



Palms Australia

Learning language

Orientation Course – Day 4

10 January 2022





Overview – workshop objectives

- Develop an understanding of how languages encode cultural orientations to the world
- Consider the role language-related issues may play in engaging with communities
- Develop awareness of some key processes in, and techniques for learning another language





Learning language - session outline

State the significance of Asian Pacific Heritage Month

- The importance of human language to human culture
- What languages do we know?
- Why learn another language?

- Morning tea break -

- The importance of non-verbal communication
- Techniques and tips for learning a new language
- Practical resources





The importance of human language to human culture

Linda Light, a lecturer in linguistic and cultural anthropology at California State University defines culture as:

- 1) An integrated system of mental elements (beliefs, values, worldview, attitudes, norms), the behaviors motivated by those mental elements, and the material items created by those behaviors;
- 2) A system shared by the members of the society;
- 3) 100 percent learned, not innate;
- 4) Based on symbolic systems, the most important of which is language;
- 5) Humankind's most important adaptive mechanism, and
- 6) Dynamic, constantly changing.





The importance of human language to human culture

- Language is crucially important to all human cultures.
- Human language can be considered a culture's most important feature since complex human culture could not exist without language and language could not exist without culture.
- They are inseparable because language encodes culture and provides the means through which culture is shared and passed from one generation to the next.
- Humans think in language and do all cultural activities using language.
- It surrounds our every waking and sleeping moments, although we don't usually think about its importance.
- Humans don't often think about their immersion in culture either, much as fish don't think much about the water that surrounds them.



Language conveys meaning

- All human languages are symbolic systems that make use of symbols to convey meaning.
- A symbol is anything that serves to refer to something else but has a meaning that cannot be guessed, because there is no obvious connection between the symbol and its referent.
- For example, many cultures assign meanings to certain colors, but the meaning for a particular color may be completely different from one culture to another.
- Western cultures use the color black to represent death, but in China it is white that symbolizes death. White in the West symbolizes purity and is used for brides' dresses, but in China the bride usually wears red, the color of good luck.
- Words in languages are symbolic in the same way. The word **key** in English is pronounced exactly the same as the word **ki** in Japanese, meaning "tree." We must learn the language in order to know what any word means.



What languages do we know?

Work in small groups

- 1) What languages have you learned?
- 2) How did you learn them?
- 3) What was that experience like for you?
- 4) How did you overcome communication barriers?

Share with the whole group



Why learn another language?

Work in pairs

- 1) Think about 10 reasons why learning another language is important
- 2) Consider the role language-related issues may play in engaging with communities
- 3) Write down your ideas
- 4) Share your thoughts and ideas with the pair next to you
- 5) Share with the group



Language learning principals



- Language learning is about **relationships**
- It means becoming **part of a community**
- It involves **participation** and **practice**
- You **will** make mistakes / You **will** plateau
- You need **thousands of hours** in the language to become bilingual
- However, **attitude** and **motivation** are more important than aptitude
- **Patience, good will** and a sense of **humour** are vital





How can we communicate well?

- Be **welcoming / friendly**
- Be **kind and respectful**
- Be **present**
- **Really listen** and **seek to understand**
- **Clarify** what is being said / **seek feedback**
- Be **patient**
- What else helps?



**SUCCESSFUL CROSS CULTURAL
COMMUNICATION TAKES WORK**

Morning tea break



How can we communicate without using words?



Group discussion

- What else can we use to communicate what we want to say?
- Non-verbal behaviors are often unconsciously performed and go unnoticed
- unless someone violates the cultural standards for them!
- What happens when communication breaks down?
- Do you have an experience to share?



The importance of non-verbal communication

All human cultures have not only verbal languages, but also non-verbal systems that vary from one culture to another. Let's look at the three most important systems:

1) **Kinesics** is the term used to designate all forms of human **body language**, including gestures, body position and movement, facial expressions, and eye contact.

- Although all humans can potentially perform these in the same way, different cultures may have different rules about how to use them. For example, eye contact for Americans is highly valued as a way to show we are paying attention and as a means of showing respect.
- But for the Japanese, eye contact is usually inappropriate, especially between two people of different social statuses. The lower status person must look down and avoid eye contact to show respect for the higher status person.
- Facial expressions can convey a host of messages, usually related to the person's attitude or emotional state. Hand gestures may convey unconscious messages, or deliberate messages that can replace or emphasize verbal ones.

