

# A learning experience: lost in translation

[Education](#), [Learning](#)



Ralph Waldo Emerson, a well-known American literary icon, once said that “No man should travel until he has learned the language of the country he visits. Otherwise he voluntarily makes himself a great baby - so helpless and so ridiculous.” I came upon this quote while I was looking for some passages or anecdotes that might make for a “first paragraph with a good hook.”

Emerson’s take on the issue of language learning was somehow brutal and unconstructive, instantly attracting my attention since I am an international student acknowledging some limitations in my knowledge and skills in the use of the English language.

Although Emerson was, and is still, highly-revered for his ingenuity in literature, I would have to express my disagreement about what he said about the helplessness and ridiculousness of people who visit countries without obtaining knowledge and practical skills on each country’s native language.

My experiences in this country has taught me that being at a disadvantage in terms of one’s lack of knowledge and skills in language and communication do not bring down a person to helplessness and nonsensicality. For I have discovered that being “lost in translation” is not a hopeless situation but an opportunity to sensibly and realistically learn the language.

When arrived here one year ago, my limitations pertaining to the English language has made my life adjustments worse since it was difficult to openly communicate and relate to other people. Being in an unfamiliar place was stressful enough, having to deal with not being able to conveniently visit

places, dealing with the changes in the weather, learning the culture, and such.

Not being able to communicate well enough made it much worse, since it became a barrier in smoothing the progress of adjustment and adaptation. At first, I was deeply uncomfortable with having to talk to other people who are native speakers of English for fear of being criticized or made of as a joke. However, my everyday experiences has taught me that gradual openness to socialization, interaction, and communication is a opportunity for me to learn not only the language, but the cultural practices and traditions that are unfamiliar to me.

I found out how talking to other people often about anything helped in developing my knowledge and skills of the English language. But perhaps the most important skill that I have learned is how to use the

English language in practical, everyday conversations in order to avoid or prevent confusion that is rooted from misunderstandings or miscommunications. There was this one time when I was watching the evening news with a friend of mine. The news show televised a case wherein two individuals claiming to be insurance handlers fooled other people into subscribing for insurance plans.

They ran away after obtaining the initial payments made by their clients. I remember my friend telling me initially how it was a “ rip off.” I did not understand what he meant by the situation being a rip-off since the act of ripping to me, as I understood it, is the act of tearing or cutting a thing or an

object. Out of pure curiosity, I asked him what he meant and he explained to me how the word “ rip-off” means a form ofcheatingor conning.

I especially value learning practical English language through my daily encounters with other people because it has greatly helped in my being able to adjust to my life here in a foreign country.

However, I am not disregarding the fact that learning the formal grammar rules of the English language is all too important, my learning of practical English language foreveryday usehas contributed to my getting used to living in this country as I feel that I understand people more when I talk to them leaving out confusion or awkwardness in misunderstandings or miscommunications.

I can relate to my friends when they say they are “ having dibs” on or going “ bonkers” over some girls they see in the campus or on the street, or when they say that we need to “ pull an all-nighter” before the day of the examinations, and such.

Learning words or phrases that are commonly used in this country has made it easier for me to understand what other people mean, making it also easy to respond, make judgments, state opinions, and such. Moreover, it has boosted my self-confidence in opening conversations with other people creating more opportunities for me to learn the English language effectively.