

Beginning around the year 4000 B.C.E, The Sumerian Cuneiform was born. For some, this is the defining point for the dawn of literature and language. There is evidence of earlier spoken languages existing, unfortunately there's no written accounts of such. Clay tablets were used as paper, and stones to carve the clay tablets so the Sumerians could document all varieties of information. The existence of a language gave life to large advances in trade and property. "The wedge-shaped counting marks they used in their written record-keeping on clay tablets, dating back to 4000 BC, were known as Cuneiform."¹ A portion of barley, something not given much consideration today, at one point was known as a Shekel. "The developing system needed a uniform currency, and the Sumerians used the shekel, which itself was equivalent to one portion of barley"² This was among the first currencies to be used in the developing world. One of the few that fueled the early Sumerian economy.

Sumer, like many City-States in early Mesopotamia, was rich in tin and copper, but also struggled to feed its growing population. The Sumerians overcame this issue with trade. The system they used was a complex trade system operating off of trade-debts owed to the temple. Silver was loaned out to those who could pay off what was owed. These debts could be settled with varying goods from livestock, food, or rare gems as long as it was deemed of equal value by the temple authorities. "... commercial exchange genuinely operated as trade-debts owed to the temple authorities who loaned out silver, for instance, could be paid in silver or a silver equivalent."³ This brought an end to traveling collectives of nomads, and culture developed as a whole.

Trade often occurred inter-regional, one of their primary trade partners was Egypt. This of course presented its own set of challenges. Egyptians and Sumerians did not write in the same language. So, the question is, how did they understand each other? Even long ago, scholars in the cities between Egypt and Sumer would learn both languages and would assist in facilitating trade as translators. Thus, helping bridge the vast gap in their languages.

Language barriers have been an issue for all of written human history. In modern times services such as the internet and AI have

weakened these barriers. Teachers, and Cultural Diffusion have always played a large part in helping us communicate, but it hasn't been and isn't easy. All languages share similarities with one another, a few prime examples are "the romance languages". Native English speakers will have an easier time learning Spanish, versus learning Mandarin Chinese. This is due to the dissimilarities in the way they are spoken, also known as the Language Barrier Index. "... the Language Barrier Index (LBI) quantifies International language barriers by measuring the dissimilarity between the main languages of trading partners."⁴ This index attempts to evaluate the "distance" between a select two languages.

The further away two languages are determined to be, the less likely they are to be seeking to trade with one another. This prevents trade between the two countries, and in our modern day this harms our economy globally. "The estimation of the gravity model of trade shows that language barriers are a significant deterrent to bilateral trade. a 10% increase in the language barrier index can cause a 7%-10% decrease in trade flows between two countries."⁵ This decrease in trade and existence of the language barrier can generate obstacles for businesses, especially those looking to expand into newer markets, and reach different clientele. Anywhere from not understanding the suppliers or misreading a contract with a partner company is always a potential risk. "When trading partners use similar languages, trade is likely to be 72% higher on an average than when trading partners are linguistically distant."⁶

Even in our own country, when someone who moves here from Portugal calls 911, he may not be understood if he did not have the time or money to learn English, or if the dispatcher on the other line doesn't speak Portuguese. Language barriers can prove to be a significant hurdle when directing emergency services or directing the construction of a skyscraper. A translator may not always be available, and in countries where they may not have the economy to afford such services, misunderstandings can leave the world in disarray. If you go to another country, you might not be understood, and that's a scary feeling. Language barriers hurt us, so how do we overcome this?

There are many types of barriers, the most commonly known barrier is different languages. Sometimes you can live in the same country and still not understand, this kind of barrier is a dialect barrier. There are several languages that share this issue. Spanish is the perfect example for this. Puerto Rican Spanish is not the same as Spain's original dialect Spanish. Neither of those are the same as the Spanish dialect spoken in Mexico. "India, for example, uses over 22 major languages, written in 12 different scripts, with over 720 dialects."⁷

Entering a new workplace there is a language barrier. This one is harder to notice in effect. Have you ever gone home from a day at work, being out at the gym, or finished working on a hobby, but when you tell your friend/family they look at you confused when you use a word that only has meaning at your workplace? This is a variety of language barriers you may not have even known existed inside your own home.

