

Chapter Zero - Getting Started

I. Reading

Cases of misunderstanding

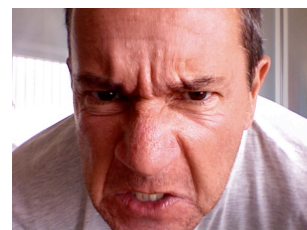
Example 1:



Craig was a bit nervous about his first meeting at his new job with the Yamamoto Company in Japan. He had lots of great new ideas and was enthusiastic about sharing them with his group. When he was introduced, he thanked his new boss, said how happy he was to be there, and then gave a brief summary of his new ideas. When he finished, the room was quiet, and everyone else in the room was silently looking downward.

Example 2:

Keiko was very excited about her first day at the university. She was very interested in learning English, and had been eagerly looking forward to her first class taught by a native English speaker. Soon, the teacher called on Keiko to answer a question. She quickly turned to her friend to confirm that she had understood the question correctly. Before her friend could answer, the teacher was angrily yelling at Keiko.



Example 3:

Hiroshi: What kind of music do you like, Jack?

Jack: Rock, mostly, but I also listen to blues, and even classical music sometimes. What about you, Hiroshi?

Hiroshi: Mmm, rock, yes. Classical. Me, I like hip-hop and J-Pop.

Jack: Really? I can't stand hip-hop. I don't like J-Pop too much, either.

Hiroshi: ...

Intended vs. perceived meaning

In each of these situations, both the Japanese and the non-Japanese thought they were being polite, correct, kind, and considerate. What happened? Just as the meaning of the word "cold" means very different things to a person from Thailand and a person from Russia,¹ words, speech patterns, actions, and even silence can mean different things to people from different cultures. In many ways, 21st century life in Japan doesn't look very different from life in the U.S.: people commute to school or work in the morning, return home for dinner with their families in the evening, try to relax on the weekends, etc. Because of these similarities, though, the differences can sometimes catch us by surprise. In each of the examples above, both parties were doing their best to communicate effectively and politely, yet in each case, a serious misunderstanding occurred. The speaker meant one thing (intention, 意図), but the other person or persons understood something quite different (perception, 会得, 知覚). We'll be studying many of these differences and many of the reasons for the differences.

¹ Perfunctory apologies to Steven Pinker.

Us and Them



Some of the differences are very small, and others are huge. Some differences are as simple as how we think of color. Do you walk when the light is green or do you walk when it is blue? The “go” color is 青 (*ao*) in Japan, but green in other countries. How many colors are there in the rainbow? Japanese students are taught that there are 7 colors, but American students see an infinite number of colors in a spectrum. Other differences are

complex and deep. (*Who am I?*) We will be using language itself to talk about these differences, so let's start with a look at how even simple language can sometimes lead to misunderstandings.

Each chapter will end with sections like these below:

II. Comprehension Questions

If you have a difficult time answering these questions, read the passage again. If you can't find the answer, make a note of your question and ask the teacher for an explanation in your next class.

1. What mistake did Craig make in his meeting?
2. Why was Keiko's teacher angry?
3. Why is Hiroshi unable to respond to Jack?
4. How many colors are there in the rainbow?
5. Why don't intentions and perceptions always match?

III. Thinking

New words and expressions

(Here, write down new words or expressions you don't understand well. Look up the words in the Glossary at the end of the book, a dictionary, or ask your teacher for help.) Parts of this section have been completed for you.

can't stand

catch by surprise

complex

effective/effectively

huge

infinite

intend/intended/intention

occur/occurred

parties

perceive/perceived/perception

similarities

spectrum

What are the main points in this chapter?

People from different cultures express themselves and understand others in different ways. When two people from different cultures try to communicate, mistakes and misunderstandings happen regularly. These mistakes can be made with language, actions, or silence. Sometimes these misunderstandings are small, but sometimes they can be very big.

List some examples from your own life or observations that support these points:

List some examples from your own life or observations that do not support these points:

Your reactions and opinions: