

Consultant Handbook Linguistics

**Highline College
Des Moines, Washington
Writing Center 2017**

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PURPOSE –

On Speaking and Cultural Terms defines linguistics as, “the study of language as a system of communication.” In writing centers, we know that at the foundation of any good written work, is the ability to communicate ones words and thoughts in a way that is understandable to a larger audience. However, writing centers in the past decade have seen a great shift in the needs of students. We are seeing more and more non-native, international students utilizing writing centers for help. However, often these students are needing more than traditional writing center practices have offered; what they are often needing is assistance in better grasping the linguistics of English. *On Speaking and Cultural Terms* also lists the foundational skills of full language fluidity as being able to “listen, read, write, and speak” in the said language. As writing centers, pedagogy is beginning to change in an attempt to better meet all four of these areas for students.

That is where the linguistics handbook comes into play! To date, this handbook includes 10 student interviews from our multilingual consultants. Each student was asked a number of questions including, but not limited to: experiences learning multiple languages, how working in the writing center has broadened their skills, the major differences or challenges they see students from their language facing in learning English, and their best advice to fellow consultants and consultees.

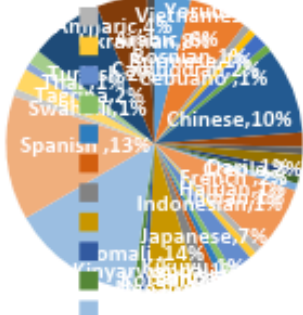
In looking to future quarters, my hope is that the handbook will continue to grow and expand. While my focus so far has been on multi-lingual consultants, in spring quarter, I plan to draft out new questions and interview the other half of our staff (native-English speakers) as well

as any knew multilingual students that we hire on. Perhaps I may also be able to interview some frequenting consultees to learn their language learning experiences. My hope, is for this handbook to be as all-inclusive as possible of the dynamics in writing centers when it comes to language. As of now, the handbook is much more personal experience than research based. My thought process on this, was that in having this handbook be a resource for consultants, it would be more beneficial to read about actual people and their language learning experiences, than isolated language concepts.

Beside the interviews, the handbook currently includes several charts and synopses of the data that has been collected on student languages to date from the past two quarters.

(Courtesy of Karina and I's efforts).

(English excluded)



A clearer image of the graph can be viewed in our excel file

* ENGLISH is EXCLUDED because the number of speakers seems unrealistically enormous. This may be due to a misinterpretation of the language question during registration; it says, "The first language you learned?" This can be interpreted as the first language studied, not acquired as a native language during childhood. In addition, students may be off-put by the question and fear judgment for their native language. We left out English to display a more accurate representation of our current data until we can right the discrepancy. On the next page, is a chart where ENGLISH is INCLUDED. Below is a more condensed listing of our most popular writing center languages to date.

WC Languages based on popularity

1. Somali
2. Ukrainian/Russian
3. Spanish
4. Chinese
5. Japanese
6. Vietnamese
7. Arabic
8. Amharic

(very similar language structure)

Chart of above graph with English Included

Frequency of Languages at Highline Writing Center							
Sep. 9, 2016 - Mar. 22, 2017							
Amaharic	5	Indian	1	Saho	1		
Arabic	8	Indonesian	1	Samoaan	1		
Bosnian	1	Japanese	9	Somali	18		
Burmese	1	Josphyoo	1	Spanish	17		
Cambodian	2	Kikayu	1	Swahili	1		
Cebuano	1	Kinyarwanda	1	Tagrina	1		
Chinese	12	Korean	3	Thai	1		
Creole	2	Nepali	1	Tigrigna	3		
Dari	1	Oromo	1	Tigrinya	1		
English	90	Pashtu	1	Turkish	2		
French	2	Punjabi	6	Ukranian	10		
Haitian	1	Russian	7	Vietnamese	7		
				Yoruba	1		

In the Writing Center, we feel that it is important to keep track of the first language data of the consultees we serve. As a multilingual college and center, we pride ourselves on being aware of the needs of students, and tracking the commonality of student languages can help direct us to areas of focus. Especially in looking to hire new consultants and advertise language needs on campus, it is good to know what sorts of languages are especially prevalent at various times. In keeping records over many quarters, we hope that trends of patterns will emerge, and we will begin to see a wider, broader picture of student's first

languages. Then as a center, we can begin to think about how best to meet students where they are, and provide resources to aid in every student's written (and linguistic) progress.

