

“The limits of our language are the limits of our world” Language, Identity and Culture in Mental Health

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May 6, 2021

1:00 PM – 2:30 PM ET



The MHTTC Network uses affirming, respectful and recovery-oriented language in all activities. That language is:

STRENGTHS-BASED
AND HOPEFUL

INCLUSIVE AND
ACCEPTING OF
DIVERSE CULTURES,
GENDERS,
PERSPECTIVES,
AND EXPERIENCES

HEALING-CENTERED AND
TRAUMA-RESPONSIVE

INVITING TO INDIVIDUALS
PARTICIPATING IN THEIR
OWN JOURNEYS

PERSON-FIRST AND
FREE OF LABELS

NON-JUDGMENTAL AND
AVOIDING ASSUMPTIONS

RESPECTFUL, CLEAR
AND UNDERSTANDABLE

CONSISTENT WITH
OUR ACTIONS,
POLICIES, AND PRODUCTS

Adapted from: https://mhcc.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/Recovery-Oriented-Language-Guide_2019ed_v1_20190809-Web.pdf

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This work is supported by grant No. 6H79SM081788 from the DHHS, SAMHSA.

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Mental Health Technology Transfer Center Network

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<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/M7N3FPT>



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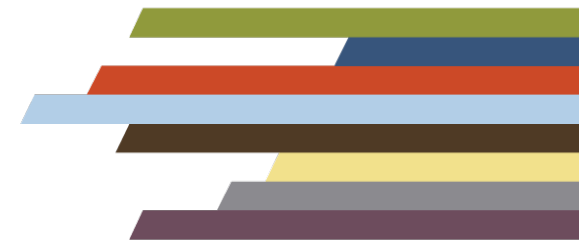
Author Disclose Conflicts of Interest

- The author declares no conflicts of interest.

