

## Chatterbox #81 – An interview with Georgina

### Transcript

Maura: Hello everyone. This is Maura and...

Georgina: Georgina!

Maura: And this is your Culips English podcast. Now, don't forget to go to our website, Culips.com. Can you spell that for them?

Georgina: C-U-L-I-P-S.com.

Maura: And on our website, you can learn how to become a member. And when you're a member, it just makes all of our episodes that much more educational, because you have the transcripts, more detailed explanations of the expressions we use, and a quiz. So go check that out. You can also say hi to us on Facebook or on Twitter, which I'm still trying to learn how to use properly. But check us out and say hi there. Now today's episode is a Chatterbox episode. And that is where we chat about all different kinds of topics and sometimes we chat to new people. And that's what we're going to do today. Today we're going to interview my friend Georgina. Say hi again.

Georgina: Hello.

Maura: So we always try to choose someone to interview that has something a little bit interesting about them that we can talk about. And I have to say that out of all the people that we've interviewed on Culips, I think that Georgina speaks the most languages, which is pretty cool and I'm pretty jealous of, I have to say.

Georgina: Thanks. That's very flattering of you.

Maura: So, first tell us a bit about yourself. You're from Montreal and what else do we need to know about you?

Georgina: **Uh**, I'm from Montreal. I'll tell you how many languages I speak. Because I was born in Montreal, obviously I speak English and French. **Um**, I'm Chinese, so I also speak the Chinese dialect of Cantonese. And because I love Japan, I, **uh**, for the past five years, I have been learning how to speak Japanese. So I speak those four languages.

Maura: Very impressive.

Georgina: Thank you.

- Maura: So, you grew up in Montreal and you grew up speaking three different languages then, right?
- Georgina: Basically, yes.
- Maura: And how did you learn and manage three different languages at the same time?
- Georgina: Well, it was basically at school it'd be, **uh**, French and English. That's where I would mostly speak, **like**, learn, French and English. But at home, my parents also insisted that I spoke Chinese with them, even though I would speak mostly English when I was at school and sometimes when I could, when I couldn't find the words, I would speak to them in English.
- Maura: OK. So when you were going to school, were you going to a bilingual school? Or did you go to school in just English or French?
- Georgina: I went to a bilingual school. So at the bilingual school, because we're in Quebec, we had 60% French and 40% English. Some of the classes that I had, for example, like math, were in French. So even though I say I'm an Anglophone, I know all of those crazy math terms in French more than I do in English.
- Maura: Does that ever **come in handy** now that you're done school?
- Georgina: No. I don't do anything that has anything to do with math, so it's actually quite a relief.
- Maura: OK, cool. And you also said that you grew up with your family speaking Chinese. Now, one thing that I've heard people say who have lived a similar situation is that they can speak the language that was their parents', **um**, native language, but they have trouble reading or writing. Is that true for you as well?
- Georgina: That is so true. **Um**, another thing now in Canada we have, **uh**, satellite TV. So my parents love to watch Chinese shows. And, **uh**, because there're so many different Chinese dialects what they do now is they'll just have subtitles in Chinese in a Chinese show. And I would read that, **every now and then**, just to see, just to test myself. And I usually can't understand what's going on. And sometimes they use words that I don't understand. So yeah, my vocabulary is very, very limited in Chinese.
- Maura: OK. You're Canadian, you were born here, you grew up in Canada, but how close do you feel to Chinese culture and the traditions? Did you practice any of those growing up?

- Georgina: I think I practiced more as I grew up. We have this thing in Chinese tradition where, depending on the year, **like**, it could be a bad year for you. You'll know right away according to your, **uh**, Chinese astrological sign. And probably about two, three years ago, it was, **like**, my worst year ever. When I heard it was my worst year ever, my mom was like, "You should go to the temple." And I was like, "You know what? I don't know how much I believe in this stuff, but, you know, it's not gonna hurt me. I **might as well** just go." And, I'll be honest, it was probably one of the worst years I ever had and I don't know if it's because I was told it was my worst year or if it really just... Everything just happened to be like that. But I'm really glad that I went, and I think I went the next year as well, because it was also... It was, **like**, my second worst year or something like that, so...
- Maura: Yeah, that's true. To know at the beginning of a year that it's going to be a bad year is not really a good thing. I think that if I was going to have a bad year, I wouldn't wanna know. I wouldn't want anyone to tell me.
- Georgina: Exactly. But you know what? Since I was told, I just had to go and I went to the temple and I prayed to everybody and, **uh**, got my name on this thing that spins and people were gonna pray for me. I'm glad I did, because I don't want to know what would have happened if I didn't go.
- Maura: That's true. And what about **Chinese food**? In Canada, **Chinese food** is pretty popular and I usually see signs that say **Canadian** and **Chinese food** together. And I also know that the **Chinese food** that we have here is heavily influenced by Canadian culture so it's not very authentic. What do you think?
- Georgina: Well, to be honest, I've probably had **Chinese food**, **like**, real **Chinese food**, for the first time in my life this past winter when I had gone to China. And even at that, **like**, I think the food that was there was completely different than what we have here, **for starters**. But even here there's a difference in the **Chinese food**. **Like**, there's places you could go to get, **like**, you know, your **Chinese-Canadian food** and even though they say, **like**, real Chinese authentic, you know that the Canadian's hidden there, in there somewhere. But then there's places that are a little bit more... Who try their best to kinda bring real Chinese culture to Canada. And it's usually the smaller types of places that'd be able to do that. **Like**, the bigger franchises, unfortunately, have to cater to more people, so won't have the same type of menu. But I mean, I won't lie, I would really love a plate of General Tao right now.
- Maura: Did your mom cook **Chinese food** at home?

- Georgina: Well, you wanna hear something really interesting? My parents might be Chinese, but they were born in Vietnam. So most of the food that my mom cooked was actually Vietnamese food, more than **Chinese food**. And they also spoke Vietnamese. But I only learned how to say “the dishes” in Vietnamese. That's the extent of how much Vietnamese I know.
- Maura: Oh, that's cool. So do you still have some family that lives in Vietnam?
- Georgina: **Um**... I think mostly everybody is outside of Vietnam. My grandmother and my aunt on my dad's side are in China now. **Uh**, but I think the... My major family members are pretty much all in North America or Norway.
- Maura: Hmm. Interesting.
- Georgina: Yep. My dad's side of the family—I don't know why or how—all ended up in Norway. I think my aunt, the one who's living in China right now, started one of the first Asian supermarkets in Oslo. So, yeah, I think that's really cool to see, **like**, for example, my cousins speak... Two, you know, young Chinese girls speaking Norwegian, because that's really strange for me to see. I don't know.
- Maura: Yeah, that's cool. And that would be a pretty cool country to be able to visit and visit family.
- Georgina: Yeah, absolutely. I went there once when I was eight. They have the midnight sun. I was eight, so I couldn't really enjoy anything. But I heard there's a lot of, **like**, there's a cruise or something, where they just go around and the sun never sets during that time of year. So, it's really cool. And I would love to go back.
- Maura: Yeah. That is really cool. That's something that really interests me: this idea of 24 hours of sunlight or darkness seems pretty cool.
- Georgina: Yeah.
- Maura: So, you grew up speaking English and French and Cantonese, and then you decided to learn Japanese. Where did that come from?
- Georgina: **Um**, that's a really good question. It must have been because when I was in, **uh**, **CEGEP**, my friend started watching anime, which is Japanese animated, **uh**, cartoons. I don't know. I think it's because I was exposed to so many languages when I was younger, I felt the more I watched anime in Japanese, not, **uh**, not in English, but in Japanese, the more I wanted to learn about the language. I mean, I think at that point, I never really thought about learning languages, but as soon as I started being exposed to a different culture, in its own language, it made me really interested to learn. And I liked the way it sounded.

