

# Learning the Language of Our Patients

Mark Wardle, DO, MIH, FAAFP



INSTITUTE FOR  
INTERNATIONAL  
MEDICINE

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# Session Objectives:

- Discuss the relationship between language and culture
- Evaluate how language learning can foster improved communication and connection
- Analyze various solutions to perceived obstacles for language learning
- Explore resources for enhancing language learning

*“The limits of my language are the limits of my world” - Ludwig Wittgenstein*



# Language and Culture Definitions

- Culture: a system beliefs, customs, values, and behaviors shared by particular group of people
  - Groups often bound by place, time, society, or other shared characteristics
  - Culture functions as a way of interpreting, organizing, and understanding their experiences
- Language: a system of words, gestures, and/or written symbols by which we express ourselves.
  - Language functions as an expression of thoughts, feelings, and identity.
  - Heavily influenced by culture

- adapted from Britannica.com



# The Language-Culture Connection

Rita Mae Brown – Language is the road map of a culture

- “Language reveals the culture of its speakers. The work of learning a language effectively involves learning something of the culture simultaneously, and one of the joys [is] to discover aspects of the people’s way of life and thought reflected in the language.”
  - J. Kirton – Some thoughts on Yanyuwa Language and Culture
    - Nouns and conjugations denoting respect vs familiarity, even classes & subclasses
    - Special vocabulary used only by certain groups (Yanyuwa men; youth)
    - Importance (or not) of time, location, emotions, etc.

# Language Learning & Cultural Understanding

Since Language is so heavily influenced by culture, learning that language gives you special insights into that culture and a new way to look at life:

- *To learn a language is to have one more window from which to look at the world – Chinese Proverb*
- *A different language is a different vision of life - Federico Fellini*
- *If we spoke a different language, we would perceive a somewhat different world - Ludwig Wittgenstein*
- *You live a new life for every new language you speak - Czech Proverb*
- *Learning another language is not only learning different words for the same things, but learning another way to think about things - Flora Lewis*
- *To have another language is to possess a second soul - Charlemagne*



# Issues with Language Discordance

- Limited Language Proficiency leads to:
  - Less medical services
  - More chronic diseases
  - Worse outcomes
  - Decreased Trust
- Language discordance between providers and patients:
  - Lead to more miscommunication
  - Reduced satisfaction (for patients & providers)
  - Decreased quality
  - Decreased safety
- Improved with:
  - Interpretation (even Google Translate)
  - Even more if direct through bilingual provider



# Better language...Better Connection?

- In one study of Spanish speaking patients with primary English speaking providers who had varied Spanish levels:
  - Better Spanish =
    - More connected to patient
    - More welcoming and better at addressing concerns
    - Lower frustration (for everyone)
    - More shared decision making
    - Better Satisfaction for all
    - More cultural awareness
    - Better understanding of limits of communication
      - i.e. lower levels were less likely to think they may have missed something
  - Perceived warmth, empathy not related to language level



# Other Benefits of Language Learning

- Improved Cognitive Function
  - Improved Executive Function and delaying dementia onset
    - Even those starting after 65! (benefits seen after 16 weeks of using Duolingo app)
- Improved Emotional and Social Wellbeing
  - New social networks
  - Improved Self-esteem
- More fun!



# A little goes a long way!

- “Learning a local language is of incalculable worth...learning just a few words and phrases can prove very useful, for it communicates respect.”<sup>6</sup>
  - Nicholas Comninellis
- “...the most compelling reason to learn the language of another land is because of the symbolic significance... the attempt to speak with people of a foreign country is an acknowledgement of their humanity and individual worth, a sign that we take them and their concerns seriously.”<sup>6</sup>
  - Craig Storti as quoted by N.C.
- If you talk to a man in a language he understands, that goes to his head. If you talk to him in his own language, that goes to his heart.
  - Nelson Mandela