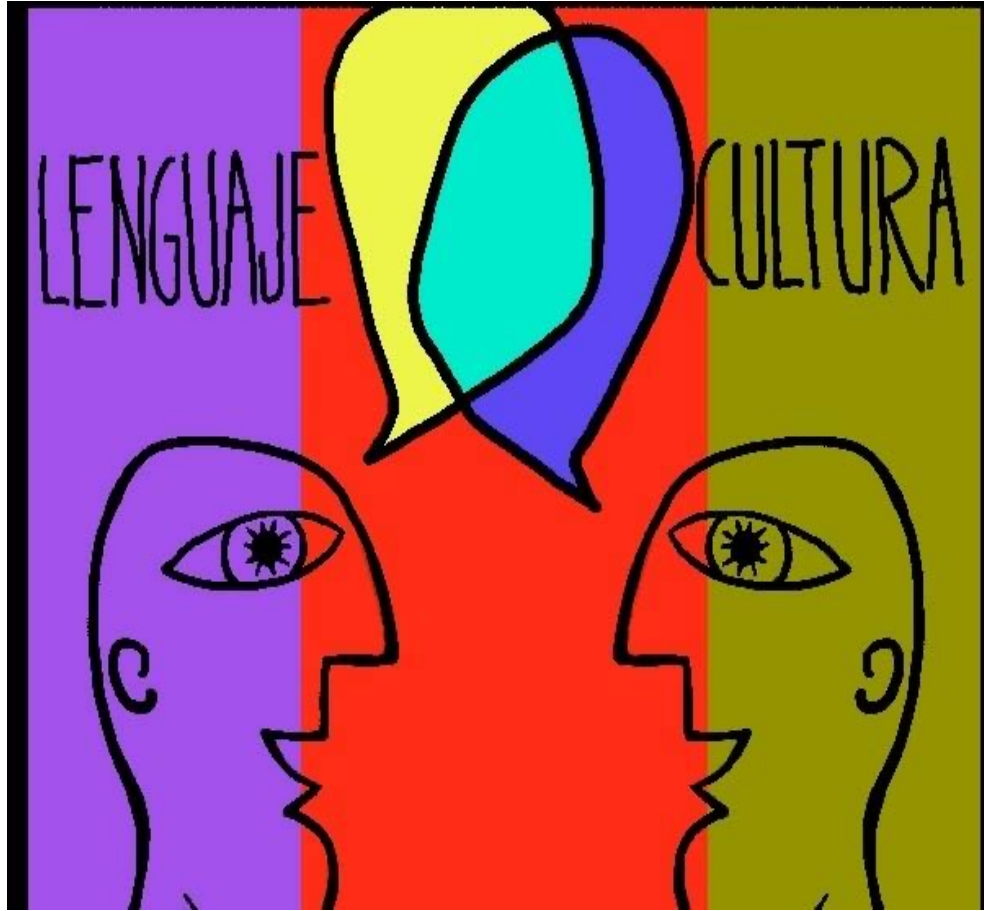


Topics:

- How does language and culture interact?
- Do people who speak different languages think/act/feel differently?
- What's the interaction between language, culture and mental health?
- How do we practice Linguistic Responsiveness and Cultural Humility?

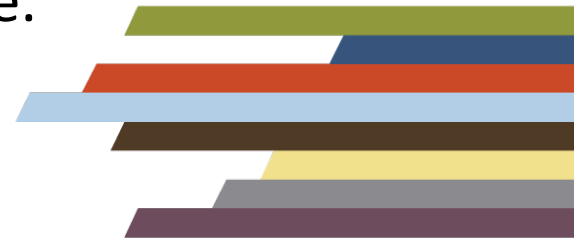


How does language, identity and culture interact?

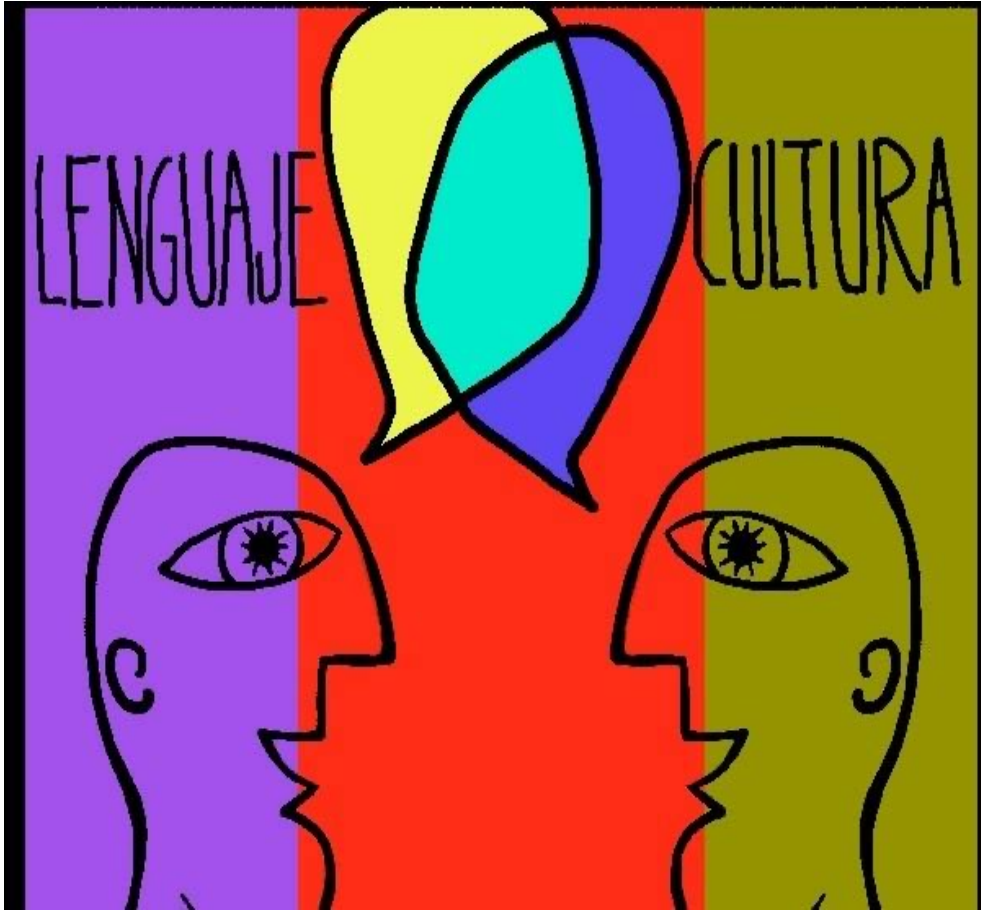


Language is a system of human communication which consists of a set of sounds (spoken language), gestures (sign language) and written symbols, that are shared by members of a culture.

