

# Portraits

## Babylonia

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**No. 48a** Authors: Daniel Stotz and students of communication at Zurich University of Applied Sciences Winterthur

### A Life in the Day of ...

#### Semester project English 2<sup>nd</sup> Year

#### At a glance

**Language:** English – adaptable to any language

**Level:** B2 or higher on the Common European Framework of Reference

**Aims:**

- Researching and writing a publishable portrait of an interesting person's daily routine
- Conforming to and playing with a journalistic genre
- Working in pairs and using each other's resources
- Revising and improving a draft text with the help of dictionaries and the teacher

The texts on the following didactic pages are the outcome of a semester project in which 16 students of the undergraduate degree programme Journalism and Organisational Communication were involved. These students, of German and Italian mother tongue, are normally expected to be able to write publishable texts in their main language. In addition, they attend courses in English and French as a second language for three years.

The project engages students in writing texts in the foreign language with the deliberately high aim of producing publishable texts. The idea is that the prospect of discussing and re-writing the drafts carries the students beyond the confines of the usual classroom situation where they mainly write for themselves and their teacher. The first versions of the texts were discussed in small-group sessions among the authoring students and the teacher. The students then produced a second, final version, which was edited only slightly (some necessary cuts).

This is part of the brief that students received:

The form that the texts should take is that of a portrait mixed with reportage. The format was pioneered by the Times of London under the heading "A Life in the Day of ...". Why a Life in the Day and not a Day in the Life? The idea is to show, with a description of a typical ordinary day with its routines and personal preferences, the personality and environment of an interesting person, and thus of his/her life. The readers should be able to identify themselves with the person in the text to some extent, but they will also learn something new, an intriguing or even exotic look at the ordinary.

In our project, the common focus should be how these people need and use language / languages in their daily working life. Perhaps they have become language and communication specialists because of a certain talent, certainly because of their education and training and possibly they also have a fascination for languages showing up in their private and family lives.

### Some ideas for “language people”:

- translator
- interpreter
- corporate communications specialist
- science or technical journalist
- tour guide
- hotel receptionist
- development aid specialist
- UN collaborator
- supervisor on multilingual construction site
- airport assistance
- conflict mediator

### Form of the text (genre, structure)

Portrait reportage in the style of “A Day in the Life of ...”  
Introduction of the person with name, field of activity, employer  
Routine of a typical day, with challenges and joys  
Possibly a confession: why the person is fascinated by his/her job  
Perspectives for the future

Length of text: 400 to 500 words

### Assessment:

The project counts as two marks (one for the draft version and a second for the final version)

The same set of assessment criteria will be used for the draft version and the final version. Each version is assessed with the grid below, the draft version with blue colour, and

the final version with red. The sums are added up. The maximum number of points is 50. For a sufficient mark, a total of 30 points is required.

The best 5 or 6 texts will be chosen for publication in the journal Babylonia.

### Assessment Grid:

Criterion	1	2	3	4	5	Points
Task realisation	weak coverage of brief or inappropriate choice of subject	subject portrayed but lacks important aspects of life or day	fair choice of subject, not related in all aspects to task	appropriate choice of subject, covers day and life	excellent choice of subject, well portrayed	
Reportage style	fragmented and unrevealing style of reporting	uneven or superficial reporting style	factual but not very inspired style	clear and factual report style with occasional emphasis	high quality clear and lively style	
Coherence and paragraphing	no evidence of planned paragraphing and lack of coherence	some evidence of paragraphs but lack of structuring and coherence	some attention given to paragraphing, coherence	distinguishable paragraphs with coherent texture	well-organised paragraphs with clear beginnings and endings	
Vocabulary	basic range of vocab with little flexibility, a number of explicit mistakes	vocabulary with a narrow range or frequent mistakes	reasonable range of vocabulary used to mostly accurate effect	evidence of thoughtful choice of words, using reference sources, few mistakes	Broad range and appropriate choice of words and phrases, evidence of creativity	
Syntax and grammar	faulty use of structures which hamper comprehensibility	narrow range of structures and frequent mistakes	fairly narrow range of structures or occasional mistakes	good and mostly correct use of structures, infrequent mistakes	widespread and varied use of clauses, few mistakes	

## 1 Bellinzona, Switzerland

*Katja Hämmerli, 26, employee for Swisscom Mobile. She couldn't imagine having a job where she wouldn't use foreign languages.*

Every morning I wake up and I'm motivated for the day because working with other people and using different languages is something that motivates me a lot! I always had a particular gift for languages. When I was at school, my best marks were always in French, English and German. At that time my aim was to become an interpreter, but life had other plans with me. I started to work for Swisscom by pure chance. All began with a work placement. I immediately felt good because I have an immense passion for foreign languages, and for Swisscom I had the opportunity to practise them a lot.

