



More than words: Real Life Stories

Ashleigh Thompson is a professional writer who speaks multiple languages.

I started learning French in primary school and continued the subject in secondary school, picking up Spanish along the way. I enjoyed learning languages so much that I decided to take my language studies further and during university, I found myself living in Madrid for three months, making some of my best memories. Speaking Spanish meant I was able to build friendships I couldn't have otherwise, to see things from new perspectives and to completely immerse myself in the culture.

Being able to speak several languages has opened so many doors for me and enabled me to help others in ways I could never have imagined (translating words of an English man who wanted to apologise to his wife for them missing a train and to say how much he loved her, for a poet to then turn into a Spanish poem, being just one example) but the most unexpected benefit of learning a

language is being able to think quickly on my feet and improvise. I find I can talk my way around most tricky situations!

Being able to speak other languages always comes up when interviewing for jobs too. It gives me that edge. I now work for a company that's all about language and although I write in English, I often use my translation skills.

Plus, in a research project I did years ago, I discovered that learning languages can mitigate the effects of some brain damage on communication; even potentially delaying Alzheimer's. It's basically the best exercise your brain can get!

Languages: English (first language), Spanish, French, Italian, Portuguese

Favourite foreign phrases: "ojalá" in Spanish. It means something similar to "I wish" or "I hope" but is deeper and more emotional. I love that it's almost untranslatable; it's just a feeling.

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