Not all language barriers have to be just spoken languages. For our disabled friends, a language barrier could be something as drastic as not being able to hear you or read what you wrote down. This applies to our non-native speakers who may not have learned the language just yet.

Avoiding using complex words can help. In our day to day, we use many complex English phrases that non-native English speakers may not have picked up. A key example of this is slang, or conjugated words. Large words are especially common, they can convey our expression efficiently, but only if others understand. Even if you just say hello, that can be enough to show them you are trying. "...4500 words is the most common vocabulary size for on native English test –takers. ... when living in and English-speaking country, non-natives acquire 2.5 new words per day."⁸

Employing the use of a translation service can also be an excellent choice, while it's more workplace specific, writing information to be passed along in a language they understand can be beneficial both in and outside of a company and workplace setting. Miscommunications often lead to mistakes, minimizing this helps everything run smoothly. In legal cases, it can even be a good idea to enlist the aid of an interpreter. Having someone to read off or translate information into a method they

understand is an excellent method to avoid loss of services, or a bad reputation.

In all languages photos and images are well received and understood. In some cases, images are even globally recognized. Most people would be able to identify a photo of an apple, versus a photo of the word apple. Making use of both sound and sight, this method could help break down language barriers across the globe. There are several E-services that feature this as a way to help teach non-native speakers. Rosetta stone and Duolingo are just two examples i have for exact case. "Text is a much more complicated thing that requires extended learning. Visual information can be processed 60,000 times faster than text and is easier to remember. Researchers say that people tend to only remember 20% of what they read while around 37% of the population are visual learners."⁹

Pairing all of that together with repetition helps out more than you would think. Newer speakers may take a moment or two to remember what you said. It's important to repeat yourself, while also being respectful. Speaking slowly and clearly is a big help, getting louder and angry doesn't help anyone. Breaking down a language barrier isn't something that just happens overnight.

The strides we've made in understanding each other shouldn't be overlooked, language barriers had to be overcome for religious purposes as well. The Bible was written in Greek and Hebrew. but as the faith spread and gained popularity, it spread to other countries. When it got there, they had to translate it. because of this the bible has been translated into over 700 languages that feature the entire bible. This saw an increase as just the New Testament has been translated into over 1500 languages. "According to Enthlogue, there are currently 7,106 languages int the world. as of 2020 the bible has been translated into 704 languages. The New Testament has been translated into 1551 languages, and parts of the bible have been translated into 1160 additional languages."¹¹

The history of translations however far exceeds the age of the bible. It's theorized that the first translated literature was "The Epic of Gilgamesh". Believed to originally be written in Sumerian, it was translated to a variety of Asian languages. However, another widely accepted concept is the potential of the Rosetta stone being the first. "One of the most accepted theories states that the first translation known was a poem called "The Epic of Gilgamesh", originally written in Sumerian and translated into a variety of Asian languages."¹² "another widely accepted hypothesis believes that the Rosetta Stone, an ancient Egyptian stone inscribed with a decree, issued at Memphis in 196 BC, was the first piece of translation."¹³ i can't say for certain which came first, but i can tell you the Toledo School of Translators was founded in the 12th century, and is considered to be the first translator school in history. I found the greatest part about this school is, that there was a heavy mix of Arabic, Jewish, And Christian scholars, and scientists. They were all working together to translate the varying works into Spanish. The procedure for translation was usually the following; the Jew translated into common Spanish, the Arabic text, which was read aloud to him, and the Christian translated this Spanish version into Latin."¹⁴

With this long history of Translation innovation and development, it has become easier for us to understand each other. For how long? Language will continue to change and grow as time goes on and we create new terms and repurpose old ones. So where do we go from here?

