# I did / 'ng:tsi/ that coming

### Stereotypes as a conversation starter

Stereotypes are omnipresent in everyday life! They help people to get a grasp of a complex world by simplifying different cultures greatly. But when stereotypes are applied to the real world, they tend to fall apart.

#### **Definition**

The Merriam-Webster Dictionary describes a stereotype as "a standardized mental picture that is held in common by members of a group and that represents an oversimplified opinion, prejudiced attitude, or uncritical judgment". I want to focus on the last part, the uncritical judgement, and how reflecting on your mental picture a bit can change your own ideas about the person standing in front of you.

#### **Speaking from experience**

Being German comes with its on set of received ideas when you're interacting with people with a different cultural background, some funny, some harmless and others less so: drinking beer, wearing lederhosen, etc. The same goes for my own beliefs about the US, which made it all the more interesting whenever these two sets of ideas 'clashed' during my high-school year in Syracuse, New York. As soon as I left the plane, my 15-year old self (more or less seriously) expected to see obese people on motorized scooters, which was obviously not the case. Instead, I was confronted with an extreme openness and friendliness. There was also lots of interest in my origins, which meant I had to deal with some of the German stereotypes. Even a guy behind the counter of a Tex-Mex place mentioned somebody he knew who was stationed in Germany. He even asked me if I knew where the army base was or if I knew the person in question. Of course, others enquired about German history, though

the questions were expressed quite carefully. "So you're from Germany, right? Wasn't there like something about .... um... Nazis?" Nothing a quick "Whoa, I did nazi that one coming," a laugh and just talking together couldn't fix. This very same guy ended up being one of my best friends throughout the entire year abroad. To this day when we meet each other, we're teasing ourselves about our shared ignorance from that first day.

#### **Self-reflection**

So this was my experience. It could've been different anywhere else in the world for someone else. One experience I want to carry forward, though, is that stereotypes are not necessarily bad. They can be a great conversation starter, as you can laugh about them, but also educate the other party in case there are some glaring misconceptions.

























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# What the heck...

### ... are you saying?

I grew up in northern Tyrol; both my parents come from the Allgäu, and the way I speak reflects this. Sometimes people don't understand me when I slip into dialect. This made me think about how the way I speak shapes me as a person and how dialects do this in general...

#### **Looking for locals**

At first, I wanted to keep it local. But finding a ,true' Augschburger is harder than one may think. My first stop was Königsplatz – excuse me – Kö. Was it bad luck or a sign? I don't know. But most of the people I talked to were not from Augschburg. It didn't take too long for me to change my approach – instead of looking for various Augsburg dialects, I decided to look into what people think about their dialect and how it influences them in their everyday life.

#### "Du bisch abr koi Augschburger!?"

After finally overcoming my initial fear of approaching people, I began talking to several different Augschburger and people from other places; someone tried to troll me by claiming they didn't know what a dialect is. Most of the "non-locals" I asked about their dialect told me that they're always happy to hear their native dialect and sometimes even try to find radio stations with moderators from home (for example Antenne Bayern). And yet, they sometimes slip into Augschburgerisch by force of habit.

#### No dialect approved

A man in his early forties uses dialect but doesn't really like it (he likes Swiss German, though). He says dialects separate people and can exclude others. Another person nearby agreed – she notices her dialect the most when she comes home after journey and is shocked by how strong the dialect is in the area where she lives. She'd rather speak standard German, as she feels that it sounds more sophisticated.

#### **Identity and community**

I also found some people who their dialect means a lot to. The one person at Kö that actually was from Augschburg – a rather fancily dressed lady - told me that she doesn't really speak a broad dialect but that she still sees the way she speaks as a part of who she is. A woman I asked about her thoughts had similar views – for her, a dialect reflects a sense of community and belonging. An elderly couple I talked to reported how they identify with their dialect and that it's a pity that their grandchildren are losing more and more of the dialect that was once spoken in the area.

