CS377E Assignment 2

We interviewed 13 people this week (summary below). We spoke to a mix of people with different language learning experiences, some successful and some unsuccessful, and a range of people with English as a native or foreign language.

Age	Native language	Foreign language	Notes
Adult	English	Spanish	"unsuccessful" grad student at Stanford
	EXPERT		director of Habla Tutoring Program for Stanford affiliates to learn English
Adult	English	Spanish, Russian, French	"successful" grad student at Stanford
Adult	English	Chinese	from Ireland, teaches in China
Child	Chinese	English	native Chinese, in kindergarten here in PA, 6 years old?
Adult	Chinese	English	visiting scholar
Adult	teacher		from the UK; teaches in China
Adult	Tamil and Kannada	English and Hindi	successful learner
Adult	English	Spanish; Chinese	successful in Spanish, not so much in Chinese
Adult	Chinese	English	successful
Adult	Chinese	English	from Singapore; successful bilingual
Minor	Chinese	English	"unsuccessful" ESL and attending pre-college training because of low language score
Adult	Russian	English	successful

Key observations

We conducted an affinity mapping by pulling out interesting observations from all of the interviews and grouping them by theme (picture attached on page 5). We extracted the following themes: *self-presentation*, *embarrassment*, *difficulties in learning languages*, *difficulties caused by language*, *technology making communication difficult*, *intrinsic motivation*, *extrinsic motivation*, *immersion*, *prior knowledge*, *traditional classes*, and *what works*.

We focused on breadth with these interviews, so there was a broad mix of successes and failures that we noted from the interviews, with many participants having had both successful and unsuccessful language learning experiences. Despite the breadth of our interviews, we still noted some overarching themes, such as the need for a strong purpose in order to successfully learn a language, whether intrinsic (e.g. wanting to experience another culture and make connections with speakers of that language) or extrinsic (e.g., needing to learn Hindi in order to travel in northern India). Unsuccessful language experiences were often not associated with strong purposes, and several participants noted learning foreign languages in school with no obvious need for the language, and ultimately not progressing to any sort of useful level of proficiency.

We noted themes of *embarrassment* and *self-presentation* in several participants. Inability to speak a language as well as one wants can be a source of embarrassment and shame, and people may use different languages for different purposes. Unsuccessful learners could easily come up with examples of opportunities missed because of language deficiencies, and felt regret, but these experiences did not produce enough motivation to push them to learn the language.

Insightful quotes

- “Every time I'm in another culture, I wish I could speak another language and not be another ‘dumb American’”

- “My connections with people are shallow because I don’t speak the language”
- “I feel a lot of shame about only speaking one language”

The above two quotes came from Klint, who recently traveled to Japan and has had many travel experiences, but has not been successful in previous language learning attempts. He mentioned several times how he felt that traveling can be much more enriching if you’re able to speak to locals, but he is unable to do so unless there is someone there to help translate.
We were surprised by the contradiction that he seemed to think of coding languages as more useful and easier to learn than traditional languages because the outcomes are more tangible, but feels so shamed by not being able to speak another language, even though he knows multiple coding ones.

- “I’m very proud that I know how to speak English as a native Chinese speaker. Other people may not know another language.”

L, a successful ESL learner, is sharing that even though her English is not perfect, she is proud of her mastery of two languages, knowing that other people would wish they know another language. What she said posts an interesting contrast of what Klint said.

- “[The phone] is the worst for me”

Ying, a visiting scholar, said she was generally fine with face-to-face conversations about work-related topics or in general day-to-day life, but that phone conversations were especially difficult. She felt that in face-to-face conversations, people could more easily see when she wasn’t understanding, but she felt embarrassed about asking someone on the phone to repeat multiple times.

- “They end up not knowing what my grown-up personality is”

This quote is from Anna, whose first language is Russian, but she moved to London at age 3 and is now much more confident working in English. She mentioned difficulties in communicating with family in Russian, and felt that she is unable to express herself the way she wants to, largely because of not having the vocabulary to do so.

- “teachers are expensive and you have to find a match”
- “I need an instant opportunity to check where the result came from ... if it is accurate... if native speakers use it that way... I want to see the backend”
- [I think it is useful to] “see how words are written ... shape content to things that are relevant to my own life”

This is E pointed out why some current solutions can’t effectively solve some of her difficulties for learning English. Even for traditional language tutoring, the quality might vary depending on how good a match is. What she looks for is immediate feedback to correct mistakes, to prevent future mistakes and pedagogy (e.g., providing multimodality and context).