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“Encourage students to listen, read and write, so that they can build on their skills every day.”

Nadia

Age: 18
Quarters in the Center: 1
Ukrainian, English, Russian

Nadia came to the United States when she was just one year old, and her parents and siblings all spoke Russian. Being the 11th out of 12 children who were all older when they immigrated to America, Nadia was young enough that she learned Ukrainian from her family, but grew up in American schools learning English as well. Most of her older siblings, however, had to take ESL classes in order to learn English. Growing up, while her family taught her Ukrainian, Nadia watched English T.V. shows and was largely surrounded by people speaking English.

Nadia considers herself fluent in Ukrainian and English, but says that she can understand about 50% of everything she hears in Russian. However, Nadia is interested in continuing to improve her Russian understanding. Nadia said that she also took Spanish in high-school and found it somewhat similar to Ukrainian and English.

Nadia said that she initially found it hard to switch her thinking process when going between English and Ukrainian. She also explained that while she is a fluent speaker in Ukrainian, she only has remedial reading and limited writing skills in Ukrainian. In her everyday life, Nadia speaks Ukrainian at church and with her parents. In all other circumstances, she speaks English.

In working in the writing center, Nadia hasn't had any sessions in Ukrainian. She commented that there seems to be more Russian immigrants than Ukrainian at Highline. As a consultant, she has learned just how different languages can be. For example, in Ukrainian, there are no articles and in general, the language is more grammar-orientated than anything else. There are also different endings in Ukrainian and Spanish, depending on if you are referring to someone who is male or female, but this is not the case in English. Also in Ukrainian, the subject of a sentence is determined by its conjugation, NOT by its placement in the sentence, unlike English.

In going between Ukrainian and English, the structure of wordings can be hard to grasp, primarily because of the switch in article use. The Ukrainian language itself has Greek roots, and has spread apart into many Slavic lineages.

Nadia's advice to consultants is to compare and contrast how English could be different from their language, but encourage them that they shouldn't be afraid to speak in English and use a balance of both when they are first learning. Her advice to consultees would be to try and expose themselves to the English language as much as possible.

“Give lots of examples and then ask consultees to reciprocate an example back to you, to show they understand.”

Renata

Age: 16

Quarters in the Center: 1
Ukrainian, English, Russian

Renata was born in Ukraine, but moved to the United States when she was just three years old. Growing up, she was taught Ukrainian by her family, but upon coming to the U.S. and being enrolled in American schools, she soon became just as fluent in English. When she was 10 years old, Renata attended Ukrainian school to keep up with her reading and writing skills. Her family did not want her to forget her Ukrainian knowledge while attending school in English. After two years of attending Ukrainian school in addition to schooling in English, Renata was at the same fluency level in speaking, reading and writing for both languages.

Besides learning Ukrainian and English, Renata was taught the basics of Russian from her grandparents and some friends, alongside watching Russian cartoons. When she first started school in America, Renata was in ESL for her first year to learn the basics of English grammar. After that initial year, she was placed into regular English classes. In her day-to-day life, Renata

speaks Ukrainian at home with her parents, as well as at church. She speaks English with her siblings and at school.

Renata explained that what sets her apart the most, is her accent change. Her Russian accent is not as pronounced as her Ukrainian accent. Overall, Renata can speak fairly well in Russian, but is not able to write or read. In public school, she also took Spanish for three-years as a required foreign language, but says that she doesn't remember a whole lot.

In going between Ukrainian and Russia, Renata explained that some words and phrases said in one language can't always be translated properly in another language. In English, for example, ways of addressing someone formally or informally are not as specific as they would be when addressing someone in Ukrainian. For example, there are certain words or phrases used to address one's elders and a whole other set of words or phrases to address someone who is a friend. This is not the case in English. Also in Ukrainian, the sentence structuring is often times the reverse of how you would structure the same sentence in English.

Though Renata has not had the opportunity to speak Ukrainian in any of her sessions, she explained that before working here, she never realized just how diverse the center really was. In her advice to consultants, Renata said that it's very important to get consultees to interact, and actively participate together with you in the session. It's also important to do your best to see from their language perspective and tell ESL consultees especially, to look at their language and ask themselves what makes English different. In this way, they will be able to learn more, and move forward in their understanding of English.

“Don’t translate, but be able to *think* in English.”

