We all use language in every aspect of our daily lives, from awakening to an alarm clock, a cultural communication signal that tells us it is time to wake up, to reading the morning paper... scanning street signs and billboards on the way to work or school...and then engaging in our daily activities that most likely include written, verbal, and non-verbal communication.

Most of us do not remember the process of language acquisition because the majority of this happened at a very early age. Indeed, we may remember reading in front of the class, or learning how to write cursive, but we began acquiring language at the moment we were born. As an infant we learned to signal our needs to our parents whether that was through crying, restlessness or motor activity. As we developed the capacity to speak, we all began engaging in telegraphic speech or manner of speaking that is characterized by short, choppy sentences like “I go” or “want juice”.

What you may not recognize, however, is that until children start learning the lexicon, or vocabulary of their indigenous culture all children tend to make the same types of sounds. Thus it is literally our culture and our interactions with those in our culture that shapes the way we speak and communicate with others.

Have you ever attempted to learn another language? If so, what language and when in your life did you attempt to learn it? Those among us who have been educated in the United States likely were required to learn a second language as part of the high school or college education experience.

Research has indicated there are sensitive periods for language development and most theorists agree that children learn language most easily from birth through the beginning of adolescence. After this time we can still learn language but it is much more difficult and effortful than during the sensitive period.

But the process of learning a language is even more complicated than just learning the rules and developing a vocabulary at a precise time. The process of learning a language without being immersed in that culture can prove quite challenging. Words exist in the culture that have no translatable equivalence outside of that culture, and the way we use language often involves an intimate understanding of life in that culture.

For instance, Germans frequently use the term gemütlichkeit to describe a feeling in which they have a sense of social acceptance and belonging with those around them. They often use this term to describe conscious choice to spend quality time with important people in their lives. Indeed, we might try to translate that feeling into English so we can grasp it by using terms like “cozy” or “warm and snuggly.” The meaning to Germans is much deeper than that. To understand the meaning of gemütlichkeit we would actually need to be immersed in German culture.
Slide 3

Title: Critical Thinking Points

Slide Content:
- Given that there are certain sensitive developmental periods at which language acquisition is easier, should the United States educational system afford students the opportunity to other languages at an earlier age?
- What are the benefits and costs associated with such a strategy?

Narrator: Given that there are certain sensitive developmental periods at which language acquisition is easier, should the United States educational system afford students the opportunity to other languages at an earlier age? What are the benefits and costs associated with such a strategy?

End of Presentation