- Maura: So did you start taking Japanese classes in Montreal?
- Georgina: I did. I did. I started on my own a little, kinda just buying books. And then I found a class at a University and, **uh**, I studied for a year and a half here and then I went on an exchange to Japan and I learned there for a year and came back and, **uh**, continue going to school and I'm still learning. Still learning.
- Maura: Well, I hear you're pretty good in Japanese.
- Georgina: I'm proud to say that I can at least carry interesting conversation. **Uh**, at this point, I'm pretty... I'm pretty proud of, **uh**, what I've done so far with Japanese. Yeah.
- Maura: For sure. And in a pretty short amount of time, **I would say**, too. You've been able to learn a lot.
- Georgina: When I was younger, I was always told that I was able pronounce things in a correct accent. So, it's really cool that, you know, that type of ability stayed with me.
- Maura: For sure. And how did you enjoy your time in Japan? What is something that you really loved about being there?
- Georgina: First of all, I loved being in Japan. It was so much fun. There were so many things that I kinda knew about because I was watching a lot of, not just anime but TV shows and other things. And I was just so into it. And when I went to Japan, it just... It was like as if everything had come to life. And it was so great and everything, but I think my favourite thing about Japan was the hot springs. Yeah. They call it the onsen but the hot springs is basically... It's like a big public bath type of thing. And usually, because it's a bath, where you are naked, **uh**, you are separated by male and female. And it was just a lot of rules, but you kinda just soak there and apparently there's a lot of, **uh**, health benefits when it comes to onsen. So I liked it a lot. And it's really relaxing. It's really relaxing. And it's very accessible. It's not too expensive. And, **uh**, I think you really need to have that time to relax, because Japan could be a very stressful place, definitely.
- Maura: And now we're seeing, even in Canada, spas—which is the closest thing you could probably get to hot springs—becoming more and more popular. So, there's a bunch of places even around Montreal where you can go, where they have a hot tub and maybe a cool waterfall or saunas and massages. So yeah, it's good to relax, for sure.
- Georgina: Exactly. The world is not, apparently not, getting less stressful, so...
- Maura: Unfortunately.

Georgina: Yeah.

Maura: So, we've talked a lot about your different experiences, especially learning languages. So why don't you tell everyone what you're doing now in Montreal?

Georgina: OK. So, yes, even though I speak all those languages, my favourite one and the one that I have the most ease with is probably English.

Maura: Did you say favourite?

Georgina: Yes, I did! **Um**, so because I love English so much, I love to write. And I am trying to see if I can't **break into** the writing area, the literary circles here in Montreal. **Uh**, I am writing a small manual for a publishing company. So when that comes out, I'll see if I can't, **like**, show you guys as well. That'd be really cool. I don't know. I'm just trying to see what I could do here. I would love to edit. If I could work for a magazine, maybe a fashion one, that'd be really, really cool. Other than that, because I need to survive, I also have a part-time job. But that's about it.

Maura: So you're able to use some of your ability with language now in the work that you're doing. Have you ever thought about doing translation and things like that?

Georgina: **I do translation on the side**, volunteering, and, **uh**, my parents sometimes can't read all the English stuff, so we'll do some, **like**, at-home interpretation, but, **uh**, I've also thought about that. There's so many things that I could do with the fact that I speak so many languages. So, I think I really like interpreting, but I don't know. It's maybe something for me to look into if writing doesn't work out after all.

Maura: Yeah. It's true that when you speak so many languages, you have a lot of **doors that open** to you, especially in Canada, where we have English and French and then as well, because more and more it's just becoming an international community where people are communicating from all different kinds of places.

Georgina: Exactly.

Maura: Now for someone like you, who is able to speak four languages really well, you've gotta have some kind of tip for the rest of us out there who are struggling to learn.

- Georgina: This is what works for me. It's not something that I actually decided to go out, it's just something, it just happened. **Um**, when I first got into Japanese, I ended up listening to a lot of Japanese music and I think also when I was growing up, for Chinese, for example, **uh**, my parents loved Chinese pop music, so I'd be listening to a lot of music. If you like the music, it's easy for you to sing along to it, and then at least you could learn how to pronounce the words properly, which is super fun. I don't want to study all day because that's kinda boring, so I like watching things. And if you watch it in the original language, and then let's say you have subtitles in the language that you're most comfortable with, that's probably something really easy for you to do. I guess that's it. I think maybe listening to music to start off with, then trying to see if you can watch the shows and if there are subtitles available. And then last is really reaching and going for, **like**, into the country where you learn. Because I really learned how to speak Japanese when I actually went there and was forced to speak the language.
- Maura: Yep. Well, another good way is to listen to podcasts, right?
- Georgina: Well, that's part of listening, right?
- Maura: But, yeah, I think you're right in that you have to try to have fun with it.
- Georgina: Exactly. I feel like you can't learn it if you're just kinda forcing yourself to do these things.
- Maura: Yeah. You gotta find a way to enjoy it a little bit as well. So, thanks so much for letting us interview you. As I said, you're the winner of the unofficial Culips award for the person interviewed who spoke the most languages.
- Georgina: Yay!
- Maura: And I think that it should be really interesting for our listeners to hear from someone who speaks so many different languages. And also, it helps give people hope that one day we can all learn to speak the language that we wanna learn how to speak.
- Georgina: That's definitely an achievable goal.
- Maura: Yes. So, **uh**, don't forget to go to our website if you haven't been there. Culips.com, that's C-U-L-I-P-S.com. And by becoming a member, you help support us at Culips, which enables us to keep making these podcasts for you. And if you're on Facebook or Twitter, say hi. This has been Maura and...
- Georgina: Georgina.
- Maura: And we'll be talking again to you soon. Bye.

