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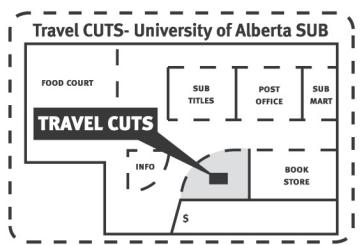
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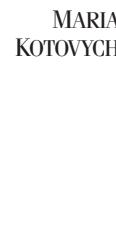
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Do yourself a favour and become a cunning linguist



MARIA KOTOVYCH

"Learning a new language can admittedly be quite humbling. I've not yet had an opportunity to travel to a place where I don't speak the local language, but I can certainly understand what it's like to listen to somebody and not understand a word that person is saying."

"Pfffft, English. Who needs that? I'm never going to England." Educated, worldly university students might laugh at Homer Simpson's words, but let's face it: how many of these same students have expressed a similar attitude at the thought of taking a second-language course?

I can understand where some of these attitudes might originate. I've had some wonderful language teachers throughout my pre-university schooling, but I also remember one French teacher who was trained to teach a completely different subject. Her "knowledge" of French was matched only by her inability to teach it. So perhaps schools need to set higher standards and hire people who can actually speak the language and have some interest in teaching it. That way, students will enter university and won't have an aversion to taking language courses as their options.

I have actually known people who chose to go through Sciences rather than Arts to get their Psych degree simply because the Science program does not expect students to take a language other than English. I have also known Arts students who moaned and groaned through all six of their

second-language credits and then swore off any subsequent language courses after that.

When people start to learn a language, they can get involved with that cultural group or meet others who are learning that same language. The U of A has student groups and clubs for people who are interested in meeting others who are learning that particular language.

These clubs also allow students to meet exchange students from that country. Additionally, language classes tend to have fewer than 30 people, so taking languages opens up opportunities for meeting many new and interesting people.

Learning a new language can admittedly be quite humbling. I've not yet had an opportunity to travel to a place where I don't speak the local language, but I can certainly understand what it's like to listen to somebody and not understand a word that person is saying.

Despite this, there are definite benefits to knowing more than one language. I love learning languages: I'm fluent in two (English being my second), conversant in a third, and am just starting to learn my fourth. One

of the benefits of knowing these languages is that I can have so many more concepts in my mind. You see, some languages can express ideas that others simply cannot. Many things are lost in translation simply because some concepts or ideas just don't exist in other languages. Imagine being able to have a thought that people who don't speak your language can't have!

I've found that knowing more languages has helped me to broaden my mind, not only in terms of new concepts but also because I'm exposed to the corresponding cultures of these languages. As a result, I can enjoy more books, films, radio programs and music as well.

There are also many career-related opportunities for multilingual people. We live in a global village, one with so much international business and communication. We also live in a bilingual country. Maybe that's not a popular sentiment to express here in Alberta, but we cannot deny this fact. People from most other countries generally tend to speak more than one language, and if you can speak two or more languages, you will become a more active participant in the global discussion.

Alas, I am Crestfallen

People won't talk to me because of my bad breath—but maybe it's just my personality seeping through



BRAD LAFONTAINE

You have no idea, not a single, foggy, soggy, slushy idea how hard I've been trying to talk to people. The polite, yet hurtful response I receive, however, is nothing but a smile and retraction, ending with a good ol' turn and walk away, leaving me with many questions and a heavy heart.

Okay, okay, okay. My breath stinks. Bad. It's the breath of my 9th grade girlfriend after she ate curly fries and fish sticks. It's the breath of my dog, and my dog's been dead for two years. It's the breath of Hades, Gehenna, and your grandmother all rolled into one.

My fear is this: what if I brush, floss, rinse and repeat ... and repeat ... and repeat ... and still no one responds to my friendly gestures? I'll tell you what: my last justification for being lonely will be gone. I'll have to face the truth that I'm a self-centered trying hard whom people dislike as much or more than I dislike them, and I'm not ready to face up to that.

Upon further consideration, while hovering on the precipice of insanity caused by not speaking to anyone other than my reflection for days, I think I should brush my teeth. Yes, tomorrow I will brave the grainy Colgate—and potential bleeding gums—and brush my blues (and death breath) away. After that I will meet a few new people and learn their names. I will talk to them whenever we meet. And I will smile, smile, smile all the while.

THE BURLAP SACK

This very special international sack-beating goes out to Mr Zhang Xinyan, who, while on vacation in Beijing, had himself a beer or four and stumbled his way to the city zoo. Upon arriving, Xinyan did what so many of us get the urge to do after a night out on the town: he climbed into the enclosure of a male panda named Gu Gu and attempted to hug the creature.

When the bear inevitably got startled and bit the man, Xinyan responded by kicking Gugu and eventually pulling out a move from Mike Tyson's School of Bear Boxing by biting into the panda's back.

Now, Xinyan would be eligible for a sack beating just for foolishly entering an animal's enclosure or for attempting to touch a potentially dangerous animal. But it's this idiot's comment made from his hospital bed—where he explained no one told him that pandas would bite people—that truly makes him beat-worthy. As if he expected the manhandled bear to hug back, or perhaps gently explain that it felt things were moving too fast.

So let's toss Xinyan into the sack. And, as a warning to those administering the beating, you might want to invest in a pair of thick gloves. I hear he's a bit of a bitey little bastard.

SCOTT LILWALL

The Burlap Sack is a semi-regular feature where a person or group who needs to be put in a sack and beaten is ridiculed in print.