# But what about...

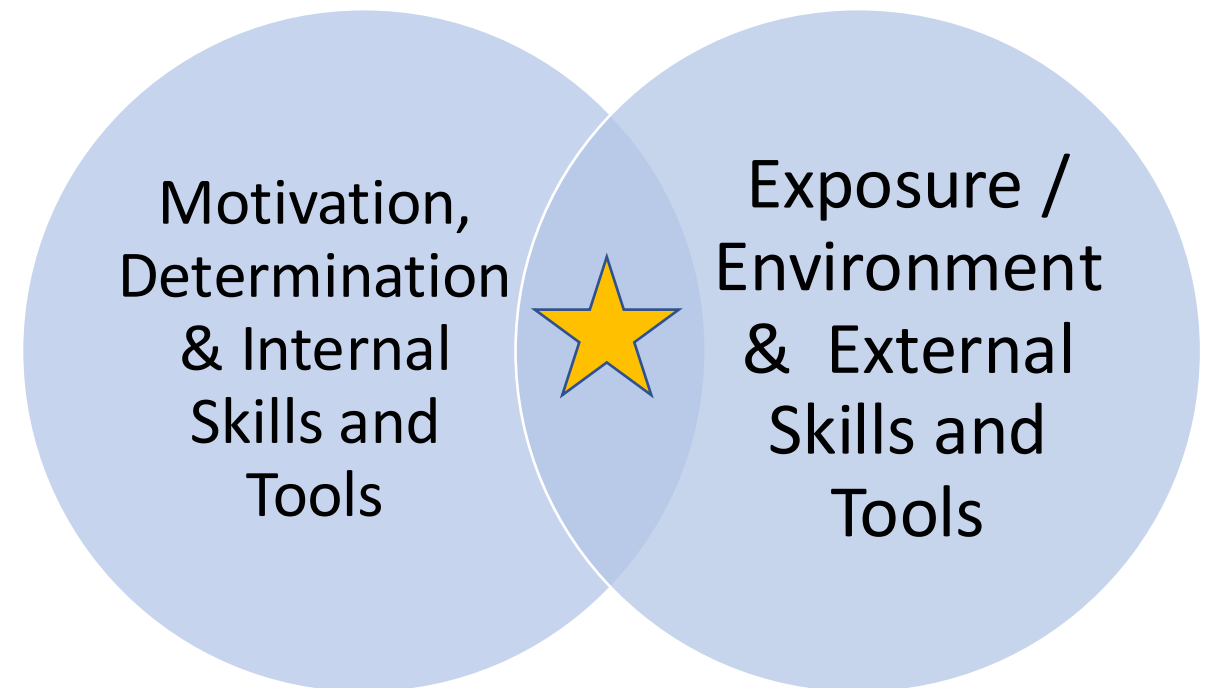
## Obstacles in Language Acquisition

- I was no good at languages in High School
  - Does not correlate well with ability now
    - Different Motivation, Different Purpose...we will discuss this more!
- I'm too old
  - Brain is AMAZING. Multiple studies show ability to learn late adulthood...with benefits!
- I'll never be fluent
  - That's Okay. The goal is Communication and Connection...not Perfection
- I don't have time
  - Slow and steady...Consistency beats Intensity!
- My Accent is horrible
  - Amy Chua – “Do you know what a Foreign Accent is? It's a sign of Bravery.”



# What do we need to learn a language?

- Internal:
  - Inherent cognitive capabilities
  - Determination and/or Motivation
  - Prior knowledge & experience
- External:
  - Available time
  - Study Tools
  - Your Environment/Exposure



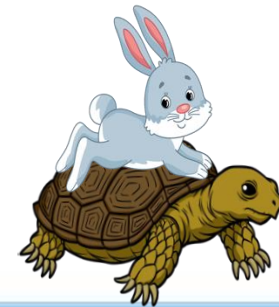
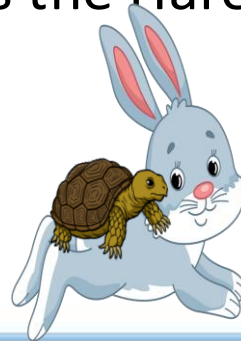
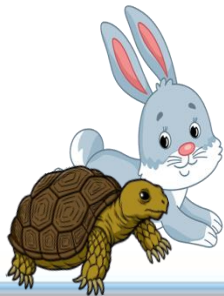
# Strengthening the Internal Resources

- Inherent cognitive capabilities and prior knowledge/experience
  - Start where you are
    - Humility
  - Grow
    - Growth Mindset. Learn how YOU learn. Try out new techniques.
    - Every effort increases our abilities.
- “That which we persist in doing becomes easier for us to do—not that the nature of the thing is changed, but that our power to do is increased.” - Ralph Waldo Emerson



