

# The chain of stories triggered by seeing a package of Ahoj-Brause

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December 25, 2013



Raymond Chen

While ~~surfing the Web aimlessly~~ doing valuable background research, I happened across a page that had a picture of a package of Ahoj-Brause (pronounced *ahoy browse-uh*). Seeing that package triggered a bunch of memories. My emergency vacation from several years ago included a visit to a friend spending the year at Uppsala University in Sweden. The following year, he invited one of his classmates (a student from Germany) to the United States to join his family for the Christmas holiday season. She brought with her some small gifts, among them a package of Ahoj-Brause. On its own, Ahoj-Brause is just a drink mix powder, but those in the know consume it by dumping the contents of a packet into your mouth, then adding a shot of vodka. (When written by hand, it looks like Ahoj-Braüse with a breve over the u. That's a trait of German handwriting: A breve is written over the u so that it isn't confused with a handwritten n. Compare putting a slash through a o or a crossbar through a 7 to avoid confusion with O and 1, respectively.) During her visit, I got to practice some German, telling her the story of Bill Gates and the hotel next door. Her conclusion was that my German was fairly good, and with one month's immersion, I could become fluent. Unfortunately, it's not practical for me to spend a month in Germany just to bring my German skills from "fairly good" to "fluent". For one thing, my wife would be pretty annoyed. (And this is completely setting aside the question of "Why would you devote an entire month of your life to becoming fluent in German? If you're going to devote an entire month of your life to becoming fluent in another language, shouldn't it be Chinese?") Man, that's a lot of digressions before getting the story I actually wanted to tell. My friend's classmate wanted to head into downtown Seattle to do touristy things, so she was taken to the neighborhood bus stop and given instructions on which bus number to take and where to get off in downtown. That part of the plan worked great. The part that didn't work so great was returning home. When you're unfamiliar with an area, traveling a road in the opposite direction doesn't quite trigger the memory cells. My friend's classmate got on the return bus, but couldn't quite remember where to get off to get back home. She got off somewhere close, but the houses didn't look familiar. "Okay, now I'm lost. What do I do?" She had my friend's address and phone number, but she didn't have a mobile phone or a map of the residential neighborhood. She walked down the street and saw a house with the sign *Mi casa es tu casa* hanging by the front door. She considered this an indication that the people in the house were friendly and

welcoming, so she knocked on the door. She was okay with the possibility that the people in the house spoke only Spanish, because she had been learning Spanish in anticipation of studying there the following semester. (For those who are keeping score, this means that my friend's classmate speaks at a minimum German, Swedish, English, and Spanish.) The assumption that they spoke Spanish was correct. (They also spoke English.) The assumption that the family was friendly and helpful also held up. What she didn't expect was that *they spoke German, too!* Apparently, the family spent a few years in Germany because the father was assigned there by his work. It so happens that she was only two blocks or so from my friend's home; the hard part of course is knowing which two blocks to go. The family was so enamored of their unexpected German-and-English-and-Spanish-speaking visitor that they invited her to stay for dinner, but she had to decline due to other plans for the evening.

**Bonus chatter:** When my friend sent back some photos from Uppsala, he didn't include any description with the photos, so I made up my own narrative. I had to make up names for all the people in the photos, and Astrid was the name I chose for the subject of today's story. She liked the name so much that she adopted it as a secret nickname.

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