Ivanna

Age: 30

Quarters in the Center: 4
Ukrainian, Russian, English

Ivanna learned Ukrainian growing up. She had no problems learning the language because she was constantly immersed in the environment from a young age and learned it in its ‘natural space’. She also learned Russian from hearing it spoken when she moved to another part of Ukraine, where Russian was predominantly spoken. She never took any official Russian classes, but just learned it from hearing it spoken. She was ‘thrown in’ so to speak, and learned the language in the process of living in the area.

While she was in Russia, Ivanna learned basic English. However, she said that there was not a strong amount of good English teachers, so she felt that the instruction she received was both limited and inaccurate even, in some regards.

Ivanna came to the U.S. three years ago and enrolled in the Caplan language school to work on her English. When she first began, she was placed in level four. However, she felt that she didn't understand a lot for the first 2-3 weeks. In asking Ivanna what she found to be the greatest difficulty learning English in America, she said that it was forgetting the wrong rules she had been taught in her home country.

Ivanna noted that some of the logistical challenges in learning English are centered on lexis (vocabulary), tenses, and articles. Specifically with articles, it can take students a great deal of time and effort to understand, because in both Ukrainian and Russian, they do not exist. Vocabulary can also be difficult, specifically knowing in which cases to use which words. Between Russian and Ukrainian, the grammar is similar, but the vocabulary is where the main differences lie.

Ivanna sees articles and perfect tenses as two of the biggest challenges in learning English from Ukrainian. She also said that the view of academic writing between Ukraine and English is very different in its structure, citations, and overall view of what 'good writing' is. English writing is stricter in structure, in Ivanna's experience.

In her day-to-day life, Ivanna speaks Ukrainian at home with her mother, friends, and at church. She speaks only Russian with her husband. Everywhere else, she speaks English. Ivanna also explained that when it comes to reading and writing on familiar topics, she uses Ukrainian and Russian. However, for certain topics (interior design for example) she prefers writing and reading in English because she feels that the concepts are easier to explain using English. With things like the news, she switches to whatever language the news is referring to. "It really

depends on the situation,” Ivanna explained, when referring to at what times she prefers using each language.

Ivanna has a two-year old daughter, and so I asked her if she was planning on teaching her daughter both Ukrainian and English. Ivanna said she felt it best to expose her to just one language at a time. Otherwise, Ivanna felt that her daughter might confuse the languages and assume that they are not separate, but just one language with different ways of saying the same thing. She plans on teaching her daughter Ukrainian first, and then Russian. Her daughter will be attending school in America, so she knows that it won’t be long until she learns English just from being in that environment.

In working at the writing center, Ivanna said that she has seen herself make many improvements in her own abilities. She told me about a recent time doing workshop revisions where she pulled out her old essays from English 101, remembering how good she had thought they were back when she was taking the class. However, in seeing them then, she realized all the mistakes she made and understand the improvements she had since made in the language. In past quarters, Ivanna said she used to have a lot of Russian sessions, and encouraged the students to speak in English. “It can be hard for students to interpret what they read, but translation will not help. Students must learn to *think* in English,” Ivanna explained. If, however, students are having a hard time to remember and understand terminology, then Ivanna said she would explain what the concept or idea means in Russian.

Ivanna’s greatest advice to consultants is to think from the consultee’s perspective instead of your own. Try to understand why each person struggles with what they do. Asking a lot of

questions is a good way to do this. For consultees, Ivanna suggests that it's better to think from the language you are learning, and to not rely so much on translating. It's important that students recognize that every language is different.

“Students have to *see* the difference to make a change”

Karina

Age: 19

Quarters in the Center: 6

Russian, English, Ukrainian

Though Russian is Karina's native language, she did not grow up learning it institutionally. As a child, she acquired her understanding at home. From kindergarten through 2nd grade, Karina took ESL classes through the American school system to learn English. Though she was born in Belarus, she has lived in American her whole life.

When Karina first began school in America, she had no idea what anyone was saying. By the time she was in 3rd grade, however, she considered herself to be pretty fluent. But in 5th grade, she started going to Russian classes once a week for grammar because being immersed in an English-speaking setting in school, had her lagging behind in Russian. When she was in the 7th grade, she started learning Spanish, (just as a typical foreign language class required for school). Karina took Spanish for a total of 4 years (7th-10th) before coming to Highline. From there, she took a class or two at Highline before doing her own self-studying. All in all, Karina has been studying Spanish for about 6 years.