#### So... what now?

Walking around and trying to find out more about how dialect influences us as people, I learned two things. First: people I walk up to won't bite; the worst that can happen is that you hear "No"! Second: dialect can be great and mark us as a part of a community. At the same time, some people feel it can exclude us from other groups. The way we speak every day creates subcultures. So, it really cuts both ways; as a sign of belonging and as one of not doing so.

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# Interview with lecturers

We decided that we're not going to be the only ones struggling with 'Language and Identity', so we decided to approach our university's *Anglistik* staff as well. Enjoy their answers...

#### 1. Who would you be without the ability to speak English? Would it affect your identity?

#### Prof. Dr. A. Fetzer

I would be a very different person: less tolerant, less discursively competent, and certainly with a different sense of humour. Speaking English - but this also applies to speaking other languages - opens up different perspectives on life in general as well as on particular issues, such as interpersonal aspects of communication, politeness, argumentative strategies or education Speaking English has been a prerequisite to being able to work in English-speaking countries, experience their ways of organising life and their ways of teaching and doing research.

#### Dr. C. Hoffmann

This is a tricky hypothetical. Honestly, I would not know. English has become an integral part of my identity over time and probably will for the foreseeable future. It's difficult to imagine me being part of an alternate reality in which I don't speak English. It certainly seems strange. Then again, would I know the difference?

#### Dr. M. Klumm

English has been an important part of my (private and professional) life ever since I was a child, and it has had a strong influence on who I am today. Without the ability to speak English I would obviously not be a lecturer of English linguistics, but since I love languages and teaching, I would probably teach students some other interesting language such as French, Spanish or maybe Japanese.

#### C. Hofmockel

I think it's fair to say that I'd be a completely different person. For one, I'd certainly have a different job: I wouldn't have studied English, wouldn't have gone abroad to live in Scotland for a year, wouldn't have been fascinated by the dialect of my weegie school children, and might never have discovered my love for all things language and linguistics. Seriously, I think I'd be a maths teacher. Or an artist. Or whatever. Who knows. Also, personality-wise, I'd probably be different because I wouldn't have been able to talk to as many people from different backgrounds in everyday life and when travelling (in fact, as a backpacker, travelling without being able to chat to anyone in English is a horryfying thought to me), and as a result might be less open-minded and mindful when it gets to different cultures and lifestyles. And I don't even want to think about who I'd be if I didn't have any of my English-speaking friends in my life...

#### M. Riedelsheimer

Without the ability to speak English I probably wouldn't be a lecturer in English literature. I might have pursued one of my various alternative plans for a professional future as mathematician, neuroscientist, professional athlete, rock star or firefighter. Or I might have ended up as someone who invents unlikely stories.



#### 2. What role does 'bilingualism' play in your life?

#### Prof. Dr. A. Fetzer

Bilingualism is very, very important in my life. This also applies to my family. But bilingualism goes beyond the ability to speak / write / read in more than one language. It includes using language in an appropriate manner, and it includes not only knowing what to say / write and do in a particular context, but also how to say / do this without deliberately offending your communication partners.

#### Dr. C. Hoffmann

Mmmmh. Unfortunately not a big role, since I'm not a native speaker of English. My wife and I don't raise our children bilingually (since she is not a native speaker either). I wish I would be able to do so, though. Both of m kids attend a bilingual nursery school in Augsburg with bilingual educators. Most children in this school are bilingual speakers of English or German, French, Spanish, Hindu, etc. So, I see the benefits of being bilingual everday day.

#### Dr. M. Klumm

Being proficient in two (or more) languages is an important asset in today's globalized world. Bot German and English play an important role in my life, not only at work (of course) but also in my everyday life, for instance when I talk to friends from different parts of the world. Bilingualism also plays a role in my family: My three-year-old nephew is growing up bilingually, which I - speaking as a linguist - find very fascinating to observe.

#### C.Hofmockel

Bilingualism is an essential part of my everyday life. My job and field of study alone make it necessary for me to read and speak English on a daily basis, but I also have close English-speaking friends who I talk to nearly every day. And I have this weird - some would say, slightly embarrassing - codeswitching thing going on with some anglophile German friends, which - besides usually raising some eyebrows among overhearers - appears to serve a variety of interesting social functions. I really should start analysing that...

