#97 Languages

Words, mix-ups, and who we become in another language

LEVEL 4 | FREE TALK

PALLO!

ICEBREAKER QUESTIONS

1 **If you could learn any new language right now, which one would you pick?**

2 **What's a Konglish word you were shocked to find out isn't real English?**

FREE TALK

highlight = key expressions

1 When a language is **all Greek to us**, its words somehow look cooler. That's why T-shirts and café signs in Korea are full of random English and French. It works the other way around, too: pop star Ariana Grande once got a Japanese tattoo meant to say "7 rings," only to find out it actually read "small charcoal grill." **What's the funniest or strangest use of a foreign language you've ever seen, on a T-shirt, a menu, or a product?**

2 Some ideas fit into a single word in one language but need a whole sentence in another. Korean has "눈치" for quickly reading the mood in a room, and Danish has "hygge" for a warm, cozy feeling: words that say a lot about a culture but take a long explanation to **get the idea across**. **Which Korean word is the hardest to explain in English, and what do you think it says about Korean culture?**

3 Philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein wrote, "The limits of my language mean the limits of my world," and many learners would agree. Koreans learning English often start giving compliments freely and stop letting their age **box them in**, and some feel louder, funnier, or more confident, as if they've finally **come out of their shell**. **What's changed for you, or someone you know, after learning a new language: their world, their habits, or even their personality?**

4 Learning a language usually starts fast, but most learners soon hit a wall: the "intermediate plateau," where you're still improving but feel stuck, whether it's with listening or the fear of speaking. Then one day, things you've struggled with for weeks suddenly **fall into place**, and that's when it starts to get fun. **Which part of learning a language seems hardest for most people you know, and when does it usually start to get fun?**

5 Some people live abroad for years and still only **get by** with basic phrases. In LA's Koreatown, many immigrant families rely on their kids to translate. Korea is similar: because Koreans often switch to English first, many people from abroad do just fine with basic Korean. **If you lived in another country for years, would getting by in English be enough for you, or do you think you should become fluent in the local language?**

KEY EXPRESSIONS

Slip a couple of these into your answers.

be all Greek to someone
be impossible for someone to understand

get the idea across
make people understand what you mean

box someone in
limit someone to a fixed role or way of thinking

come out of one's shell
become more confident and talkative

fall into place
suddenly make sense or come together

get by
manage with just enough

SAY IT BETTER

The professional line isn't a direct replacement for the everyday one; it's the same idea in a semi-formal, business style.

EVERYDAY		PROFESSIONAL
The wording came out all wrong.	→	It was **an unfortunate turn of phrase**. ***Nuance:*** *A tactful way to admit wording caused confusion or offense.*
That feeling needs its own word.	→	English **lacks a precise term for** that feeling. ***Nuance:*** *Useful in reports when an idea is hard to name.*
I'm more outgoing in English.	→	I **come across as** more outgoing when I speak English. ***Nuance:*** *Means "seem to others"; useful in feedback and interviews.*
Listening seems to be the hardest part for most people.	→	Listening seems to be **the biggest hurdle** for most learners. ***Nuance:*** *Natural in project reviews when naming the main obstacle.*
I'd want to learn the local language.	→	I'd **make a point of** learning the local language. ***Nuance:*** *Shows deliberate effort, e.g. "I make a point of replying fast."*

DEBATE: WHAT WOULD YOU DO?

Are emojis ruining language, or creating a new one?

1 WARM UP · No sides yet. Share your own story first.

1. **Do you tend to use emojis or texting shortcuts, and who do you use them with most?**
2. Shortcuts like "brb" or "idk" can look like a secret code at first. **Have you ever come across one that left you totally confused? What was it?**

2 SITUATION · Read aloud, one sentence each.

Emojis have come a long way since a Japanese designer created a famous early set of **176** in 1999. There are now **3,953** official emojis, and they can even carry legal weight: in 2023, a Canadian court ruled that a farmer's 👍 reply to a contract counted as a signature. Texting shortcuts have spread just as fast: "LOL" and "OMG" made it into the Oxford English Dictionary in **2011**. Young Koreans shorten so many words, like "ㄱㅅ" for "thanks," that there's a slang term for the habit: **byeoldajul**, or "they shorten everything." Yet not everyone speaks this new language. In a 2024 survey, **81%** of Americans said they had been confused by someone's emoji, and many younger people use the slightly smiling face 🙂 sarcastically and read a thumbs-up as passive-aggressive. Critics say shortcuts widen the gap between generations, and that messages full of symbols leave too much room for misunderstanding. Defenders reply that emojis and shortcuts add the speed, tone, and humor plain text lacks, and a UK study found no evidence that texting harms children's grammar. **Are emojis and texting shortcuts ruining language, or creating a new one?**

3 TWO SIDES · Everyone picks one. No need for equal sides!

A RUINING IT

votes ☐

"Real feelings deserve real words."

Emojis and shortcuts make us lazy writers, leave meaning open to interpretation, and shut out anyone who doesn't know the code. When a single 👍 can end up in court, clear words are safer.

B A NEW LANGUAGE

votes ☐

"Language has always evolved."

Emojis and shortcuts put back the speed, tone, and humor that plain text strips away. People can still write formally when they need to. They just know when to switch.

Everyone speaks once before anyone speaks twice · Answer the last person **first**, then add your point.

4 FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS · Ask one that could make the other side rethink.

ASK SIDE A

- If emojis add the tone that text lacks, aren't they making messages clearer?
- People once worried that slang and the telephone would ruin language, too. Isn't this just how language changes?
- If "LOL" is in the dictionary now, isn't it already real language?

ASK SIDE B

- If you can't read "ㅋㅋ" or "brb" out loud in a conversation, is it really language?
- If a new shortcut needs explaining every time, is it really saving anyone time?
- If emojis are a language, why does each generation seem to speak a different one?

USEFUL LINE "Fair enough, but doesn't that depend on…" *Fair enough, but doesn't that depend on who you're texting?*

5 FINAL ROUND · Don't skip this part!

FINAL POSITION	"In the end, I think emojis are **ruining language / creating a new one**, because…" Did anyone switch sides? Why?	**BEST POINT**	"As the other side **rightly said**…" Name the best point you heard today.

KEY EXPRESSIONS

come a long way develop or improve a lot	**carry weight** be taken seriously; have influence	**passive-aggressive** showing anger in an indirect way
leave room for allow something to happen	**open to interpretation** able to be understood in different ways	**strip away** remove something completely

Data: Emojipedia (Sep 9, 2025), Engadget (Jul 7, 2023), Deseret News (May 20, 2024), The Conversation (Jul 7, 2025), Nuffield Foundation (Sep 5, 2012).

PALLO!