In our conversations, she explained that if she had to compare her fluency levels across the three languages, her reading fluency would be about the same for both Spanish and Russian; however her knowledge of Spanish grammar is better than Russian. Since Russian is her native language, for speaking purposes, she can talk more fluently in Russian than in Spanish. She referred to herself as an ‘eye learner’ for Spanish, and an ‘ear learner’ for Russian. And for Ukrainian, all of her knowledge was observed orally from hearing what was said around her.

All in all, Karina learned the languages she knows from a combination of parents, teachers/school and friends – basically she internalized everything she knows from being in those different settings. Karina said that learning English was not hard because it became internalized through constantly being surrounded by it in school, and she learned it at a pretty young age. In Karina’s words, “you just hear things, and you pick them up!”

A funny story Karina shared with me was that when she began learning Spanish, she was one year behind everyone else, so the first week was so confusing and she didn’t know what the

teacher was saying. Soon, however, she not only caught up, but surpassed everyone else in the class. She said that having a background in Russian really helped her in learning Spanish.

Nowadays, the times she speaks Russian are at home and at church where the sermons are in Russian. Otherwise, Karina usually speaks English at school (if she is not talking in Russian at the writing center! :) And she tries to practice her Spanish speaking whenever she can.

“Linguistics is my hobby!” Karina told me.

In working at the Writing Center, Karina uses her languages a lot. The biggest thing in keeping Spanish up for her has been speaking it in sessions. Working on her conversational skills with consultees has been extremely helpful! “It’s a two-way learning street a lot of the time,” Karina said. “I help them with their English, and they help me with my Spanish.”

She told me that what she sees as the biggest mistake for students, is when they try to use their native language structure to write in English. “You just can’t cross over. You have to actually understand the structure of the language you’re learning,” she explained. For example, Karina told me that in Russian, there are no articles, but in English and Spanish, there are. And then even between English and Spanish, the use of articles is different.

It is easier to directly translate from Spanish to English, much easier than for Russian which has a completely different structure. For example, native Russian speakers commonly put English words out of order because of the differences in sentence structuring. In Russian, you can switch words around and it will still mean the same thing, but that’s not the case in English. For example, in English, the direction of the subject is dictated by its place in the sentence, unlike Russian where that is not the case.

In regards to the usage of pronouns, English only recognizes the ‘singular’ and ‘plural’ forms. Spanish on the other hand, recognizes ‘singular’ and ‘plural forms’ in addition to feminine and masculine forms. Then there’s Russian, which recognizes the same four forms as Spanish, in addition to a ‘neutral’ pronoun and 12 special cases used in determining the placement of specific objects in certain sentences.

Karina’s advice to consultants would be to get familiar with the general structure of the languages that we commonly see in the center. And for consultees, she would encourage them to pin-point the common mistakes they are getting corrected on, and then learn the correct way to fix them!

“Really listen to what consultees are saying, and try to understand the meaning.”

Hailey

Age: 19

Quarters in the Center: 1
Vietnamese, English, French

Hailey grew up speaking Vietnamese in her home country, Vietnam. As she was growing up, her mother hoped that she would one day be able to study abroad in another country if she learned another language. At the time, Hailey's mother thought that French would be a good language to learn because it was not overly competitive to send students from Vietnam abroad to study in France. So when Hailey was 7, she began learning French in primary school along with Vietnamese. She spent five years studying French before the opportunity arose to learn English at home from a tutor.

Hailey took the opportunity, and learned English grammar mostly from her tutor. She explained that this process was challenging because she would often confuse English words and grammar concepts with French. However, what was the most challenging, Hailey said, was learning all the different vocabulary words of English. Overtime, her understanding and memory of French faded as she progressively learned and spoke more and more in English. Eventually, she took English classes at school in Vietnam. Overall, Hailey said she felt stronger in her knowledge of English grammar than she did in pronunciation.

On a scale of (weakest) 1-5 (strongest), Hailey said that she would rate her speaking skills in Vietnamese as a 5, as it is her native language. She would rate English as a 3.5/4, and French at 1. However, what I found interesting, was that Hailey felt that she was better in reading and writing in English, than in Vietnamese.

Finally, Hailey had the opportunity to study in the United States, so she moved to America and is currently sharing a house with other international students. All in all, Hailey has only been living in the United States for one year.

In her day-to-day speaking, Hailey almost always speaks English both at school and even in her shared house with other international students. The only time she speaks Vietnamese is with other Vietnamese students on campus, or in writing center sessions. She also speaks Vietnamese when she talks on the phone with her mom.

