Language attrition and professional re-immersion

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People who live and work in a foreign language environment for any length of time get used to the fact that they do not use that language in exactly the same way as native speakers do. They accept that they have a foreign accent, that they sometimes fumble for words, or that they may make lexical or grammatical mistakes. We understand that, for most multilinguals, that is simply the reality and does not usually impede communication.

However, very few people are prepared for the experience that similar things may creep into their native language. When they speak to family or friends back home, on the phone or during visits, they are often shocked to find themselves fumbling for words. This is made worse by the fact that the responses from those around them can be extremely negative – often, it is simply assumed that they are “showing off”.

Such experiences can be very frustrating and negatively affect the expat’s ties with their home country. However, language attrition can also have more concrete effects, for example if a speaker who wishes to return to the home country applies for a job. Unless you are fully aware of any potential limitations to your language skills, due to the fact that you mainly use your other language in the workplace, your application, CV and performance at interview may not show you to your best advantage.

This presentation will reflect on some of the phenomena that can occur in the process of native language attrition, how these may negatively affect performance in contexts such as job applications and interviews, and what to do to avoid any professional fallout.