

MFL Reading Homework 1

'How learning a foreign language changed my life'

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'Why learn a foreign language when English is spoken by hundreds of millions of people worldwide?' some people wonder.

Others question the need for a second language when translation technology is advancing so quickly.

But many speakers of foreign languages extol the benefits. Four native English speakers tell the BBC how making the effort to learn a second language is important - and how it changed their life.

'It gave me the confidence to interview footballers'



When Alex Chaffer moved to Germany four years ago, he could only say "hello" and "thank you" in German. He had not learnt the language at school, but was starting off a career in sports journalism and had the opportunity to go to Germany.

When he first arrived, he discovered his accommodation had fallen through. "I had been scammed," he said. "I couldn't speak to anyone because I didn't have the language, I was lost."

"The first year I was here I didn't learn a lot. I then had a German girlfriend that helped massively, having someone force me to do it and hearing it around all the time. She would speak in English and I would speak in German."

The 23-year-old is now fluent and works on the website of Germany's top football league, Bundesliga.

He said that in his job, he was "embarrassed to not know the language" and learning German has given him "so much confidence".

"I would be worried about going to the shops and restaurants," he said. "Even professionally, I didn't interview footballers for three years because I didn't have the confidence in my language but now I can go up to any player. It's totally changed my way of living. It's opened me up as a person professionally and personally."

'I gave my children the gift of a second language'

James Westgarth's first introduction to a foreign language was at school, a comprehensive in west London where he learnt French.

"My parents had no language skills but they encouraged me so I could order food etc. when we went on holidays," he said.

"The result is a 23-year international career. I spent 13 years at Airbus in Toulouse and the US and am now a sourcing director at a subsidiary of Lufthansa in Frankfurt."

The 44-year-old puts his successful career down to his language skills and the cultural awareness they bring.

"Speaking a language helps to break the ice," he said. "Even if it's not perfect, it's a good introduction and brings people on-side when you're negotiating."

"My own two children, who attend an international school in Toulouse, are of course bilingual in French and English. Now they have a lot of international friends and they're discovering the world through two sets of eyes. The gift of a second language is the best thing I can give to them."

From his experience of working in Europe over the past 20 years, he said he believes the UK has become "more and more insular" and that "a language barrier plays a part".

"Things could be made a lot easier with language skills," he said. "I'm still learning German, and when I'm with my work colleagues in Frankfurt, it helps to show that I'm making an effort. Languages really do help people later in life."

'Why do we see languages as nice but not important?'

Being introduced to languages at a young age is something that teacher Ellie Baker believes strongly in. She founded BilinguaSing - which runs musical French and Spanish classes for children.

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"Since 2013, I've been teaching babies and upwards," Ms Baker said. "My business is about empowering families. We cannot afford for children not to learn languages. We should be equipping them for whatever Brexit is going to bring."



Among the benefits of learning a second language is the potential to "boost brain power", Ms Baker's company has said. Studies have suggested that learning a second language **can slow brain ageing, and can lead to higher mental function** in the brain.

'Foreign languages did wonders for my English'

Cassandra Scott, from Edinburgh, studied three languages in her final year at school: Advanced Higher French and German as well as beginners level Russian, which her French teacher taught "just for fun". She is now a freelance translator in Edinburgh, and said: "Learning languages at school really set the course for my career."

"I went to Fortrose Academy in the Highlands, where we had brilliant language teachers. It's a state school, but they offered us so many amazing opportunities.

"Learning two foreign languages also did wonders for my English. It gave me a new perspective on my own language and also gave me extra practice in identifying parts of speech, and later on, analysing literature."

Since studying interpreting and translation, she has worked as an in-house translator and an assistant language teacher (for English) in Osaka, Japan.

"I now work as a freelance medical and marketing translator," she said. "Most of my work - about 80% - is in German. I love my job and I'll always be thankful to my language teachers at school who taught me how to learn."

VOCAB HELP

extol – praise enthusiastically

subsidiary – assisting, additional or supporting (in the text, subsidiary refers to a business that is controlled by the company Lufthansa)

bilingual - able to speak two languages well

insular - closed to new ideas; narrow-minded

empowering – allowing or enabling

freelance - a person who earns a living as a writer, graphic artist, musician, or the like by taking on a variety of assignments, often completed at home, for a variety of employers

interpreting – translating (changing) speech from one language to another

translation - the process of changing words or text from one language into another