Five years have gone since then. In the meantime I have realised a big dream. I went to America, precisely San Diego, for six months in order to learn English. Since I was a child I had dreamed of America, and now I go back every time I can. When I started working for Swisscom I was employed in the Call Centre. With time I moved to different departments and now I'm the team leader of a small group of seven people. I like my job and I try to accomplish the different tasks with enthusiasm and accuracy. I usually start to work at around nine o'clock. At first I read the e-mail that I receive daily. I took up this habit because I have some difficulties beginning powerfully in the morning and in this way, after about an hour, I'm ready to start. The foreign languages are essential for my work; our clients call from all over Switzerland and we have direct contacts with them. Every person in my team can speak at least two foreign languages and I have a colleague who knows six languages. Languages are the base of my work for the simple reason that we need them to communicate with our clients.

The sector where I work is called "Customer Voice", which means that my team represents the voice of the clients inside Swisscom Mobile. This department is divided into two parts: the "Claim" and the "Retention". The first one is where we receive the claims from our customers. Often a claim is seen as a trouble but that's not correct. You have to see it from another point of view: the claim is the last chance that the customer gives you to repair a mistake that you made, maybe accidentally. In the "Reten-

*(by Eleonora Mola, student of journalism and organisational communication, Zürcher Hochschule Winterthur)*

## 2 St. Gallen, Switzerland

*Her workplace is her home, a VIP-lounge or a doctor's practice. Her profession is teaching and her favourite subjects are languages. Silvana G. teaches German, French, English and Latin, and she speaks Italian quite well. In addition she is learning a language which is known in the Western world as one of the most difficult languages: Arab.*

Silvana has a job which many people would probably like to have; she is the German teacher of the foreign players of the Football Club St. Gallen.

They do not have lessons in a normal classroom but in the VIP-lounge of the football club in the stadium. "I enjoy teaching my boys", she says, "it is usually quite a lot of fun



tion" department we try to keep our clients, for example by offering our faithful customers new mobile phones at a low price or subscription discounts, etc.

Our department is subdivided into four centers: Lausanne, Olten, Chur and Bellinzona. We are all connected to the same telephone exchange; as a result the first free agent at one of those places takes the phone call. This means that in Bellinzona we can take a call from Zürich. We have to be ready any time to speak a foreign language and we need them as well to communicate within the different centers. Because even if we are in different cantons, we are a unique unit: Swisscom Mobile Customer Voice and we have to interact with each other.

The first language for Swisscom Mobile is German. Once a week I have to go to Olten to meet my boss. With her I speak German and often I have some problems because it is not my mother tongue and when I have to express my thoughts or my convictions I can't always argue as I would wish.

At the end of the day I'm usually alone in my office. I use this time to think, because during the day there is always a lot to do and I rarely have some time alone. I like this part of the day because it's calm and I can think about the day that has just gone and about all the things that I still can improve.

It is during this part of the day that I get some good ideas. For example I created the "crying wall". I hung a big piece of paper on the wall where my colleagues can write the problems and all the things that they dislike at work. Every two weeks we have a meeting and each of us takes the responsibility of what he/she wrote on the paper and we discuss it in the team in order to find a solution all together.

and it is interesting to see how they improve." Silvana teaches there because the trainer wants it. "We started the lessons when Marcel Koller was the trainer and since then – with one little break – I have been teaching the foreign players." It is hard for a coach and the staff of the club to communicate without sharing a common language. This is

why they have to learn some German.”

However, it is not only the players who learn languages. A few months ago Heinz Peischl himself, the trainer of the team, started to learn a new language. He hates being passed over during press conferences in the French-speaking part of Switzerland and fighting against the language barrier. There is only one way for him: learning French. Everybody who ever started to learn a new language knows the beginner's problems. So does Peischl. He made that experience when he once met Silvana and tried to wish her in French “a good meal”. Instead, he said “ne mangez pas trop”, which means “do not eat too much”.

