

Language Learning Biography¹

A trip down memory lane - an experiment to reconstruct language learning biographies²

I would like to invite you on to trip from the present day back into your childhood, concentrating on your linguistic experiences along the way (mother tongue, family language, dialect, standard language, technical language, foreign language, second language). Everyone has her/his own language biography. Experiencing and dealing with language is probably just as complex as our identity or our group memberships.

- Have you recently experienced a situation, in which you would have liked to understand or speak a foreign language? (on the street, on holiday, in a professional situation...?) What feelings emerged?
- When was your last attempt to acquire a new language - informal or by instruction? What motivated you? (An individual, a desire to travel, professional reasons?)
- Did your **motivation** last for a longer period of time? If yes, why? If not, why not?
- Do you have **friends, family members and/or a partner**, who have another mother tongue than you? Did you learn their language or did they learn yours? Or, do you communicate together in a foreign language?
- What languages did you deal with during your **vocational training**?
- During your **schooldays**: how did you get on with **language subjects (German, English, French, Italian, etc...)?** Were there classmates, teachers or foreign language assistants speaking in another language? How were your contacts with them?
- What memories do you have of the **teachers** of the language subjects?
- Do you have **positive memories** of specific situations during your education? (exercises you particularly enjoyed; an exciting story, film, play, music, presentations...?) What was the context? Can you describe what was positive about it?
- Do you associate **negative feelings** with a specific situation during your education? (A boring book, exams, being embarrassed in front of classmates, fear, competition, envy...) What was the context? Can you describe what was negative about it?
- Did anything significant **outside of school** influence you? (a move, change of school...)
- Did you have contact with a foreign language already at **primary school** - during or outside of class? Were there classmates, teachers or foreign language assistances who spoke in another language? How were your contacts with them?
- Can you remember your **first day at school**? How did your teacher greet you? Did you understand her/his language straight away? Did you have to learn to communication a different way?
- Was it possible to speak in your family language/ your dialect at **nursery school**? Or did you already learn at that time that there was a different language/dialect for nursery school, and later on, for school?

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² Detailed reasons in Georg Gombos: (1995) Zur Archäologie des Spracherwerbs in: Huber / Huber-Kriegler/ Heindler (Hg.) Sprachen und kulturelle Bildung. Beiträge zum Modell Sprach-&Kulturerziehung. ZSE III, BMUKA, Graz.



It is very unlikely that you will be able to respond to all of these questions. This is not at all a problem, as they are just a way to help you in the process of remembering, and completeness is not important.

Additional questions for the language learning biography:

- Question 4: How is it determined which language is spoken (in partnerships/families with two or more languages)?
- Have you already experienced that certain languages are regarded in a different way? If yes, in what way and which languages? Are there "cool" languages and unattractive ones?