The UB Foreign Language Roundtable
Spring 2010
UB Foreign Language Roundtable

The Purpose of the Publication

To provide UB students with knowledge of the target cross-world cultures and societies, in a relaxed non- or semi-academic manner, in order to promote mutual understanding and respect among the people living in the target countries.

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The UB Foreign Language Roundtable is published by the International College twice a year: Spring and Fall
Can I get through Japanese, Chinese, Russian, Arabic or Korean?
Dr. Thomas J. Ward
Dean of International College

The short answer is yes, absolutely. The key is consistent study every day.

Secondly, I would encourage you to think first of all of the enormous benefits of mastering one of these less commonly taught languages (LCTL). Let us consider one practical example from modern U.S. history. In 1960 the United States did twice as much trade with Western Europe as it did with East Asia. By 1980 the United States was doing twice as much trade with East Asia as it did with Western Europe. Since that time, the economies of Asia have continued to explode and the unfortunate reality is that we have far less people trained in the languages of Asia than we should have. The same is true for Arabic, a part of the world where greater understanding and dialogue are essential. Keep in mind that study of any one of these languages is going to make you a national treasure here in the United States. We badly need people who have mastery of these languages for a whole variety of reasons.

Chinese, Japanese and Korean all use Chinese characters although Japanese and Korean also have additional alphabets and are less reliant on Chinese characters. Koreans develop the mastery of about 1,800 characters, and Japanese need to have mastered 1,945 characters designated by law for general use in publication, excluding scholarly books and magazines. In the Peoples’ Republic of China, Chinese characters have been simplified and most Chinese know 1,500 to 2,000 characters. Chinese characters have symbolic meaning. They invite you to reflect on human nature and on the meaning of life and the world around us. They are fun to learn. Over the years, I have been greatly inspired by studying and mastering them.

In the case of the East Asian languages, there are synergies among them so that if you master one you have the possibility of mastering a second one in far less time. This is especially true for certain of these languages. For example, the grammars of Korean and Japanese parallel each other so that if you master either of these languages it is much easier to get to know the other (incidentally the Mongolian language also shares a similar grammar as that of Korean and Japanese although they no longer use Chinese characters in their written language, having opted instead for Cyrillic). Knowledge of Chinese can prepare you with vocabulary and with valuable skills that will help you with Japanese and Korean and vice versa.

If you wish to become fluent in Japanese or Korean, you should plan to dedicate one year of your undergraduate to study in the country where your language is spoken. You will also probably want to spend a couple of years in country after your undergraduate study. There are many opportunities to teach English in places such as Korea, Japan and China. We are regularly approached by schools in these countries who are looking for English language instructors. This could provide you with a unique way to be onsite to master a language and also earn money that will help you to pay down any student loans that you have. When you complete your overseas study and have one of these languages “under your belt,” you will have a language asset that will make you a national treasure at home in the United States.

Our experience at UB shows that one needs to spend less time in country to master
Chinese than is required to master Korean or Japanese. This is partly due to the fact that there are many similarities between English grammar and Chinese grammar. Also there is greater flexibility of word order in Chinese so that students can more easily make themselves understood. At UB you can learn about opportunities that will allow you to study and intern in China during the summer.

Arabic is also a valuable language from the viewpoint of culture and from the viewpoint of human security and diplomacy. We need to be able to communicate with and come to understand and appreciate our Arab-speaking fellow citizens of the planet Earth. The Middle East is a cradle of civilization and the root of so much of our culture.

The University of Bridgeport now has a partnership with Princess Sumaya University, a well reputed new Jordanian University located in Amman, the capital of Jordan. UB students can spend one summer there developing a mastery of the Arabic language. They can also potentially intern with an internationally NGO. Internships are not compensated; however, those chosen for the Princess Sumaya university program study with no charge for tuition or dormitory. You are responsible for travel and for some meals. Contact intlcoll@bridgeport.edu to learn more about our overseas study opportunities in the Middle East, China, Korea and Taiwan.

Many years ago, I had a French Instructor named Jean Beillard. I remember not only what he said but I did it and his promise came to pass. Professor Beillard told me that if I studied French every day for 15 minutes I would get an “A.” I not only got an “A” but I ended up later having the chance to live, study and work in France for several years.

You can best master a language by studying consistently every single day. Mastery of a language requires discipline and consistent study patterns. If you find time to study any of these languages every day, for 15 to 30 minutes (a little extra study time is in order for less commonly taught languages), you are going to make tremendous progress. Languages can not just be crammed for the night before an exam. That would be similar to an inexperienced athlete “cramming” one night and expecting to become a starting player on the UB women’s or men’s basketball team.