Silvana also gives supporting lessons to 25 pupils from 10 to 16 years – for free. “I don't want to take money from them because they often don't have much.” She prefers being ‘paid’ with cakes, flowers or maybe a gift coupon. She teaches them at her place or in the doctor's practice of her husband.

Why is Silvana, with her education as a primary school teacher, so good with languages that she can teach four of them and speak two more? “Well, I'm not as good as it may look now. I have never learned English at school, for example”, she says. Silvana started learning English by translating Beatles songs into German. She then went to the United States for some weeks, attended a language course and afterwards she knew enough to be able to teach English.

Silvana was not content with being fluent in five languages and for that reason she started to learn Arab some years ago. “It is a very difficult language with a completely new

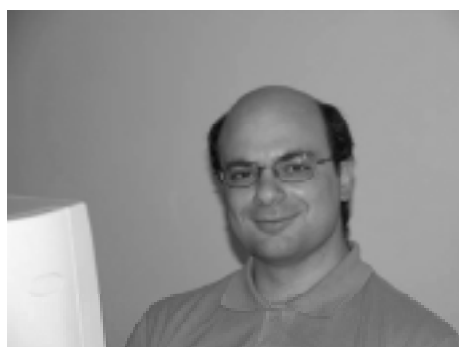


system of writing and grammar”, she says, “but I take one step at a time.” She learns Arab words by heart when she walks her dog or waits for the train. Sometimes she meets people on the train who speak Arab. “I try to talk to them, sometimes I do not understand a lot, but usually people are very happy that a Swiss woman is trying to talk to them in their own language.”

*(by Selina Backes & Alice Born, students of journalism and organisational communication, Zürcher Hochschule Winterthur)*

### 3 Winterthur, Switzerland

*Alfio Russo is a translator with a special taste for Sicilian cuisine and basketball. He talks to us about his day.*



It's been a great game. Both basketball teams are happy because I'm an impartial referee. By the way, if you see me coming out of the sports hall, you wouldn't believe that I go in for sports – I'm shortish and my figure shows my 30-year-long preference for my mother's Sicilian cuisine. But being Italian also has its advantages: My sister and I were brought up bilingually and I've always wanted to work as a translator. I graduated from Dolmetscherschule (Translators' and Interpreters' School) and took on a job at

Helsana Assurances.

My working day begins at 9 o'clock. I share the office with two other Italian translators. It's on the first floor and bleak; the two small windows don't let the sun in at all. However, my two colleagues are real “sunshines” and often make me laugh.

We translate various texts: Articles, newsletters, descriptions, instruction material and so on. Many of these texts have an interesting content and are fun and challenging for me. When I translate a text, I get to know its author. The writing style shows the author's character and his mindset. Sometimes while translating I can tell if the author's sad and when I ask people about their mood, they're often surprised. A few days ago, a colleague paid me a compliment for caring about her. I'm a cheerful person by nature, but after that compliment I was smiling all day and my dark brown eyes were sparkling.

Sometimes I translate texts which I believe no one will read. In moments like this I'd like to pull my hair out – if I had any left. But fortunately my two colleagues read all my texts. I do the same with their texts. We do this for quality control.

The company defines what style of language we are allowed to use. We write and talk “Helsana-like”, quite a formal language. But during my lunch break we create a mix out of Italian and German, unlike at home, where I only speak Sicilian with my mother. I think she appreciates that I don’t have a girlfriend. Thus she gets a lot of attention. So do my employers. They’re glad, if I read their texts attentively. This is how I find mistakes, such as wrongly spelt names.

From this point of view I’m not only a translator but also a proof-reader. Sometimes it costs me quite an effort not to

change the content of the texts. But I need to abbreviate some of them. That’s quite an exhausting job because every time I change something I first have to consult the writer.

After a whole day of reading and cross-reading I’m zapped when I knock off work at 6 o’clock in the evening. Therefore, I don’t feel like reading books or dealing with languages in my leisure time. I prefer to have a square meal – cooked by my mother of course, and then I grab my bike or pursue my hobby as an umpire in basketball. That’s when people become aware of my Italian spirit – they have to do my bidding.