Thanks to a vast increase in the availability of mobile phones, and computers, that barrier gets smaller every day. There are hundreds of services on the internet that offer real-time translation. Varying social media apps will translate conversations you're having with someone, while you're having it. Viber and Transfire are two great examples of this. even getting as advanced as to provide this same service to phone and video calls. You could have a conversation with someone in Chinese and not know a single word in mandarin. All of these tools have helped to increase trade across the planet. Among all of this, is it really enough? For big companies like Ebay, it's not. Ebay has been pushing even further with Ai based translations services offered in its app. With it, they've made strides

in closing the language barrier further and further. As a result, Ebay was able to boost its sales by more than 10%.

In other companies, it enables collaboration, from across the globe. Companies that wouldn't have likely done business before are now making deals and shaking hands. Sci Space is another corporation that recently had a struggle with language barriers, some of the staff couldn't read the research papers they were sent out. So Sci Space developed an ai to translate all documents to the recipient's preferred language. This technology could help further increase job safety, and product quality would see a nice jump.

Other ways to cross the language barrier, says one Navratan Soni, writing for LinkedIn, include not actually crossing the language barrier, but gaining the respect of your peers from other countries. A strong work ethic, will to persevere, and willingness to engage in small cultural displays with them. Some of these cultural rituals may seem silly or unnecessary to some visitors and itinerant workers, but those displays are rather important to the host culture and should be respected. "If you're beginning to sweat because you only speak one or two languages, ... there are many different ways you can navigate these barriers."¹⁵ "... Don't be afraid to attempt a project just because your team does not speak the language. By making an effort, you can show the other company that you are trying, and invested in the venture."¹⁶ learning an entire language just for one project is a tough ask, so there are not many who would dare to truly expect a foreign business partner to be fluent in their native tongue. However, even a modicum of understanding a host culture and language can break down cross-cultural barriers and open up trade.

Trade barriers, such as tariffs, are another thing that can exacerbate language barriers. They are legal documents that, while already hard to navigate to most sane tradesmen and merchants, are doubly difficult for the well educated but unfamiliar foreign trader. Lightweight trucks from Europe, for example, are quite hard to come by in the United States, specifically because of a Cold War tariff on the same. This is a relic of a trade war started when European chicken farmers were struggling to keep their products, such as chicken breast and thighs, at a price they could

afford. This led their European governments to erecting tariffs on American poultry, and America responded by raising a tariff on European lightweight trucks. This was the tariff raised because of many political considerations at the time, such as the Equal Rights movement sweeping America, and President Johnson being under pressure from the United Auto Workers union while trying to sign the Civil Rights Act. The tariff remains in place today, not because of a continuing trade war, but rather political games played by the UAW and the politicians they fund to keep them in power. The scarcest acknowledged tariffs are often the reason that foreign merchants, who would otherwise be interested in doing business with places like America, consider the language barrier too high for them to leap. To comply with the labyrinthian trade codes in one's own country can be a struggle, but to comply with the same in a country with a different language, tradition of law, and perhaps even a different flavor of law, can be an infinitely greater obstacle.

The flavor of laws can vary between traditions of law. The Anglosphere, such as the United Kingdom, United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and the Falklands, enjoy a tradition of more relaxed laws written in a precise, and ideally brief, dry dialect that most can at least comprehend at a glance if you know the language. In other places, however, the language may not be the only difference to a legal code you will have to comply with. Middle Eastern laws, for example, pull their "flavor" from the Quran, Hadiths, and other Islamic religious texts. This legal flavor, as well as the vast linguistic barrier between most developed countries, has made trade with the Middle East a game played more by politicians and soldiers than the traders who should be running the proverbial show of trade and commerce. Another barrier to trade, beyond the particularly Islamic legal flavor of the area, is the cultural prohibitions that Muslims must live by. No Muslim is allowed, for example, to make money through morally gray investments. These may not be illegal investments, per se, but the legal activities the potential invested company may be Haram, or unclean and sinful under Islamic doctrines. If one wishes to genuinely trade with the Islamic world, then one must necessarily adopt a slightly more Islamic flavor for that branch of the company.

