



Episode 441 – Learning the Language of Your Art | [whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com](http://whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com)



### Jeremy Lesniak:

Hello everyone, welcome! this is whistlekick martial arts episode of 441. today were exploring the idea learning another language, in fact the language the country where your martial art comes from. but before we get into that, who am I? I'm Jeremy Lesniak. I'm your host on this show, I'm the founder here at whistlekick and I'm a traditional martial artist probably like you. I love everything about the traditional martial arts which is why I started whistlekick and what do we do? we do a lot of stuff in addition to the show we have an entire product line and you can find it at [whistlekick.com](http://whistlekick.com) and if you make a purchase use the code `PODCAST15` that's gonna save you 15% off everything. we also have a number of our products on Amazon, no discount code there but you can still check it out. if you want to know more about the show this episode or maybe another episode [whistlekickmartialartsradio.com](http://whistlekickmartialartsradio.com) that's the place to go. You're gonna find transcripts, links, videos, photos, and all the other 440 episodes that we've done. never behind a pay wall, you never have to pay to get access to our wonderful content whether it's here on martial arts radio or [MartialJournal.com](http://MartialJournal.com), the awesome original stuff that we put out over social media, there's a lot there. so, if you're not following us, you should be following us, in fact the best way to follow us, subscribe for the newsletter. you can do that on any of our websites we won't bombard you, we send out 2 a month that's it. sometimes even throw some discount codes in there so you should be on that list, just saying. let's talk about today's topic.

Now, this one came in from a listener a suggestion of whether or not it made sense to learn the language of the country your art originated in. so what does that mean? if you're training in



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karate maybe you can learn Japanese, if you're training taekwondo maybe you've learned Korean etc. if you've been training awhile, there's a good chance that you know some of that language. if you're in a traditional karate class, you probably know how to count to ten in Japanese you probably know some very unuseful in everyday conversation terms like kick being geri and mae being front things like that. that's not gonna help you too much if you go to Japan, but it's part of our traditional martial arts education often. I'm not even to say most the time or typically because I haven't trained in that many schools I'm willing to make that generalization. Now why would you consider this? why would spending the time to learn another language? a language that you're really not going to get too much benefit out of directly in your training. could be helpful? sure. And note that I'm just posing the topic right now, I'm not taking a position. but if you imagine for a moment that you are fluent in Tagalog, you're probably not going use a ton of that knowledge in your Filipino martial arts class. if you're fluent in Korean you're probably not gonna use 99% of what you know in a taekwondo class. yet there are people all over the world who are learning these languages as a result of their interest in the martial arts that they train. There's gotta be something there. so why what is it that they are exploring? what is the connection that they're looking for? when we look at traditional martial arts, we're talking about things that have been handed down. we're talking about connecting with people and with the past. there are cultural elements, there are historical elements. if you dig really deep into the history of any particular art, you know that there are things outside of training that helped shape at least some aspects. the best example is if you read A Killing Art you'll learn a lot about the things that helped shape and spread taekwondo. and the more time you spend training in any art, the more at least hopefully you feel connected to not only your body and the art but some of that historical sense, that traditional sense that had to come before. for some of us that connection becomes really important. whether were connecting to people or we're reading or listening to music or were learning a language. See, if you look at martial arts as cultural production, if you're looking at as more than simply how to fight or how to defend yourself, there are aspects to it that are culturally unique. there are things done in Japanese martial arts that you don't see in Chinese martial arts in the same way that you don't see in, say, an American boxing gym. there are things are uniquely relevant and historical to that country. and if you want to explore it deeper, one of the ways that you can go is learning that language.

now, there's an obvious benefit you could travel to that country in train in a super traditional class or maybe people don't speak any English. that's cool, but is that enough of a reason? I don't think so. I don't think too many people are going to learn a language just for that single reason. but if you want to immerse yourself, if let's say, a kung fu has changed your life and you watch kung fu movies and you train several times a week and your dedicated to that training and you're trying to become a better practitioner. maybe you've embraced some of the other cultural aspects, maybe the food, maybe the drink. I know a number of martial arts schools that have traditions around Sake, rice wine, as part of their promotions. these little bits that we start to pull from the origin countries give our training more tie, more depth. and language, I would suggest is probably the easiest one for us to achieve without traveling. because if I really want