#### M. Riedelsheimer

In my life bilingualism plays the roles of Dromio of Ephesus and Dromio of Syracuse (from Shakespeare's Comedy of Errors): fairly important characters who get things going by creating mix-ups all the time and are yet incredibly entertaining and serve their master well.

# Ich bin der Peter

### Bin i da dahoam?

The Facts: Peter has taught English in the Language Centre since 1998. He has been eMAG co-ordinator since 2002. He will retire in December 2019.

#### What brought you to Germany?

My wife, Beate, who is German, and who I met at the University of Reading. She was doing a year abroad, and I was doing an MA. I came to Augsburg in 1997; we have two kids, Tom and Valerie. This is a nice example of international cooperation.

#### How many languages do you speak?

I speak German and Spanish (at about the same level). I can also get by in French (I love the sound of it). I started French à l'école when I was eleven, and German at the age of fourteen. So in a sense both these languages have always been part of me. Spanish came into my life much later, though, when I was twenty-four, and I went on to live in Spain for thirteen years. I literally learned Spanish on the streets and in the cafés of Barcelona and Bilbao, with very little formal instruction. But my school French and three years of Latin helped me get off to a flying start.

### What languages have had the most impact on your life?

When I speak Spanish, I am a different me, though it's not just linguistic or that I throw my arms around. While speaking the language, I unconsciously connect with all the friends I've had there over a lifetime, as well as the wonderful things I did (like catching overnight boats to the Balearics, hiking in the Pyrenees, acquiring basic cooking skills, learning to love Rioja wine). But when it comes to German, I have good days and bad days! I guess I have a more utilitarian relationship with the language. I can get things done here, and understand practically everything (except, maybe, mumbled Tatort dialogues). I agree with Mark Twain, though, who said that life is too short to learn German. I also love being able to move back and forth between languages and cultures, not only when crossing borders, but in the Language Centre, where I hear different languages every day. Undoubtedly, all this has enriched my life, my identity.

#### Has English changed over the years?

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Certainly, as far as how different varieties of English are accepted in education. When I started teaching in Augsburg, British English was preferred to American English, which was frowned on at the time. This is very different now, because of the influence of the media and people's exposure to spoken American English. As a result, many more students now speak American English. Another thing: I'm not sure whether Britain was ever, or is 'cool', whether it's an attractive place for young people. Even if it is, will it continue to be so after B...b...b...Brexit? Time will tell.



#### You've been living in Germany for some time, but only recently became a German citizen. What was the deciding factor?

Brexit decided for me. I'm delighted that I now have both British and German nationality! While the UK remains in the EU, it's still possible to apply for both passports. So I've been a German citizen since January 2018. At the ceremony to celebrate becoming German in the Goldener Saal, we were explicitly encouraged to go out and take part in the community, which I hope I've done or do. I feel that I belong here; it's one of my 'homes'. I can now vote in the German parliamentary elections, too. Perhaps, even more importantly, I can continue to be an EU citizen when - or maybe if - Britain leaves the EU, and enjoy the same rights.

#### Do you consider yourself to be 'European'?

Naturalmente! I'm a passionate supporter of the EU, and have been able to work in Germany (twenty-two years), Spain (thirteen years), the UK (eleven years) and France (five years). I guess I feel at home in the EU, well, at least in Devon, Augsburg and Bilbao. Not only can we travel freely in the EU, but we can also work and study in other countries. But I remember Spain in the 1970s, when working there as a foreigner was far from easy. In my university classes now, we welcome exchange students from Italy, Spain, France, the Czech Republic, etc., which enriches my daily life. Did you know that since 1987 nine million people have benefitted from the Erasmus programme?