- “I don’t know what’s the point of learning if I don’t use it” -- J

This quote is from J who learn languages for practical reasons and whose think his language learning is driven by extrinsic motivations. However, during the interview, he also showed

intrinsic motivation - learning a new language helps prevent Alzheimer's, which creates a contradiction.

- “I don’t want to learn. My mom signed me up [for the after-school English program in China]” -- K
- “I also want to learn languages from other countries. All over the world. Because I can then talk to anyone on the planet.” -- K

K, a young kid who is learning both English and Chinese at the same time, thinks languages are powerful tools for communication. He has both extrinsic and intrinsic motivation to learn English.

Compelling stories

- Klint is a self-declared monolingual English speaker. Despite having studied Spanish, Italian, and Japanese at times in school, he felt that these language learning experiences were without purpose and he never found opportunities to use them outside of class, so he did not become proficient in any of them. However, he learned several programming languages in high school and college, and was quite successful in that. He described the different approach he had for learning programming: wanting to build something, trying it, and figuring out what went wrong. He actively searches for video tutorials when trying to learn a new concept, and he is able to quickly get feedback when coding and something doesn’t work as intended, whereas with communication, it is difficult to know what the problem is.
- Anna is a successful learner of Spanish. She took French and Spanish classes in school, but her Spanish abilities really took off after she began to travel in Latin America and build connections with people there. She translated between her family and contractors in order to build a home in the Dominican Republic, and built strong personal and romantic relationships with locals in Latin America. Her interest in Spanish-speaking cultures, including music, movies, and literature, drove her to improve her language skills and her work is now based in Latin American countries. On the other hand, French, which she studied in school, was never really a passion and has been mostly abandoned now.
- E is an English language learner whose native language is Russian.
    - Before attending university, E saw learning English as one of her duty as a good student. At university (in Russian), E’s motivation to learn English is to read English articles for research. But she noticed that people around her learn English for understanding songs, movies, and television.
    - E noticed that her writing was much better than her speaking, probably because she rarely spoke in English in Russian (and it is not because she was afraid of speaking in English). E hates making the same old mistakes and tries to avoid learning misuses as much as possible. She would use Google search and Google book to double check phrases she wants to use. Product features that are attractive to her are high accuracy, just-in-time support, task-relevant content and less time-consuming.

    - E thinks current technological solutions are not very individualized. As for human help, it is hard to find a teacher that is a good match. She thinks chatbots are not authentic enough and she doesn't trust their results. What she needs is the instant opportunity to check for proper and authentic use of English and where the result comes from.
- L is a Chinese graduate student at Stanford who came to the State about 7 months ago.
    - In college, her motivation to learn English was to study abroad. Before that, her motivation was to pass exams. Though she thinks her English is above the average ESL learners, she thinks she needs to work on speaking and writing more. Her strategies for studying English are listening, observing and imitation what others do. L thinks that it takes time and practice to learn a language. She shared that one of her biggest improvements in English writing after studying in the US is in email-writing.
    - She identified that the key to English learning is not to be afraid to speak. She is "very proud that I know how to speak English as a native Chinses speaker. Other people may not know another language."
- Z is a student studying in a language school + pre- community college in Oakland.
    - Z doesn't like learning English. She said she was "forced" to learn English, and confessed that she doesn't see the point of learning English. Given her plan of going back home to China after graduating, she thinks the only English she will be using is those that are relevant to her major. Her biggest challenge when learning English is the lack of self-discipline. If there exists a solution that can solve her problem, it'd be something that can provide supervision or reminder her to study and can also give her feedback on her progress. She believes if no one corrects her mistake, she will keep making the same mistakes. It also seems that one of her challenges is the lack of practice of English speaking. She fears to talk to people, thinking she is too shy and that she can't speak English well.

Affinity mapping of observations:

Empathy maps:

Say

"When I was at school, there is no motivation … I was a good student and did all the homework"

"If I can immediately ask someone, then AI might be better (24/7)"

"The solutions now are not very individualized. What you learn is not very specific ... teachers are expensive and you have to find a match"

"I don't trust chatbot's results."

