



More than words: Real Life Stories

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

My name is Zhuzhen Xie (Nina) and I am currently a French and Business Management student at the University of Manchester.

2. What languages do you speak?

I am native in Chinese and I also speak English. I am currently learning French.

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

I've studied English since I was young because it is part of the school curriculum in China. Later, I went to high school in California so it became my main language for study and daily communication. I was always intrigued by the French language and culture, so I decided to take French as part of my university degree. I always enjoyed learning languages and particularly being able to read books in their original languages. I like the phonetics and the flow of English

and French in both spoken and written forms.

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

Additional languages have indeed expanded my capacity to learn about more cultures. Particularly, I believe that it is important to have an open perspective to embrace different variations in a culturally pluralistic world today. As I have grown up in several different cultural backgrounds, the various experiences that I have accumulated allow me to empathise better with others from diverse backgrounds. Although my understandings are not comprehensive, they have led me into interesting conversations with my friends who gave me more insights from personal narratives. Moreover, new friendships are a mutual exchange of values and beliefs for me. Whenever we share about our own customs or values,

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we always learn something new about each other and thus enrich the dynamics of our perception.

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

Being able to speak more than one language enables me to expand my career opportunities as many positions, especially in international conglomerate companies, appreciate their candidates to have additional language skills. Personally, my current ideal career is to work for an international company, so my additional languages may strengthen my application however I also think being multilingual is a more common phenomenon now, so having additional languages might be regarded as essential skills to have as a candidate.

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

One of the most impactful influences from learning a language is the access to studying or living abroad. Since I went to an international secondary school, I was able to apply for universities in English-speaking countries or to programs that are taught in English. Languages almost pave the path for me as they help me to settle in a new country. While entering a new environment does present many challenges and uncertainties, it also gives me possibilities to reinterpret my realities by exploring around the world.

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

I want to learn Japanese or Korean because their forms are not based on Latin alphabets and they have roots in Chinese. I am quite interested in learning how the



words are constructed as each dash or point carries some significance behind it. I am also interested in learning about their evolutions.

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

Try to find at least one aspect of the language and its related culture that fascinates you the most. Although one may feel passionate about learning a new language at the beginning, the motivation can be hard to maintain as the increasing level of complexity can be challenging when one delves deeper into the syntax, grammar, and application. Therefore, the specific interesting parts can help us to continue exploring the language. The best situation is to learn the language as an adventure that excites you and enhances your learning from a constructed scheme. And also to learn from your mistakes.

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

While I thought learning an additional language would just be a cultural experience and an additional skill, an additional language builds almost a different persona for me. One commonality that I have discussed with my friends who also speak multiple languages is that we feel like we have different personalities when speaking a different language. It might be because the logic behind each language is so closely entwined with its culture, so we instinctively envision ourselves in the cultural context and our behaviours slightly change. I am fascinated by my nuanced voices and expressions as they formulate different sides of me.

10. 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?

Knowing another language has helped me tremendously to adapt to a new environment. For example, knowing English is extremely helpful when I travel to stay in an English-speaking country because I am able to communicate my concerns. Without knowing the language, I might feel estranged and impotent if the language barrier is too hard to overcome in a short term. For example, my transition from high school to university was easier as I am already familiar with the language used for academics.

11. At what point in your life did you realise how important / the value in knowing another language was?

When I travelled with my parents to other countries, it used to take

us a lot of time to communicate our needs to hotel staff, restaurant servers, or office administrators. Those experiences really motivated me to learn another language so that our trips can be more relaxed. More importantly, these situations also happen to a lot of other people. When I was younger, my parents would always ask me to help them with my limited English, even just a little bit was very helpful. Therefore, knowing another language certainly facilitates the communication process and connection among people.