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"Jak na thruz" – Thinking in a foreign language

Sunday, July 21, 2013

If any sparkers were fortunate enough to grow up bilingual, I hope you hang onto that skill forever. Traveling through Europe I was amazed at how easily our guides and those in the hospitality industry slipped from one language to another.

Next month DH & I will spend a month in Slovakia studying "Slovak Language and Culture" and I'm preparing with some self study. As a child I was able to understand the conversations between my grandmother and her bilingual children. I could speak "broken Slovak" well enough to communicate with her too.

That was 50 years ago and a distant memory. Now I've got a book and CD, but there's a difference between working on grammar exercises or reading dialogues and actually "thinking" in the language.

The phrase "jak (yak) na thruz" is a loose translation of what my Slovak(Rusyn) grandmother would say when something interfered with her plans – "just like for spite"

Perhaps she was caught in the rain when walking to town.
Maybe the wind blew her clean laundry off the line.

I've begun saying that to myself when confronted with things that cut my run/walk short or make me adjust my route.

A black bear was reported on the road ahead.
I heard gunfire in the distance.
Loose dogs were in my path.

Last week I hit the trifecta. I planned quarter miles (out and back) for a time trial and I have several directions to accomplish this.

In front of one house there were a group of people smoking on the sidewalk. I'm glad they weren't smoking inside near children, but running through a cloud of smoke every few minutes is not a good idea for me.

In another direction there were several trucks, all with their motors running. I assume they were making deliveries and keeping the cabs cool. It is HOT here, but the fumes were not conducive to healthy lungs either.

On my 3rd route a crew of landscapers were mowing grass right along the road. I'm very allergic to grass.

All of these people had a right to be doing just what they were doing and I thought "jak na thruz." My solution – drive to the gym.

That phrase was only for annoying things. If something serious happened, Grandma would break into

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impromptu prayers. I learned those too.

Note: In the USA most of us study some language in school, but when we don't use it, facility disappears. While traveling on our own in Eastern Europe, we learned that English isn't as universal as it seemed when with an organized group or in facilities that cater to westerners. Those who were in school during the domination of the Soviet Union were discouraged from studying English. After 1992 English study was popular, but continual practice is necessary. Otherwise, it's like our facility with our high school French.

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BAZOOKABOBCAT

A month immersed in culture and language?? That sounds incredible!
2881 days ago



GINIEMIE

My mom just said "merde" Of course it was the first french word I said in front of my Bonne maman, when I met her in 1954 for the very first time. My mom got yelled at for that one! "that she knows!" my grandmother said. Funny, I say it in German, French, Spanish and when I shouldn't in English-that is in front of my grands!
I'm so excited for you learning slovak. I want to try Dutch or German.



2881 days ago



CD12146214

We have two official languages in Canada - French and English. I have conversational French but am fluent in English. Our son goes to French Immersion where 75% of his classes are taught in French.
2882 days ago



CAROLCRC

Trying french through Rosetta Stone - as with others, I found attempting french in France got you a disdainful correction, but much friendlier english help that just speaking in English. Hoping I grasp enough to make our trip in September a bit easier.

My daughter picked up the Greek expression "Lathos" when she did study abroad... Means "failure" - as in - I can't run the route I planned because of construction.. Lathos...
2883 days ago



BOILHAM

All the terrific comments. Lots of multilingual folks reading your blogs, Eileen. I traveled a bit in the Navy and learned to order a beer, and ask where the restroom is in many languages.



2884 days ago



DR1939

English is more common among young people and in the Scandinavian countries. Sweden doesn't dub their movies. They are shown in the original language with Swedish subtitles. When we're traveling (we almost never do tours) and need some assistance we look for a young woman. We've had very good luck with that even in areas outside the large cities and tourist spots. What I found with my college French was that I couldn't speak nor understand but could read it. Certainly not easily, but enough to get the gist of the message. I found myself reading the billboards! However, I think my biggest accomplishment was in finally being able to switch between local dialects in the UK.
2884 days ago



WILSONWR

It is so great that you and your DH are taking the time to really learn the language better. I'm impressed! Have a great time on your trip.
2884 days ago




**TRAVELGRRL**

We will be traveling in Europe "on our own" next year. I'm hoping our experience is different from yours! When we've traveled in Asia, we've discovered that asking YOUNG, well-dressed people usually yielded an English speaker!



I am always embarrassed at my lack of language ability in a foreign country. All I manage to learn

is "hello", "thank you", and "goodbye." 
2884 days ago

**WATERMELLEN**

Love the way you found a way that worked for you: good for you!



And it's so terrific that you are reclaiming your Slovak language because of course it's not just "words", it's "cultural attitude" too . . . and all those great memories.

My only native language is English but of course as a Canadian I spent many years studying French in school. Living in an anglo area, I don't have the chance to use it often. It's fun when travelling to wait for that moment when my French "kicks back in" so that I'm understanding overheard conversations and even thinking a bit in French. This happened recently at a winery when the Francophone owner was speaking with some other customers in French and assumed I did not understand . . . but I did and was vastly amused at their expressions when I was able to say so in pretty rapid and colloquial French . . . although I didn't admit that this had pretty much "shot my bolt" actually!!
2884 days ago

**CD14034154**

First off I want to say for finding another avenue, to do your workout!!!



