

Unit 2 - The Variety of Languages

Lesson 1 - Importance of speaking other languages

Day 1:

Discuss

- Speaking other languages
- Brainstorm ideas about when you might use another language. (e.g. traveling, singing foreign songs, etc.)
- What jobs might you have in which it would be useful to know another language? (e.g. doctor helping a patient who does not speak English, government positions)
- Do we have expectations of people to speak our language when they are in our country?
- Do we also expect people to speak our language when we are visiting their country?
- Some classes may at this point want to start a discussion of what we would gain or lose by having one universal language or of the history of Esperanto. But this will also come up in a later lesson.

Discuss

- Why are there so many different languages?
- Perhaps the first human words were formed by mimicking sounds in the environment, and different regions developed different sound patterns.
- Could there originally have been one universal language or many fewer languages than there are today, and they simply developed in different ways creating new languages.

Activity

Have students read aloud a version of the Tower of Babel story from the Bible. Look at this as an historical document. Was there someone who was trying to make a theory about how languages were developing, someone who thought that there was an original language that was now developing into many?

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Tower of Babel link

Day 2:

Activity

Experiment and see how language could change when it passes from one generation or one group of people to the next. Play whisper down the lane with a nonsense word.

- Number each student around the room.
- The teacher goes out into the hall with a nonsense word, such as sarguintifial, written on a piece of paper.
- The teacher calls one student out into the hall, says the word and shows it to the student.
- That student then stays out in the hall while the teacher returns to the class. The student in the hall is writing down the word from memory, right after seeing it from the teacher, but without looking at it, while the teacher sends the next student out into the hall.
- Student #1 says the word and shows it to student #2, who then stays, writes it down, and prepares to say it and show it to student #3.
- The last student will then write the word up on the board, announce it to the class, and compare it to the original from the teacher.
- Have students list the words they wrote down in order on the board to see how gradual the changes were. Make sure the list of numbers is already on the board.
- Look for changes such as consonants dropping out, vowels changing, the end of the word dropping off, the word splitting into two.

Discuss

- Does this happen to languages?
- These are changes that happen to words as they evolve over generations, across cultures, and into other languages.
- This experiment happened with a handful of people over 20 minutes, but imagine the changes that a language goes through over centuries and millions of people.
- There are so many different languages in the world, but we are going to find out during this year what similarities they have, and if some of them have in fact grown out of the same original language.

For Next Class

Have students ask the people in their household what languages they know or have at some point studied. Ask them to make a list of all of the languages known by their family. (You may want to discuss the difference between being able to say a few phrases in a language and speaking fluently.)

Homework

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Find out spoken languages at home