Local customs, a big barrier to gaining the trust of a business partner in a foreign country, are also a good way to become more accustomed to an area's flavor of law. If you understand a culture, you can more or less intuit how to remain legally compliant, trusted by business partners, and held in high regard by the consumers of a foreign market, which should allow international trade to become a less stressful and more profitable venture. For instance, doing business in rural America can be done, and often is, in my experience, with a handshake and a verbal contract. No form of formal dress is required, and you may even get an odd look or two if you appear in your professional attire. However, in places like the Republic of Korea, many business partners will judge you more on the brand of professional attire you chose for any given meeting, and it could lead them to sour on your business partnership.

This vast variation in the way businesses interact with one another, and how differently businesses can run, while also continuing to stay afloat in volatile markets is no easy task. These issues are only increased when COVID-19 hit. Businesses had to continue to navigate even trickier markets but had to employ entirely new strategies to still reach their consumer. Unfortunately, hundreds of businesses shut down between 2019 – 2022. We saw many companies shut down for an assorted number of reasons. A big factor that came into play toward the ending years of covid lockdowns, was a company's social media. Based on their vaccine mandates, they allowed and prevented individuals from coming to their store, which may have made some people happy, but they forgot about the rest of their consumer base. So when lockdowns lifted Many smaller businesses had to shut down and apply for bankruptcy due to either a lack of popularity, or a lack of workers. "In June 2021, 6.2 million people did not work at all or worked fewer hours because their employer closed or lost business due to the coronavirus pandemic. This is down from 7.9 million in May 2021, and from 49.6 million in May 2020."¹⁷

Businesses lost profit internationally. As covid raged on, many countries closed their borders while their country was ravaged by Covid-19. This directly prevented new deals from being made. People were scared to spend their earned capital in fear of being unable to regain it at a later

date after a strategic purchase. These came about because of the present danger COVID-19 still poses, but also as a result of Businesses and consumers not talking to each other.

Nowadays we don't have to go into business to let them know what we thought of them. The star system is a key example of this, by giving a business either 1 or 5 stars, you can easily let others and the business know how your visit was. I've seen it most frequently on google maps and yelp. This one way consumers can overcome the Language Barrier between corporation and its clientele. In China, China adopted a Social Credit system. Where you can go as far as rating even your neighbor. Every entity, from businesses, to individual people, all the way to government entities. They all have credit scores that are affected in real time depending on who you meet. In China your outward appearance is very important. As an individual having a low score can prevent you from receiving loans, travelling outside your city, and even as harsh as public humiliation and shaming. Having a low score in China can turn civilians into outcasts. For businesses, these penalties can restrict business opportunities, and can even come with imposed fines, or even a loss of rights to do business in China. This can be dangerous for Everyone from all classes of society. Incoming businesses have a fair chance to outperform existing businesses, and corporations who don't exercise customer service, a taste of why a business should care for its consumer base.

This system is by no means perfect; however, some citizens have already found themselves blacklisted from the travel list. Penalties can be invoked based on a person's spending habits, outfit choice, in some cases even losing a court case? "Chinese lawyer Li Xiaolin found himself in this predicament last year. According to Human Rights Watch: "He tried to use his national identity card to purchase a plane ticket. To his surprise, the online system rejected it, saying he had been blacklisted by China's top court. Mr. Li checked the court's website; his name was on a list of 'untrustworthy' people." "... He was blacklisted for losing a defamation suit that was brought against him. He wrote an apology letter to the court as a means of making amends, and didn't know that the court rejected his apology until the travel mishap." ¹⁸

