

Tena koutou katoa,  
Ko Opuke toku maunga,  
Ko Otakaro toku awa  
Ko Otautahi  
Ko Rittey toku whanau  
Ko Jo toku ingoa  
Tena koutou, tena koutou, tena koutou katoa.

Good afternoon. That will probably have sounded very unfamiliar to most of you. It's a traditional mihi mihi or pepeha in te reo Maori, the language of Aotearoa, or New Zealand, where I come from. It's how people introduce themselves in situations like these, an assembly or at conferences. It tells you what my mountain is, what my river is, where I come from and who my family are. So it places me very firmly on the land I am from and amongst my people and I like that. We use a lot of te reo maori in our daily lives in New Zealand, you hear it on tv and on the radio and I miss it.

Welcome to Language and Culture Festival Week.

Language teachers often say that Languages take you places and they do and I'll get to that. But another aspect of languages is that they reflect the way people see the world and their place within it, which we can see in the maori mihi mihi I started with.

You can see that Mme Iskander is signing in Auslan and this is an example of the way in which languages evolve to specifically meet the needs of the people using them. While Auslan is used to translate spoken English, it is not based on English. Auslan has a different set of rules for grammar and syntax. Its vocabulary is also different to English. Auslan is a natural language which was developed organically over time. It is also a visual-spatial language where hands, eye gaze, facial expressions and arm, head and body postures are used to convey messages.

Language is created and shaped by the needs of a culture as it changes. This means that language and culture are fluid, shifting to reflect one another and the changing physical and social landscape of the world.

We have probably all heard about the many inuit words for snow but it is also true that the Hawaiians have 65 words alone for describing fishing nets, 108 for sweet potato, 42 for sugarcane and 47 for bananas. Scotland goes into extraordinary distinctions for foul weather, Somali have a huge number of words for camels and likewise the Baniwa tribe of Brazil has 29 words for ants and their edible varieties.

In our own context, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island languages are not just a means of communication, they express knowledge about everything: law, geography, history, family and human relationships, philosophy, religion, anatomy, childcare, health, caring for country, astronomy, biology and food.

Each language is associated with an area of land and has a deep spiritual significance, and it is through their own languages that Indigenous nations maintain their connection with their ancestors, land and law.

In the late eighteenth century, around 250 distinct Indigenous language groups covered the continent. Most of these languages would have had several dialects so that the total number of named varieties would have run to many hundreds. Today only around 120 of those languages are still spoken and many are at risk of being lost as Elders pass on and there is a lot of work going on in communities to stop that happening.

Now back to languages taking us places. I grew up in Christchurch, New Zealand, in the seventies and eighties. We did not hear a lot of different languages then. When I was 7 years old, my family went on holiday to Tahiti, where as well as speaking Tahitian, a Polynesian language, people also speak French. My family had been out for a walk and as we came back to where we were staying, I went on ahead and was met at the door by the housekeeper who spoke to me in French. She probably said something like, *Bonjour petite fille*, but in my 7 year old naivety, I found it so shocking that I screamed and ran all the way back down the road. I then devoted my life to overcoming that fear of French going so far as to get a PhD in Medieval French Literature just to really knock it on the head. But seriously. I took French and German at school and I loved them both. At the end of my final year of high school I went on a 3 month exchange to Germany. It was 1988. The Berlin wall was still there and my host family told me that there would always be two Germanies, West and East. I lived in Lubeck and I could cycle to the border and see the Wachturm (watch towers) with soldiers on guard with guns and we went on a trip to Berlin which meant driving through East Germany to get there. East Germany and East Berlin were like stepping back in time. There was no fashion, no coca cola and I returned to NZ, started university and a few months later, the wall came down. I felt lucky to have been in Germany and to have experienced that part of history for myself.

Between my honours year and starting my PhD in French, I spent a year in the south of France as an English assistant. I love speaking French. It feels as though something blossoms inside me when I'm in France speaking French. I lived in a small town, Chateaufort and I made friends with the French people who lived there and spent many happy weekends discovering the region and incredible food with them. Since moving to Melbourne, I've been in two French plays and made friends with lovely French people, so I get to use my French outside school.

