



More than words: Real Life Stories

1. What is your name and what course are you studying?

My name is Alannah Purslow and I have just finished my final year at The University of Manchester studying Linguistics and Spanish.

2. What languages do you speak?

My native language is English and my additional languages are Spanish and French.

3. When did you decide to learn another language and why?

For Spanish, I decided to learn it when I was around 11 years old. I was watching an English-dubbed version of an Argentine Disney Channel telenovela and the English dubbing, unfortunately, wasn't the best. Once I found out the programme, and indeed its songs, were originally in Spanish I decided to give it all a listen. As they say, the rest is history! I fell in love with the language. Shortly after that, I started to learn to sing so I would learn the songs in both languages. It ended up that I knew

most of them in Spanish way before I ever knew them in English!

With French, it was a much more calculated decision. I'd discovered what type of learner I was and analysed the mistakes I made with the initial approach I took to learning Spanish. While I was on my year abroad, I decided to tick off a bucket list item: learning another language! I contacted a tutor and have been learning French ever since.

4. How has being able to speak more than one language helped you in your personal life?

It's had an absolutely massive effect. I've made so many friends and have been able to live and work in a different country. Additionally, I can culturally immerse myself in both Spanish and French-speaking places.

A feeling that will never get old for me is when I am in a restaurant, or

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a random inconspicuous place and I get the opportunity to interact with people in their native language. Living in the UK, people don't usually expect you to speak foreign languages to a high level, so being able to surprise people and understand them in their language is an ability that I am so thankful to be able to have.

5. Has being able to speak another language opened any doors for you?

Absolutely! When applying for jobs ahead of my year abroad, I was able to apply for work opportunities as well as ones for study. I am so happy that I chose the option to work. I didn't fully realise it then, but the workplace was bilingual: lessons completely in English (apart from a beginner's class which I taught in Spanish) and admin meetings completely in Spanish. Being able to have that bilingual workplace whilst in Spain has helped me so much since.

I find that my flexibility in switching between languages has increased, as well as my ability to be culturally sensitive to various things from many different angles. Problem-solving is also something that I had to do between the two languages and being able to have that flexibility really aided my ability to work "on my toes", so to speak.

In addition to Spanish, learning French has given me a wider scope of the Romance languages and deepened my capability of self-expression on all fronts, personal and professional.

6. What has been the most impactful thing about learning a language on your life to date?

I've found that my curiosity and love for other cultures has grown and with that, my ability to converse and connect with people in their native languages as well as just English. Whenever I can have a multilingual conversation with



someone, it makes me thankful, reminds me why I started learning in the first place and gives me the courage to weather the difficult parts of the learning journey.

7. What is your favourite foreign language word or phrase and why?

My favourite foreign language word is in Spanish: *flechazo*. It has two meanings, one literal and one metaphorical. *Flechazo* means, literally, the shooting of an arrow. Colloquially, it means 'love at first sight'. There's a similar phrase in French, actually: '*coup de foudre*' which means 'lightning strike', to express the same feeling. I love how there can be so many dimensions to words.

8. Is there another language you would like to learn?

Yes, I have a mini list of languages I'd like to learn next! Italian and German are currently on there. German because I go travelling to Austria a lot and I'd like to be able

to converse with locals in their language. Other than that, there is Italian because I've been lucky enough to live with a few Italian people and have heard it spoken around me. The sound of the language is really growing on me!

9. If you could give one piece of advice to students thinking about learning another language, what would it be?

Go for it! Know that to get to the higher levels, you will have to put a lot of work in and you may not see results immediately. Saying that, though, when you do see the work pay off, it is enormously rewarding.

10. What has been the most unexpected benefit of learning an additional language?

To be honest, there have been many but I'd say that the best most unexpected benefit is being able to surprise people by switching to another language when they least expect it. I've had

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so many fantastic conversations that have come from moments like that.

me that I'd be falling in love with languages for the rest of my life, and she was certainly right about that!

- 11. Can you give an example where knowing another language has helped you develop / progress in a way that would have been harder without having that skill?**

Again, there are many possible answers to this, but I think that it has really helped me when developing hobbies. Something I've always loved to do is write and learning another language has meant that I can write in other languages, which has been so eye-opening and fulfilling to do.

- 12. At what point in your life did you realise the value in knowing another language was?**

Fairly early on. I was given some fantastic advice from a teacher just before doing my GCSEs: "Once you start learning languages, you'll want to learn them all." She told