(L Light)



The importance of non-verbal communication

2) **Proxemics** is the study of the **social use of space**, specifically the distance an individual tries to maintain around himself in interactions with others.

- The size of the “space bubble” depends on a number of social factors, including the relationship between the two people, their relative status, their gender and age, their current attitude toward each other, and above all their culture.
- In some cultures, such as in Brazil, people typically interact in a relatively close physical space, usually along with a lot of touching. Other cultures, like the Japanese, prefer to maintain a greater distance with a minimum amount of touching or none at all. If one person stands too far away from the other according to cultural standards, it might convey the message of emotional distance.
- If a person invades the culturally recognized space bubble of another, it could mean a threat. Or it might show a desire for a closer relationship. It all depends on who is involved.

(L Light)



The importance of non-verbal communication

3) **Paralanguage** refers to those **characteristics of speech** beyond the actual words spoken. These include the features such as: pitch, loudness, and tempo or duration of the sounds.

- Varying pitch can convey any number of messages: a question, sarcasm, defiance, surprise, confidence or lack of it, impatience, and many other often subtle connotations. An utterance that is shouted at close range usually conveys an emotional element, such as anger or urgency.
- A word or syllable that is held for an undue amount of time can intensify the impact of that word. For example, compare “It’s beautiful” versus “It’s beauuuuu-tiful!” Often the latter type of expression is further emphasized by extra loudness of the syllable, and perhaps higher pitch; all can serve to make a part of the utterance more important.
- Other paralinguistic features that often accompany speech might be a chuckle, a sigh or sob, deliberate throat clearing, and many other non-verbal sounds like “hm,” “oh,” “ah,” and “um.”

(L Light)

Vietnamese **Tiếng Việt**
Let's give it a try!



Techniques and tips for learning a new language

- Set your language goals...
- Start small and make a commitment...
- Find a learning style that works for you...
- Investigate different resources...
- Learn common vocabulary...
- Practice speaking daily...
- Engage with the culture...
- Don't be afraid to make mistakes...



Be realistic...
Start with short term goals
and
build slowly



Practical resources

- Formal language study
- Self-teaching programs
- Language Apps / Online study
- Podcasts / Google translate 😊
- Personal notebook, dictionaries, games
- TV, radio, newspapers, local books
- Camera, digital recording device
- **People** – everyone in the community!



Slowly, slowly...
Shwayah shwayah...
Aahista aahista...
You can do it!





How can we create opportunities for learning language in our day?

Group discussion

- Think about everyday activities that provide opportunities to engage in and learn language
- What are the simplest words and phrases that will be helpful when communicating for the first time?
- What can you do to help yourself remember what you've learned so far?
- How does it feel when you're able to speak a few new words?

Willingness to learn goes a long way



and is deeply appreciated

References / Attributions



Palms Australia

Produced by Palms Australia, 2023 ©

Text on slides 4, 5, 6, 12, 13 and 14 adapted from:

- Light, L. (2020) 'Language', in *Perspectives: An Open Introduction to Cultural Anthropology*. 2nd edn. by Nina Brown, Thomas McIlwraith, Laura Tubelle de González (2020) American Anthropological Association, pp. 71-74
<https://perspectives.americananthro.org/>
- Licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Non-Commercial 4.0 International License, except where otherwise noted. <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>

Image sources (free for non-commercial use, in compliance with DMCA):

- Slide 2 - flags of the world heart <https://www.cleanpng.com/png-flags-of-the-world-world-language-gallery-of-sover-3425550/>
- Slide 7 - globe with people speaking languages: <https://www.pngegg.com/en/png-ewvmm>
- Slide 8 – globe sphere: <https://www.pngwing.com/en/free-png-iabuj>
- Slide 9 - language speech bubbles: <https://www.pngwing.com/en/free-png-dmacv>
- Slide 10- cross cultural communication takes work <https://www.pngwing.com/en/free-png-yzqil>
- Slide 11 - teacup image: <https://freepngimg.com/png/34636-tea-cup-transparent-image> Licenced under a Creative Commons Attribution-Non-Commercial 3.0 license <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/3.0/>