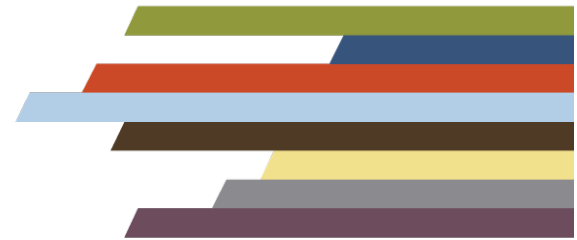
Culture can be defined as shared characteristics (values, behaviors, beliefs, attitudes, etc.) and learned tendencies or patterns of a group that are transferred from one generation to the next and can adapt slowly over time.



How does language, identity and culture interact?



Learning a language, is not only learning the alphabet, the meaning, the grammar rules and the arrangement of words, but it is also learning the behavior of the society and its cultural customs.



17 Spanish Words for POPCORN

BY WWW.SPEAKINGLATINO.COM

1. CABRITAS



Chile

2. CANCHITAS



Peru

3. CANGUIL



Ecuador

4. COCALECA



Dominican Republic

5. COTUFAS



Venezuela

6. CRISPETAS



Colombia

7. GALLITOS



Venezuela (regional)

8. MAÍZ PIRA



Colombia

9. MAÍZ TOTE



Colombia

10. MILLO



Panama

11. PALOMITAS DE MAÍZ

General

12. POCHOCLOS



Argentina

13. POP



Uruguay

14. POPOROPO



Guatemala

15. PORORÓ



Argentina



Bolivia



Paraguay



Uruguay

16. ROSETAS

General

17. ROSITAS DE MAÍZ



Cuba

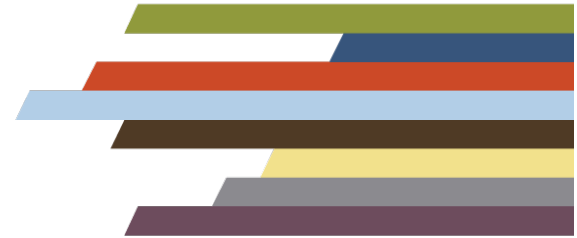


Dominican Republic

- **Formal/Informal:** You/tu, you/usted.
- **Wider vocabulary,** descriptors for the “same” noun. Reflects importance of thing’s and activities in our culture.

Ex: Inuit people and their 50 words for “snow”

Or, different words in the same language for the same object.





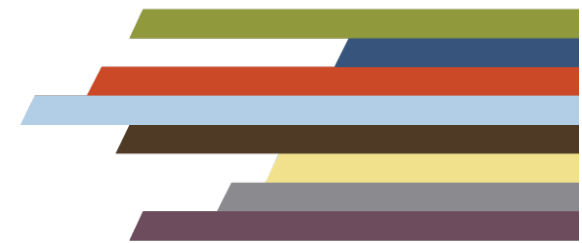
Space/directions/time:

English / Hebrew.

Left to Right / Right to Left.

Past to Present

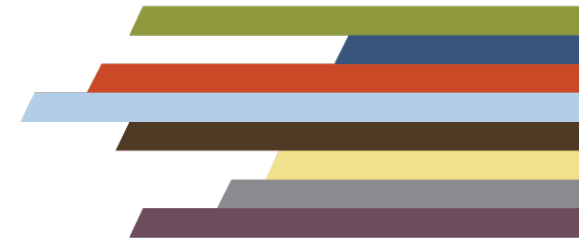
For the Kuuk Thaayorre Community in Australia, the space/sense of direction stays on the landscape.