#### What are your retirement plans?

Don't get me wrong - I've enjoyed teaching - but I'm looking forward to not teaching English, to not having to explain language or British life. I long to return to a more natural relationship with my mother tongue, to a kind of age of innocence. I also want to continue to help my family both here in my German home and my Devon home. I also hope to read and write, cook, travel (modest trips to Barcelona and Paris, as well as overseas ones to Argentina, India or Australia). Oh, I have some new projects, like tennis. And the Italian language - I'm teaching myself, whatever that means.

#### Any last words?

Oh dear, really? Here goes... don't take the European Union for granted. Fight to protect its enormous achievements. Language education is important and can be life-changing! Spend at least six months in a country where the language you're learning is spoken. I predict that what you experience there will have a greater impact on you than the language learning itself. After all, language is only a means to an end! Good luck!

Authors: Tobias Lorenz, Aleksandra Goralska, Peter James Pictures & Layout: Aleksandra Goralska























# A European perspective

### **An interview with Language Centre teachers**

#### 1. How has your language/identity changed over time?

Maria: La lingua della mia infanzia è l'italiano ma sono sempre stata esposta a più lingue, e sono cresciuta con il desiderio di studiarne tante, per cercare di scoprire, capire, conoscere culture diverse dalla mia. Adesso tante lingue fanno parte della mia lingua interiore.

Frederik: Mina föräldrar kom till Tvskland 1973. då var jag två år gammal. Hemma pratades det alltid svenska. Om man sedan bara kommer till Sverige en gång om året några veckor under sommarlovet avbryts språkets naturliga utveckling. Släktingar påpekar då från tid till tid att det låter en aning gammalmodigt när jag pratar...

Luis: Sin duda alguna se produce una simbiosis entre las dos lenguas y las dos culturas. Entras en una especie de estado esquizofrénico: no eres de ningún sitio y de los dos a la vez. Vives una sensación de extrañeza y desarraigo constantes: para los de allí soy el alemán, y aquí sigo siendo el español. Digamos que tengo una doble identidad; al fin y al cabo soy géminis... (risas)

Christophe: J'ai découvert qu'une identité évolue en fonction des expériences, dont les expériences à l'étranger. J'essaie de m'approprier le "meilleur" (c'est subjectif bien évidemment) de chaque culture que je rencontre pour me construire et avancer dans la direction qui me convient le mieux dans la vie. Mon identité est en constante évolution, au rythme des découvertes d'autres cultures et modes de vie, mais aussi au rythme de mes découvertes linguistiques qui m'aident à comprendre profondément comment une culture est influencée (et influence) un langage.

Pictures: The lovely people seen in the pictures



Swedish

Fredrik Ahnsjö Maria Aquaro Italian

Luis Martín Spanish

Christophe Lips French

#### 2. What role does bilingualism play in your life?

Maria: lo e mio marito abbiamo scelto di vivere in Germania perché abbiamo sempre ritenuto che fosse importante per i nostri figli crescere quantomeno bilingui. Per essere veri cittadini europei è necessario conoscere più lingue europee.

Frederik: Att vara tvåspråkig gav mig chansen att få jobba på universitetet här i Augsburg som lektor i svenska - nog det bästa som kan hända en språkmänniska som älskar sitt modersmål men har studerat germanistik i Tyskland. Nu är det Tyska som främmande språk som gäller - inte illa det heller!

Luis: El bilingüismo es fundamental en mi vida. Desde que vivo en Alemania es el pan de cada día. Con mis hijos lo integramos desde el primer día. Pero no solo aquí experimento el bilingüismo. También en España vivimos con la familia de Barcelona situaciones de bilinguismo y diglosia.

Christophe: environnement Je vis dans un trilingue, voire quadrilingue, au quotidien, que ce soit chez moi, ou au travail. C'est un ,outil' de travail, de communication, de rencontres et de compréhension de l'Autre et du monde au quotidien.

The rest of the interviews will be published on our website.



# Who would I be without **mo**lish?

### A struggly tale of my language biography

I've had some struggles with this question and I can't tell you how many times I've tried to actually start writing something. If I had to be honest then this is probably my 19th draft. It usually takes three to four drafts to go from idea to finished article but, y'know, this no easy one. I must admit that I had never asked myself this question before, but when I heard it, I found it to be guite a thinker. Bear with me, while I try to figure out how the f\*ck this article is going to turn out.

