

INVITATION TO LANGUAGES



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FOREIGN LANGUAGE EXPLORATORY PROGRAM

Conrad J. Schmitt



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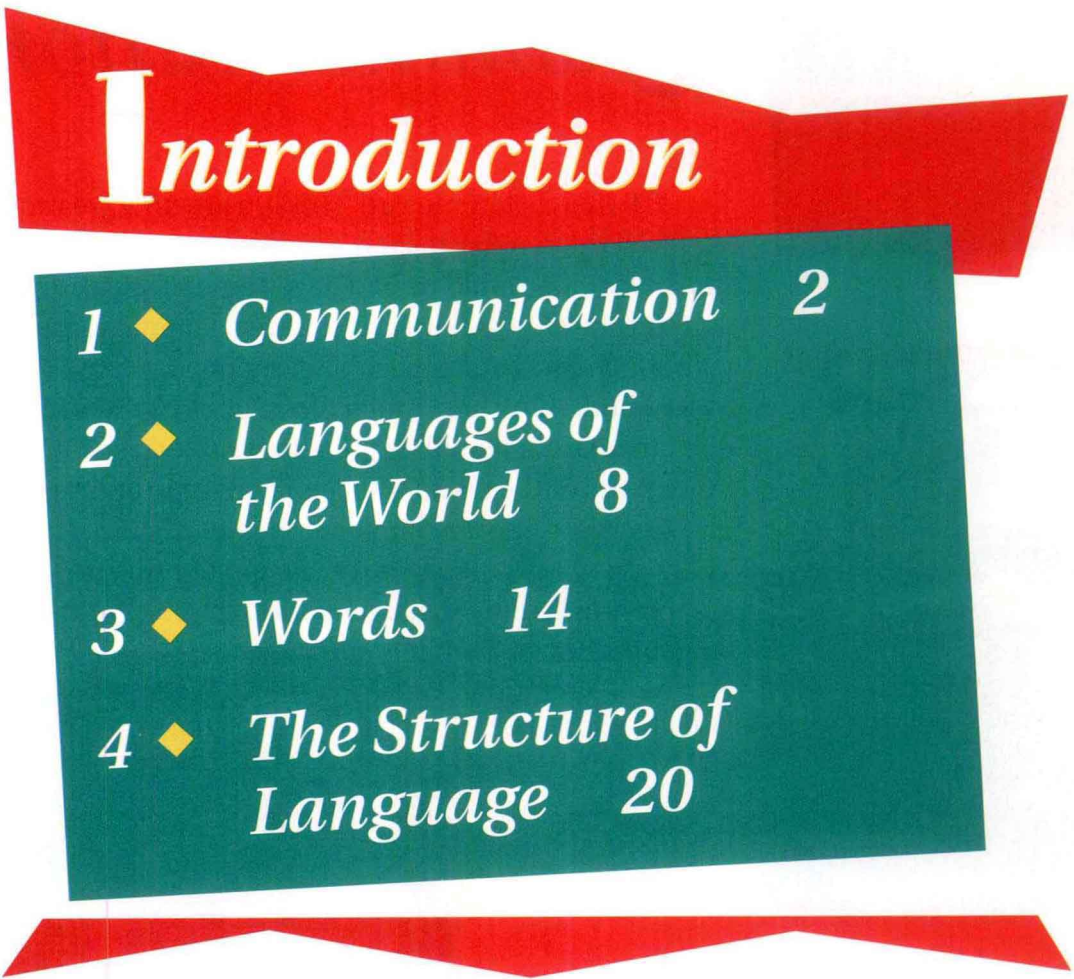
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¡Hola! ¿Qué tal?

1

Communication

“Hi there! How are ya?” This is a greeting we probably use a hundred times a day to start a conversation with someone. Just think what life would be like if we couldn’t speak to each other. We wouldn’t be able to if we didn’t have a language. Try to imagine life without language or speech. It certainly would be dull! On the other hand, think how much fun it would be to speak more than one language. It would be great to be able to speak to people from other parts of the world. We can if we study another language.

Learning another language is not difficult. It’s actually fun. There are many languages we can choose to study because there are many different languages spoken in the world. Everyone has a language. But, just what is language?



Guten Tag. Wie geht's?



Konnichi wa.



Ciao. Come va?

Salut! Ça va?



What is Language?

Spoken Language

In its broadest sense, language is the exchange or transfer of meaning. It is a tool of communication. Spoken language or human speech is produced by the human speech organs and received by the ears. Each day we spend hours speaking and listening to friends, relatives, or strangers. Why do we spend so much time talking and listening to each other? We converse to exchange information, to communicate, and to interact. Language lets us exchange ideas, facts, and even emotions. It is a source of knowledge and a source of enjoyment. Language is one of the most fascinating and essential tools possessed by humans. It is our ability to use language that separates us from the rest of the animal world.