Grammatical Gender

Children could add voices to animated objects depending on the grammatical gender of the object.



*Golden, intricate,
little, and tiny*

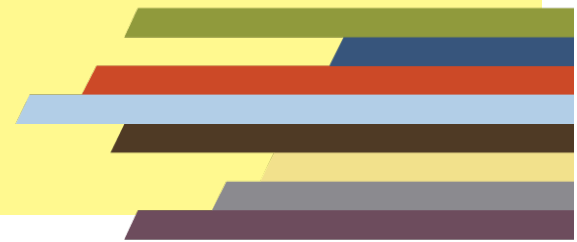
*la
llave*



DER
SCHLÜSSEL



*Hard, tool, metal,
and useful*



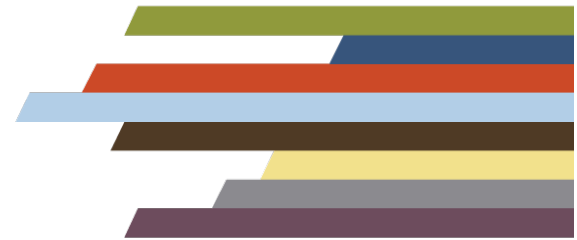
Guilt/Punishment. Assign agency, cause of power. Agentive or non-agentive.



“A man broke his pencil while trying to write with it” / El hombre estaba escribiendo y el lápiz se rompió.

“He lost a balloon” / El globo se le fue de las manos.

“He put his arm down and picked up a sticky note” / Se le quedó pegado el papel en el brazo.



Summary

Language, Identity and **Culture** are intrinsically connected.

Language plays an important role in our perception and worldview.

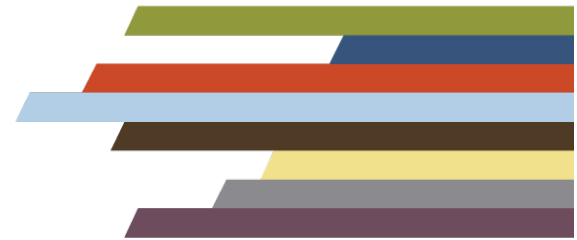
Variables in language **can change**: notions of space/location and how we view time and social status, assign identities through grammatical gender, or even consequences around blame/guilt.



Do people who speak different languages think/act/feel differently?

“To have a second language is to have a second soul.”

- Charlemagne



Do people who speak different languages think/act/feel differently?

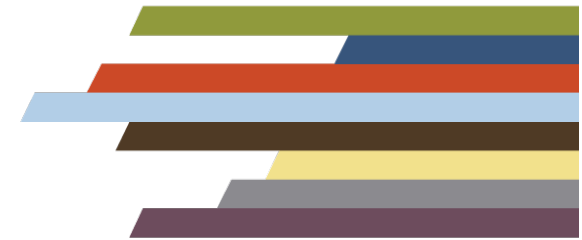
A research published (2010) Journal of Experimental Social Psychology.



The researchers administered the Implicit Association Test (IAT) in two settings: once in Morocco, with subjects who spoke Arabic and French, and again in the United States, with Hispanic/Latinx who spoke English and Spanish.

In Morocco, participants who took the IAT in Arabic showed greater preference for Moroccan's names. When they took the test in French, that difference disappeared. Similarly, in the United States, participants who took the test in Spanish showed a greater preference for other Hispanic's names. But again, in English, that preference disappeared.

<https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2010/11/change-languages-shift-responses/>



Do people who speak different languages think/act/feel differently?

Apapacho

To hug with the soul

Guayabo

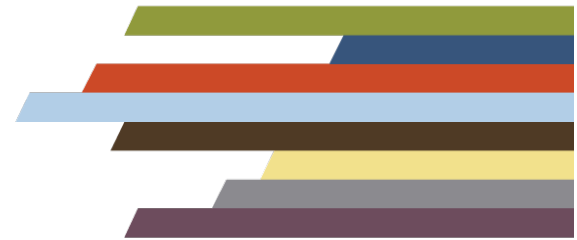
Being hurt after a breakup

Quebranto

Affliction, feeling sick/weak.

