

Listening to language experiences

Student 1: So when I just arrived and I (was) afraid to speak, when I go to the shop, I...really, I even...I have to explain...I stand next to the shop and I'm thinking okay, I'm going to go in now; I want to buy this item, and then I have to arrange my sentence before I actually go (in)to the shop and say: Excuse me, can I have this and this and this and this. You know I'm kind of afraid, you know, because we don't know whether we can be accepted or not. We do not know whether people actually know what we want to say, because, it might (be) embarrass(ing to) myself and so I (a bit) struggle when I just arrive so then I start to talk to them. You know, with the support from the university when the lecturers, they always offer...come to talk to us, come to talk to us, and then they have organised things like, for example, from the union, they have like, café culture, they have gatherings, they bring students here to try...we can see that they try to come to us; to make us feel comfortable when we just arrived. Then from there, I slowly gain my confidence, and then we always ask them how to communicate with English people, and then from there, we learn step-by-step, and then I build up my confidence, and then now I (am) not any more afraid to speak to them, and even can debate with them.

Tutor: I think the experience that you have if you're not confident or fluent in the language, is limited. Again, you would tend to either seek out people of the same country as you, or at least the same language background, you know, that's the sort of 'looking for safety' if you like.

Student 2: Obviously, the emotional support that we have, you feel like being at home, you don't feel so homesick, you speak in your own language, and you can express yourself, and be clearly understood, and have a common culture to share. On the other hand, if you always keep company with people from your own country, you run the risk of not improving your English, of being excluded or excluding other people, and living in your own small island in another country, and not really get to know the culture there, so I think a balance between the two is the best thing.

Tutor: Or, you're only going to be perhaps meeting the local people who speak your language, I mean, that was the tendency that I saw when I was abroad, you know, living in Russia for instance, only meeting Russians who spoke English. I do speak Russian so I was able to meet lots of other people, and I'm sure that the experience is a fuller and richer one, if you are competent in the language.