"I need an instant opportunity to check where the result came from ... if it is accurate... if native speakers use it that way... I want to see the back-end"

I think it is useful to "see how words are written ... shape content to things that are relevant to my own life"

"I'm not afraid but I am conscious about my mis-takes."

Think

Had difficulty talking in English during college.

Her writing is much better than her speaking.

Individualized learning is important but it could be hard to find a teacher that's a good match.

Things about learning technology that are important to her: 1) accuracy 2) just-in-time help 3) task-relevant 4) less time consuming (ranked in order of importance)

She doesn't like making the same mistakes. It is important for her to double check English uses to prevent making new mistakes.

Using multiple modalities and having context are important in language learning.

It is not scary to talk to people in English.

Do

Always try to avoid learning the wrong things and double check using different sources to prevent mistakes.

Use Google to search English phrases and over time learned to use the number of search results from Google and Google book to tell accurate uses from misleading uses.

Use Google book to check Grammar.

Showed disbelieve when talking about current solution in language learning.

Feel

Feeling cautious when learning new English phrases.

Feeling annoyed about misleading uses that's available online and the possibility of learning the wrong things.

Hate making the same mistakes and developing

Feeling distrust about technology.

Say

"I thought it [Spanish] might be practical to know; it is also a popular language to learn in High school. I didn't know anyone who speaks Chinese and French. I don't have people to speak them but I can talk to friends in Spanish. I don't know what's the point of learning if I don't use it"

"I was pretty good at it, but I don't use it anymore ... It should be easy to pick it up and learn ... it's intuitive"

"It's [spanish] Latin based root and feels it's similar to English. I can predict the meaning by the sound of the words. Verse Chinese, I have no ideas because there is no correlation ..."

"I like the online pinyin table ... It makes it easier for an English speaker to understand the scope of the sounds, to pronounce words and recognize what's Chinese"

"I can just open the app and decide I want to learn about the weather today"

Think

Language learning takes both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations. His motivations are all for practical reasons.

Having someone to practice a language is essential in learning the language.

Prior knowledge of English helped him learn Spanish. It should be easy for him to pick up Spanish again.

Language one speaks shape how one thinks.

Learning different Spanish tenses is difficult.

It's challenging to grasp Chinese sentence structures.

The Chinese learning app made learning more accessible - reduce mental effort, motivational and psychological barriers.

Do

Spoke to Mexicans in San Diego in Spanish. "They laughed but I didn't care because I think I understand it. I don't need someone to tell me I'm good or not, unless I know I'm struggling with it."

Spoke in Spanish and imitated how his teacher gave instructions in their Spanish class to show me his Spanish level and how he learned Spanish in class.

Acknowledged that his Chinses level is "ultra-beginner"

Acknowledged that he is learning Chinese for a girl that he met and for preventing Alzheimer's as he've heard learning another language is a prevention.

Showed confusion when talking about Chinese sentence structures. Tried to make up a Chinese sentence and expected me to correct him and show him the right way to say it.

Spoke a few Chinese words to give me some examples of words that cannot be translated into English.

Feel

Feeling confident in his Spanish and metacognition (i.e., awareness of his Spanish skill).

Feeling confident about his Spanish speaking.

Feels it 's okay that his is a beginner now, and there is nothing to be ashamed of.

