

My Mobility

Students from Ca' Foscari Recount their Learning Experiences Abroad

The unexpected virtue of imperfection

Giorgia Frigerio

LT Lingue, Civiltà e Scienze del Linguaggio

Destination: Cardiff University, Wales, UK

Giorgia Frigerio learns how to embrace her mistakes (especially the language errors) and laugh at them.

My Erasmus exchange in Cardiff was certainly the most defining experience in my life. It may sound like an overstatement, since it only lasted four months, but the truth is that even after a few weeks I started to realise the impact it was having on me. I definitely think that Erasmus represents a key experience not only from an academic point of view, but also on a more personal level. This is why I would like to talk about something that combines these two aspects, since it affects both my language learning habits and my daily life: confidence.

Being extremely insecure, I always worry about doing my best and I often fear other people's judgement. I still remember that during the first week in Cardiff one of my housemates told me that he thought my way of saying the word 'about' was weird. He didn't mean it in a negative way, but I started to wonder what was wrong with it, worrying about all the mistakes I was probably making without even realising. Scared of making mistakes, I sometimes prefer not to say anything and I think this is something a lot of language students can relate to.

My excessive self-awareness could have ruined the entire experience, making me feel awkward every time I mispronounced a word or made a small grammar mistake. Luckily, it was the exchange itself that helped me handling this problem. Indeed, speaking English every day and constantly being exposed to it made me feel more comfortable expressing myself in the language, so that I progressively started to worry less about my mistakes. One may say that this happened because my English improved, but it's more than that. The point isn't that I stopped making mistakes, but that my approach to them changed.

The perfect example is something that happened during the last week of my exchange. I was having dinner with my housemates and when one of them told me that I was quite short, I replied: – Actually, I'm very *high*!

Needless to say that I meant to say 'tall' and that everybody immediately started to laugh – including me –, especially because of the actual meaning

of my sentence. I'm absolutely sure that if this had happened at the beginning of my Erasmus, I would have been utterly embarrassed, since this is the kind of mistake you would expect from a beginner. Instead, I laughed.

This is what Erasmus taught me: to embrace my mistakes and laugh at them. Not only are they a natural part of the learning process, they're also necessary to improve. I'm not saying that mistakes don't matter or that we shouldn't care about them at all, but sometimes accepting that we're allowed not to be perfect can be extremely beneficial. If there's one thing I learnt, it's that when you're not making any mistake it simply means that you're not speaking the language, and if you're not speaking the language you're not making any progress. I will always be grateful to this experience because - both in language learning and my personal life - imperfection doesn't scare me the way it used to.