Mastery of a less commonly taught language can solidify your future. In the twenty-first century, the United States will increasingly need bi-lingual professionals whose first language is English to translate from languages such as Japanese, Chinese, Korean, Arabic and Russian into English. Mastery of any one of these languages will open many doors for you.

UB language instructors are not only professional but they are also caring and responsible. Study a language with them. I promise that, if you do so with commitment and follow-through, you will greatly expand your career horizons.
My Interest in Foreign Languages
Dr. William Jassey
Director, International Degree Program

Life is simple and yet it is complicated as the story of life unravels. We can say that the story of one’s life is contained in one’s language. Without language, life is barren and insipid. Obviously, a language offers insights to which meaningful communication is attributed. To all intents and purposes, my story of language hinged on my choices of yesterday underscoring my own personal life experiences that came my way.

As a teenager, I was required to study a second language as a prerequisite for securing an academic high school diploma. So which language would it be? I chose Spanish because my big sister influenced and convinced me that we would have something special in common to talk about at the dinner table. “Why not use Spanish as if it were a vehicle for developing a secret communion between us?” she postulated. Well, at that time, a second language was taught traditionally in school, so we conjugated verbs as if they were conversational tools. It became competitive as to who would do the task faster and more correctly. Our siblings who could not join in the give-and-take listened passively to the delight and amusement of our parents who felt that Spanish was being spoken at a native-like pace. My brothers and sisters, in turn, had their interests aroused and intrigued to the point that they wanted to have a chance to opt for a foreign language, so as to participate competitively in the use of language forms. Parenthetically speaking, when they had an opportunity to study a foreign language, they all chose Spanish whether they were enrolled in the academic or commercial course of high school study. However, as I continued to enjoy the round robin drills beyond the dinner table, my direct attention moved from the drilling to the meaningful aspect of Spanish, that is, I preferred to immerse myself in conversation with the use of dialogues as the mainstay of oral discourse. For me, I realized that Spanish study should evolve into something more than verb drills and grammar exercises. I really wanted to speak like a native, so I kept up with my Spanish for 4 years of high school study, and, at the same time, I branched out to take 4 years of Latin since it was a friendly language by virtue of its connection with the power of vocabulary in English and Spanish.

As a young college student at the age of sixteen, I steeped myself deeper into the nuances of Spanish and then baked myself in the study of French. As my interest grew stronger, I empowered myself to take a myriad of diversified courses in the two Romance languages which were taught by native speakers from Spain/South America and France. With intent, I wanted to talk like a native, think like a native and act like a native. Was it doable? I felt that it would require me to go beyond language per se and enter the realm of history, geography, sociology, psychology, philosophy and literature of the two target languages. There was no study/travel abroad program, so I had to rely on my native professors to whom I was indebted for intensifying the course offerings on my behalf. To my amazement, my language studies paid off when the chair recommended me to receive a graduate teaching assistantship with all expenses covered for a master’s degree. I was loving my languages and proceeded to love them even more so.

To be continued in the Fall issue
A Visit to Spain
Robert J. Cavaliero

There are many different cities and quaint “pueblos” that you will discover on your visit to Spain. I speak from experience as one who has studied in Spain (España) and traveled throughout the country. I will begin my presentation with Madrid, the capital of España. Madrid is a cosmopolitan city with a fascinating combination of tradition and modernity. The various architectural influences represent the impressions and impact left by the Moors who occupied the country for two hundred years. As a matter of fact, Madrid owes its name to the Arabic Magerit.

The Austrias arrived in the 16th century and it was in the 17th century that the great monuments of Madrid started to appear. The “Madrid de los Austrias” is a very famous section of the city which includes the “Plaza Mayor.” This area is a tremendous square which attracts people for a variety of reasons. The madrileños (residents of Madrid) gather in the plaza for dining, entertainment, conversation and for the opportunity to sell their arts and crafts to the incredible number of tourists who pass through the Plaza Mayor every day and evening. The architecture throughout this beautiful city is a combination of Baroque style and Gothic designs.

The 18th century left the Neoclassical mark on the Royal Palace (Palacio Real), the Sabatini Gardens and “Campo del Moro,” which is located in the center of the city. Other examples of this style include the Prado Museum, the Toledo Bridge, the church of San Francisco El Grande and the Puerta de Alcalá.

