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Why should I learn a language?

Learning a foreign language takes time and dedication. The reasons below may help to convince you to take the plunge, if such persuasion is needed. Some reasons are practical, some aspirational, some intellectual and others sentimental, but whatever your reasons, having a clear idea of why you're learning a language can help to motivate you in your studies.

Kolik jazyků znáš, tolikrát jsi člověkem.

The more languages you know, the more you are human. (Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk)

Emigration

When you move to a different country or region, learning the local language will help you to communicate and integrate with the local community. Even if many of the locals speak your language, for example if your L1 is English and you move to the Netherlands, it's still worth your while learning the local language. Doing so will demonstrate your interest in and commitment to the new country.

Family and friends

If your partner, in-laws, relatives or friends speak a different language, learning that language will help you to communicate with them. It can also give you a better understanding of their culture and way of thinking.

Work

If your work involves regular contact with speakers of foreign languages, being able to talk to them in their own languages will help you to communicate with them. It may also help you to make sales and to negotiate and secure contracts. Knowledge of foreign languages may also increase your chances of finding a new job, getting a promotion or a transfer overseas, or of going on foreign business trips.

Many English-speaking business people don't bother to learn other languages because they believe that most of the people they do business with in foreign countries can speak English, and if they don't speak English, interpreters can be used. The lack of foreign language knowledge puts the English speakers at a disadvantage. In meetings, for example, the people on the other side can discuss things amongst themselves in their own language without the English speakers understanding, and using interpreters slows everything down. In any socialising after the meetings, the locals will probably feel more comfortable using their own language rather than English.

Study or research

You may find that information about subjects you're interested in is published mainly in a foreign language. Learning that language will give you access to the material and enable you to communicate with fellow students and researchers in the field.

Language is the archives of history.

(Ralph Waldo Emerson)

Travel

Many English speakers seem to believe that wherever you go on holiday you can get by speaking English, so there's no point in learning any other languages. If people don't understand you all you have to do is speak slowly and turn up the volume. You can more or less get away with this, as long as you stick to popular tourist resorts and hotels where you can usually find someone who speaks English. However, if you want to venture beyond such places, to get to know the locals, to read signs, menus, etc, knowing the local language is necessary.

Americans who travel abroad for the first time are often shocked to discover that, despite all the progress that has been made in the last 30 years, many foreign people still speak in foreign languages.

(Dave Barry)

A basic ability in a foreign language will help you to 'get by', i.e. to order food and drink, find your way around, buy tickets, etc. If you have a more advanced knowledge of the language, you can have real conversations with the people you meet, which can be very interesting and will add a new dimension to your holiday.

Die Grenzen meiner Sprache bedeuten die Grenzen meiner Welt.

The limits of my language are the limits of my universe.

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(Ludwig Wittgenstein)

Studying abroad

If you plan to study at a foreign university, college or school, you'll need a good knowledge of the local language, unless the course you want to study is taught through the medium of your L1. Your institution will probably provide preparatory courses to improve your language skills and continuing support throughout your main course.

Secret communication

If you and some of your relatives, friends or colleagues speak a language that few people understand, you can talk freely in public without fear of anyone eavesdropping, and/or you can keep any written material secret. Speakers of such Native American languages as Navajo, Choctaw and Cheyenne served as radio operators, known as Code Talkers, to keep communications secret during both World Wars. Welsh speakers played a similar role during the Bosnian War.

Required course

You may be required to study a particular language at school, college or university.

Getting in touch with your roots

If your family spoke a particular language in the past you might want to learn it and possibly teach it to your children. It could also be useful if you are researching your family tree and some of the documents you find are written in a language foreign to you.

Revitalising or reviving your language

If you speak an endangered language, or your parents or grandparents do/did, learning that language and passing it on to your children could help to revitalise or revive it.

Culture

Maybe you're interested in the literature, poetry, films, TV programs, music or some other aspect of the culture of people who speak a particular language and want to learn their language in order to gain a better understanding of their culture.