In being a writing center consultant, Hailey says that she has learned a lot, and not only from other consultants, but often from consultees as well. Hailey talked specifically with me about the two students she works with in Vietnamese and how the session dynamics go.

One of the students that Hailey works with is very willing to learn and improve. The second student, however, is very hesitant to break away from speaking Vietnamese. Hailey said that she feels this second student is being held back by their unwillingness to speak English more often. When working with the first student, they mostly speak English and rely on Vietnamese only for Hailey to explain concepts that the student is having difficulties understanding in English.

When Hailey first began working as a writing consultant, she felt a lot of pressure, wondering whether or not her English was good enough to assist other students. However, as time passed and she became more and more comfortable taking sessions, her worry diminished. Now, she says that she is always excited to learn something new at each session. In reflecting on her session experiences, Hailey said that topics surrounding American government law are difficult because they often relate to policies and topics she is not familiar with as an international student. In addition, Hailey voiced her initial concern with balancing the given 25 and 50 minutes time frames, especially when she felt she needed more or less time to work with

a student. Though with more time and practice, she has gotten better at asking questions and learning how best to guide students through a variety of topics in sessions.

In going between English and Vietnamese, Hailey described some differences. In Vietnamese, for example, there are a lot more pronouns compared to English in addition to the pronunciation styles being very different. Hailey said that there are 6 different tones in Vietnamese, which makes pronunciation in English seem more straight-forward, in her experience. In English, each meaning is more direct compared to Vietnamese where there can be ‘hidden meanings’ or a lot of ideas that need to be inferred. However, Hailey says that even with all of that, she feels that she can express herself better in Vietnamese. In her sessions, Hailey sees Vietnamese consultees struggling with feminine and masculine pronouns and verb tenses.

Hailey’s advice to consultants would be to keep eye-contact and do your best to support the student and help them feel that they are smart and capable. Especially in ESL sessions, it is important to have patience and go through things at a slower pace. “It is hard, because I always feel like I need to help them more,” Hailey said. Though working towards the greatest clarity can be helped by showing every detail and step that is relevant to what a student might be working on. When working with consultees, encourage them to practice speaking in English as often as they can, but if they really don’t understand something, they can ask in their first language. This may require them to step out of their comfort zone, but it is essential in improving their English.

“Don’t short cut your sessions!”

Jenn

Age: 19

Quarters in the Center: 2
Vietnamese, English

Jenn's family immigrated to America in 1994/95 and held onto a very traditional view of Vietnamese culture. Starting at age, Jenn learned both English and Vietnamese simultaneously. She was born in America and attended English school. Throughout her experiences, Jenn found that learning letters and how to physically write things out, was not as hard as learning verb tenses and grammar. All the way to age 12, Jenn learned English and Vietnamese at the same rate. Jenn expressed that it was really hard at the time, having to learn two separate languages at once and be able to differentiate and recognize the differences. Now though, she says that to switch between both languages is virtually effortless.

In her past experiences, Jenn found her ability to speak Vietnamese helpful when traveling to visit family in Vietnam. She also helped her half-brothers learn Vietnamese, and currently she lives with her grandparents and speaks Vietnamese with them. Otherwise, she speaks English in school, at work, and with friends.

When I asked her what was most challenging about learning languages, she said just being young and having to constantly be in school was hard. If she wasn't taking American classes, she was taking classes to learn Vietnamese. Jenn also expressed that it was hard continually feeling like she was wrong. Having to constantly transition from one language-speaking setting to another, made 'correctness' especially hard.

I found it particularly interesting when Jenn talked about the cultural-differences she experienced between languages. Having grown up in a very conservative family that praised a passive, soft-spoken personality, made her family dynamics difficult at times. Being generally more exposed to American culture, she said, has made her much more outspoken. Faith was another topic that Jenn expressed challenges in, being that the majority of her family follows a different faith than she does.

Before she started working in the center, Jenn envisioned our approach as being a lot like the tutoring center. She thought it was all about editing essays and didn't realize that languages were so important or that international students utilized the center as much as they actually do.

