

Professor Chris McCarthy

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### Three Countries And Three Languages

Although America is a country full of diversity and a land made of immigrants, they tend to have some stigma towards immigrants as well. In America people of all different backgrounds have learned to live and be together in harmony, but some people seem to be very bitter and hold a lot of hate in their hearts. For example there are many movies, shows and novels that mock another person's race or ethnicity. One thing that can be mocked easily is someone's language and accent. Growing up in three different countries has its side effects when you're a kid. The first is that you may not realize just how many things you're going to have to learn to be able to communicate to people and feel like a member of society. Understanding where I am from and how I grew up is a big part of who I become as I grow older; but it also helps me grow as an individual and start thinking independently. And it feels very special when I learn and understand different languages in these countries.

I was born in Iran, I lived there for sixteen years. The first language I spoke was Arabic because my parents are from Iraq. When I started learning the Persian language, Farsi, I was six years old, and I learned it through cartoons, films, and at kindergarten. At first it was difficult for me to understand the teacher and the other kids, but I passed this stage in the first three months and began to understand them well, but my Persian was broken. A funny story I have at the kindergarten was when the teacher asked us to choose a cartoon to watch during the last hour of the school day, and the kids usually chose Cinderella or other princesses because we were all girls, but I said Tom and Jerry. When the teacher agreed and said she liked it too, all the other

students got mad at me, and after we finished watching the cartoon the student had a change of mind and wanted to watch more because they really liked it and every day when we were asked to pick a cartoon the other kids would ask for Tom and Jerry. After this the students were kinder to me and spoke more to me, and this helped me understand and learn new Persian words and in return I taught them some Arabic words I knew. Every day I learned new words and my mom would help me. She would put the new words I learned into a sentence for me to understand their place and meaning. My Persian became very good when I was in third grade, I was taking Persian more than Arabic, even with my parents. But the first and the second years of school were very hard, especially when I did not understand the teachers and some students laughed at me.

When I was sixteen, my family and I moved to Iraq due to Iran's bad economy. My Arabic was good, and I understood a lot but not as much as the native Iraqis who've lived there all their lives. Because the majority of my childhood was spent in Iran, my Arabic faded away and I forgot many words. The only Arabic I spoke was with my parents but even then I would mainly speak Farsi. Because of this, moving to Iraq was hard for me. Everything was different and the first two years at school were very hard. It was so weird to speak Arabic in school and I was very bad at the Arabic class. It's said that when you're younger it's easier to soak up and learn a language. I think that's true because with Farsi I managed to feel more comfortable picking it up. And since I was a teenager in Iraq, I got embarrassed easily in school when my Arabic was weak and I had an accent. The other girls in my grade weren't very kind about this. They would say, "Oh, she's from Iran, she doesn't speak Arabic and doesn't understand us" and mock me. But I could understand them, I just struggled to respond and let them know that I could. Sometimes I would be happy if they assumed I didn't understand them, so then I didn't

have to speak. My grades in Iran were always A's and I wanted to become a dentist, but now I just wanted to pass and I was passing with C's or sometimes D's. I did not raise my hand to the teachers when they asked, even when they forced me to speak, I did not say anything. I was sad the first two years because of my grades, but then I decided that I needed to work hard to progress. After that, I became more determined to learn. I organized my time, I began waking up at 4 am and studying Arabic, and science from 4 to 6 am. I studied science because the textbooks were all in Arabic as well so I obviously struggled. These two hours of extra studying before I went to school every day really helped me. I also took classes after school to become better in Arabic so I can read faster. I lived in Iraq for five years and not only did my Arabic become stronger there, I got to know a new culture. I lived modestly in a decent sized house and I had all the games my heart desired, clothes, food, and everything I needed. On top of that, I now had the ability to communicate with the people around me. I stopped feeling embarrassed and sad and finally felt at peace and happy.

Going back into the past when I still lived in Iran, my mother thought it would be beneficial for me to learn English as well, since it's such a widely used language around the world and also because she wished to learn it but she never had the opportunity because she was raised during a time of war. So each summer I was taking English classes four days a week, and I did that for seven years. With that I built up a base for my English speaking skills in Iran. I found English to be harder to learn because its letters, grammar, and sounds were different from Persian and Arabic. But I enjoyed learning it because I got to watch shows and movies in English and that helped me with my accent. When we moved to Iraq, I didn't take any English classes outside of school but the schools in Iraq had English as a mandatory class. Because I had been studying English longer than the other students, this was the one class I was ahead of them in. In fact,

personally, I sometimes like to say I was better than the teacher herself in English because I had less of an accent. I think I had less of an accent because Farsi is part of the indo-european languages which has other languages like English and slavic languages. But unlike Farsi, Arabic is a semitic language, their letter sounds and phonetics are different. The closest language relatives to it is Hebrew and Aramic.

I began courting my husband when I was 19. He was from America, so even though he spoke Arabic it was still weak, and even though I studied English I was still not fluent as well. Together we taught each other the languages, and my English grew stronger because of this. And because I knew that if I did marry him I would probably move to America. I studied English even more and watched more English movies. Which were surprisingly very helpful, almost like magic. After a couple years we had gotten married and I moved to America leaving Iraq behind. Now i've lived here for two years and my english is very good, I speak fluently with my sister in laws and friends.

I'm very grateful for all the languages I've learned. When I tell people I know three different languages they are usually shocked and ask me how. They say "How do you not mix them up and remember them all " and my answer is simple. I still practice them all with different people. With my family I speak Persian and Arabic, here in America I speak a lot of English so I speak them all everyday. I achieved this because of my determination and love for languages. I am also very grateful for my mother. She was right to send me to that English school. It helped me so much. Understanding where I come from can be a bit complicated since there are so many places. When I was born in Iran I was called an Iraqi, and when I moved to Iraq they called me an Irani. When I came to America I was called both Irani and Iraqi, yet when I returned to Iraq over the winter I was called an American. I have all these identities but I know that I am Irani,

Iraqi and American and I'm fine with that. To anyone that meets an immigrant struggling to learn a whole new language, please be patient with them. They are trying their best to survive in a new environment.