

The Puzzle of Interculturality

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Annet Chu is a freelance writer who loves to travel, eat, and write in Europe. She embraces intellectual travel opportunities by partaking in summer academies abroad. As a lifelong learner, she recently started to learn German and relearn French. During her free time, she enjoys reading about yoga philosophy, intercultural competence, and holistic nutrition.

I think that French is a romantic language, and I do listen to French-Canadian singers like Isabelle Boulay when I need a virtual romantic escape. However, to my surprise, I discovered something other than romance while traveling in France.

Strasbourg, France, is only 45 minutes away from Germany by train. In this city, many people in the hospitality industry are linguistically talented, for many of them can speak at least three languages. I went into a restaurant near the main train station and encountered a young server who was remarkably patient with my fragmented Canadian French. At the same time, he was extremely willing to speak in English. As I waited for my order, I heard him speaking German with another customer. Such trilingual communication is common in the busy streets of Strasbourg.

On the train back to Germany, I heard the announcement broadcast in three languages and wondered if linguistic competency is the solution to intercultural competency. Are people closer when everyone is speaking the same language? Are people really speaking the same language when they speak the same language? Perhaps only the communicators will know the answer.

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August 2014, Strasbourg, France