

General Education Reflection

My general education courses have all been for learning Chinese. I took courses from Chinese 101 to Chinese 301. Learning another language challenges your brain to think differently. For example, in Chinese, questions follow a different structure than they do in English. Question words don't move to the front of the sentence as they do in English; instead of saying 'Where are you?' you literally say 'You are where?' Learning to shift the way I think about sentence structure helps my mind to think more flexibly. I needed to learn to change my thinking process quickly when going from one language to another. When I am trying to debug, I often find I need to shift between different possibilities of where the problem is coming from. It can be easy to get stuck in one way of thinking or have trouble trying to shift between different ideas. Taking these courses to learn a second language gives me a broader perspective and helps me adapt quickly to problems.

These courses taught me about a different culture, which broadened my point of view, so I can have a better understanding of how the technology I make affects others. It is important to immerse yourself in the culture when learning another language. Not only for the practice, but also because the context and sentences can be different in another language. It is not enough to know what every word means; you must pay attention to what the context implies. For example, I remember in my 202 class, my tutor explained to me that the phrase in Chinese, which literally translates to 'Have you eaten?' in English, actually is more of a polite greeting. It shows care for someone you are familiar with. Technology can be shared with people all over the world. I may need to think about how the way things look or how they are read may come across in a different culture. These classes make me less likely to assume there is one "natural" way to express an idea.

When developing a new language, you also have to be comfortable with being misunderstood or being wrong. It can be hard to try to communicate with a native speaker without feeling foolish for making a mistake. However, I remember in the first week of my Chinese 101 class, our teacher encouraged us to try to speak with native speakers as much as possible. It helps you not only practice the language but also get comfortable speaking it. I remember being partnered with a native speaker and feeling so awkward when I tried to speak with them. In the professional world, there are times when you need the confidence to speak even when you aren't certain. Not every solution is straightforward, especially during a crisis where you may have to act before you have all the information. It also helped me let go of perfection and feel ok even when I make mistakes. Making mistakes is part of success, and not being afraid to make them will help me learn more.