

# *Feng Chia University* *Outstanding Academic Paper by Students*

Language and Communication

語言與溝通

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## Abstract

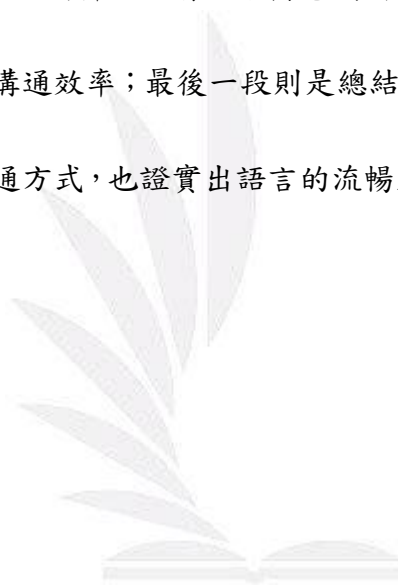
This article aims to compare the three stories: Lucy Honig's *English as a Second Language*, Ernest Hemingway's *Hills Like White Elephants*, and Danny Santiago's *The Somebody*. In these stories, the type of communication and the effectiveness of language used to communicate are distinctive. This report respectively discusses the theme of language and communication in the three short stories and focuses on the different levels of effectiveness in their communication. This article includes five paragraphs. The first paragraph briefly introduces the aim of this article, and the second to fourth paragraph are different examples of communications, demonstrating the distinctive level of effectiveness. Finally, the report ends by concluding that communications can be established effectively no matter the language is being spoken well or not.

**Keyword :** language, communication, *English as a Second Language*, *Hills Like White Elephants*, *The Somebody*

## 摘要

本文旨在比較三個故事: (*English as a Second Language, 1990*)、(*Hills Like White Elephants, 1927*)、(*The Somebody, 1970*) 中，關於語言與溝通的部分。透過如此比較，我們可以從文章中看出兩種不同形式的溝通方式，並且從中探討在使用不同語言溝通的情況下是否會影響溝通之效率。本文共分成五個段落，第一段簡述語言與溝通的定義；第二段到第四段則依序舉例三個故事中角色們之間所使用的語言以及對話內容，並剖析如此情況下角色們所使用的為何種溝通方法以及語言相同相異是否影響溝通效率；最後一段則是總結，透過比較這三篇故事我們能比較出兩種不同的溝通方式，也證實出語言的流暢度並不是影響溝通效率的主要原因。

關鍵詞：語言、溝通



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## Language and Communication

Language is primarily a system that human beings use to express themselves. The functions of language include the expression of personal thoughts, emotional release, and most particularly, communication. Communication can be divided into two kinds: intrapersonal communication, which occurs within an individual, and interpersonal communication, which takes place between two or more people. In Lucy Honig's *English as a Second Language*, Ernest Hemingway's *Hills Like White Elephants*, and Danny Santiago's *The Somebody*, the type of communication and the effectiveness of language used to communicate are distinctive. This article respectively discusses the theme of language and communication in the three short stories and focuses on the different levels of effectiveness in their communication.

In *English as a Second Language*, Honig includes a story about the death of a male teacher for the purpose of showing the differences and similarities between cultures. The character who shares the story, Ling, however, also serves as another purpose—to demonstrate the connection between language and communication. Ling is a Chinese girl in an ESL class, which means her mother tongue is not English. Her English, therefore, was poorly spoken. For example, she says, "I say, 'You be better?' But he hurt. Doctors no did helped. He alone" (line 474, p.124). The communication between Ling and her classmates is an interpersonal communication. There are

interesting moments when she manages to express herself through gestures while all her classmates are trying to help as she searches for words to say. For example, the narrator says “She stopped and looked up toward the ceiling. Then she gestured with her fingers around her face. ‘Handsome!’ said Charlene, [...] Ling smiled broadly. ‘Handsome! Yes, he very handsome. [...]’” (line 376, p.122). From here, it is clear that not only speaking a language but also gesturing it is a way to express oneself. Her classmates are able to understand what she tries to say despite the fact that her English-speaking ability is substandard. In the case of the ESL students in Honig’s English as a Second Language, the language boundaries do not affect the effectiveness of communication.

The theme of language and communication also appears in Ernest Hemingway’s Hills Like White Elephants. Similar to English as a Second Language, the communication between the two main characters in Hills Like White Elephants is an interpersonal communication as well. Contrast to Ling, however, the two main characters in Hills Like White Elephants are English native speakers. Although the story is mainly a conversation between the American man and his girlfriend, Jig, neither of the speakers truly communicates with each other. Both of them speak the same language and talk fluently but neither of them really listens or understands what the other person tries to say. Jig is indecisive about the whole thing, while the

frustrated American man tries everything to convince her to have the operation, which, although never directly mentioned, is understood to be an abortion. For example, while waiting for the train to arrive, the American says, “You’ve got to realize that I don’t want you to do it if you don’t want to. I’m perfectly willing to go through with it if it means anything to you” (line 139, p.8). On the surface, the American seems to care about Jigs feelings, but in truth, he tries to talk her into having the abortion. The two characters merely talk without ever saying anything directly about the issue at hand; even Jig’s remarks about the hills that look like white elephants are subtle hints of her true thoughts about the unborn baby—a hint that the American does not understand. This story demonstrates the fact that simply speaking a language is not the same as communicating.

In the case of Danny Santiago’s *The Somebody*, both interpersonal and intrapersonal communication can be seen. The story is written in a first-person point of view, the narrator being the main character, Chato, himself, as if he is talking directly to the readers. Through the narratives, readers are able to see what is in Chato’s mind; that is, how Chato communicates with himself. For example, when Chato sees a man smiling at the sight of his signature, he thought to himself, “I bet he’d give me a job if I asked him. I bet he’d take me to his home and to his office in the morning. Pretty soon I’d be setting at my own desk and signing my name on

letters and checks and things” (line 226, p.41). From these lines we see how Chato communicates with himself and persuades himself that he will soon become a successful person. This is an ineffective communication because the facts differ from what he tells himself. On the other hand, the interpersonal communications he has with others are also ineffective because, as seen in the story, Chato tend to flee from his problems. The talk he has with Mr. Calderon in the Boys’ Club is a great example; when Mr. Calderon tells him off for signing everywhere, Chato talks back by saying, “You’re a dog yourself” (line 166, p.40). But then Chato thinks to himself “But I didn’t bother to listen, [...] From now on I’m scratching that Boys’ Club off my list” (line 168, p.40). This shift from an interpersonal communication to an intrapersonal one is how Chato unconsciously escapes from his problem; making everything alright in his mind by communicating with himself.

Language and communication is a common theme among Lucy Honig’s English as a Second Language, Ernest Hemingway’s Hills Like White Elephants, and Danny Santiago’s The Somebody. Through the three stories, one can clearly see the difference between interpersonal communications and intrapersonal communications. It is also proved that communications can be established effectively no matter the language is being spoken well or not, Conversely, merely talking, or speaking a language, does not necessarily guarantee effective communication.



## References

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