarded for Best Foreign Films in Italian!  |
| 2 | (b) Only a few tongues, like Navajo and Cherokee, can claim more than 50,000 speakers; Navajo is the most widely used, spoken by about 150,000 people in the US. |
| 3 | ALL 6 OF THEM!   |
- US: English, not "American"  
 Israel: Hebrew, not "Israeli"  
 India: Hindi [and about 4,000 others], not "Indian"  
 Canada: English and Canadian French  
 Cuba: Spanish, not "Cuban"  
 Sri Lanka: Sinhalese and Tamil