Second, you're so right, if you learn a language, or anything for that matter, and don't use it, you lose it. I haven't used my Sign Language for some time, as when I was in the hospital, I was unable to use it, and when I came home, it was just the very basics that I remembered.

In church today, my hands just started to fly to the chorus of one of our songs, and I thought to myself, "It's still in there somewhere, now cultivate it!"

Be blessed,

- Nancy Jean -
2884 days ago

**SARAWALKS**

Great blog. I'm currently working on talking and thinking in French, getting ready to go to France next year for 3 months. I started French in high school, continued in college, but until 2007 (when planning an independent trip to France in 2008) I didn't really confront the conversation issue. I managed ok that trip but came back so motivated to REALLY be able to speak and understand. Videos at Yabla.com have helped me a lot, so has Frenchpod101.com, and I walk around listening to the Frenchpod lessons and muttering to myself in a conversational way. Gradually, this is helping me, but it's much more a matter of just absorbing the feel and structure of sentences than of learning all those grammatical facts. Many of the facts are still in my memory but putting them together when needed is a whole other story. You're so right, people react very differently to you if you attempt their language, even if your attempts are very basic. French people both in Paris and outside were so very friendly to me when I approached them in French...



Bonne chance a toi avec ton nouveau langage!
2884 days ago


**LINDAKAY228**

I so often wished I was bilingual living in southern New Mexico where we have a lot of Hispanics. It would help me so much in my job and other things. I was married to a Hispanic for 16 years but he never would really teach me anything. I've taken classes but have a hard time with conjugating the verbs and besides usually what is taught in classes is not the same as the version of Spanish spoken locally. Being bilingual in any language is truly an asset.
2884 days ago

**SUZYMOBILE**

That's a wonderful skill to have, and you find that natives look more kindly on the American tourist who tries to speak their language, even brokenly. French Canadians are more likely to crack a smile, and Thais will fall all over you. I learned a fair amount of Thai on a three-week trip that we took. Sadly, I remember only enough of it to make a good first impression in a Thai restaurant ("Hello," "Thank you," "Very hot," "Quite delicious," and the like). While there, on the other hand, I learned enough to sympathize with a female bar manager whose boyfriend had taken up, not with another woman, but with a "katoey"--pretty tricky use of the language! There was also a very international bar that we frequented in Phuket, where you'd talk with people in whatever languages you shared, or turn to someone else to do the translating.



I like your grandma's phrase, but I have a much pithier one that I use in such situations. 
2884 days ago

Comment edited on: 7/21/2013 12:44:50 PM



LALAFLOWERS



I'm lucky to have graduated from French High school in Quebec. I grew up speaking 3 languages. English, French & Latvian. The Latvian has faded, as I only have my parents to speak it with.. but when I still understand all of it. Just the words don't come as easily to me.....

However, I have not taught my kids these languages.. I know.. bad mommy!

But, they spend time in Quebec each summer, and are slowly learning French. :-)

2884 days ago



FANGFACEKITTY



Use it or lose it...true for many things. I studied Spanish for 5 years and Russian for 3...and only remember a few words of each because I never used them for 20+ years. Now I am trying to learn French in my 40s...and it isn't as easy as it used to be. I am grateful I had studied other languages way back when because I can at least understand the grammatical structures a little, and the difference between the formal and informal "you". But thinking in a foreign language...not there yet, although I have noticed my English speech patterns are shifting to be closer to how I would construct the sentence in French.

2884 days ago



ONEKIDSMOM



I studied Spanish in high school, German in college, and learned a good bit of Italian while immersed in that country for seven weeks on a work assignment. One of my favorite memories of that trip was a second class compartment on a train where we managed to converse because each of us in some halting way had a connecting language: one Italian mom knew French, a traveling African spoke French and German but no Italian or English, my American friend and I had English and German in common... and I was doing my best to learn Italian...

It was a great experience in the way most of the world has to work: they MUST have more than one language to get across the same distance that we have covered by one US state (especially the western ones).

Good luck with your lessons, and have a blast on you learning trip!
2884 days ago



YMWONG22



I'm a Malaysian. Most of the people in my country knows more than 1 language. In a sense, we are blessed in being multilingual. But there are times when non locals find it hard to understand



the locals as we tend to mix our conversation in snippets of different local languages.
2885 days ago



MISCHAKEO



I am bilingual. I studied Spanish in college, but did not really learn to think in the language and use it fluently until I did a program in Colombia where I took classes at a university and lived with a family who spoke no English. Now I work with students who cannot speak English and often translate at meetings with parents.

The thing that amazed me about Europeans was that often they were trilingual..they often spoke two or three languages..especially on their border towns.

I think it is great that you are studying your heritage. I would love to study Hawaiian which is my heritage..great idea for retirement!



2885 days ago



KELLIEBEAN



I took a French class in 7th grade. I wish I had applied myself, really learned it and held on to it. It would have been nice to have that knowledge when I was in Canada last week.

Youth is wasted on the young. I used to hate when my aunt said that!



2885 days ago



CD1690287



y
2885 days ago

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