People with limited proficiency in the English language are not able to express their feelings in the English language in the same way as they do in their first language.

Words of quality and/or words of emotional states cause certain difficulties for translators primarily because they have no equivalents in most languages and they tend to change their meanings over the course of time.



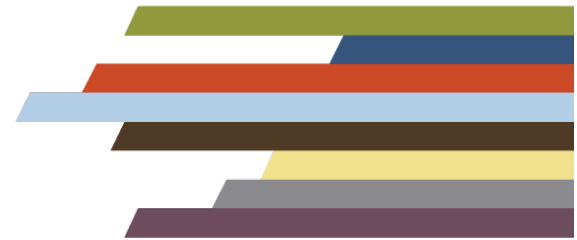
What's the interaction between language, culture and mental health?

Every language carries within it all the assumptions used by a society to make sense of the human condition, including inner feelings and emotional distress. These assumptions contain what people believe to be “true” in relation to mental health. Just because emotional reactions to distressing circumstances can be found worldwide does not necessarily mean that they mean the same thing for people everywhere.



A **thought** or a **feeling**, are they...

- Nouns (which has grammatical gender),
- Process (starts and ends, time/space),
- Quality of yourself (I am thinking/ it has agency)?.

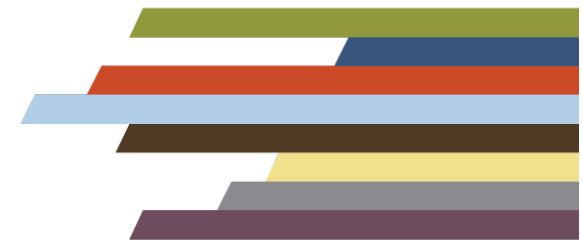


What's the interaction between language, culture and mental health?



Language affects our perception, so the way we speak has a impactful effect of organizing, categorizing, and understanding also, mental health.

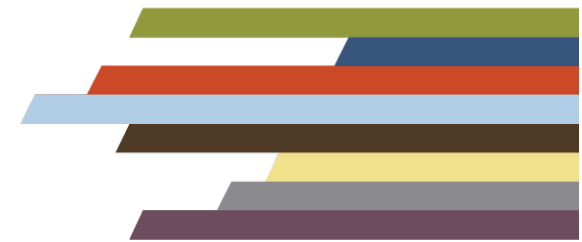
That's why we use Person-Centered Language



- **How do we practice Linguistic Responsiveness and Cultural Humility?**



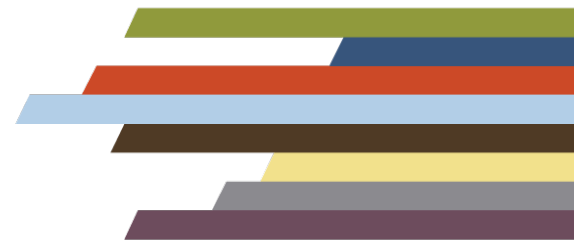
- **Understanding that language is a big part of culture and perception of the world.**
- **Only translating information is never enough.**
- **Being careful on the information we're leaving only for translations.**



