

A link for life?

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Jaap went on exchange to the University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh, The United Kingdom as part of his Bachelor's in Linguistic at Utrecht University.

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This summer I visited Edinburgh, the capital of Scotland, known for its beautiful Georgian architecture and breath-taking views. The city was sprawling with tourists and artists from all over the world gathering for one of the biggest arts and culture festivals in the world. Among the local artists were some of my friends: friends who I made on a semester abroad that shaped me in many ways. In particular, this semester abroad significantly changed my views on linguistics.

Two years ago, I embarked on an adventure to the city of Edinburgh, United Kingdom, to study at the University of Edinburgh. Ever since I started thinking about doing a semester abroad, it had been clear to me that this was the only option I was willing to consider. I did not really feel the urge to leave The Netherlands. I was very happy with my Linguistics degree at Utrecht University and felt very at home in the city. However, I always wondered what it would be like to live in Edinburgh again, where I was born but have only lived for three years. When I discovered that, in addition, Edinburgh University was home to one of the best Linguistics departments in the world, the decision to go there was quickly made.

Together with another student from Utrecht University, I was selected to study Linguistics in Edinburgh. Because I knew the city very well, I quickly felt at home in my new home for the next three months and I did not suffer from any culture shock. Life in this city suited me well and everyone I met was extremely warm-hearted and friendly. I quickly became friends with people I still visit today, especially in the theatre group I joined.

The Edinburgh semester lasts three months, which is relatively short. I took three courses, and aside from one midterm exam in October all my exams and essays were in December, at the end of the semester. This did not distribute the workload very well. Students get one week before their exams to revise. It seems that only during this notorious revision week many students actually start working.

Two of my three courses were on linguistics. One of them, *Origins and Evolution of Languages*, has had a lasting impact on me and shaped the rest of my Linguistics degree back home. Somewhere during my first year, it struck me that I felt I was only hearing one side of the story about language, and although I realised I did not agree with some of the theories that were taught, I did not know of any alternative ones. *Origins and Evolution of Language* offered me new ideas which were exactly the kind of counter-arguments against things I had learned in courses at Utrecht University, which I had been looking for. The course offered a very interesting new insight in the way language, and specifically structure in language, might have originated.

It was during one of these lectures by UU-alumnus and Edinburgh University post-doc Marieke Schouwstra that I found a topic for my Bachelor's thesis. Back home, I wrote my thesis on the topic of language evolution using a method I learned of while in Edinburgh. It was written under the supervision of Henriëtte de Swart and Marieke Schouwstra, so, even when I was back home, I was still connected to Edinburgh and Edinburgh University academically. I would love to keep this link alive and to return one day to work at the Centre of Language Evolution, where I learned so much. ■