Of course, the 20th century afforded us with the most modern and avant-garde sections of Madrid: the “Gran Vía” and “El Paseo de la Castellana.” The Gran Vía is an avenue of shops, hotels and dining establishments much similar to New York City’s Fifth Avenue. The Paseo de la Castellana offers elegant hotels, offices and art galleries. This avenue crosses the city from north to south! The Paseo del Arte has three amazing museums all in close proximity to one another: the Prado Museum, the Thyssen Bornemisza Museum and the Queen Sofia National Art Centre. The Prado Museum is considered to be the best gallery of the world. El Prado contains a collection of art from the sixteenth, seventeenth and twentieth centuries. Some of the best art work is on display from the Italian, Flemish and Spanish artists. Besides Rubens and Botticelli, El Prado also has paintings and sculptures from Velázquez, Goya and El Greco. Naturally, Dalí, Picasso, Cezanne and Renoir have some of their paintings available for the public to see. Madrid also has palaces, monuments and parks which highlight the rich history of this wonderful city! For instance, “El Parque del Retiro” is a huge park which includes lakes, picnic areas, bicycle paths, promenades, playing fields and areas for concerts. This park rivals Central Park of New York City in terms of land mass and opportunities for family centered attractions.

I would be remiss if I didn’t mention that on every major intersection of avenues and streets throughout the city of Madrid you will discover at the center of the rotary an architectural phenomenon: a fountain with the image of a mythical god from the Greek and the Roman cultures. A tribute to the past but also an amazing artistic statement that will last for centuries!
A Hidden Agenda
Dr. Ikuko Anjo Jassey

When I was a doctoral student in an applied linguistics program, I examined a Japanese dictionary, with fun and curiosity, to find clues as to how females had been scrutinized both overtly and covertly. In short, of one hundred thirty-six Chinese characters (kanji) with the “female” radical in the Kangorin Dictionary (1987), forty-six kanji were associated with negative meanings: temperamentally envious, mean, lazy, untrustworthy, irresponsible, disgraceful as well as flattering; socially low as well as lightly treated; politically destructive; and physically frail. Conversely, only five kanji with the “male” radical are found in the dictionary, and one out of the five kanji was given unfavorable meanings. This survey clearly indicates how the then-women and -men were pictured in society when kanji were coined thousands of years ago. I was, thus, gradually attracted to the hidden correlation between the overt and covert meanings of kanji.

With these associated meanings obscured in kanji with the “female” 女 and the “male” 男 radical in mind, let me take some compound words merged with the character “female” and “male” as examples. 女時(female hour) and 男時(male hour) imply “bad time” and “good time,” respectively and are used when the speaker/writer wishes to indicate when things go (or don’t go) well. Similarly, 女滝(female waterfall) and 男滝(male waterfall) imply that the former waterfall is “small/weak” and the latter “big /strong.” 女瓦(female tile) and 男瓦(male tile) mean that the former is “concave” and the latter “convex.” In other words, females are depicted as bad, small, weak, and passive, while males are good, big, strong, and active.

Moreover, the character 姫 also has a “female” denotation, whose specific meaning is “princess.” The following are some examples of compound words using this character: 姫垣 and 姫松. They mean “low hedge” and “small pine tree,” respectively. Likewise, 姫 is also used to imply “small” or “short.” It is, however, fair to add that this character often connotes “adorable” as well. Furthermore, “smallness” is not always negative in Japanese society. Instead, as bonsai trees are very popular, “smallness” is often considered favorable and even beautiful in Japan.

In real life, presumably there are many wives who are taller and/or bigger than their husbands. One of my aunts, too, is taller and bigger. Regardless, in Japanese society (and provably in many other societies), ideally a husband should be taller and bigger than his wife. I still remember one of her wedding photographs; I see part of a pillow under her husband’s buttocks apparently used as a platform to make him look taller in his sitting position. This notion applies even to his or her belongings. The “husband-and-wife rice bowls” and “husband-and-wife tea cups” are sold and commonly used in Japan. We also have “husband-and-wife chopsticks.” Of course, the bigger bowl/cup and the longer chopsticks are for the husband’s use! So, perhaps “smallness,” “shortness,” “weakness,” and “passiveness” of women are a magic concoction for conviviality in their married life. To find out a hidden agenda embedded in language is surely a solid step to understand deep culture in society.

