

Name: David Kay

Profession: Arms Inspector/Research

Number of years in this line of work: 35

Native Language: English

Other Language(s): German/Russian/French/Spanish

1) What is your profession?

Most recently headed the Iraq Survey Group in its hunt for weapons of mass destruction in Iraq

2) Describe a “typical” day as an Arms inspector.

There were no “typical” days in Iraq. In leading a search for weapons you are talking to Iraqis from all walks of life – scientists to truck drivers; reviewing documents that have been found; meeting with your own team and moving about the country.

3) What do you enjoy about it?

In this case the challenge of determining what Iraq was up to, whether there were weapons and how you solve this puzzle.

What do you not enjoy about it?

Being shot at and mortared.

4) Do you speak any other language(s) besides the one(s) you work with?

In this case my missing language was Arabic of which I know far too little.

5) What language do you think in?

English, although when immersed in work in France I have wandered between the two languages without really thinking about it.

6) What do you think helped you the most in mastering the foreign/second language(s)?

Necessity. It has also been the greatest impediment to mastering a foreign language as so many people in other countries want to master English that it is sometimes difficult to get them to carry on a conversation in their native language.

7) What opportunities have knowing another language provided in your career that you may not have had otherwise?

I spent 15 years working in Europe that would not have been possible without language skills.

8) Do you think it is essential to learn not just a language, but also the culture(s) of the regions where it is spoken?

Language is such an important part of culture that I do not believe that you can ever understand fully another culture without at least tackling the language of that culture.

9) If you had the time to learn another language now, what language would it be? Why?

Arabic, closely followed by Chinese. Both languages are integral to areas of the world that are critical to the future of the world. We have far too few Americans willing to make the investment to understand these cultures and be able to interact with them in their own languages.

10) How do you think your life would have turned out if you had never learned another language?

I really have no idea, except that I think it would have been less interesting.

11) In your opinion, are there more career opportunities for people who speak two or more languages?

Without a doubt, and this is going to rapidly accelerate as we recognize the impact of the global economy on our lives.

12) What do you think you would be doing if you weren't an Arms Inspector?

I'd be a Photographer. Photography remains a passion, but even here without the ability to communicate in a foreign language you are restricted in trying to visually understand the world outside of the US.