*(by Cornelia Herzog & Sarah King, students of journalism and organisational communication, Zürcher Hochschule Winterthur)*

#### 4 Trogen, Switzerland

*Olga Donitcheva is looking after children from Russia who take part in exchange projects at the Pestalozzi Children’s Village in Trogen (Appenzell). She is 25 years old and came from Brinsk to Switzerland. She has been living in Switzerland for about three years now, mainly because of her German language skills. She talks about her daily routine.*

In the morning, I have a problem getting out of bed. I know I have to get up at 7 o’clock, but then I stay in bed and think that today is an exception: today will also pass without me. At 8.45 we hold a meeting. We discuss who is going to do what today. It’s very busy every day. There are a lot of kids, many groups and many wishes and the information has to flow. After the meeting, I am in charge of a group of children. For the children, I translate German into Russian. We are playing games, doing workshops together or we are going on excursions. Today, we have organised a quiz. A group of children and I go to St. Gallen, where they get a map and a few questions. For about three hours, they walk around, solve the tasks and learn to orientate themselves in a city. The children are always very enthusiastic about St. Gallen. They like the quiz and of course they like to go shopping, although they mostly don’t buy a lot. It’s quite exhausting to bring them back safe and sound at the end of the day. Overall I like my job. Working with children makes me happy.

I studied the German language in Russia. My friends in Russia joke half seriously that they also want to come to Switzerland. But for that, you need the language skills. It wasn’t my aim to emigrate. I got the chance because I majored in German. While we were studying, some of my school friends and I worked as translators for a German union. I liked it, and I benefited because I was able to go to a foreign country. It was fine. So after my studies, the union got back to me and told me that they needed a person in Switzerland. I was very lucky.

It is possible that I will go back to Russia one day. I am homesick: I miss the music from home, my friends ... yes, I’m constantly homesick. At the moment it’s only my work that keeps me here. There are many things that should become better to make me feel better. I wish I had more friends around me. I hope that if I go home or stay here, my decision will be based on an inner feeling.

At 12 o’clock, we all eat together: the children, the teachers – all together. I think that is good. I don’t like the restau-



rants. It’s a good idea that the people go out and meet in restaurants, but I have pricks of conscience to spend such a lot of money for something that you can also eat and drink at home.

I send to my parents 70 percent of my wage. It makes me feel good when I can help my father and mother. Although I know that my friends in Russia have a tough life, I often say to my parents that I want to come back and that I miss them. I know that I relieve my parents from lots of work. This motivates me even more to stay here. I think all in all I’m doing the right thing.

I work till 5 o’clock in the evening. If something is going on, I work till 11 p.m. I live together with a trainee in a shared flat, here in the Pestalozzi Children’s Village. She has not lived here for a long time yet. We like each other, but we don’t do a lot together. Sometimes we dye our hair or we talk about the day.

*(by Simone Rechsteiner, student of journalism and organisational communication, Zürcher Hochschule Winterthur)*

## 5 Dagmersellen, Switzerland

*Fridolin Alejandro Kaiser started his career in the Swiss Army three years ago. He did the recruit school as a radio transmission soldier in Kloten, but was never really happy although the Army has always been fascinating to him. But then he heard that they were looking for some language officers, so everything was clear to him. He explains:*

On a normal day, my alarm clock rings at 6.30 a.m. I'd like to stay longer in my comfortable warm bed because I'm really grumpy in the morning. So it's not amazing that I neither talk a lot nor have a big breakfast. A Cup of Ovomaltine is all I need. At 7 o'clock I'm on the building lot where I work as a building worker. Actually I learnt the job of a switchgear mechanic but directly after my apprenticeship I went to the Swiss Army where I remained for one year. After my promotion to the rank of a corporal I went abroad for one and a half years. First I travelled to Guatemala for about ten months. My mother is from Guatemala and I wanted to visit my relatives and find my second roots. In fact I was born here in Switzerland twenty-two years ago, but when I was a little child I only spoke Spanish. So the language was no problem. After this time I felt like learning English and I went to New Zealand for three months. When I came home I directly had to engage in the officers' training school of the Army.

The job of a building worker is much more physically exerting than the job of a switchgear mechanic. I have to scoop and to concrete nine hours a day. But I like it. "Guate! Have a break!" the foreman calls. Guate is my nickname. It's derived from Guatemala. The nine o'clock break is a holy time for the building workers. They all put their tools down at the stroke of nine o'clock. The building lot where I currently work is right in front of my house and I can go home during breaks. My mother cooks very well. Her meals are a mixture between traditional Swiss cooking and the cuisine of Guatemala.