*This essay was originally published in the Japan Society of Fairfield County Newsletter, Vol. XV, No.3 and largely re-written for the Spring 2010 issue of The UB Foreign Language Roundtable.
Growing up with Juan Bobo
Aneury S. Morales

Growing up with Juan Bobo on the island of Puerto Rico was like growing up with the Gotham in England and the Lagos in Mexico. Juan Bobo has been known as Lazy Jack or Foolish Jack in the United States. Interestingly, Bobo’s tales are found not only in the Americas but also in Asia, Europe, and Africa, and they are very similar to one another. This character was originated in India and was described as “an ignorant and awkward person who does not learn from experiences.” Since the tales of Juan Bobo are silly and entertaining while teaching what not to do in certain situations, it is really hard to put the book down. The readers want to continue reading the story because there is always an unexpected twist at the ending. Storytellers have used Juan Bobo to help children develop their character for hundreds of years. So did my parents help me as a child by reading Juan Bobo.

Juan Bobo usually makes a series of funny errors, but whatever he does, at the end he would strike good luck. For example, in Juan Bobo Goes to Work by Marisa Montes, Juan Bobo loses every payment he gets before returning home. Juan Bobo’s silliness makes the rich man’s daughter laugh. As a token of appreciation, the father repays Juan Bobo with ham every Sunday for the rest of his life. For a poor boy like Juan Bobo, a mass of ham a week is as good as hitting the lottery for one million dollars.

Likewise, Juan Bobo’s tales end in the most unexpected way as I referred to before, and many times he is fairly compensated. In Ladrillo and Tales of Juan Bobo, Juan Bobo gets a reward for catching a thief. Other times, Juan Bobo is chosen as the king of a town or finds a treasure chest full of gold coins. In every story, a lesson is learned about what not to do. Children learn “right” from “wrong” through Juan Bobo’s experiences. If the reader behaves like Juan Bobo, he/she will surely become his/her town’s biggest “bobo.” I am fortunate I grew up with Juan Bobo as a dear friend.
The Chinese hold the Lantern Festival during the first full moon of each New Year (based on the lunar calendar), which also marks the end of the 15-day New Year’s celebration. From the historical records we know this was officially named as a festival in the Han Dynasty. During the time of Emperor Wudi (139 BC to 90 BC), servant girls in the palace were not allowed to see their parents or family again once they were selected to serve the emperor. A servant girl, named Yuan Xiao, was very depressed during the New Year and decided to end her life when Prime Minister Dongfang Shuo passed by and heard her cry. Mr. Dongfang immediately thought of a plan to help her.

He disguised himself as a fortune teller in the busy market and told every one who visited his booth about the impending misfortune of the capital being set on fire by the angry Fire God on the 16th day of the New Year. The news quickly reached the palace and the Emperor was alarmed and turned to seek advice from the Prime Minister. Of course, Dongfang devised the plan: Send out all servants in the palace with lanterns to lighten up the whole capital city on the night of the 15th. The lights from all the lanterns will fool the Fire God to think that the capital city of Chang-An was already on fire and he did not need to set the fire for the next day anymore. At the same time Dongfang contacted the family of the servant girl to meet her on the street. Since then the Chinese love to have the Yuan Xiao Jie or the Lantern Festival to close the celebration of each New Year.

However, the custom of attaching riddles with prizes in every lantern which added excitement to this festival was not started until much later. Around the Tang Dynasty, there was a rich man who was tall and pale skinned. People called him “White Tiger” because he was not only heartless but also noticed only those who appeared to have money. A poorly dressed Mr. Wong tried to borrow money from White Tiger and needless to say, he got kicked out of Tiger’s castle. During the coming lantern festival, Mr. Wong wrote a poem on a huge lantern and hung it outside of Tiger’s Castle. The poem read:

A thing has a pointed head with a tall cadaver,
Its face is as white as shining silver,
Its eyes are hanging on its butt and not seeing very far,
It only recognizes clothes instead of something to perdure
(In Chinese, a snobbish person is usually described as having their eyes on their derriere.)

The rich man was very angry and insisted that the officials jail Mr. Wong. However, Mr. Wong’s defense was that he was only posting a riddle to give the prize to whoever could solve this riddle. The people gathered, laughed and guessed the answer. Everyone had a very good time. Mr. Wong became famous and rich from creating riddles for others year after year. By the way, can you guess the answer? It is a thing.

Here is another popular one for entertaining Chinese children. You might need to know a few words in Chinese to solve the riddle:

If you draw it, it should be in the shape of a circle,
If you write it out, it should be in the shape of a square,
When it gets cold, it appears to be shorter,
When it gets warm, it appears to be longer
The answer is a Chinese character. I hope that you enjoyed the night of the first full moon in the year of 4708!
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