In discussing Jenn's session experiences, she said that she has one regular consultee who picked her to work with solely because she spoke Vietnamese. Jenn has worked with him a few times, but expressed that her level of comfortability is lower, and even the tone of voice she uses in speaking Vietnamese is different than if she were speaking Vietnamese with family. She said it may be because most Vietnamese speakers can recognize that she has an American accent, even though she is a fluent Vietnamese speaker. She finds that in her sessions, sometimes she blanks out or has to think more about what she wants to say than she would speaking Vietnamese with friends or family.

In the session dynamic with this student, Jenn said that they tend to speak mostly English, but if the consultee isn't understanding something, she will try and explain it in Vietnamese. One particular challenge she has encountered with this student, is that he wants to learn everything as

quickly as possible. He often looks to find shortcuts through Vietnamese, Jenn said, rather than working through to understand it in English.

In examining the differences between Vietnamese and English, Jenn said that the structure and verb tenses between the languages are different. In Vietnamese, one word could have five different meanings and there are multiple ways to say the same thing. In addition, the accents and tones of the languages can create barriers for students. In Vietnamese, there are also less articles and the speaking style is much more straight-to-the-point than English, in her experience. In some cases, the ordering of words is flipped or the opposite of what it would be in English. In writing, Jenn said that Vietnamese text looks similar to English, but the punctuation changes and goes above the letters like Spanish, not after the words like English.

Jenn's advice to consultants is to be really patient and understand that when students attempt to communicate something, it doesn't always correlate in a way that makes sense in English. "Things can get really frustrating, really fast for consultees if they cannot get their ideas across," Jenn said. It is very important then, to provide all students with encouragement and let them know that learning English is a time-consuming process. "Let students know that to get to the point they want to be, will take time," Jenn said.

“The best way to learn languages is to immerse yourself completely.”

Katherine

Age: 19

Quarters in the Center: 3

Chinese (Mandarin/Cantonese), English, French
(Korean/German)

Katherine grew up learning Mandarin as her first language, and when she was 17 years old in her junior year of high school, she was a cultural exchange student in Texas. During that time, her level of English was very limited. However, she forced herself not to speak anything in Chinese and cut off contact with everyone she knew for two months. It was hard at first, she said, but her host family was very accommodating and spoke slowly, making sure to explain every word. They took her to as many places as they could to give her opportunities to speak English. After two months, Katherine said she felt much more confident in her English.

Also with her host family, Katherine had the opportunity to learn Cantonese, as the family spoke Cantonese as well as English. For her senior year of high-school, Katherine decided to move to Washington to stay with friends so that she could enroll in the running start program.

Katherine told me that what was most difficult throughout this process of learning language, was having to take classes while simultaneously learning the language that you are

being taught in for other subjects. It was hard having to read books at school in the language you were still working to get a grasp of. However, Katherine said that she loves learning new languages, and is now in the process of taking French classes at Highline and is hoping to minor or major in the language. She is also studying a bit of Korean and German on the side.

In rating her fluency levels on a scale of (weakest) 1-5 (strongest), Katherine said that for translation or speaking purposes, she would be at a 5 for Mandarin, as it is her first language, a 4.5 for English, 3 for Cantonese, and 2 for French.

In a lot of ways, Katherine said that in learning English, she was very self-taught. She explained that she had a high-school teacher in her junior year at her first American school who was very helpful. She said that he was very strict, but gave a lot of extra instruction as to how she could improve in her English. Overall, however, she said that she learned most of her English from hearing others speak and just being immersed in the environment.

In her day to day life, Katherine speaks Mandarin when contacting family, and she has many friends at Highline with whom she speaks Mandarin. Otherwise, she speaks English. She only speaks French in her class at Highline, and a few friends help her learn Korean, and she face-times one friend who helps her with German.

In the writing center, Katherine said that she has been able to learn the English language structure better, and has expanded her vocabulary and word phrases. During her multi-lingual sessions, Katherine said that she speaks Mandarin but refers back to English terms throughout, switching back and forth to help students understand in both languages. A lot of times, she says that the students think in Chinese and then translate in English. But she encourages them to think

in English and speak in English, and then switch back to Chinese. Once, Katherine said she was even able to understand basic words that a student spoke in Korean, to better understand what the student was trying to express. During Mandarin sessions, Katherine said that she tries to speak and explain things in both languages.