And of course I'm not the only one who has gone places with languages. Mme Hoffman fell desperately and immediately in love with the French language at the age of 6, when she received a vinyl record from relatives in France, featuring two children her age singing a series of children's songs. She listened to that record up to 10 times a day to try to imitate the sounds exactly and can still remember the lyrics about 60 years on.

When she was 18, she took the chance to practise her school Japanese on two Japanese tourists she came across visiting Captain Cook's Cottage, by asking them "What time is it?" This simple question led to her becoming the interpreter for the tourists who turned out to be the Directors of the Nagoya Zoo and Botanical Gardens, visiting Melbourne to negotiate a delivery of plants and animals for an "Australia Fair" in Nagoya. She ended up their guest in Japan to open the fair and receive a bouquet from an orangutang!

Ms Wighton moved to South Korea in 2009 to teach at an international school and so started teaching herself Korean in the month or two before she left. She had learned Japanese at primary and high school, so the grammar was a little familiar, but otherwise Korean is a fairly distinct language. Once in Korea, she learned from western and Korean friends and language

coaches, and learned key phrases rather than worrying too much about understanding grammar construction. Most of her learning happened through need and making mistakes. She was really glad to not live in the 'Foreigner district' and to have to look up, learn, and practice all the time. Ms Wighton thinks that learning more Korean would have opened up the country a lot more, but she is still quite confident with her everyday phrases and wants to return to Korea again.

Dr Reid not only studied in Germany but wrote his doctoral thesis in German as well. The fact that he had only studied German to Year 10 did not put him off embarking on this project. He absolutely wanted to work with this particular supervisor who was German and in Germany and if studying and writing in German was how he could make that happen, he was willing to do so. He said he had a lot of help from German friends, but it is still an impressive feat.

So, languages can take you places and they can help you to become more open to other cultures and ways of seeing the world. But why else should you study a language?

If you're planning on going to university, learning a language will give you a leg up in the applications. Some Australian universities actually offer bonus ATAR points to students who have studied a language in Year 12.

There are many career pathways available to language graduates. Teaching, interpretation, translation and diplomacy are some of them.

A quick search on Seek throws up more than 4,000 jobs requiring language expertise including for lawyers, technical support engineers, sales representatives and market data analysts. Other options include finance, media, public relations, tourism, consulting, marketing, charity work, international business, foreign affairs or government work.

Many industries will welcome language graduates because they bring intercultural skills, which are crucial in our globally connected world. Plus, a second language can allow you to travel the world while developing your career.

In addition to these fairly vocational bonus points, research shows that learning a language in high school can improve your results in core subjects as well and can certainly improve your fluency and adeptness in your own language.

Special mention must go to Sarah Zhou who designed our Languages week banner that you can see in the courtyard and to Frau Beck for making the banner happen and for generously offering prizes to the first and second place. Cate Mead came second in the competition. Cate is a passionate languages supporter and has organised the language hubs for Thursday lunchtime where you can go and speak the language you are learning with other like-minded students. The Library has a magnificent display highlighting the many language books and books about different countries that we have. Thank you to Mrs Devenish, Nina and Madison for their work on this and in particular to Nina for her display. Thank you to the International Captains, Shuhan and Daleney and to the Reconciliation Captains, Pelagia and Jacq for helping us organise this week and running some of the events.

I once heard Jo Lo Bianco speak at a language teachers' conference and what he said has always stuck with me. Jo Lo Bianco is Professor Emeritus of Language and Literacy

Education at the University of Melbourne. He wrote Australia's National Policy on Languages in 1987 which was the first multilingual national language policy in an English-speaking country. His career has focused on education and promotion of languages, multiculturalism and peace building. At the conference he was talking about how important languages are and he said: we should learn our mother tongue, the language of the country we live in, plus another language. That's the challenge I set for you.

And I am also going to leave you with a Maori proverb: **Ko taku reo taku ohooho, ko taku reo taku mapihi mauria** which means: *My language is my awakening, my language is the window to my soul.*