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to understand the food of the country, I have to go to that country. if I want to understand what it's like to live in that country, to work in that country, I have to go there. but language is well documented and there's never been an easier time to languages, there are apps you can get on your phone for free that will teach you languages. there are a multitude of books, there are classes, you can turn on subtitles on some television or movies and teach yourself that way. there are a lot of ways you can immerse yourself in that language.

and what is that do for us? it allows us to imagine. It allows us to feel some of the things that our martial arts ancestors had felt. and if you don't think language has feel, you've probably not spent much time reading poetry. or maybe there aren't movies where there are monologues that really resonate for you. music is language, it's all steeped in language. and it doesn't mean that by simply learning that language that you're going to get all of that cultural and historical substance. but you can, you could, it's the first step in being able to do that. most of us have seen some manner of bad kung fu movie with either terribly translated subtitles or bad voiceovers. if your kung fu practitioner, how would it feel to watch that movie and know what they were really saying? if you get so good learning that language, now you know what actual words tie-in to those expressions, those movements, those conversations. how can that not deepen your understanding of what you train? maybe it doesn't help you understand why you train, maybe doesn't make you better technically, in fact it's probably not going to do either of those things. but it does give you a bond. a deeper bond with everyone who's ever trained that art and spoken that language. When we talk about connecting things the more connections they have, the more solid that relationship. so, learning a language can help solidify your connection to a or the in general martial arts. is it easy? No. especially if we're talking about learning a language that uses a whole different character set. we heard recently from Ms. Susan Spann, how her love of martial arts led her to calligraphy. and we heard about the similarities between actual physical martial arts training and the art of calligraphy. we've heard from a number of guests over the years who were so passionate about their arts that they moved to the country where they started. we've also heard from others who learn their martial arts, who use that martial arts training, to better understand the countries that they came from.

martial arts is a legacy we pass things down from instructor to student who then becomes instructor passes it down to a student and we repeat that process. it's shared. and the more we can share and the experiences and the less tangible aspects, like culture, the more complete what we hand down is. the more complete we can learn what we are being taught. the more time you've spent in the martial arts the more you know that advanced training an understanding of martial arts is sometimes subtle and there's a lot of subtleties in language. now I'm gonna be the first one to disclose, I know very little of any foreign languages. I can get by in Spanish but that's about it. my Japanese is limited to a little bit of accounting and some general martial arts terms. I know even less Korean and far less of every other language of the martial arts I've trained in. but that's okay. if I had more time, would I want to learn say, Japanese, sure. absolutely I'm not opposed to it, but is not a priority for me right now. it doesn't mean it will become a priority in the future, it doesn't mean I'm writing it off and say I'm never



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going to learn Japanese, that's stupid and it's a waste of time. not what I'm saying. all I'm hoping you'll do with this episode is consider it. consider your training, consider where you're at in your training. and I wonder if making that effort to learn more about that language might be beneficial for you. just take some time to contemplate and if it is, do it. and if it's not, then don't.

I'd really love to hear from people in this episode because I'm sure we have people out there who have learned language because of their training. so, I'd love for you to head to [whistlekickmartialartsradio.com](http://whistlekickmartialartsradio.com), this is episode 441 and leave some comments there. let people know what's going on. if you want to do that, then you can go to Facebook and if you're not already you can join the martial arts radio behind-the-scenes group and you can post a comment there. if you are not following us on social media were @whistlekick everywhere. my personal email [jeremy@whistlekick.com](mailto:jeremy@whistlekick.com) get the discount code PODCST15, there's a lot going on, we're doing a lot of stuff and hopefully you're checking out as much or as little as works for you. Hope you enjoyed today's episode. until next time, train hard, smile, and have a great day.