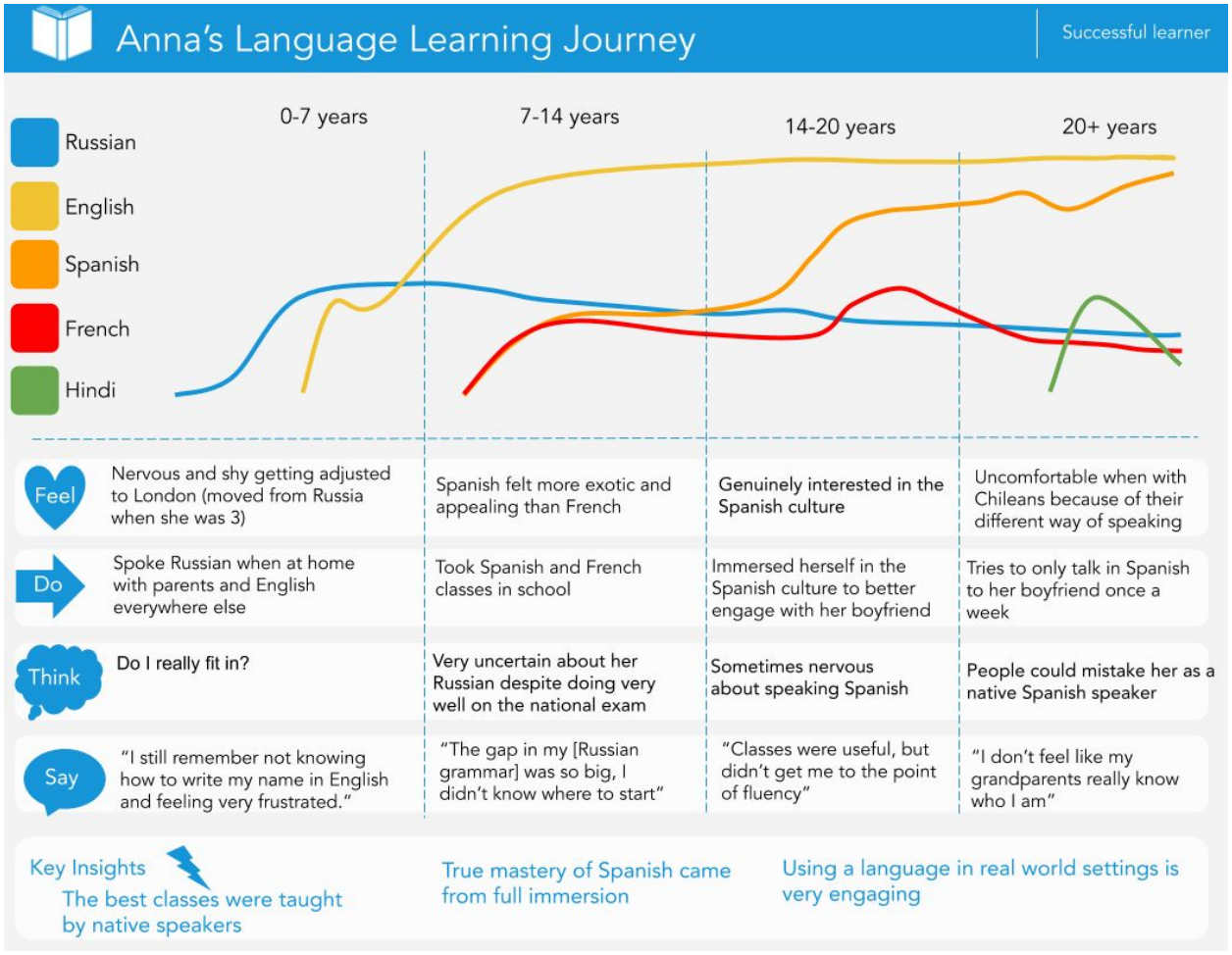
Feeling confident that he can improve his Chinese.