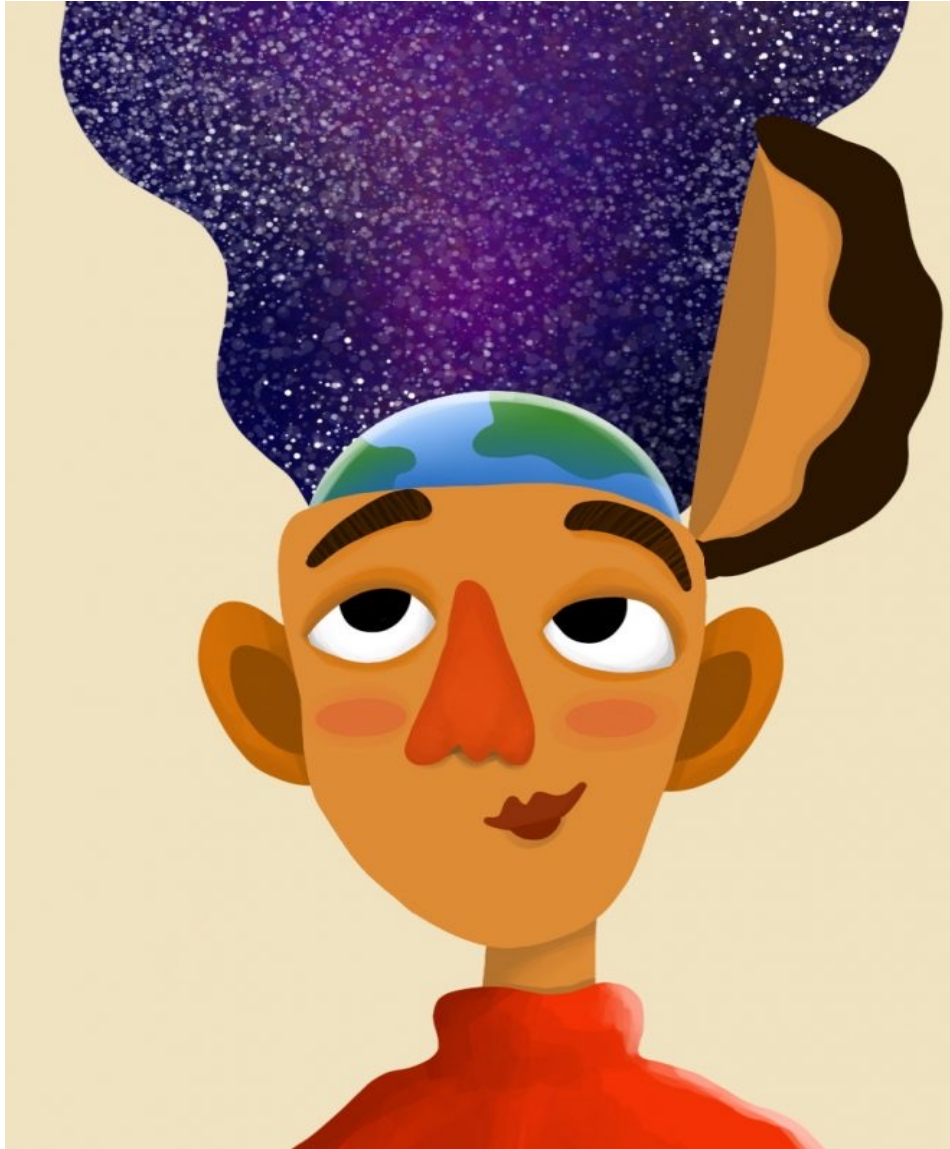
How do we practice Linguistic Responsiveness and Cultural Humility?

When working with Interpreters:

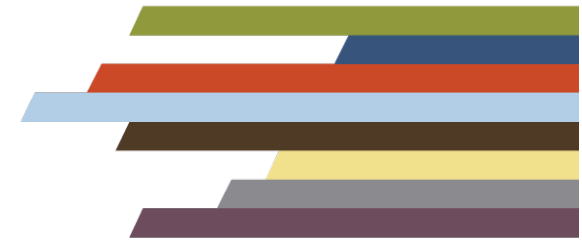
- Sit in a circle or triangle. This positioning helps everyone to see non-verbal cues.
- Pause frequently. Allow time after one or two sentences for the interpreter to interpret for both you and the client.
- Ask open-ended questions. Ask questions if you don't understand and encourage the client and the interpreter to do the same.
- Use Teach-back.
- Be patient. Interpreted sessions will generally take longer than sessions conducted in English.



How do we practice Linguistic Responsiveness and Cultural Humility?



- Think about your perceptions based on the language that you speak.
- Listening to an interpreter is having a glimpse of someone's identity, culture and worldview explained on your own worldview.
- Be comfortable with the idea of not understanding.
- Be humble and curious.





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Thank you / Gracias

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