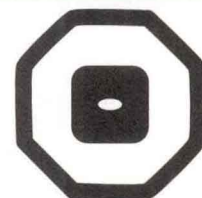
Written Language

Spoken language is the most frequently used method of communication. In addition to speaking and listening, however, we obtain much information and enjoyment from reading. To read, we must rely upon written language. Written language uses symbols to represent spoken language. Spoken language, however, existed for thousands, or perhaps millions of years, before the development of written language.

Writing Systems

Pictographs and Ideographs

The writing system for some languages such as ancient Egyptian, as well as modern Chinese, make use of pictographs and ideographs. A pictograph is a symbol or drawing that represents a specific object such as a fish or a chair. In ancient Egypt, the written word for “sun” was a drawing of the sun. It was impossible, however, to draw pictures to represent all words. For this reason,



Egyptian hieroglyphic
for “sun”



rè = sun



yuè = moon



míng = bright

ideographs were developed. An ideograph is a symbol for “non-picturable” things. An ideograph is used to show actions and to convey ideas. For example, the Chinese put together their pictographs for the “sun” and “moon” to form the ideograph that symbolizes “bright.”

Alphabets

Other languages, such as English, use the letters of an alphabet for their written language. The Phoenicians and Hebrews were the first to use an alphabet. An alphabet is a series of symbols. The Phoenicians and Hebrews made up a symbol for each syllable of a word. It is from these people that we have the beginning of a true phonetic alphabet. A phonetic alphabet is one in which each letter represents a sound in the spoken language. Let's take a look at some alphabets:

כב זטח זון קר דג גבב א

תתשש רפ צפ פפ עס נמ ל

Hebrew alphabet

A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z

Roman alphabet

Α Β Χ Δ Ε Φ Γ Η Ι Θ Κ Λ Μ Ν Ο Π Θ Ρ Σ Τ Υ ς Ω Ξ Ψ Ζ

Greek alphabet

А Б В Г Д Е Ё Ж З И Й К Л М Н О П Р С Т У Ф Х Ц Ч Ш Щ Ъ Ы Ь Э Ю Я

Cyrillic alphabet

ا ب ت ث ج ح خ د ذ ر ز س ش ص ض ط ظ ع غ ف ي ك ل م ن ه و

Arabic alphabet

Here are some words in each of the above alphabets:

Λ Ο Γ Ο Σ

“word” in Greek

DOMVS

“house” in Latin

استاذة


“professor”
in Arabic

שלום

“house” in
Hebrew

СУЦ

“milk” in
Russian



Unlike English, Hebrew and Arabic are read from right to left.

Other Methods of Communication

There are other forms of communication that are neither spoken nor written. Many things that do not involve spoken or written language can convey meaning. For example, a person driving a car stops at a red light. Why does the driver stop? The red light has meaning—it means “stop.” On the other hand, a green light indicates “go” and the driver does not stop. The color red stands for “stop” or “danger.” The color green stands for “safety” or “go.” A transfer of meaning takes place when we see these colors.

Gestures

You are having a conversation with someone. The person you are talking to says nothing, but he uses a gesture. He points his thumb downward. Without a word being said, there is a transfer of meaning. His gesture indicates that he does not agree with you. In a similar conversation, another friend gestures with her thumb up. Without saying a word, she indicates to you that she agrees with what you are saying. She lets you know that you have a good idea.

Sounds

Some non-linguistic forms of communication come close to spoken language. The grunting sound “uh, uh” is an example. It has several meanings depending upon the intonation. Intonation is the melody or pitch that we give to our speech. Have some fun. Say “uh, uh” to convey “yes.” Then say the same sound to convey “no.” Now, say “uh, uh” with an intonation to convey “maybe.”

Symbols

Other non-linguistic forms of communication resemble written language. The dollar sign is an example. When we see “\$10,” we automatically say “ten dollars.” What do the following symbols mean?



Activities

A Work with a classmate. Say a few words to him or her in English. Then ask what message he or she got from what you said. Was it correct? Did a transfer of meaning take place? Did you communicate with each other?

B Let's use some gestures to convey meaning. To the ancient Greeks, a downward nod of the head meant “yes.” What do we do to convey “yes”? To the ancient Greeks, an upward nod of the head meant “no.” What do we do to convey “no”?

C Use gestures to convey the following meanings.

- | | |
|---------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Cool! Right on! | 4. Good-bye. |
| 2. You shouldn't do that! | 5. That's it! Enough! |
| 3. Shame! | 6. Something smells. |

D Make a noise or a sound that is not a word to give the following meanings.

- | | |
|------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1. Yes. | 4. Be quiet. |
| 2. No. | 5. That's not such a good idea. |
| 3. That's awful! | 6. That tastes good. |

E Give the meaning of the following symbols.

