

Chatterbox #24 – Cross-Cultural Relationships: An interview with Melanie

Transcript

Maura: Hello everyone, this is Maura.

Melanie: And I'm Melanie.

Maura: And this is the Chatterbox podcast at Culips.com, that's C-U-L-I-P-S.com. And in the Chatterbox episode what we do is we chat about different subjects of interest, maybe to do with language or culture. Today what we're going to do is, we're going to interview my friend Melanie. And today I'm going to talk about cross-cultural relationships with Melanie because both she and I are in relationships where our **partners** are not from the same culture and they don't speak English as their native language. First we're going to get to know my friend Melanie a little bit. So Melanie can you tell us about yourself?

Melanie: Well, I was born and raised in **Lindsay, Ontario** a few hours north of Toronto.

Maura: So how did you end up in Montreal **then**?

Melanie: Well after finishing high school in **Lindsay**, I moved out west to **Kelowna, British Columbia** where I did a college diploma in aviation and I taught flying around British Columbia for a few years before heading back to Ontario to Ottawa to do a degree in language, French and English literature. That took me to France on an exchange with the University of Ottawa, where I met my **partner** Christophe. Living in France was an excellent experience, a great way learn about the culture and practice the language but tough to get visas sometimes so I had to come back to Canada. Christophe and I decided to both come to Montreal where we can both work and live in our first languages.

Maura: OK, cool.

Maura: So what were you doing in France?

Melanie: I went originally on an exchange with the university. So I took classes at one of the universities in **Lyon, France**. There I studied with native speakers in the literature classes there and I also at the same time taught English in a high school.

Maura: Oh, that's pretty cool. So how did you learn French? Just at university?

- Melanie: No, in Lindsay, where I'm from. It's funny, it's a small town, no native French speakers, and yet there's a French **immersion** program. It started the year before I went into school, luckily, so when I started kindergarten at the age of 5, I started in French immersion, where I spoke only French from the first day of school. So we were all native English speakers but learning French together.
- Maura: That's pretty cool. I'm always jealous of people who have that experience because for me growing up, I was surrounded by people speaking English and I went to English school and I took some French classes because no matter, really, where you are in English-speaking Canada you have to take French classes but it's not an **immersion** program so I didn't really learn as much.
- Melanie: Yeah, it was a really great program. We learned French from native French speakers that came to the town to teach. We learned a lot about the language and the French culture as well, which is really great 'cause the small town wasn't very diverse. We spoke only French from kindergarten all the way up until grade 4, was the first time we learned English. We had about 45 minutes a day in English and then it progressed. Every year we added a little bit more English until high school we had about 3 classes in French, 3 classes in English.
- Maura: Wow cool. That sounds like a really good experience. So you met Christophe, who is from France, when you were there, studying and teaching?
- Melanie: That's right.
- Maura: So, what do you think are some possible advantages or disadvantages to being in a relationship with someone who's from another culture or speaks another language as their native language?
- Melanie: Well, at the beginning it was hard to express myself in a second language the way that you want to express yourself to somebody that close to you. But then over time as I got more comfortable with the language and more comfortable with Christophe, I found that expressing myself wasn't as difficult and my French probably improved. Now actually I tend to speak to him only in English, which helps him improve his English, while at the same time allowing me to express myself as I would normally.
- Maura: Yeah so sometimes, and I know from my experience, when you're dating someone who speaks another language you have a problem being clear sometimes. Like, you have to use really simple words to express yourself or you have to repeat the same thing more than once.

- Melanie: Definitely there is a lot of repetition.
- Maura: OK, um, but I also think that an advantage might be that you get a lot of close contact with the other culture or, like you said, you get the chance to maybe practice that other language.
- Melanie: That is a definite advantage and Christophe, coming from such a diverse background himself, makes it **all the more interesting**. His father's side of his family is German and his mother's side is Italian, so I get to experience those languages and cultures at the same time.
- Maura: Yeah, cool. So it's interesting because you get a lot of different contact with European cultures and languages. So, I imagine because you're from very far away countries it's difficult to decide where to live.
- Melanie: Yeah.
- Maura: I mean, like I said, for me, my **partner** is from Quebec, which is still in Canada and we have a hard time deciding where to live but that's not as big of a difference as Europe and Canada. So how do you, kind of, decide where to make your life?
- Melanie: It's a definite challenge. So we have had to spend a bit of time apart because of that distance. Our cultures aren't that different so there hasn't been a big issue there, but the distance does cause some problems.
- Maura: So are you going to stay in Canada forever?
- Melanie: I'd really like to, but because I am beginning a career as a teacher and I have summers off it does seem a bit **more fair** that we spend our time in France. That is one of Christophe's complaints, we'll say, about Canada, is that we only get **roughly 2 weeks'** vacation, whereas in France they get minimum 5 weeks' vacation.
- Maura: Right, so yeah, in Canada when you start a job, sometimes you only get 2 weeks, but after time you do accumulate more weeks of vacation. But for sure if you compare 2 weeks of vacation to 5 weeks in France, seems like a good deal.
- Melanie: And in France, their holidays accumulate as well. So they start at 5 but they end up with months.
- Maura: Yeah, that's a good point. So when there's a holiday, like Christmas, that's a big holiday, how do you decide what to do?