#### Poczatki sa trudne

Although I was born into a Polish family and raised bilingually, English was always surprisingly present in our household. Even more so than German. My parents both studied English at uni, BBC Radio was playing all day long, blasting mostly English music. All the content I consumed, like video games, music or movies, was in English. Mostly because said content was either no good or non-existent in German or Polish. So, if I now try to picture my life without English, I honestly can't. And it's not just me, my entire family would be very different without English. We probably wouldn't even have moved to Germany and would be living somewhere in the Polish province, leading a much less curious and adventurous life.

#### Part-time belonger

As mentioned before, there are two other languages in my life, which have impacted me and my identity. Here's why: People not being able to tell where I'm from just from hearing me speak is what makes me feel like a secret agent but it also makes it difficult for me to identify with one country/culture. When in Germany, I feel a stronger connection to the Polish part of me; when in Poland I tend more towards being a kleiner Schwoab. In an English-speaking country I don't feel any belonging whatsoever. I identify with both countries but it's either exactly 50-50 or nothing at all. It's all a big weird identity cocktail that I haven't really figured out yet, but maybe I don't have to? Maybe that's exactly who I'm supposed to be: a wild mix.

English continues to be a big part of my life and myself today. I study English. I work in English. I can't watch dubbed movies or series without cringing (seriously, ask my boyfriend, this used to be an issue we fought about). Basically everywhere I look in my life, English is there, somehow. So to answer the question: I can't answer the question. I can't picture my life without English, even if it's hypothetical. I'm happy with how everything has turned out so far and I am very happy with my language biography. I hope it continues to be an adventure.



















# What I think about Britain...

### ...without ever having been there

I've never been to Britain but I'd still love to go some day. Maybe when I have money (in about 20 – 30 years, perhaps). When I think of the UK, there are a few things that immediately come to mind. Tea. Rain. The Royal family, including the possibly immortal Queen. British accents. The Highlands. Sherlock. Brexit. The sea. Fish and chips. The Northern Ireland conflict. Suits, for some weird reason. Jane Austen and the Brontë sisters. Ugh, Shakespeare. Colonies. Pounds. Yes, that's about all I've learned in about ten years of English classes.

#### Pop culture and...

I think Britain's contribution to pop culture is underrated at times. I mean, they have Sherlock and The 1975, which happens to be one of my favourite bands ever. OK, to be fair, I don't remember a single British contribution to the European Song Contest that was good, but that's another cup of tea. In general, I think we learn a lot about British culture at school, just not about the stuff that interests me. Personally, I have a bit of a weak spot for Jane Austen and the Brontë sisters (even though I still haven't finished Jane Eyre), and I think it's a shame that this isn't talked about in different classes, really. Sometimes you just need a strong female character that gets her happy end with a handsome rich man, you know?

#### **The Royals**

I also love the Royals – I may or may not have spent the entirety of December 31st last year watching documentaries about the Royal family. I especially love the younger Royals, and, frankly, Charles shouldn't become the next king. There, I said it. It's so weird, but also so cool how a random family has so much influence on a whole country. I mean, Royal weddings? A whole country pressuring their sovereign to publicly mourn her deceased daughter-in-law? Iconic.

#### Yummy?

Another topic – food. I feel I only ever hear bad things about British food. Most people probably think of haggis and that

disgusting-looking Christmas pudding, but I suppose these are just things people push as clichés? I don't know; I haven't been to Britain. But my dad told me that he spent his entire Abschlussfahrt week eating TUC crackers because the food was horrible. So there must be some truth to it. Anyway, I guess I would survive in the UK when it comes to food; they have porridge and vegetables everywhere, don't they?

