

On Canada, bilingual people, Estonia, levelling up, Uganda, Gordon Brown, tech giants

Letters to the editor

A selection of correspondence



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Rights and wrongs of protests

You were wrong to criticise Justin Trudeau's handling of the protests in Canada ("[No, Canada](#)", February 19th). These were not protesters. These were occupiers who said they would not leave until their demands were met. You said the police already had ample powers to quell the disorder, and yet it took two court injunctions to stop the incessant air horns and honking. The police had to deal with a core group showing utter disregard for the rights of Ottawa's residents to enjoy their homes. Invoking the Emergencies Act was necessary to remove them. This was more than a question of free speech. We were dealing with a group of well-funded bullies. This was not a regular protest. This was something else.

MADELEINE CÔTE
Gatineau, Canada



Processing language

Johnson's column on losing native languages was outstanding ([January 29th](#)). It is true that a multilingual person's "first language is the one most imbued with emotions." Our "mother tongue" seems to be stored in both the procedural (more emotionally based) and explicit (or verbal) parts of our brains. Subsequent languages have fewer connections to procedural memory, where neurons are fully myelinated at birth, in contrast with those of explicit memory, which are myelinated during the first three years of life.

Ribot's law refers to the clinical finding that people with brain dysfunction may have their first language skills preserved intact. In 1843, Jacques Lordat described a priest from Languedoc whose brain damage created profound language deficits,

but only in French, his second language. His native Occitan was unaffected.

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Such clinical findings offer a fascinating window into the way our brains process language. In his book on aphasia, Sigmund Freud made the controversial but now generally accepted claim that language is processed in multiple brain regions.

RICHARD WAUGAMAN

Clinical professor of psychiatry

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I found Johnson's essay both insightful and moving. It made me reflect on my personal journey, growing up in America but speaking only Cantonese until the age of six. Since my mother never spoke English, I was able to keep up with my Cantonese. In 1980, at the age of 31, I went to Hong Kong for the first time to set up my cookery classes there for foreigners who wanted to learn about Chinese cuisine. Being in Hong Kong was a déjà vu experience, as I recognised the streets from Chinese movies I had watched as a child. I was also delighted to find everyone speaking Cantonese and looking like me. My first TV series for the BBC included many clips from Hong Kong. I still love hearing Cantonese, whether on film or in music. Being bilingual has greatly enriched my life and made for a surprising career.

KEN HOM

Chef and author

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