- Melanie: Well, we haven't spent too many years **back to back** in one country. We've been moving **back and forth** for a little while so, so far we just spend Christmas where we are. But now with Christophe working, he's afraid that next year he won't even get the time off, which is nice for me because then we get to spend it with my family.
- Maura: Yeah, it is a hard decision to make, where to go when families live in different locations. I think anyone who's in a relationship where the families are from different areas have that problem.
- Melanie: That's right. You can have that problem even if you live 2 hours apart. But we sort of follow the rule, **every other** year.
- Maura: Yeah, that's a good rule. I use that rule too actually. So what is it like when you visit each other's family and friends? 'Cause I know that that can be difficult because of the **language barrier**.
- Melanie: It definitely is. For me it's not as big of a deal because I have been speaking French for almost my whole life, even though I'm not as **comfortable** in it I can express myself fairly well. For Christophe though, English is still a bit of a challenge and it makes me sad sometimes thinking that maybe the relationship he's forming with my parents and my brother isn't as strong as I would maybe like. So my parents don't speak any French at all, which makes it difficult for Christophe. Lots of my friend, though, growing up were in the same French immersion program as me, and my brother as well, so they can speak to him a **fair amount** in French, but my parents, not at all. Although my mom, it's really given her a new **urge** to learn French.
- Maura: That's cool.
- Melanie: Yeah.
- Maura: Yeah, I totally...I totally agree. It can be it can be a little bit difficult. I remember when I first went to meet my partner's family and at that point I really didn't speak French at all so luckily his father spoke some English so we could speak a little bit of English but, yeah, I was quiet a lot for sure. So it's hard.
- Melanie: I remember the first time I visited Christophe's family, his grandpa, who is Italian, worked at an army base, an American army base during the war, and he started to bring out the English words he remembered. Like *fork* just to make me feel comfortable.
- Maura: Aw, that's cute.

- Melanie: The one good thing is that Christophe has found a new love for hockey. Hockey isn't popular in France. So since being here he's really **taken it up** and that's one way that my dad and him can **bond**.
- Maura: Nice. So we talked about, kind of, your past and a little bit about your future, but what's your situation right now? What's happening?
- Melanie: Well, I'm fairly new to Montreal still so I'm excited to start my teaching career here and getting to know the city a little bit better, really making a life for ourselves here.
- Maura: Cool, well good luck in Montreal. Have fun, it's a great city. I'm sure you already know that. So thanks a lot again for coming in to talk to us because I think that this is a really interesting subject and anyone who's in a cross-cultural relationship, or wants to be in one maybe, can relate to these stories and as we talked about before maybe between French and English the difference isn't so huge as maybe some other relationships that some of the listeners are in. So if you're in a cross-cultural relationship, you can leave a comment on this episode and that would be interesting to hear from you too. So remember: you can go to our website to get the Lipservice, which has the transcripts, the detailed explanations, and a quiz for this episode if you want to enhance your learning even more. So this has been Maura and my friend...
- Melanie: Melanie.
- Maura: Thanks a lot for listening. This has been a Chatterbox episode and we'll talk to you soon. Bye!
- Melanie: Bye!

Detailed Explanation

Partner

A **partner** is someone who works together with another person for some reason. When we say **partners** we are talking about only two people. It could be a business **partner** or a tennis **partner**, or someone who is completing a project at school with you.

Partner can also mean romantic partner, or husband/wife, boyfriend/girlfriend. When people use **partner** to talk about a romantic partner it is a serious relationship. We would NOT use **partner** to talk about a couple that has been dating for one month. Also, **partner** does not signify male or female, so it is gender neutral.



Using **partner** to mean romantic partner has become more popular recently in western culture. This is probably because of the increased social acceptance of same-sex relationships. This is also because of the increased number of couples who are not married, but have a serious relationship.

Lindsay, Ontario

Lindsay, Ontario is where Melanie is from. It is the small city where she grew up. Lindsay is north of Toronto, Ontario, about 130 km away. It has a small population of fewer than 20,000 people. Many people have cottages or summer homes there because it is on a lake and close to many natural spots. Melanie and her family lived there all year.