#### I don't know any Brits!

I'd love to be able to tell you that I know lots of people in the UK, but honestly, I don't. I had a pen pal in seventh grade, and I had to share her with my friend from school. Her name was Kiara and I think the only reason either of us wrote to each other was that our teachers forced us to. So much for Brits being super friendly. No, I'm kidding, of course. I only ever hear that British people are super polite and considerate. Maybe it's just their accents that make them sound so kind. To quote the icon, John Mulaney, "Hey, you could pour soup into my lap and I'll probably apologize to you". I feel like that's what most people could imagine a British person saying.

Anyway, I promise I'll go to the UK some day. Just give me some time and lots of money.

[the author is a guest contributor]





### ...after being an au pair in London for a year

Sharing my thoughts about Britain is a demanding task because there are at least as many facets to Britain as kinds of tea at Sainsbury's. As a 20-year-old university student who spent a gap year in London as an au pair, I hope that I have a few insights...

#### What are they like?

I admire the British people, for several reasons. I love their sense of humor! Actually, German wit doesn't differ all that much from British people's, except that the Brits don't laugh at their own jokes (they don't even grin, unless someone else bursts into laughter).

And Brits are supposed to have a calm, cautious nature, which is, of course, a stereotype. However, many stereotypes contain a grain of truth. For example, on a hot 2018 Bank Holiday weekend, passengers were queuing for hours for the Gatwick Airport to Brighton train. British Rail called it 'absolute chaos', but I can't imagine how Germans would've reacted! They probably wouldn't wait patiently in an orderly queue. The same with standing on the right only on the London Tube escalator to allow people in a hurry to pass. British people are, of course, remarkably polite (or maybe Germans are a bit grumpy most of the time). Studies show that smiling actually has an impact on your mood; whether this is true or not, I still like the idea of this British 'outside-in-mentality'.

#### Language, dialects, varieties, accents

As a wise man once said, "We have really everything in common with America nowadays except, of course, language." Obviously, Americans, Brits and other native English speakers can communicate without any trouble. But the UK is interesting for its languages, varieties or dialects, such as Cockney or the famous Yorkshire accent, as well as Scots or Welsh. However, on holiday in (Northern) Ireland, Scotland, Wales and Cornwall, I didn't hear much variety. At least, that was my experience. But accents can be challenging for non-natives to understand, for example, when Glaswegians speak.

#### Hungry?

Britain's a great place for food! In the morning, breakfast with scrambled eggs, beans on toast, mushrooms, hash browns and a 'nice cup of tea'. Later, a local pub... any dish will do because it'll be great. How about afternoon tea? Is 'scone' pronounced ([skpn] or [skoun]?). Some people might recommend shepherd's pie or the compulsory fish and chips, too. Don't forget some vinegar on those chips!

#### The music scene

In the last few decades, the UK has been influential in the music industry, especially since the so-called 'British invasion' of the US started by the Beatles around 1964. Other musicians include David Bowie, Led Zeppelin and The Smiths, to name but a few of my favourite artists. And music isn't standing still! I particularly like some contemporary musicians who try to convey their pro-European attitude, for example, the band, Enter Shikari. They not only produce great music, but also reach a wide audience with their political allusions. In times of Brexit, incorporating statements in this and other forms, particularly art (see Banksy, who, by the way, is also British; he's from Bristol) has proven effective.

#### Education

As an au pair, I learned quite a bit about the British school system and people's attitudes towards it. My host kids go to a state school, which, in my opinion, is perfectly fine. Although most children attend state schools, I don't really understand why parents spend exorbitant tuition fees for their kids' education! Shouldn't education be available to anyone, no matter what social class? This 'two-class system' only serves to impede some kids' academic development. Less privileged children don't get equal opportunities, which really upsets me. The same goes with universities. It wasn't until 1998 that some British universities started charging tuition fees. Students had to pay around 1000 quid a year, which is only a fraction of what students pay nowadays. A degree is essential for some careers so...bad luck if you can't afford to study law, even with really good A-levels. Personally, I'd have loved to study in the UK, but simply can't for financial reasons (let alone being able to afford to live in London).

#### What do you think?

We do tend to pigeonhole British people; we think we know what they're like, but we don't. This article's an attempt to observe British people and life, but it's only a snapshot (my snapshot). What do you think?