## Detailed Explanation

### To come in handy

When something ends up being beneficial or convenient, people often say that it **came in handy**. **To come in handy** means to become useful. For example, in this episode, Georgina talks about how she had to learn math in French, so she knows all sorts of French math expressions. Maura asks her whether this knowledge ever **comes in handy** now that she is done school. What Maura is asking Georgina is whether her French math knowledge is ever useful now.

Here's another example with the expression **to come in handy**:

Matthew: Did you get that \$20 I owed you? I left it in your locker

Steve: Yeah, I did! Thanks. It **came in handy**, actually. I found it right before I went for lunch, so I was able to buy myself a nice meal.

### Um and uh

**Um** and **uh** are widely used in the English language when a speaker pauses in their speech. You will notice that in this episode, you can hear Georgina use **uh** and **um** quite a bit, and you will also notice it written out in the transcript.

These are quite common and natural sounds for native English speakers to use, and most other languages have similar sounds that mean a pause in speech, like *er* or *ehm*.

Some people use these sounds more often than others, but these sounds always indicate a pause of some sort. Sometimes they are used intentionally and with emphasis. When they are used intentionally, they are meant to draw attention to a pause, usually in order to show that someone is hesitant or unsure of something.

Here's an example of **um** and **uh** being used intentionally:

Nick: So, that was a good movie, don't you think?

Kevin: **Um**...

Nick: What? You didn't think it was good?

Kevin: **Uh**... it was okay. But I wasn't that impressed with it.

Every now and then

**Every now and then** is a common expression that means sometimes but not often. Other common ways of saying sometimes are **every now and again**, **every so often**, and **every once in a while**.

In this episode, Georgina tells Maura about her difficulty reading Chinese, although she can speak it quite well. She tells Maura that **every now and then**, she'll watch a show with Chinese subtitles to test her reading abilities. What Georgina means by **every now and then** is that she'll sometimes watch a Chinese show.

**Every now and then**, and the other ways of saying it, are usually only used when something is not done regularly or is not done all the time.

Here's another example with the expression **every now and then**:

Jessica: I've been trying to get into the habit of riding my bike to school. It's good exercise.

Mary: Oh, that is good! Do you do it every day?

Jessica: No, not at all. **Every now and then** I do, when the weather is nice, but I should be doing it more often. Maybe I'll try to do it every day for a while and see how it goes.

Like

We've already mentioned that Georgina uses the common sounds *uh* and *um* in this episode, and the fact that these sounds are often used in natural pauses in conversation.

**Like** is a word that has only recently become very widely used in this same way. You might notice people under 30 years old using it quite a bit. **Like** is a word that is sort of similar to *uh* and *um*, in the sense that it is used during natural conversations, often when there is a pause.

The verb **to like** by itself means to enjoy. Or **to be like something** means to be similar to something. But today, when we hear the word **like** used in casual conversation, it often has no meaning at all.

Let's look at two examples. In the first example, **like** is used twice, both times it has a meaning. In the second example, **like** is used in a similar fashion to *uh* and *um*:

David: I really **like** movies about zombies. I don't know why, but I always enjoy them!

Mark: I do too, but I prefer movies that are more scary and not gross or bloody, **like** ghost movies. Zombie movies have too much violence.

In the example above, David used **like** to mean enjoy, and Mark used like to mean similar.