Kelowna, British Columbia

Kelowna is a city in the middle of the province of **British Columbia**. It is south, not very far from the United States border. It is warmer than much of Canada in the winter, and drier and hotter in the summer. It also has many outdoor activities to do during both seasons. It has an airport and an aviation school where Melanie studied and taught students how to fly airplanes. **Kelowna** is in the Okanagan Valley, a tourist area known for producing wine.

Lyon, France

Lyon is the second biggest city in **France** after Paris, so there is a lot going on there. It is located in east-central France. There are many businesses, universities, and tourist attractions in **Lyon**.

Immersion

An **immersion** is a great way to learn a language. An **immersion** is when one thing is completely surrounded by something. For example, you can **immerse** a shirt in a bucket of water. This means that the shirt is then completely covered in water.

Just like the image of the shirt, people can be completely **immersed** in something, like a language or culture. Melanie did a French **Immersion** by going to school in French all the time. If you study a language and receive some instruction in your native language this is not **immersion**. **Immersion** means that all parts of the course are delivered in the language you are practicing.

All the more interesting

This is an expression, **all the more interesting**, that means that something is even more interesting. One thing is interesting but it can be more interesting. **All the more interesting** means more interesting, but it is stronger and more intense.

Here are some examples with **all the more interesting**:

Ron: Do you want to go for a hike tomorrow?

Erin: It could be **all the more interesting** if we went camping too!

Ted: Did you like the movie?

Maggie: Yes, but it would have been **all the more interesting** if they had used fewer special effects.

More fair

You will see and hear this often in English. When we make a comparison in English we add -er on the end of the adjective (smaller) or we use the word *more* before the adjective (more beautiful). And then we have some words where there is an option. What is happening now is that some people construct their comparisons incorrectly by using more before the adjective when they should not. Technically **more fair** should be **fairer**. This is an error that goes largely unnoticed in speaking. In writing it is more important to be correct.

Roughly

To use the adjective **roughly** means that you are estimating or taking a guess. Melanie says that in Canada you start with **roughly** two weeks' vacation. You usually get two weeks' vacation, but in some cases you might get less or more. She means that you start with approximately, or around, two weeks. When we use **roughly** we are often not giving an exact number.

Here are a couple of examples with **roughly**:

Kyle: Did you win anything last night?

Trina: They gave away **roughly** 25 prizes and I didn't get one.

Kyle: Too bad.

Bill: How many people were at the party last night?

Nancy: I don't know. I'd say there were about 50 people, **roughly**.

Back to back

When something happens **back to back**, it happens the same way twice in a row. There is one event and then a second event happens next in the same way. For example, if someone has a sports game that they will play in their hometown and then they have another game the next day that they will also play in their hometown, we can say they will play two home games **back to back**.

Another example with back to back could be used to talk about exams. Maybe you have an exam scheduled for Monday morning and then another exam Monday afternoon. You can say that you have two exams **back to back**.

Melanie uses **back to back** to talk about her past experiences at Christmas. She says, "We haven't spent too many years **back to back** in one country." **Back to back** Christmases means one Christmas and then the Christmas the following year. So, Melanie says that they have not often spent two Christmases in a row in the same country.

Back and forth

To move **back and forth** means to go somewhere and then move back to the original place; to move between two points. In Melanie's case, when she moves **back and forth** it is between Canada and France.

To go back and forth does not have to be a big movement like between countries. A rocking chair or a swing moves **back and forth**. It goes in one direction and then comes back to where it started.

Back and forth can also be used to talk about something that is not physical. Someone can go **back and forth** when making a decision. For example, Shelly says that she is going to travel to Egypt, but then she changes her mind and says she is going to stay in Canada. We can say that Shelly keeps going **back and forth**.

Every other

Every other is a time expression. **Every other** means that one time you do something and the next you do not, then, the next time after you do it again. We can say **every other** year, **every other** week, **every other** day, or **every other** minute.

For example, if every other week I go to Vancouver. Then this is my schedule:

Week 1 – stay home

Week 2 – go to Vancouver

Week 3 – stay home

Week 4 – go to Vancouver

We can also use this expression to talk about other things, not just time. We could say that **every other** person will go outside. This means one person stays and the next goes outside. We could also say, it seems like **every other** student is failing. This means one student is passing and another one is failing.

Every other means 1 time for every 2 times, but sometimes it is used more generally to mean *often*. If I say, “**Every other** time I go to work, there is trouble.” This is not literal. It means that often when I go to work, there is trouble.

Barrier

A **barrier** is like a fence, it is something that separates one place from another. A barrier is something that is in one’s way to getting to another place. For example, if you are driving into a parking lot, there might be a barrier. The **barrier** must move before you can enter the parking lot.

A **barrier** can also be something that is not physical. A **barrier** can be something that stops you from getting the job you want or prevents you from getting into the school you want to go to.