This shows we can take wrong steps in the pursuit of understanding one another. Even without speaking it can be easy to miscommunicate our intentions. Oftenly known as 'body language' the way we move, and the energy we give off can alter how others view us, and how we view others. Tattoos are one of the biggest barriers we still face in modern day. A large muscular man with tattoos is less likely to be viewed as friendly, versus a similar man without any. "...about three-in-ten (29%) say that seeing a tattoo on someone gives them a negative impression of that person." ¹⁹

It isn't just tattoos, the way we stand, and our facial expressions can say things we never meant to be heard. Similar to how we understand the frown to be a sign of upset or displeasure, the way you stand can convey the same. Folded arms can come off as guarded or defensive. Whereas a more neutral stance seems more receptive to interaction. "A person who waves their hands and gestures while speaking might be perceived as enthusiastic or passionate about the subject. Meanwhile, a posture that is curled inward may suggest anxiety or fear. Reading these cues enables the person perceiving them to respond appropriately and foster stronger relationships." ²⁰

The way we interact with each other can help us all learn, and develop new ways to efficiently complete tasks. The railroad system that stretches across America is a living testament to the feats accomplishable even when the workers may not all understand the common spoken language. The railroads featured thousands of immigrant workers, the Chinese, Irish, Black, and Mexican migrant workers. They blasted through mountains and bridged valleys to construct a method of efficient transport so good can be exchanged across the United States. The varying regions they hailed from are all geographically and linguistically very different. The prospect of having a better life brought them all to one place. "Beginning in 1863, the Union Pacific, employing more than 8,000 Irish, German, and Italian immigrants, build west from Omaha, Nebraska; the Central Pacific, whose workforce included over 10,000 Chinese laborers built eastward from Sacramento, California." ²¹

Migrant workers still play a vital role in our current economy, they earn income and pay taxes which stimulates the flow of currency. While

also providing or selling a service natives may use and find better than what they had previously available. "Migrants accounted for 47% of the increase in the workforce in the United States and 70% in Europe over the past 10 years."²² The diffusion of different cultures affects the foods we consume. Many Oriental style dishes are modified when they reach the United States. This is to do with knowing their customers. Many Americans won't try something if it's made from unconventional ingredients. So many who come here to open restaurants will "Americanize" their recipes to make it more appealing for their target demographic. "Menu favorites like Crab Rangoon, Chop Suey, and General Tso's Chicken originated in America."²³

Racism, still inhibits us. An unexplainable dislike toward someone else, is something that will keep us from truly understanding. In countries like South Africa and Afghanistan, Discrimination is rooted deeply within the heart of each country. South Africa Just ended its long walk under the cruel apartheid sun, only for it to flip on its head where now the oppressed are the oppressors. This hate isn't new, we've just ignored it. The history of Africa as a continent is riddled in civil wars and bloodshed. And has been dating back to the Nigerian civil war in 1967.

If we demonstrate Respect for one another when communication is difficult, and attempt to learn from our failures, we can achieve an age where no person is misunderstood. Where language won't be a defining obstacle within international and domestic affairs. The future of mankind lies in relationships we build and alliances we make. We don't have to eliminate conflict, but we can make the human cost a little less. Innovation reaches its peak when there's a driving force behind the need for growth. Competition is a necessary part of evolution, however i believe we can achieve greater heights if we can get past the concept of fighting for what you believe. The cold war was an excellent example of human innovation and logic overcoming the desire to fight and destroy. The cold war gave life to the space race, a competition between the United States to demonstrate which country had synthesized better rocket technology. And there was no fighting involved. "The Space race began as an arms race between the respective militaries of the United States and the Soviet

Union. World War II had demonstrated to the world that rocket technology, and would drive modern warfare, and as such the U.S and Russia locked themselves in a race to have the most superior technology.”²⁴

Not all communication has to be through conflict. There are thousands of years of transcription history. Centuries of evidence of how even in their earliest forms language barriers have negatively impacted communication. Trade, however, has prospered despite the challenges language barriers provide. We have created ways to understand each other, without needing to say a word. In the developing age of information, we can know more about another ethnicity, or another language than we ever have had access to in history. It’s right at our fingertips

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