Here's another example, where **like** has no meaning:

Jessica: I'm not going to math class today. I find it so, **like**, boring.

Tabitha: I know, but you have to go. It's, **like**, part of your grade to show up. Attendance counts for, **like**, 20% of your final mark.

In the example above, all three times that **like** is used, it does not have any meaning. **Like** is just used as a natural part of speech. Keep in mind that **like** used in this way is only part of casual conversation, not formal speech or writing.

### Might as well

**Might as well** is an expression that can be used in a couple of ways. It can be used to mean that you should do something you have to do or were meaning to do, because certain reasons have prevented you from doing something else.

For example, it can be used like this: "I **might as well** study, since it's pouring rain outside anyways."

This expression can also be used to express how silly or nonsensical something is, such as "If you spend money on the lottery, you **might as well** throw your money down a drain," or "If you're going to talk during a movie, you **might as well** not even go to the theatre at all."

Here's an example with both uses of **might as well**:

Karen: Susan, if you're going to watch TV while you study, you **might as well** just close your books, because you won't remember anything you study.

Susan: I guess you're probably right. I wasn't planning on studying tonight anyways. I just figured that since it's snowing so much, I **might as well** get some studying done, because I sure don't want to go outside.

### Canadian and Chinese food

In this episode, Maura talks to Georgina about her experiences with eating **Chinese food** in Canada, because of all the variations there seem to be. She tells Georgina that she always notices signs that say **Canadian and Chinese food**. Maura emphasizes the word **and** because she is wondering why restaurants would say that they serve both, instead of just saying that they serve **Chinese food**.

This is probably because in Canada, **Chinese food** is very Canadianized, meaning that certain flavours and ingredients have been changed to suit the tastes of people who don't regularly eat the foods and spices of China.

When a restaurant has on their sign that they sell both kinds of food, they are saying that they have real authentic **Chinese food** as well as **Canadian-Chinese food**. In other words, they are recognizing that there is a difference between authentic Chinese food and **Canadian-Chinese food**, and they want to assure their diners that they can prepare both **Chinese food** that has Canadian qualities, and **Chinese food** that is more traditional.

### For starters

**For starters** is another way to say to begin with or in the first place. This expression can be used at the beginning of a list, or it can be used to emphasize a central point or a main idea.

In this episode, Georgina uses the expression **for starters** when she tells Maura about the difference between Canadian-Chinese food and authentic Chinese food. She says that, **for starters**, even the food in China is different than the 'authentic' food they serve here in Canada.

Georgina is using **for starters** in both ways: to begin a list of how many things are different between Canadian and Chinese food, and to emphasize that the fact that even Canada's version of authentic Chinese food is still not the same as food in China is the most important and central point of the difference.

Here's another example with **for starters**:

Henry: I have no idea how to finish my essay. I can't even figure out the main subject I'm supposed to be writing about!

Jane: **For starters**, you need to actually read the book that the essay is supposed to be about. You haven't even read the first page! You can't write the essay without reading the book.

There are also other common ways of saying **for starters**. Here's a short list of just a few:

- first of all
- firstly
- first off

### CEGEP

**CEGEP** is an initialism, which means that each of its letters represents an entire word.

**CEGEP** is an initialism for the French expression *Collège d'enseignement général et professionnel*, which in English means *college of general and professional education*.

It's difficult to compare **CEGEP** to an English school system, because this system is unique to Quebec, but **CEGEP** is most like a general or technical college. It's something that most Quebec students attend after high school, and the public ones have little or no tuition fee!

After graduating from **CEGEP**, some people start working at a job that they prepared for during **CEGEP**, but other students choose to go to university. In order to go to university in Quebec, you must have attended **CEGEP**.

Even though **CEGEP** is an initialism, people pronounce it like it is a word (cee-jep). We call this type of initialism an acronym. There are lots of acronyms in the English language. For example, the word *scuba* actually stands for self-contained underwater breathing apparatus! Another one is *ASAP*—it means as soon as possible, but we say it as if it's an actual word.

### I would say

***I would say*** is a common expression that is used at the beginning or the end of a sentence when you are expressing your opinion. It's another way of saying in my opinion or it is my belief.