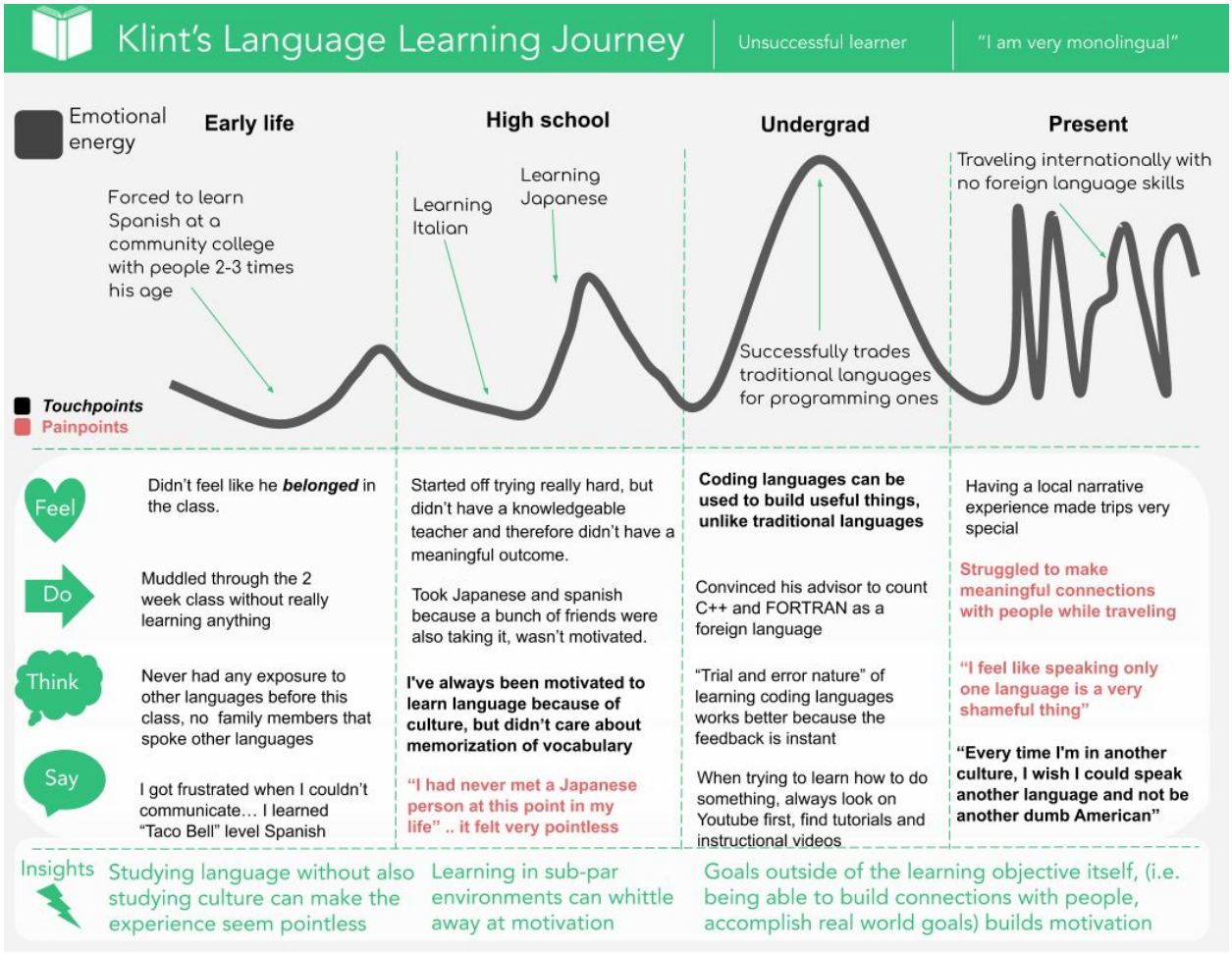
Feeling it's okay to acknolwedge his highly practical reasons for learning new languages.

Feeling confused about Chinese sentence structure but showing interests in learning it.

Feeling confused about some Chinese words but trying to make sense of them.

Journey maps:




Klint's Language Learning Journey
Unsuccessful learner
"I am very monolingual"
Emotional energy
Early life
High school
Undergrad
Present
Forced to learn Spanish at a community college with people 2-3 times his age
Learning Italian
Learning Japanese
Successfully trades traditional languages for programming ones
Traveling internationally with no foreign language skills
Touchpoints
Painpoints
Feel
Do
Think
Say
Didn't feel like he belonged in the class.
Muddled through the 2 week class without really learning anything
Never had any exposure to other languages before this class, no family members that spoke other languages
I got frustrated when I couldn't communicate… I learned "Taco Bell" level Spanish
Started off trying really hard, but didn't have a knowledgeable teacher and therefore didn't have a meaningful outcome.
Took Japanese and spanish because a bunch of friends were also taking it, wasn't motivated.
I've always been motivated to learn language because of culture, but didn't care about memorization of vocabulary
"I had never met a Japanese person at this point in my life" .. it felt very pointless
Coding languages can be used to build useful things, unlike traditional languages
Convinced his advisor to count C++ and FORTRAN as a foreign language
"Trial and error nature" of learning coding languages works better because the feedback is instant
When trying to learn how to do something, always look on Youtube first, find tutorials and instructional videos
Having a local narrative experience made trips very special
Struggled to make meaningful connections with people while traveling
"I feel like speaking only one language is a very shameful thing"
"Every time I'm in another culture, I wish I could speak another language and not be another dumb American"
Insights
Studying language without also studying culture can make the experience seem pointless
Learning in sub-par environments can whittle away at motivation
Goals outside of the learning objective itself, (i.e. being able to build connections with people, accomplish real world goals) builds motivation