[the author is a guest contributor]



### Scared and alone in a foreign country

### When refugees are put into a pigeonhole

As a child of former war refugees, some things I end up hearing around me really hit home. Many people don't know about my background and comment on how immigrants and refugees are just the worst people imaginable. Just because I blend in well on the exterior, doesn't mean I've stopped considering myself a part of this group.

#### Learning something new about myself every day

The Yugoslavian war started after Tito (the dictator of Yugoslavia) died. Up until his death, Catholic, Muslim and Christian Orthodox people lived together. When he passed, anger soon spread among politicians as to who should govern ultimately, resulting in several wars and Yugoslavia splitting up.

My parents fled to Germany just like many others. In 1998, we weren't given permission to stay any longer. Worried about our future, our parents applied to other countries and soon we were on our way to Canada. My sister and I grew up bilingual, learning French and Croatian. After five years, we received Canadian citizenship and from that day on, whenever someone asked, I was a Canadian. Simple as that. Now let me stop right here. As I'm writing this, I just found out that, contrary to my belief, we had two nationalities all along. A Canadian passport and a Bosnian one – my sister and I just never knew

these passports existed. We were born in Germany and we always knew our parents still had a second nationality. They just kind of omitted to tell us, "Hey, you have those, too." So... to anybody that knows me: sorry I lied. I didn't know any better.

#### When people know better

In all this time, I've been asked some questions very frequently. For some reason, my answers are often met with more questions or they just don't seem like the answers people want to hear. The most popular question is "Where are you from?", and I've always said 'Canada' and usually ended up with one of the following replies: "You're not a real Canadaian, though?" "You were born in Germany, so how can you not be German?" "Where are you really from?". Now that I know about my second nationality (that I had all along), I doubt that adding it to my response would satisfy such people. If I said I'm German, I'm still missing the papers, I still can't vote, there's still something 'wrong' with me. I don't get angry at anyone that asks questions or even at those that correct me aggressively, because most times they have no ill intention. They think it helps me, which it really doesn't. I'm just kind of uncomfortable at the end of the conversation.



#### Think before you speak

Some things, on the other hand, really anger me. Sometimes people forget or they don't know that my parents fled their country, too, so they think I'm fine if they're just blatantly racist around me. Surprise: I'm not. To show you what I mean, I will tell you a little bit about a boss of mine. She made it very clear that she hates refugees, people from the Middle East, Asia and especially Africa. One of her comments was: "I couldn't withdraw any money from the bank today because two black people came in and stood behind me, so I was terrified." Like, how dare people stand behind you in line in broad daylight? She also loved to complain about foreign mothers and their kids because they "were running around being loud" and "their mothers have no idea on how to raise children properly". Last but not least, my personal favourite: "Not to be racist, but just look at their nationality and you'll know what kind of people they are."

My point is that very few refugees are what the media make them out to be. Not every person with dark skin is a criminal or even a refugee in the first place. Vice versa, the light-skinned person sitting next to you on the tram might very well be a refugee (or a criminal, for all you know). No matter what group of people you look at, there will always be some bad examples that you can put your focus on. Somebody's looks, language or nationality do not determine who they are. Easiest way to find out is to interact with them before making assumptions. Show those people arriving in your country scared and alone that they are safe and accepted, because that's what feeling at home is all about. Not your passport, the language you speak or your looks, but how you treat others is what matters the most.



# An Englishman, an Irishman and a German...

Well, hello there. You're probably wondering what that title is about, right? Looks like the start of a very bad joke.. Alas, it's not. It's me - your favourite English-/ Irish-/German. The main topic this issue is one close to my heart, as a lot of my identity has been shaped by the nationalities I 'represent', so to speak. Anyway, enough of all this - shall we begin?

