

Conditionals: Notes from the Alien Underground

READING TEXT

The Weekly News Feature

by Roberto Keskin

The First Day

Eh? Eh? Eh?....Is everyone in this country deaf? Why do they keep saying “Eh”? It is the only sound in this strange language that I can pick out. After a protracted flight and a maze of immigration procedures, I am officially in Canada. At least I think I am. My brain is still back home. But the fact that I cannot understand anything that anyone is saying should provide a good clue that I am in alien territory. All I want to do is curl up in a warm, cozy bed and hide. What possessed me to leave everything behind and come here? I would be lying to you if I didn’t tell you that I was frightened. But I am also excited. I am being bombarded with new things and experiences. Everything is interesting, weird and different.

The First Week

I cannot describe what it feels like. I am exhausted because it takes so much energy to deal with everyday things. It takes me ten times longer than it should just to buy food or get money out of the bank. I have become a caricature. I can imagine people looking at me and thinking, “Look at what the weird alien does. How stupid is he? He doesn’t even understand how to use the public transportation.” I am the alien who doesn’t fit in, no matter how hard I try. The stress is unbelievable. Yet in the midst of the stress I feel something else. Humility. So this is what it is like to start again. Disorientation. Invisibility. Insignificance.

I walk the streets near my new home, past people hurrying here and there in pursuit of urgent business known only to them. I feel as if I am walking in complete silence, even though the sounds of the city assault my ears. But the noise is silent, because I can’t understand any of it. I do not recognize the sounds. If I could buy a simple food item and understand how much money to hand over I would be ecstatic. And if I could know what to say when someone asks me a question, I would feel like a complete genius. But I don’t. It’s just the opposite.

I had to go to a government office. I had a map. I drew the route out on the map. But at some point I took a wrong turn. I stopped someone on the street and pointed on the map to where I wanted to go. He was very kind. He walked with me all the way to the door of the government office. I didn’t get lost on the way back.

Advanced 3 – Reading Exercise 3 – Conditionals: Notes from the Alien Underground

The First Month

As an alien, there is never any rest. Everything takes tremendous energy. Funny, it is sometimes exhilarating and liberating to know that you've stripped bare most of your life (or at least some) and gotten rid of every luxury and every security. I don't even have the luxury of having a simple conversation with a store clerk or asking the price of a cup of coffee. How much we take the reality of our day to day lives for granted when we live in a place where we are familiar with the society and the language! No one here knows me and I haven't the faintest idea about the things people seem to value. I know nothing of beer or this game they go on and on and on about - hockey. I don't know anything about Christmas or Easter. And I certainly don't know anything about skiing and snowmobiling.

On the positive side, I have discovered the power of the smile. People smile right back at me and help me out. So, here I am, making mistakes left, right and centre, and smiling for all I'm worth. It is great fun.

I have tried peanut butter. My English teacher swears that, spread on toast with honey, it makes a great breakfast. I think she is crazy. It is disgusting. When I tried it, it glued my mouth together. I thought I was going to choke. And it is way too sweet. No, thank you!

Six Months

After six months of English classes, I am beginning to make sense of everything. Here is my theory. It is not how well you use this language, but how often and how loudly. If I yell and gesture with great energy, I get results. If I look like I know what I am talking about, people actually seem to believe me.

The freedom offered by this country has come with a price. Increased responsibility. Increased stress. I am exhausted. Sometimes I wish I could just close my eyes, and like magic, be back home again. And sometimes I wish I could just automatically fit in, without the endless effort and energy it now requires.

But I am, strangely, beginning to feel connected to people here. I have begun to make new friends, real friends. And I have discovered the advantages of being an alien. I can get away with making mistakes more than Canadians. I just have to say, "I'm sorry, I didn't understand." Then I smile and everything is all right.

I had some of my new friends over for dinner. One friend, Julie, stayed to help me wash up the dishes. She asked me where my dishwashing liquid was. I told her it was next to the sink and pointed to the bottle. She shook her head and laughed. And said, "That's liquid to wash your floor!" Great, for the past six months I have been using floor washing liquid to wash my dishes. I had always wondered why it didn't make very many bubbles. I just thought this was normal for dishwashing liquid in Canada.

Advanced 3 – Reading Exercise 3 – Conditionals: Notes from the Alien Underground

First Year

I asked a Canadian girl on a date and she didn't laugh or run away. Wow. I met her at a coffee shop. I go there every day after school to study. She is there at the same time, studying as well.

I asked my English teacher exactly what I should say if I wanted to ask someone out. I wrote it down. Then I practiced for two weeks. I was sweating profusely as I stammered out the simple but fateful words, "Would you like to go to a movie with me some time?" She smiled and answered, "Sure. There is a great movie coming out this weekend at the theatre down the street. I am free on Saturday. Does that work for you?"

This frozen place is beginning to feel comfortable. I am an alien no more.

Find examples of different CONDITIONALS and HYPOTHETICAL statements.

Write a sentence with each of the following words and expressions.

- | | | |
|-----|-----------------------|-------|
| 1. | PROTRACTED | _____ |
| 2. | A MAZE | _____ |
| 3. | A CLUE | _____ |
| 4. | AN ALIEN | _____ |
| 5. | TREMENDOUS | _____ |
| 6. | EXHILERATING | _____ |
| 7. | TO BOMBARD | _____ |
| 8. | A CARICATURE | _____ |
| 9. | DISORIENTATION | _____ |
| 10. | INVISIBILITY | _____ |
| 11. | INSIGNIFICANCE | _____ |
| 12. | ECSTATIC | _____ |
| 13. | FATEFUL | _____ |

Answer the following questions.

1. What experience is the author describing?

2. What different things does the author find difficult about that experience?

3. What strategies does the author find to help overcome the difficulties?

4. Has your experience been similar or different? Why?