1.



3.



5.



7.



2.



4.



6.



F Be creative! Draw some pictographs. See if your classmates can guess what words your pictographs represent. If your pictographs are clear, they should be able to guess at the words.

G Make up ideographs to show the following actions or ideas.

- | | |
|-------------|----------------|
| 1. to throw | 4. angry |
| 2. to sit | 5. happy |
| 3. to love | 6. interesting |

H Convert the following math equation into spoken language.
Read it aloud.

$$6 \times 2 = 12 \div 3 = 4 + 4 = 8 - 2 = 6$$

I Have some fun and invent your own language.

1. Make up five sounds. Give each of your sounds a meaning. Then share your sounds with classmates. Say your sounds aloud and tell your classmates what they mean.
2. Invent a symbol for each of your sounds. You can use pictographs, ideographs, or letters from your own alphabet. Read each of your symbols by producing the sound it represents.

2

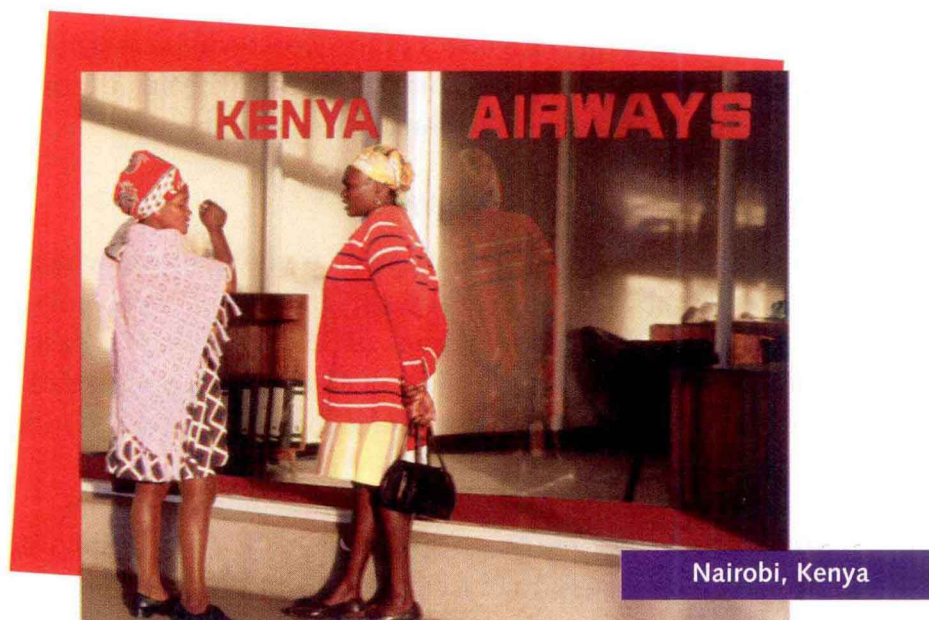
Languages of the World

Every person in the world has a language—a mother tongue. In every city, town, or village of the world people are always talking to one another. They very often express the same ideas, but they all use their own language. People from Nairobi can convey the same message as people from London or Tokyo.



London, England

But in Nairobi, the message is conveyed in Swahili; in London, it's in English; and in Tokyo, it's in Japanese.



Each person will use different sounds and words because each language has its own sound system and its own vocabulary. People who share the same language have a great deal in common. Language brings people together.

History of Language

Linguists are scientists who study the many aspects of language. All linguists agree that the origin of human speech is still a mystery. No one knows when or how humans began to speak. No one knows how language started. There are, however, many theories about the origin of language. Some are religious—language was considered a gift from the gods. Others are scientific—language started as an imitation of sounds occurring in nature. For example, humans heard a dog barking. They imitated the sound they heard and said “bow-wow.”

Although linguists have not been able to solve the mystery of the origin of language, they have been able to study and analyze almost all of the world's languages.

Language Families

Almost all of the languages of the world can be assigned to families or groups. Languages are assigned to the same family based upon a definite resemblance to each other.

The Indo-European Family

Indo-European is the name given to the family to which English belongs. The Indo-European family consists of languages now spoken in the Americas, most of Europe, and as far eastward as northern India and some parts of Asia. Almost one-half of the world's population speaks a language that belongs to the Indo-European family.

It is thought that in prehistoric times, long before the introduction of written language, speakers of the original Indo-European language formed a closely-knit group. They probably lived in what is now known as central Russia. Because of famine,

natural disasters, or wars, there were waves of migration. Some people left their homeland and some people stayed. Those who left did not all go in the same direction. They separated into various groups and went different ways. They, therefore, lost contact with one another and their speech began to change. Over the centuries the changes became so great that the original parent language evolved into many new and different languages.

