



LANGUAGE BARRIER

The Impact of Illiteracy on Job Safety

INTRODUCTION

Illiteracy as well as functional illiteracy were defined on the 20th session of UNESCO in 1978 as follows:

- A person is illiterate who cannot with understanding both read and write a short simple statement on his everyday life.
- A person is functionally illiterate who cannot engage in all those activities in which literacy is required for effective functioning of his group and community and also for enabling him to continue to use reading, writing and calculation for his own and the community's development.

INTRODUCTION

United Arab Emirates

- No exact data on 'functional illiteracy' available among the working population, including nearly 8 million expatriates;
- Among the professions most susceptible to illiteracy or limited English language skills are cleaners, plumbers, carpenters, electricians, and construction workers;

LANGUAGE BARRIER AND THEIR CAUSES

Cause	Condition		
	Personal development	Foreign language	Other factors
Poor education and training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Illiteracy; • Poor vocabulary; • Poor writing, reading, and calculating skills. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not understood; • Other (local) language; • Used to other gestures, pictograms, symbols. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diversity
Poor writing communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wrong language level; • Too large documents; • Poor editing. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor translation; • Too short display time 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Medical problems (dyslexia); • Poor printing.
Poor verbal communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication via others; • Language skills. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multi-language work environment; • Poor translator. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hurry; • Noise, etc.

LANGUAGE ISSUES CAUSING HAZARDS

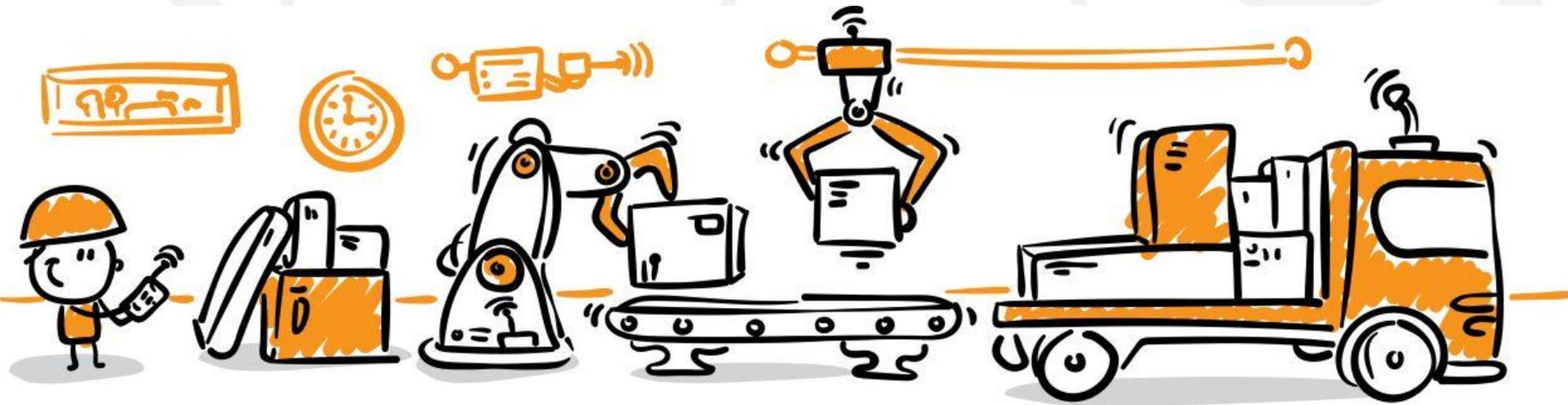
- **Lack of knowledge** due to procedure not sufficiently readable or not clear;
- **Wrong actions** due to gesture, hand/arm signal not correctly understood;
- **Not aware of danger** due to safety information (label, SDS) not understood;
- **Unsafe actions** due to safety instructions or instructions for use of equipment not effective;
- **Unreliable information** due to wrong interpretation of lists, tables, graphs, and drawings;
- **Wrong place** due to location error (not able to read a map), or mixing left and right;
- **Lack of supervision** due to supervisors ability to read.

COMMUNICATING SAFETY

- Keep an open mind and avoid projecting your assumptions on others;
- Engage in casual conversation with your employees;
- Don't take nodding as a sign of agreement;
- Avoid "isn't it?" questions;
- Practice active listening. Looking for employee's body language while also being mindful that your body language matches your message;
- Ask more open-ended questions;
- When possible, use simpler words and visual aids to communicate your message

OVERCOMING LANGUAGE BARRIERS

- 'IKEA' style SOP's
- Providing SOP's and instructions on or near equipment.
- Pairs a new employee with a seasoned employee.
- 'blue-hardhat program'. Bi- and multi-lingual employees wear a blue hardhat for easy identification on-site.
- Providing 'English as a Second Language (ESL)' course.
- Low employee-to-trainer ratio.
- Visual thinking. Use of drawing to explain a work process



OVERCOMING LANGUAGE BARRIERS

Training Tips

- **Use plain language and speak slowly.** Avoid technical jargon and repeat important points several times;
- **Use a translator or multi-lingual trainer.**
- **Demonstrate while you speak.** When possible use visual aids to supplement your words;
- **Encourage participation.** Be patient and help employees express their thoughts;
- **Have employees practice and follow-up.** On the job visits to verify if employees correctly apply what they have learned in training.
- **Use feedback.** Allow extra time for questions;
- **Provide handouts.**
- **Be respectful.** Never raise your voice, talk slower instead of louder.

A FINAL THOUGHT



Road work ahead vector sign

or

Warning: man struggling with
umbrella

A FINAL THOUGHT

Remember,

written and verbal communication
is only as good as the recipient's ability
to access and understand it.