# Strengthening the Internal Resources

- Determination vs Motivation...what's the difference?
  - Motivation is typically a feeling, an initial energy, or surge
    - What you want to do powered by how you feel
  - Determination is a decision, a plan, an internal drive to push forward
    - What you need to do powered by your purpose
- In Aesop's Fables, Motivation is the Hare, and Determination is the Tortoise



# Enhancing your External Resources

## - Available time

- Schedule it out and be consistent
- 5 mins a day is better than 5 hours once
- “It’s not what we do once in a while that shapes our lives. It’s what we do consistently.” – Anthony Robbins
- “We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit.” - Aristotle

# Creating a Language Learning Habit – Strengthening that Internal Resource!

- Make It Obvious
  - Commit and Have Clear Reminders (calendar or to-do list, A set time or trigger, make a sign or post-it note in your office, set an alarm, etc.)
- Make it Attractive
  - Pair it with a positive action (favorite snack, with a favorite friend, favorite place, etc.)
  - Partner up (friend, family, colleague, tutor, interest group, etc.)
- Make it Easy
  - Free, readily available, easy to use, simple resource
  - Keep it small – 1 small lesson/day, 1 word a day, one video lesson/month, etc.
- Make it Satisfying
  - Track it / Make it a game
  - Use it with friends/colleagues
  - Reward yourself

(Adapted from Atomic Habits, Clear J.)<sup>5</sup>



# Examples:

## MAKE IT:

- OBVIOUS
- ATTRACTIVE
- EASY
- SATISFYING

- I will

- do one short lesson on my app each day (Easy)
- while I enjoy my morning Smoothie (Attractive)
- and allow notifications so it reminds me (Obvious)
- Every time I complete a level, I will celebrate with a special ethnic treat or meal! (Satisfying)
- After completing X # of levels...I will plan a trip to... (Really Satisfying)

- I will

- learn one greeting per week (easy)
- post it on my work computer (obvious)
- use it with each patient I see that speaks that language (Attractive)
- After I learn 10 new phrases, I will watch that special movie (Satisfying)



# Enhancing your External Resources

## - Your Environment/Exposure

- Travel to a place that speaks that language
- Listen to Music, Podcasts, Radio, etc.
- Watch Movies (subtitles in foreign language or reversed!)
- Read Books in that language
- Schedule a Language Session with friends/associates
- Restaurants or Recipes
- Learn about the history and culture



# Enhancing your External Resources

## - Study Tools

- There is A LOT out there:
  - In Person or Online Classes, Immersion Courses
    - Typically through local college/university
  - One-on-One Tutoring
    - Local College or business, online (italki, Preply, Verbling, Live Lingua, etc.), friends, neighbors, colleagues
  - Books
    - Formal Language learning books
    - Informal books in that language (Children books anyone?)
  - CD's/YouTube/Podcasts
  - APPS
    - Rosetta Stone, Babbel, Duolingo, Praktika, Pimsleur, Mondly, Mem Rise, etc.



# Be Realistic and Tailor Your Learning

- What do you NEED to know?
  - Pleasantries: Greetings, Farewells, Please, Excuse me, Thank you, etc.
  - Task Based Vocab
    - Bathroom
    - Directions
    - Ordering food
    - Money exchange
    - Doing an examination
    - etc.
  - AVOID:
    - Jargon
    - Slang
    - Idioms



# Make it Fun

- Find a Friend
- Translate a favorite song or poem
- Write a story/experience down in the new language
  - Or instructions or common patient education
    - Or make ChatGPT do it for you!
- Play a Game in the new language
- Compete with others
- Have a “Language Night Party”



# Kidspiration: Be like a little child

- Surround yourself with the language (exposure)
- Communicate at all costs...don't be shy or nervous or scared...jump in!
  - You can't be just receptive (read/listen)...you need to be productive (speak/write)
  - Can't communicate the way you want...find a different way!
- Be patient with yourself
  - Make mistakes and celebrate the small victories
- Be curious
  - Listen, Explore, Ask questions
- Be creative
  - Find fun ways to practice



# Wrapping Up...

- *“The limits of my language are the limits of my world”*
  - Expand your language skills, Expand your world
- Consistency > Intensity ... make it a habit!
- Learning a Language is about  
COMMUNICATION & CONNECTION...not perfection.
- As our Communication & Connection improve without patients, so do the outcomes!

- Ludwig Wittgenstein





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