#### Part One: The Englishman

Well, I suppose I'll begin here. For most of the first twelve years of my life, I was, to all intents and purposes, English. Just that, apart from my Irish dad, but I'll get on to that later. Born and bred in South London, holidays in the summer, travelling to the coast of

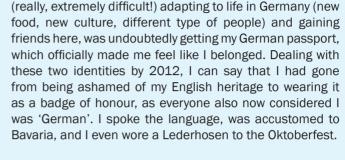
England, and that was that! I was happy; I supported England in the Football World

Cup, and supported a team from the English Premier League, Arsenal. I spoke English at home and at school, and while there were various other cultural influences, I didn't feel drawn to any of them. Then, my Grandpa came into my life, and slowly but surely, I was introduced to another part of my identity - my German heritage!

#### **Part Two: The German**

It was my Grandpa who really introduced me and my mum to German culture, and it was he who massively influenced our decision to move to Germany.

For a long time, however, when first here, I felt incredibly alone as the "English guy" in a small town. I suppose that was kind of my label for a while, till I got used to life here in Germany. The crowning moment, after mastering an extremely difficult language,



#### Part Three: The Irishman

Now there's just one part I was missing. My Irishness! My Dad is Irish as mentioned, and his half of my family is all Irish, but I'd never actually been to Ireland, until 2015. My Dad saw this as an integral part of my being, which was unexplored, and I didn't really comprehend that part of me until I was there. When my Dad and I went on a road trip around Ireland, visiting family, and night after night, hearing stories from them, I began to fall in love with the place, and felt a real bond with the family in Ireland. They were all virtually unknown to me before, but when I was there I felt instantly accepted, and I really felt as If I was Irish, even if the accent says otherwise!

So, I've come on quite a journey from the young boy growing up in London, unaware of any anything else but being "English." The move to Germany, and being the outcast "English" person, eventually assimilating into German culture and becoming German as well as English, and then finding and falling in love with my Irish heritage. So that means it's always fun when people ask me "Where are you from?"

















# Keep calm and don't judge

### **Speaking dialect**

When it comes to language there can be huge differences regarding the various dialects which exist in Germany, as well as in every other country. But have you ever been judged by your friends because of the way you speak? Yes? No? Maybe. Whatever your answer is, I'm going to tell you what it's like.

#### Sense of community

As someone who's originally from a remote rural area (near Ulm), I couldn't be happier that I grew up in a village where speaking dialect is totally common. The way you speak identifies you with a large community which has its own 'language' and whenever a person who speaks similarly to the way you speak is nearby, it feels like home. And it's so reassuring to have such a big inventory of language you can share with the people in your village or city. There are even words you would need half of an eternity to describe if you used standard German words only. Take, for example, the Swabian word 'hudla'. There's no standard German equivalent, but it means doing things very fast, but carelessly and imprecisely, so that you tend to make mistakes.

#### **Stereotypes and judgy friends**

You see, I have some friends who like to tease me just because of the way I speak. And with the dialect come the stereotypes. Whether they believe it or not, where I come from not everybody is a farmer and we don't have more cows than people either. They even think that members of a community who use dialect are uneducated or underdeveloped!

Take, for example, Munich or Stuttgart, where some people proudly speak the Bavarian or Swabian variety. These cities and other metropoles are highly developed, and still inhabitants speak dialect. Another assumption is that there's no difference between the phonemes -s and -sch. My friends and acquaintances claim that the -s is always pronounced -sch. But why do they judge me if, despite of the more frequent use of the phoneme -sch, they understand perfectly what I mean?

### **Message**

What I'm trying to say is that using a dialect reflects language awareness and it forms part of our identity. Where we come from defines how we speak and if that's the case, we're proud of it - at least, that's how I see it. Many speakers choose to use the dialect of the area they live or have lived in. and not because they don't know better - except maybe for kids who haven't been to school yet. For some people, a dialect might just represent their roots or maybe they simply like a particular variety. Speaking dialect enriches us, and it gets lost if we don't use it. Every person is different, and every person also speaks differently. If this weren't accepted by society, people would have to start criticising all the different idiolects (the language spoken by a particular person) as well. In any case, whenever you hear somebody talking differently, just remember that it's part of the person's identity and it shouldn't be used to discriminate. It should rather be seen as a valuable characteristic which should be accepted and respected.









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