

Valerie Lynn
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Post Program Report

Merci mille fois to all the faculty in the Department of Languages and Cultures on the committee for selecting me as a recipient of the study abroad scholarship and especially to Michel Sage for taking the time to write a glorious recommendation letter for my application to study in Aix. In March the department funded my trip to Greece for the linguistic landscapes research, and it is an honor and a privilege that I was once again able to go Europe—this time to the country that speaks the language I major in.

Three weeks was plenty of time for me to stay there and for what I was able to afford from my own savings, but part of me wishes that I had been able to stay for three more weeks. The longer I stayed in France, the better I got at listening, the faster I could speak, and the more I thought in French—perhaps not to the degree of the natives, but I could tell I was becoming much more comfortable with my productive and receptive capacities. On the way home, I wondered how much more proficient my French would have been if I had stayed because once I started getting better I just kept wanting more.

The second weekend I was there, the other girl in my homestay was in Paris, and my host mother invited me to go to her friend's baby shower with her. I was somewhat reluctant but went anyhow, and I am glad I did. I met some very lovely ladies and comfortably kept up with every conversation I had. Listening became so natural to me that, even for expressions I did not hear before, I understood them right away. At one point, though, I did not know how to translate 'culture shock', and when I banked on at least someone knowing the English expression (since English speakers are familiar with some French expressions), no one knew what I was talking about. Then I attempted to explain it in French, and then it clicked with them. (An excellent

accomplishment, I believe.) I had never been more natural with French until that night, and it proved to me that my experience studying abroad was working. I felt good about my French, and I felt good about myself. Even though I hate baby showers, it was definitely worth going, and I still miss those ladies.

For the first week and a half I was in Aix, half the French people I met in Aix could easily tell I was American and would speak to me in English, which frustrated me because did they not know I was trying to practice my French? It was hard to be confident in my French when clearly half the people around me were not, but after a while I learned not to take that personally, and that was very culturally sobering. Their speaking English is not necessarily a manifestation of impatience with Americans, which I thought was the case, but, in an effort to be open to and understanding of French culture, I gave them the benefit of the doubt. Perhaps they just wanted to practice their English. Perhaps they were trying to be accommodating or could not tell the difference between an American trying to practice French and an American who speaks no French whatsoever. I was really upset about this, and it made me want to go home, but you cannot do that when you are immersed in another culture. You cannot take another people's behaviors personally. You simply must observe, understand, and adapt.

While in Amsterdam for my layover on my way home, I consciously had to turn the French switch off in my head, and it felt refreshing to think "Ok, English again," but it was weird, and I knew I would miss it. I loved temporarily being a part of 'them', but it was good to come back to 'us.'

Ok real talk if you are going to Aix you need to go to Casino, the grocery store, and buy the muesli crouillant cereal with dark chocolate pieces because it's so godlike I'm not even

joking. The crêpes at Crêpes-à-Gogo are underneath la Rotonde are also quality, delicious, hefty, and inexpensive, and the employees absolutely kill it. #aixmaville

Thank you again to the department, to the languages and cultures faculty, IAU, and all of my professors who prepared me for studying abroad. 10/10 would do again.