Most people in the world are multilingual, and everybody could be; no one is rigorously excluded from another's language community except through lack of time and effort. Different languages protect and nourish the growth of different cultures, where different pathways of human knowledge can be discovered. They certainly make life richer for those who know more than one of them.

(Nicholas Ostler, *Empires of the Word*)

Religion

Missionaries and other religious types learn languages in order to spread their message. In fact, missionaries have played a major role in documenting languages and devising writing systems for many of them. Others learn the language(s) in which the scriptures/holy books of their religion were originally written to gain a better understanding of them. For example, Christians might learn Hebrew, Aramaic and Biblical Greek; Muslims might learn Classical Arabic, and Buddhists might learn Sanskrit.

Food

Perhaps you enjoy the food and/or drink of a particular country or region and make regular trips there, or the recipe books you want to use are only available in a foreign language

Linguistic interest

Maybe you're interested in linguistic aspects of a particular language and decide to learn it in order to understand them better.

Challenging yourself

Maybe you enjoy the challenge of learning foreign languages or of learning a particularly difficult language.

Sounds/looks good to me

Perhaps you just like the sound of a particular language when it's spoken or sung. Or you find the written form of a language attractive. If you like singing, learning songs in other languages can be interesting, challenging and enjoyable.

One language is never enough!

If like me you're a bit of a linguaphile / glossophile / linguaholic or whatever you call someone who is fascinated by languages and enjoys learning them, then one language is never enough.

If you talk to a man in a language he understands, that goes to his head.

If you talk to him in his language, that goes to his heart.

(Nelson Mandela)

Your reasons

If you have comments on the above or have other reasons for learning a foreign language, [let me](#)

know.

To better understand our thought processes (from Judah Kay)

All of our thought processes are conducted in language, so really our entire existence or essence or soul, however we phrase it, is inextricably bound up to and with the languages we speak. Try to think without language for instance. However, we see that the language is in essence superficial, since many languages exist. To understand the true roots of our thought processes, the real nature of the human soul, a knowledge of several languages may be necessary.

To become someone else (from Janet Gil)

As a teen, I wished I were someone else. Learning Spanish let me be part of my best friend's family and have friends in college from South America whom I may not have met had I not had such an interest in learning Spanish. I liked myself with these other people more than I liked my American self (if that makes sense). I have known of people who learned another language at age 19 and above who now speak their second language almost without an accent but speak their first language with an accent!

To understand your own language and culture better (from Evona York)

Sometimes learning a foreign language helps you understand your own language and culture better through comparison, or through the relationship between the foreign language and your mother tongue. For instance, studying Latin in high school taught me an incredible amount of English, because English has so many words that come from the Latin. Same with Greek.

Wer fremde Sprachen nicht kennt, weiß nichts von seiner eigenen

Those who know no foreign language knows nothing of their mother tongue.

(Johann Wolfgang von Goethe)

To keep your mind healthy (from Harvey Schmidt)

Learning a second language has been proven to delay the onset of dementia.

To find your future husband/wife (from Rico Suave)

Learning a new language and culture increases the size of your selection pool.

To better understand the rest of humankind (from Philip Lightfoot)

Language is an aspect of humanity, and learning what a fellow human speaks teaches you more about humankind as a whole. The more languages you know, the more you understand our species, and that is beneficial no matter what the situation is.

To talk to friends without others understanding (from Elizabeth)

If you and some of your friends learn a foreign language, you'll be able to talk to each other without other people having a clue what you're saying. This works best if you choose a language few people study, such as Japanese.

To learn songs in other languages (from Michelle Kelleher Tietz)

Michelle has been learning Irish and Scottish Gaelic because she likes to sing and has founded an *a cappella* group that sings in Celtic languages. They sing old work songs, lullabies, etc. This hobby combines her interests in languages, history and story telling.

