

Mattipedia podcast, episode 2: Finnish language as a bridge to locals

Oxana: Hi! you are listening to Mattipedia. This podcast series will discuss somewhat surprising things that can be seen as challenges when studying and living a life in a foreign country as an international student, and how to overcome these challenges. Topics of our episodes cover working and social life in Finland, as well as learning the Finnish language. The podcast is in English and each episode includes summary in Finnish to boost your language learning. Welcome on board.

My name is Oxana Turko and I'm the host of this episode. I'm here with our guest Daria Stepanova, who comes from Russia. She has lived in Finland for almost one year. Daria enjoys Finnish culture. In this episode, she will talk about her Finnish learning experience in Finland. Hello, Daria. Could you please first shortly introduce yourself?

Daria: Hello, Oxana. Yes, as you have already said, my name is Stepanova, Daria. I'm 19 years old and I came from Russia. Now I live in Finland, in a small town Kouvola, and study in local university in the direction of international business. My education takes place in English, but we take a great attention to study Finnish, too.

I have lived in Finland for almost one year and I have already got used to this country, these people and their mentality, and adapted as much as possible.

Oxana: Great. Sounds interesting. Next, I would like to know, how many languages do you speak?

Daria: Well, you can say that I speak three languages, although the latter still needs to be worked on. I speak Russian, it's my native language. Also, English is the language of my education and most of my communication in Finland. And, of course,

I try to study and speak a little Finnish. I can have a light conversation in the café or in the shop, but if someone outside suddenly starts to speak Finnish with me, I switched to English because Finns speak very quickly and often use the puhekieli that is the spoken language, so it's not always clear to me.

Oxana: Great. What is your level of Finnish language now? How long did it take you to get your level in Finnish?

Daria: I think my level is a little higher than A1. I've been studying Finnish for less than a year and mostly within the walls of the university, but when in future I pull it up a little bit, it will be easier for me to continue my studies because I will be able to talk with native speakers anywhere. I hope this will happen next academic year, maybe after the autumn.

Oxana: Please tell us about what motivated you to get your current level of the Finnish language in such a short period of time. How did you keep your motivation high during the whole learning process?

Daria: OK, for me the motivation in the first place was a life in Finland. I was fired up with the idea of learning this language after I find out that I admitted to the university but seriously approached this issue only from the beginning of my studies. I think it's important to learn the language of the country in which you live, because it's a tribute to this country and its culture.

In addition, there's no way to find any work in Finland and to communicate with other Finns who don't speak English without knowledge of the language. So, if you want to stay in Finland after graduation, for me, if I want to stay, I want to feel comfortable surrounded by Finnish-speaking people.

Oxana: Do you have some secret methods or probably apps that can help in mastering the Finnish language? Any advice for our audience?

Daria: Yes, to study words I use an app, Quizlet. It was advised for me by my Finnish teacher in the university, Anna-Liisa. So, you can create your dictionaries by yourself or just find ready-made dictionary. But actually, for me personally learning became much easier when some aspects of the language began to be explained in Russian. It was much easier for me to learn Finnish using my native language and associate words and expressions, or some grammatical rules with Russian, not with English. And of course, the main advice is just try to come to terms with the difficulties of the language. For example, with 16 cases they will all become clear over time.

Oxana: Daria, could you share with us some information, some new information, knowledge that you got from living in Finland?

Daria: Yes, of course. When I lived in Russia, I thought that all Finns are so closed and no one will speak with me. But when I came here, I found out that Finnish people are very nice and they always will help you and most of them of course, speak English. So it's very easy for me and the main new for me was Finnish people who speak English and they all really wants to know how is my Finnish language studies going. And when I tell them that they speak Finnish a little bit, they always became so happy and start to speak with me. So, it's very nice. I found out that people here are so friendly.

Oxana: OK, great. Could you please remember and share with us some funny stories about your studies?

Daria: Yes, of course. Funny stories always happen after meeting some native speakers who really want to talk with me but don't know English. One of these occurred in the shopping center. It was before the start of the war in Ukraine and a senior citizens started to speak with me in Finnish. I didn't understand him, but he continued in Finnish and a little bit in sign language because I didn't understand anything. And after finding out where I was from, he tried to ask me about Russia, our president and

the conflict in Ukraine and then other senior, a senior citizen continued, and we talked together. The conversation was very hard because I mostly nodded and tried to understand why what they speak about, but it was good, funny and a little bit sad at the same time.

Oxana: Yeah, I understand. So, Daria, thank you very much for your time and for sharing your experience with our community. Have a nice day. Bye.

Daria: Thank you, Oxana. It was very nice for me, too. Have a nice day. Bye bye.

Finnish summary

Ja sitten suomeksi! Minun nimeni on Oxana Turko, ja olen tämän jakson juontaja. Vieraanamme on Daria Stepanova, joka on kotoisin Venäjältä ja asuu tällä hetkellä Kouvolassa. Hän on asunut Suomessa lähes vuoden, ja opiskelee kansainvälistä liiketoimintaa. Koulutus on englanninkielinen, mutta samaan aikaan Daria opiskelee suomea. Daria nauttii suomalaisesta kulttuurista. Lyhyessä ajassa hän on opiskellut suomen kieltä A1-tasolle saakka.

Daria pystyy keskustelemaan suomeksi kevyesti kahvilassa tai kaupassa. Välillä keskustelu on haastavaa, koska suomalaiset puhuvat erittäin nopeasti ja käyttävät usein puhekieltä. Daria on erittäin motivoitunut opiskelemaan suomen kieltä, koska hän haluaa asua Suomessa. Hän alkoi tosissaan opiskella suomea, kun aloitti opintonsa. Hän lisää, että voi myös olla vaikeaa löytää töitä Suomesta ja kommunikoida englantia puhumattomien suomalaisten kanssa ilman kielitaitoa. Opiskelussa Daria käyttää erilaisia äppejä, esimerkiksi Quizlet-sovellusta.

Daria oppi paljon uutta, kun muutti Suomeen. Hän esimerkiksi ajatteli aiemmin, ettei kukaan tule puhumaan hänen kanssaan. Mutta hän huomasi, että suomalaiset ovat erittäin mukavia, avuliaita ja useimmat puhuvat tietysti englantia.

Darialla on monia hauskoja tarinoita yrityksistä keskustella suomalaisten kanssa, jotka todella haluavat puhua, mutta eivät osaa englantia. Yksi näistä tapahtui kauppakeskuksessa. Se oli ennen Ukrainan sodan alkua. Eräs eläkeläinen alkoi puhua hänen kanssaan suomea. Daria ei ymmärtänyt häntä, mutta hän jatkoi suomeksi ja vähän elekielellä. Saatuaan selville, mistä Daria on kotoisin, hän yritti kysyä Venäjästä, presidentistä ja Ukrainan konfliktista. Toinen eläkeläinen osallistui keskusteluun ja he juttelivat yhdessä. Keskustelua oli vaikea seurata, mutta kokemus oli hyvä, hauska ja hieman surullinen samaan aikaan.

Ad: Language and Culture Buddy course

Did you know that a new Language and Culture Buddy course will start next autumn in Kotka? The purpose is to bring students together for fun free-time activities, to learn more about countries and cultures – of course including Finland and Finnish language!

Now we are looking for Finnish-speaking students to become buddies! Find the email address for enrollment in the description box of this episode and enroll by the end of August.

For all the students who are listening: stay tuned and join this great opportunity from the autumn semester onwards!