In this episode Maura talks about the **language barrier**. The **language barrier** is the **barrier** that exists when people do not have the same native language and so it sometimes makes it difficult to communicate clearly. For example, someone who doesn’t speak very much Spanish might say, “I travelled around Latin American last summer, and sometimes the **language barrier** made it difficult.”



Comfortable

Comfortable can be used in two ways. The first way that comfortable can be used is to describe a physical place that feels good. One might say that a chair is **comfortable** or a pair of shoes in **comfortable**.

The other way that we can use **comfortable** does not talk about physical space. To be **comfortable** in this way means that you feel good on the inside. A person could feel **comfortable** solving a complicated math problem. A person might feel good spending time with another person, and in this way they could say that they feel **comfortable** with their friend.

For both uses of **comfortable** the meaning is positive. Here are some examples with the two uses of comfortable.

Mike: How was the party last night?

Cindy: It was OK, but I didn't know very many people so I didn't feel **comfortable**.

Trevor: What are you going to wear tonight?

Stephanie: I was going to wear my dress, but I don't feel **comfortable** in it.

Ariane: Are you **comfortable**?

Lily: Yes, this couch is so soft.

Fair amount

A fair amount of something means it is a good or more than adequate amount of something. Melanie says that her friends and brother can speak **a fair amount** of French, so this means that they speak French enough to have a conversation with Christophe.

Here are some other examples with **a fair amount**.

Zack: How was the party?

Bruce: There was **a fair amount** of people there.

Paul: Are you going to be able to pay for your trip?

Kristy: Yeah. I've got **a fair amount** of money saved up, so it should last me awhile.

Urge

*To have an **urge*** means that someone wants to do something. When we say that someone has an **urge** it is stronger than simply to want to do something, it is a strong desire. An **urge** is often sudden or caused by something. For example, I have an **urge** to go for a hike (because the weather is so nice).

Here are some examples:

Bonnie: Do you ever get the **urge** to just quit your job and go travelling?

Lisa: Yeah! I get that **urge** once a month.

Brendan: Lately I have been having the **urge** to call my ex-boyfriend.

Jon: I don't know if that's a good idea.

To take up something

Here is another two-word verb with another meaning! **To take up** something means to begin learning something new. Melanie says that Christophe has **taken up** hockey. This means that he has become interested in knowing about hockey or has started to practice it.

Here are some more examples with **to take up**:

Luke: Last year I **took up** karate and I loved it.

Penny: Why did you stop?

Luke: I got too busy at work.

Jeremy: Why don't you **take up** something new?

Al: OK. I am going to take up Korean. I have always been interested in learning the culture.

Bond

In this episode, Melanie talks about a **bond** between her father and partner. A **bond** between two people is a connection that they have to each other. **To bond**, as a verb, is the act of creating a connection between people.

Here are some examples using **bond**:

Gary: You just can't break the family **bond**.

Mallory: Yeah, I know my parents will always be there for me.

Shawn: How are things going with your new puppy?

Iris: It's really fun. We're **bonding**.

Bond can also be used to talk about things. **To bond** is to attach two things together physically. **Bond** also has other meanings, for example when discussing finance.

Quiz**1. What is Melanie's hometown?**

- a) Kelowna
- b) Lindsay
- c) Montreal
- d) Lyon

2. Who is Melanie's partner?

- a) Maura
- b) Christophe
- c) Lindsay
- d) We don't know

3. Where did Melanie begin learning French?

- a) Kelowna
- b) Lyon
- c) Lindsay
- d) Montreal

4. What is a language immersion at a school?

- a) when you learn another language and speak only that language
- b) when you learn another language, but speak your native language
- c) when you learn about other languages and cultures
- d) when you are tested for your knowledge in another language

5. Adam says his trip will last roughly three weeks.**How long will Adam's trip last?**

- a) exactly three weeks
- b) less than three weeks
- c) more than three weeks
- d) approximately three weeks

6. Stephan has two meetings back to back.

What does that mean?

- a) He must only attend one meeting.
- b) He must go back to the office.
- c) There is lots of time between the two meetings.
- d) The second meeting happens right after the first.

7. In 2006 Jim went to Chicago for his summer vacation. In 2007 he went to Toronto. In 2008 he went to Chicago again. In 2009 he stayed home. This year, in 2010, he is planning to go to Chicago again.

We can say that Jim goes to Chicago _____ year.

Please fill in the blank.

- a) every
- b) even every
- c) every other
- d) even other

8. Jill started to take violin lessons.

Which sentence is true about Jill?

- a) She took up the violin.
- b) She brought up the violin.
- c) She took in the violin.
- d) She brought in the violin.

9. What caused Christophe and Melanie's father to bond?

- a) learning French
- b) hockey
- c) food
- d) immersion

Answers: 1.b 2.b 3.c 4.a 5.d 6.d 7. c 8. a 9.b