To help people in need (from Nuntawun Yuntadilok)

Learning other languages increases our chances of providing help to people who seriously need it, such as those in hit by the tsunami of 2004, many of whom can not communicate in English, especially children.

Friendship (from Bill Conwell)

My best friend is French and speaks English, Spanish and some German as well. I am trying to learn French to enhance our communication, though he doesn't demand nor expect it.

Venting your feelings (from Dick H.)

Another reason why one might want to learn a foreign language is to insult/cuss out people without them understanding what you're saying. It works best if you choose a language few people study. Avoid the Big Two (Spanish and French), because too many of us learned them in high school. And you never know who has a German, Finnish, Italian, or Greek grandmother!

To help you understand how other people think (from Orionas)

Language influences culture, so learning a language helps you to understand how other people think, and it also helps you to get a general understanding of our world and the many people and cultures that inhabit it.

Because I love learning languages (from Cody Warren)

My reasons for learning foreign languages is because I just love to do it, it's all the different ways people express themselves, and it shows that there really are other people out there (to a teenager who's always stuck at home in a small farm town). It's also a way to learn how people interact and socialize with each other, and how each society works.

Also, I like conlanging, and learning different languages help me to understand how things work so i

can build conlangs, and vice versa, creating the conlangs help me to understand how all different languages grammars work (Im always a sucker for using a lot of moods, cases, tenses, etc).

Learning languages to me, is much more than making myself able to communicate with others. To me it's like getting some nice new surprise and a whole new level of understanding.

Showing respect (from Nicole Signer)

I believe that when somebody at least tries to learn the language of the country they are visiting it shows a lot of respect. People really appreciate it.

To express things that are difficult to express in your native language (from Tenacious Mel)

Learning a foreign language can provide you with ways to talk about things that might be difficult to express in your own language. It's also a way to get in touch with other selves.

To better understand your own language (from Kaiti)

In order to learn another language, you need to learn the different titles and functions of sentence parts. Learning these things can make you a better student and a more articulate person. Also, many of the root words used in foreign vocabulary will help you later on as you struggle to comprehend or analyze new words in your native language.

Understanding people (from Adam Briceland)

I believe a great reason to learn a foreign language such as Pacific island languages is so that you can understand what the native speakers are saying to each other when they're speaking their own language to each other. So you can sit there and not talk to them but completely understand what they're saying in public.



[Books on how to learn languages](#)
Language courses, dictionaries and other materials

Links

Reasons to learn Esperanto

http://personal.southern.edu/~caviness/Eo_unue/Eo_unue.html

Finnish as a world language? (Reasons for learning Finnish)

<http://www.suomalaiset.de/forum/showthread.php?t=336>

Reasons to learn French

<http://www.theworldspeaksfrench.org/reasons.html>

<http://french.about.com/od/francophonie/a/whylearnfrench.htm>

<http://www.fill.vt.edu/French/whyfrench.html>

Why Study Greek?

<http://www.classicsacademy.com/Whylearn.html>

<http://www.biblicalgreek.org/grammar/whystudy.php>

Why learn Irish?

http://www.gaeltalk.net/why_learn.html

Why Study Latin?

<http://www.classicsacademy.com/Whylearn.html>

Reasons to learn Portuguese

<http://www.brazzillog.com/pages/p37sep01.htm>

Reasons for learning Spanish

http://www.studyspanish.com/topten_reasons.htm

<http://spanish.about.com/cs/forbeginners/a/whylearnspanish.htm>

http://www.vistawide.com/spanish/why_spanish.htm

Reasons for learning Welsh

<http://gwybodiadur.tripod.com/whylearn.htm>

Why and when do people learn languages? - an examination of why people learn languages or avoid doing so: <http://www.zompist.com/whylang.html>

New Zealand Immigration - free guide to studying in New Zealand, student visas and jobs:

<http://www.immigration2newzealand.com/studying-in-new-zealand/>



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