

# Why You Should Start Learning a Foreign Language

Tomás Garrigue Masaryk, a Czech sociologist and philosopher, said once, “As many languages you know, as many times you are a human being.” It is difficult to deny the wisdom of these words. Every language is not just a number of rules and grammatical constructions allowing you to understand other people; it is rather a reflection (and at the same time—a determinant) of mentality, the way of thinking of the people who speak it. Learning a language ideally involves not only memorizing a bunch of new words, but also studying its native country’s culture and history, digging into its contemporary context, following its evolution. Believe it or not, but your native language has shaped your personality in the same way your parents and surroundings have. Logically, the more languages you know, the more diverse and profound of a person you can become; by understanding paradigms different from yours, you can broaden your outlook and become more open-minded; you will be able to read between the lines, developing your communications with other people not just in a regular—verbal—way, but in the dimension of gestures, circumlocutions, allegories, etc. You can view it as adopting and integrating a new personality in your mind, which occurs every time you dig deeper into a new language.

Of course, there are more pragmatic and less philosophical reasons to begin studying foreign languages. Since ancient times, people who could communicate with foreigners have been valued greatly. Commerce, diplomacy, and cultural exchange would be difficult or even impossible if there were no people able to converse with the representatives of other countries. Nowadays, the situation has not changed much, even despite the existence of numerous computer-assisted translation tools. Try having business correspondence with a Japanese company using only Google Translate or any of the more advanced tools, and you will realize how inferior they are compared to a real translator or interpreter. Considering that nowadays there are many companies expanding their business abroad, the demand for qualified people speaking at least one foreign language is extremely high. Even if you will not be travelling around the world all the time, you will still be more valued at work (Fluentin3months). Besides, it will be easier for you to find a job in a different country.

Besides your career, there are many other reasons for learning a foreign language. Have you ever found yourself in a situation when you are alone in an unfamiliar country, unable to find your hostel two hours past midnight, and completely unable to say anything in this country’s language? You approach people with a silly smile on your face (you hope it looks polite, but in fact it is rather suspicious), trying to show them your map; some of them ignore you, others nod their heads and start talking quickly, pointing their fingers in all directions—but you cannot understand them. Finally, you find a taxi driver who agrees to help you, and as a result, your ride takes about five minutes, and the driver charges you a hundred dollars. As weird as it may sound to a person from an English-speaking environment, the rest of the world does not speak English; in some countries—European countries, for example—you will find people able to communicate in it, but usually, the farther to the South or to the East you travel, the less English-speaking people you will be able to find. Now, imagine how great it would be to travel to China, for instance, and to have the following conversation:

– Hello! Can you help me?

- Wow!
- What?
- You speak Chinese!
- Oh, yes, a little bit.
- That’s cool, I’ve never met a foreigner able to speak Chinese.
- Well, I just like studying foreign languages. Do you know what transport I should take to get to this hostel (you show it on your map)?
- Oh, you don’t need transport—the hostel is just two blocks away from here. Just walk down this street till you see the crossroad, and then turn right, and you should see it.
- Great! Thanks for your help.
- You’re welcome. Enjoy your stay in China.

When we are at home and a tourist asks us directions, we take it for granted that he or she speaks English. Sometimes we cringe because of their accents or twisted grammar; however, in other countries, people are more grateful when you try to speak their language, and you can find even more help than you are required.

Besides, being able to speak a foreign language can save you a whole lot of money and/or time. If you are a regular English-speaking tourist, you have two options to get to your destination from the airport: either by a shuttle, which is slow (and once you miss one for some reason, you have to wait for a long time until another one arrives), or by taxi, which can cost you a fortune. However, when talking to people in the airport, you can rather often find an alternative; for example, you can learn about a cheaper local bus, or you can run into a person who will agree to drive you up to the city for free, or for a considerably lower sum of money than a taxi (Fluent). This works especially well in poorer countries, where locals are eager to earn some extra coin.

This is not to mention you can easily make new friends from abroad. Even if you are a reserved or introverted person, when abroad, you have to communicate with other people—otherwise, you will not be able to enjoy your travel and sustain yourself. Besides, if you are staying in a hostel or a guest house, the atmosphere of numerous strangers from all over the world gathered at one place often disposes and inspires communication. Sometimes, connections you make when travelling can last for years, transforming into friendships, business contacts, or even romantic relationships. All this is not possible (or would be much harder to achieve) if you do not speak a foreign language (Lingholic).

Learning foreign languages is extremely beneficial for personal development. Not only does it allow you to better understand other cultures and mentalities, but it also enriches your personality with new outlooks, makes you more open-minded—which is extremely valuable nowadays. Besides, speaking at least one foreign language can significantly improve your travelling experience, help you make new friends from abroad, and start business or romantic relationships. In addition, professionals who speak foreign languages are more valued by their companies, and often get a chance to work in different countries. Tomás Garrigue Masaryk used to say, “As many languages you speak, as many times you are a human being,” and it is definitely true.