In going between languages, structure and word order can be very challenging to understand. Recognizing that there are different ways of ordering things and knowing the rules of how to properly say something makes it hard to form the whole sentence. In Mandarin, there are articles, but they are used differently than how they are used in English. For example, there are two ways of saying 'the' depending on the noun, verb, or location placement. Chinese students may also experience problems with commas, particularly that they don't know where to put them because in Chinese, they belong in certain places where-as in English, they are determined often by when you 'take a pause' or a breath. In Chinese, it takes a shorter amount of time to say something using characters than to say something in English and a lot of times, students just beginning to learn English don't have enough vocabulary to build full and complete sentences.

In comparing languages, the Cantonese structure is different from the Mandarin. The ordering of French sentences are similar to English, however questions are posed in opposite ways. In Korean, inverted verbs and nouns are similar to English, and German is similar to English and French, but it has the hardest grammar, in Katherine's experience. Katherine compared the following languages in their closeness in similarity: French is similar to English, Korean to Chinese, and Cantonese to Mandarin.

Katherine's advice to consultants is to be as patient as you can, and to slow down. Also do your best to catch key words from what consultants say, and be aware of facial expressions. Try your best to read their faces for clues on what students might be trying to convey through their words. Encourage consultees to learn as much as they can in the language, and practice as often as possible in English-speaking settings.

"Be fair and honest – every student is different."

Christine

Age: 22

Quarters in the Center: 1

English, Cambodian, Japanese

Christine began learning Cambodian at a young age, speaking conversationally with her grandparents who spoke only Cambodia. Her mother spoke a bit of English but for the most part, speaking Cambodian was the commonality in her household growing up. By age 5, Christine was attending school in English and began growing in her English-speaking abilities. Before long, she was speaking in English all the time in her daily life. It was only at home and at church where she would speak Cambodian.

Christine began learning Japanese in high school where she studied for three years. She said that the first year was very easy and that she picked up the language quickly while learning Hiragana and Katakana. However, learning Kanji proved difficult. She explained

that the Japanese alphabet was alright, but learning the different characters was hard in her second year of study.

In rating her language abilities on a scale from (lowest) 1-5 (strongest), English would be a 5, Cambodian a 3, and Japanese a 1.5. In English, Christine can speak, read, and write fluently, whereas in Cambodian, she can understand fluently, but not speak fluently. In Japanese, she can read and write to understand, but cannot conversationally speak. Christine explained that growing up, she watched a lot of anime and read manga which helped with her Japanese understanding. However, in her experience, the Cambodian language is harder than Japanese. In terms of the language structure of Cambodian, Christine explained that it is similar to Tai and Laos in the way the characters are written. Generally, Christine speaks Cambodian only at home and at church, while she spends the rest of her time at school and with friends, speaking English.

In working in the writing center, Christine has been impressed by the respectfulness people have for the accents of others. In her prior experience, she has often seen people being made of fun for their accents. She said that this in turn, has made the students being made fun of feel embarrassed to speak because of their accent. Christine herself said that she is used to hearing and being around people with an accent or speaking 'broken English' (as is sometimes referred to), because of her Mother. She expressed anger at the inconsiderate nature she had seen from people she has known in the past. Making fun of people from other countries instead of encouraging them in their growth through English was a common occurrence.

In the writing center, Christine said that she has seen Cambodian students but not worked with them. She admitted that she is worried that even if she did work with them, she wouldn't be helpful as she is much better at understanding Cambodian than replying. She isn't sure if that dynamic would be very productive in sessions but has yet to have the opportunity to work in Cambodian with a student to see if that is true. This posed the question to both of us: how fluent does a consultant need to be in a language other than English to help students?

Christine noted that some difficulties students have in switching between their native language and English, would be their need for elaboration. More specifically, students may understand the 'gist' of something in English, but still miss the full picture. At times, students in this situation might mix together the two languages on and off to try and explain something. In this situation, Christine said that expression is key. Students want to be understood, but they may have trouble effectively expressing themselves through words.

Some difference in the languages, are that Japanese writes up and down and not the expected left to right of English. Christine explained that in Cambodian, a lot of important documents were lost during war time in the 1970's. All in all, Cambodian is a very poor area, third world in a lot of ways, and so understanding the roots of the language can be difficult as not a lot of information is out there, at least from Cambodia itself. Christine's grandparents themselves were refugees from Cambodia because of the war.

Christine's advice to consultants is to be as adaptable as possible. Take things slow, and encourage consultees to do the same.

“It’s okay not to understand it all.”

