



More than words: Real Life Stories

1. **What is your name and what is your course of study?**

Hannah Russell, Modern Languages.

2. **What languages do you speak, are interested in, or that you relate to in any way?**

I grew up speaking only English, but studied Spanish and German through GCSEs and A levels. I decided to continue with Spanish at university and also took the opportunity to learn something new and picked up Italian.

3. **At what point in your life did you realise how important and how valuable knowing multiple languages was?**

When I was in secondary school and opportunities arose for me to go on trips abroad. I realised how facilitating it can be to speak the local language however it wasn't until I got my first part-time job, when I would frequently encounter tourists visiting the UK, that I found out

just how important it really is to people, to have someone who will engage in a conversation with them in their own language, even if it is not perfect.

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

It's helped me to meet and make friends with so many new people, especially at university where there are so many people from all over the globe. But more than that, it has given me a wider understanding of how it is to try and learn a whole new culture and language, allowing me to emphasise with people from other countries, even though I may not speak their specific language.

5. **How do you think knowing more than one language has helped you, or will help you, in your professional life?**

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It has helped me so much working in hospitality. Not only is it a concrete skill that allows you to communicate with customers better, but the soft skills also that come from learning a language, like patience, communicative skills and being able to express yourself clearly are all really important and helpful in the workplace. Having languages on my CV has made me stand out from the crowd when it comes to applying for jobs, and it's a great skill that employers value hugely.

6. What career/s do you hope to go into in the future?

I'd love to go into teaching after I graduate. Being able to speak multiple languages means that I will be able to teach abroad much more easily, and it will give me the ability to work and travel at the same time.

7. What has been the most impactful thing about learning

a language on your life to date?

Seeing people's reactions when I initiate a conversation with them in their native language. It means so much to people, and it's really enjoyable as well.

8. What has been the most unexpected benefit of learning languages during your life?

Being able to read books/poems/articles in the original language gives them so much more meaning. I never realised before how much can get lost in translation!

9. What has been the most challenging aspect of learning languages during your life?

Being told by people that there's no use to learning languages, as "everyone speaks English anyway." It's not true! Speaking another language gives you the chance to communicate with so many more people than you'd be able to otherwise, and on a more

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meaningful level. Besides, learning a language is fun, and that's reason enough to study it.

10. What is your favourite word or phrase in a language other than English?

The Spanish phrase, '*para gustos hay colores*'. Literally means, "for tastes, there are colours", but it's really more like "to each their own". I love the imagery of opinions being on a continuous spectrum, just like colours are.

11. Are there any other languages you wish you could speak?

I'd love to be able to speak Arabic, because it's so widely spoken and I think it has such a rich cultural background, which would make it really interesting to study.

12. How has being an MFL Mentor supported your journey with languages?

It has allowed me to share my passion for learning languages

with young people, and it's a constant reminder of why I decided to study languages in the first place.

13. Has anyone or any one particular moment or thing, inspired you on your language learning journey?

I think seeing my school teachers' passion for learning languages inspired me hugely, and hearing them talk about studying and travelling abroad made me want to do the same!

14. Do you have any funny stories to share about your language learning experiences?

A few years ago I was in Spain, and tried to order an ice cream with a cone (cucurucho), and accidentally asked for an ice cream with a cockroach (cucharacha) instead! I got a very concerned look from the employee.

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

I'd say, be patient. It might feel like you're getting nowhere but you know more than you think you do!



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