However, this is not a normal day, because I'm in the army now. Everything is different here, in the training center of prospective language officers of Switzerland. My first impression was that this is not an institution of the Swiss Army, but this is kind of a civilian school. No military rules, no instructions and no angry looking supervisor, who tries to chivy you around. But when I'm honest, I do miss it a little. Now, I am here, one of seven prospective language officers, who were chosen to represent the Army of Switzerland. Later in my military career after that education I will be able to welcome delegates of foreign armies. I'll show them our country and I'll talk with them about their and our national defence system.

My first impression of a lazy school changed pretty fast, because sometimes it is very exhausting here. Today I have got my fifth presentation in this week. I can't do it anymore, it's too much! I need to explain, of course in Spanish, how to treat a prisoner of war, so that he tells you everything he knows about your enemy. This is something that I would have to do in case of War. During peacetime my work would be a lot friendlier of course.

It is twenty past five now. My presentation was pretty good, I think. I would like to relax a little now. At home I would go to train my body, but here, I haven't enough time. There is no time for sport, except for the warm-up jogging at 6 a.m. every morning.

Before dinner I need to read a documentation with fifty pages about the political system of Russia. It is very interesting and Sergej, my roommate in the pavilion we are sleeping in, knows a lot about this country. He is one of three Russian-speaking language officers in Switzerland. There are about twenty language officers in Switzerland and very often they speak more than one language fluently. It is an aim of the persons in charge that the Swiss Army will have at least one language officer for every common language in the world. Sergey goes out to drink a beer with the guys, but I feel too weak. So I am hanging around in my bed and think about the past day. I had tons of things to do and I still have a lot to learn. I am still convinced that I chose the right way. And in five weeks everything is done and I will become officially a language officer of the Swiss Army. I am looking forward to all the interesting tasks I'm going to be confronted with.

*(by Raoul Bigler & Marco Krämer)*



## 6 Candidasa, Bali

*Isabella Jones is wearing an orange coloured sarong. She is sitting in front of her notebook computer on the patio of her typical Balinese house. Next to her are several huge books lying on the table. The computer does not fit at all in the picture of white sandy beaches and palm trees. But the use of a computer as well as business dictionaries, technical dictionaries and other specialised books is daily business for the forty-two-year-old woman.*

Isabella Jones is neither a workaholic on vacation nor a writer for a travel magazine. She works as a translator for one of the biggest law firms in Switzerland. "For five years I have always spent half a year in Bali. In the summer time I stay in Switzerland and go to the office every day. But then in October - just before the days get really cold and grey - I pack my suitcase and leave!" she explains with a wide grin. Due to the technical progress such as e-mail and fax and also due to her straightforward boss all this is possible.

Today she is working on an application regarding intellectual property and trade mark right. A famous chocolate producer is fighting in court against a shopping centre because of a similar package of their chocolate bars. One party is afraid that customers in the shop may confound their expensive product with the cheaper one. And the owners of the shopping centre do of course not want to change the packaging of their private brand.

The vocabulary of all the applications, agreements or due diligence reports is more or less the same. "This ordinary 'lawyer language' is quite easy to translate. But all these technical terms of the packaging and chocolate industry are quite difficult, because neither my boss nor I are experts in this business", she says. The circumstances of the case change from one translation to another. So Isabella

Jones has to deal with many different terminologies. One day she translates contracts of two English football clubs, the other day a due diligence report of an aluminium producer.

"Translating is sometimes really back-breaking work. If you just can't find the right expression in English or in German, you need a lot of patience and strong nerves." Isabella Jones takes one of her dictionaries and throws it away. The book is landing softly in the white sand. "That just doesn't help at all!" She finally goes inside the house and to her computer with internet access. She is now searching the world-wide-web to find the adequate expression.

At the end of her working day she switches off her computer and puts her books away. The ten-page application is completely translated. And Isabella's "office" becomes a dining room now. She invited two German friends who are living the whole year in Candidasa for dinner. Later in the kitchen, while she's cooking the chicken curry she is famous for, she looks at a Balinese package of rice and says: "I sometimes really wonder why people in Europe are spending millions of dollars for an attorney-at-law just because somebody puts his chocolate bars in a similar packaging. I am so lucky that I get a six-month time-out every year."

*(by Claudia Naegeli & Lukas Studer, students of journalism and organisational communication, Zürcher Hochschule Winterthur)*