Fatai

Age: 19

Quarters in the Center: 2

Tongan, English

Fatai’s parents spoke Tongan to him at home from an early age. He says that he learned Tongan from a combination of visuals, examples, and context. English is known by many in Tonga, so his parents did have a bit of English knowledge when they came to America. It was Fatai’s grandparents who spoke the most Tongan, and so he was continually shifting between speaking a mix of Tongan and English with them, and then mostly English to his mom. For the

most part, though, Fatai's parents still kept Tongan-speaking dominant in the household, although he considers that he grew up speaking Tongan and English with a pretty 50/50 split. Some concepts are easier to explain in one language than another, Fatai told me, specifically when referring to the literal translation of something, as Tongan speaking relies a lot on figurative interpretation of many words.

In comparing the two languages, Fatai told me that he is the strongest when speaking Tongan (as he grew up hearing it spoken). His reading skills are middle-range, and his writing abilities are on the lower end. "I never had any formal teaching in reading and writing in Tongan," Fatai explained. "Verbal communication is what's predominantly passed down from the older to younger generations."

What was probably most challenging for Fatai, was understanding slang terminology in Tongan. Understanding slang in any languages takes a lot of exposure to the speaking, and besides an encounter of someone on a bus asking if he spoke Tongan, Fatai speaks it with his family mostly. Otherwise, at school and in most other settings, he speaks English.

Because his own family's understanding of English is for the most part secondary, Fatai can really emphasize with ESL students who come into the center. He himself, has had to find various ways to help his family communicate and learn English. It has helped him see new ways of communicating English concepts to students. "This is also helpful, because I wouldn't say that I learned English in a 'dictionary definition' way," he explained. Fatai said that he often finds himself trying a variety of ways to help students understand, and when it comes to grammar, they are sometimes working together to find the answers.

What Fatai has learned to be very important, is to know the context of a particular word being used. In the Tongan language specifically, syntax can be challenging. He explained that oftentimes, adjectives follow nouns (car blue) instead of English, which has nouns following the adjectives (blue car). Also, the usage of pronouns is different. In Tongan, a lot of things are assumed and so pronouns are used less often than in English. The pronoun ‘Us’ refers to multiple people, and ‘They’ refers to one (singular). Finally, the word ordering in Tongan sentences is the reverse from English.

Fatai’s best advice to consultants, would be to clarify with the students that they understand something. Have them repeat and interpret the advice you have given in their own words. Don’t assume that they understand, and realize that you can’t do everything in one sessions, so prioritize what’s most important.

“Usually the students are very quiet, so don’t be afraid to ask if they have something to add, because more often than not, they do!”

Sam

Age: 20
Quarters in the Center: 1
Tagalog, English

Sam grew up in a house that spoke two languages: English and Tagalog. Her father spoke English and her mother, who is Filipino, spoke Tagalog. Growing up, her mother taught her to speak Tagalog in secret because her father said that learning Tagalog wasn’t relevant. In learning

both English and Tagalog simultaneously, Sam said that she often mixed up a lot of stuff between the languages and was actually put into ESL classes in her early American schooling, even though she didn't need it. This was because sometimes she would respond to her English teachers in Tagalog instead of English by mistake.

Some significant differences between the languages are that in Tagalog, there are no pronouns and everything spoken is said in a much more general way. Each language always has their own accent or way of speaking, so that can be a challenge for students too.

When attending school, Sam took classes in Spanish, which actually has roots in Tagalog. Though Sam said that she still only has a limited understanding of Spanish. To better her Tagalog reading and writing, Sam studies with her cousins. She also has younger siblings, but none of them were taught Tagalog as her mother stopped teaching after Sam. Mainly, Sam speaks Tagalog at church and at home, and English everywhere else.

Before coming to the writing center, Sam said that she was unsure if knowing another language would be helpful; in fact, she thought that the writing center was just English-speaking. Now, however, she says that she has recognized the value of using different languages to help students feel more comfortable, even though they are learning English.

In moving between Tagalog and English, translating can be difficult simply because there isn't always a direct way to relay information. Tagalog and English have different structures and in Tagalog, verbs can come before or after the subject. In addition, in Tagalog, there could even be a sentence using just verbs. Finally, Sam said that the usage of articles is very random-like in

Tagalog and not as stringent in their usage as would be seen in English. Finally, in Tagalog, there are two pronouns: the singular 'you' and the 'everyone else' term 'they'.

Sam's advice to consultants is to be really patient with students, really affirm and let them know that becoming proficient in English isn't a race. For consultees, she recommends taking everything step by step and encouraging students to move at their own pace.