



More than words: Real Life Stories

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

Zhen Ni Gan, BA Media and Communication.

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

I speak Mandarin, English and Malay, and a bit of Italian. Growing up in the multicultural environment in Malaysia, English and Malay were compulsory to learn. I then went to Italy for a five-week exchange when I was in high school and learnt some basic phrases, which motivated me to take the Italian course at university.

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

It is the other way round for me - as most people back at home are multilingual and are still wanting to learn their third or fourth language. It is just very simple

for me - I cannot live in my home country if I only speak one language.

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

I find myself being more open and have better cultural sensitivity when it comes to living with flatmates from various backgrounds. It also shows me how people from different backgrounds process information differently, and think differently as well.

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

I was thrilled when I realised that I could read academic articles in languages other than English when writing my essays, which provided me with different perspectives of the area of study. I also did an internship remotely

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with a company based in Taipei, which was a great experience.

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

Learning and development.

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

It makes travelling easy - the world seems smaller to me than some people. The more I know about a language or a culture, the closer it feels to me.

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

I can now enjoy memes in multiple languages.

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

Language learning has never been easy at all, even in a multilingual environment, let

alone in monolingual societies. I usually struggle in the listening and speaking part, as it really requires courage at that stage.

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

勉強 has always been an interesting example that fascinates me on how languages are linked but develop in different ways. In Japanese, it means "to study" but in Mandarin, it means "to force yourself in doing something reluctantly". I think these meanings would both work in some scenarios.

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

I am quite interested in learning Welsh after living in Cardiff for the past two years. I also wish I could speak Hokkien more fluently so I can talk to my grandparents in their mother tongue.

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

It refuels my passion towards languages after ignoring it for a while. I really understand how difficult it can be to learn multiple languages at school and now I also see the benefits of it - and I am just glad to share this with younger language learners!

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

Chong Meat Aun, a Malaysian filmmaker who used to work on a project that collects Chinese dialects folksongs and oral history.

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

I got mixed up between "pesca"(peach) and "pesce"(fish)

in Italian and thought the fruit tea would be weird with fish.

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

Start young, make it fun, and take your time.

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