

The power of language

[Linguistics](#), [Language](#)



Language is considered to be one of the most important components of cultures since it is through language that human beings are able to communicate with each other. However, there are many different languages for many different parts of the world. This makes it hard for people from different parts of any culture with different language to communicate with each other. Thus, studying or learning another's language is as much a part of us as reading books is.

Learning a new language is an integral part of becoming at home in a new or another country. Stepping into another country or territory wherein another language is used, you feel as if you are the only person who can understand yourself. You feel like an alien. You feel alone.

But when you finally learn the language, it makes you feel happy and satisfied, as if you have just received an award or finished the most difficult project you have encountered. But your contentment doubles when you learn to use it effectively when communicating with other people. You no longer feel alone. You feel that, at last, someone understands what you are trying to say.

Amy Tan's article, *Mother Tongue*, talks about how her mother's "broken" English finally led her to realize that the more important thing in learning a language is not speaking or writing it perfectly, with all the difficult words and grammatical correctness. She realized that the more important thing is to speak or write a language wherein most people can understand it.

When she wrote her novel *The Joy Luck Club*, she intended to use difficult words, phrases and metaphors because she thought this is how she can

<https://assignbuster.com/the-power-of-language/>

prove to most people that second-language learners do not just excel in sciences or mathematics wherein there is a common language use. However, as she went on writing, she began to realize that she should think about the readers and how they would feel or think about her stories. She envisioned that reader to be her mother.

This is the point when she finally understands that she should “water down” the English she is using to make her mother understand what she was trying to say. That is, it is more important to capture the essence of what her mother’s language ability cannot reveal — the intent, passion and imagery her mother was trying to get across.

Tan summarizes her personal experience and feelings in learning English in her last paragraph in *Mother Tongue*:

Apart from what any critic had to say about my writing, I knew I had succeeded where it counted when my mother finished reading my book and gave me her verdict: “So easy to read.” (476)

Another article that tells a story of how difficult it is to learn a new language is Malcolm X’s *Coming to an Awareness of Language*. To Malcolm X, what makes it harder is to learn to communicate it to people effectively. In this brief autobiography, he mentioned how he would write to hustlers, presidents, and people in the streets to communicate about Allah. He gives speeches and talks in conferences. One look from him and you’d think that he went to school and got beyond eighth grade. But he attributes all his knowledge in the English language to his serving his time in prison.

Malcom X tells how hard he tried to learn the English language. All of his motivation to learn the English language came from his envy to Bimbi. He tried to emulate him by conversing with him in English and reading books in English. But then, he cannot understand most of the words and sentences in the books he picked. He would skip the difficult words so he ended up not understanding what the book really said. What he did is that he got hold of a dictionary and started to write everything each day from each page.

This is how he learned not just new and difficult words but some history and facts as well. Malcom X's autobiography tries to tell us that no matter how hard it is to learn a new language (or just to learn something), it makes you feel satisfied and free after you know you have finally understood it.

David Sedaris' *Me Talk Pretty One Day* also describes how he painstakingly learned a new language — the French language this time. He enrolled in Alliance Francaise to study French only to discover that his teacher is, as he called it, a wild animal. It was only the first day of class and he and his classmates were already grilled in using the French they knew about by telling about themselves in French.

All of them were called to introduce themselves but not one of them was saved by the sadistic teacher who made fun of their French. His fears and discomfort that he felt as a child all came running back to him as if he was being a kindergarten all over again. But then, no matter how his teacher tried to insult his laziness, he would only be studying more.

Learning a new language can be tricky and very difficult especially for first-timers. There are times when, as Sedaris described, we would prefer to hide behind stores and cash registers and avoid asking trivial questions in another language. But all this is learning. Learning is, indeed hard and tricky, but when we finally learned, it is very satisfying. In learning a new language, it is very satisfying in the sense that when we finally learned and mastered another language, we know that more people can understand us. We feel gratified that we have earned the rewards of the hardships we have experienced. And most of all, we feel a sense of belongingness.

Works Cited

1. Malcom X. " Coming to an Awareness of Language."
2. Sedaris, David. " Me Talk Pretty One Day." 2000.
3. Tan, Amy. " Mother Tongue."