

forgetting attrition

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What I would like to know is if a foreign language spoken to someone as a young child, maybe by a babysitter or caretaker, could be completely forgotten by the person as an adult, maybe over sixty years later.

This person has been told that if he tries to speak a certain language, the sounds he makes, even if he does not know any vocabulary, sound native, like a native child trying to babble words, with native sounds, but with only one or two words pronounced correctly.

I know that children who cannot talk yet, while trying to talk, make English sounds, so that it cannot be doubted they are American children.

Could I have been on the verge of learning another language as a child, maybe even in the playground, been able to make the sounds and maybe only a word or two, and then been taken away from that environment, to an English only environment.

The language at issue is Russian spoken in New York in Brooklyn during the early 1940's, not the widely spoken Yiddish.

The people who tell me I have these Russian Sounds somehow are native speakers of Polish, who understand Russian but are not speakers of it. Several of them have told me, where did you get the Russian sounds from; you don't know any Russian, but when you try to speak it, your sounds are native.

They say when I try to speak Polish I have the normal strong American accent, the way they speak English, with the Polish accent.

They all ask, did you hear Russian as a child? Maybe in a playground? Maybe with a babysitter?

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