

## George's story

I suppose this is a narrative of sorts... it's difficult to pinpoint the exact moment when I caught the language bug, but it definitely started with a kiss. Well, kisses would be more exact. Little, fluttering French *bisous* given in greeting by the mother of my first French exchange partner, on my first trip away from home, after my first solo flight, shortly before my first *tartine* and *chocolat chaud* on a cold, wet January morning in northern France.

It's probably true to say that the "language" part of the bug actually came after the culture part. First came that dizzying feeling of *dépaysement* when you arrive in a foreign country, where everything is almost the same - people, faces, meals, sports - but the sense impressions have been refracted slightly, as though through a prism. And the language at first was merely a dull background noise to the physicality of my displacement and the reality of new experiences. Only drip by drip did those vocalisations percolate through my system and form themselves into words and phrases and meaning.

And then came the glee of acting out this new language in the real world. To be understood doing what had until recently seemed so alien! There are very few thrills that can compare to communicating on the bleeding edge of your knowledge of any acquired language.

Finally, beyond that, many moons later, to cease to be aware of those differences; to truly exist as your own self but freshly renewed, the old skin having been sloughed off and the assimilation to be complete.

I still strive to taste that rush of being understood in a new country. And perhaps *that* is the bug and that search will always be my story.

George Van den Bergh is Founder and CEO of [thisislanguage.com](https://thisislanguage.com)