In this episode, Maura uses the expression ***I would say*** after telling Georgina that she learned a lot of Japanese in a really short time. Maura uses the expression to mean that in her opinion, Georgina's rate of learning was very fast.

Sometimes people use the expression ***I would say*** in response to something someone else has said, to mean that they agree with the statement. It's another way of saying *that's for sure*.

Here's an example with both ways of using ***I would say***:

Kevin: I wasn't a big fan of the last book we were assigned to read for English class. ***I would say*** it was a bit too long and sad to give to a grade 11 class.

Sabina: Yeah, ***I'd say***! I got through about two chapters and that I had to put it down! It was too sad to read much more than that in one day.

### To break into something

When you **break into something**, it means that you find a way to gain access to something that is typically difficult to get into.

People often use the expression ***to break into something*** when describing how somebody got famous, like they **broke into** the music industry.

This expression, ***to break into something***, is used quite commonly for things like fame, because fame is such a difficult thing to get and in some ways, it's not really a slow process to become famous. One day someone isn't famous and then all of a sudden they are, so it seems to happen really suddenly, even if they've been working at it for a long time.

If you think about when something breaks, it's usually a very sudden thing. So when someone **breaks into something**, they are gaining access to something very suddenly.

Here's an example with the expression **to break into something**:

Cheryl: Did you hear that Monica got offered a modelling job?

Dan: Really? Wow. That's so great.

Cheryl: It is! Modelling is such a difficult career **to break into**. Hopefully this will be the job that really launches her career.

### To do something on the side

**To do something on the side** means to do a project, task, or job in addition to one you already do. It usually means that this second job is a smaller job or takes less time than your main job.

In this episode, Georgina tells Maura that she works as a translator **on the side**. What Georgina means is that in addition to her regular full-time job, she also sometimes does translation.

Here's another example with the expression **to do something on the side**

Mark: How's your new job going?

Julie: It's okay. It's taking way more of my energy than I thought it would, though.

Mark: Why is that?

Julie: Well, I also teach gymnastics to a group of kids **on the side**.

Mark: Really?

Julie: Yeah. It's only for an hour a day, but it's still exhausting work.

### An open door

The expression **an open door** is a metaphor for an opportunity. A metaphor is a visual expression to represent an idea. The idea here is that a closed door represents not seeing something or not being let in to something, and an open door lets you in or lets you go to a new place.

In this episode, Maura tells Georgina that because she speaks several languages, she has many **doors that open** to her. What Maura is saying is that because of all the languages Georgina knows, she has a lot of opportunities and can experience a lot more things than someone who can only speak one language. She can travel and speak the language of the place she's travelling too, and she can communicate with people she normally wouldn't be able to communicate with. There are also certain jobs that Georgina can get because she speaks more than one language, like being a foreign correspondent or a professional translator. There are many **doors that are open** to Georgina because she knows different languages.

## Quiz

1. **What does it mean when something comes in handy?**
  - a) You receive it as a gift.
  - b) You buy it.
  - c) It becomes useful.
  - d) It becomes something you write with.
  
2. **Which of the following are examples of words people commonly use in conversation when there is a pause in their speech?**
  - a) if, and, and but
  - b) like, uh, and um
  - c) erh, egh, and gug
  - d) do, dee, and da
  
3. **What does the expression *every now and then* mean?**
  - a) whenever you feel like it
  - b) once in awhile, but not often
  - c) in the morning or afternoon
  - d) frequently
  
4. **What is another expression that means *first of all* or *firstly*?**
  - a) once in a while
  - b) lastly
  - c) for starters
  - d) and on top of that
  
5. **If someone says that they have another job on the side, what does that mean?**
  - a) They have a job out of town.
  - b) They have a second job.
  - c) They don't have a job.
  - d) They don't like to work.

**6. If a lot of doors are open to you, what does that mean?**

- a) You have a lot of opportunities for new experiences.
- b) Your house needs more windows.
- c) You have to make a decision that you are confused about.
- d) You need to find another job.

**7. What does it mean if you break into a new career?**

- a) You do really well at a job interview.
- b) You ruin an opportunity to get a job you've been preparing for.
- c) You have to take another job on the side.
- d) You quickly get a new job in a career that is difficult to get into.

**Answers:**

1.c    2.b    3.b    4.c    5.b    6.a    7.d