



## My Language Experience

---

Ever since the day I entered this world, languages have been my passion. I learnt English as my native language, having British parents and living in the UK.

From the young age of 4, I started learning French. Alongside 2 of my best friends at the time, we used to visit a local French teacher's house once a week to learn the basics of the language. It wasn't until the age of 6 at primary school we started learning French as our modern foreign language (MFL) in the school system. The school system in the UK promotes the learning of at least one MFL from primary school through to GCSE level. **Thereafter**, it's the decision of each student as to whether to continue with their language studies or not.

By the time I got to secondary school, **I was well into** my French studies and loved learning the language. Schools tend to focus a lot on grammar and vocabulary but I was fortunate enough to have family living in the south of France, meaning when we regularly visited, I could practise speaking to the locals, ordering in restaurants, booking tickets and tables and conversing with the neighbours.

My school offered another language at the age of 12, which is when I took up German. Compared to my French skills, it felt like **a big mountain to climb** starting almost 10 years later from the beginning. Just like my French, I was lucky enough to have a native German teacher and with intensive classes through the school system, I slowly started to progress. I found so many similarities between German and English with vocabulary and pronunciation. After all, English has its roots in the Germanic language branch. I was also fascinated by the differences; the complexity of the grammar, the cases and the word order. Our German class was very small as the majority of students had chosen Spanish as their second MFL, therefore the ratio of teacher to student was very low so the classes were more individualised.

At the age of 14, you can choose your GCSE subjects in the UK and I went with both German and French. I loved both of these languages, the methods my teachers used in class, the content we covered. The exam process required tests in speaking,

listening, reading, writing and grammar so we covered all skills in the languages. I achieved good grades in these exams and decided to pursue my study of languages at A-levels. This was certainly much more challenging with the added skills of translation from native to target language and vice versa as well as literature, artist, film and author studies. I studied **day in and day out** with supporting private classes on top of my school routine. I excelled in my languages and decided to pursue them at university alongside International Business Management.

In between school and uni, I realised I needed to keep up with my language skills, put them into practice in the real world, so I signed up to an academy in Germany for an intensive 2-week course and to stay with a host family. I immersed myself in the language, spoke only German and saw a huge improvement in my skills. Additionally, I took on a 4-month au-pairing job in a German-speaking country to help expand my knowledge of the language and the culture behind it.

When starting uni, we were really **thrown in at the deep end**. As well as reviewing the German and French language skills, we worked on live interpretation in business scenarios, translating official business documents and working in the business world purely in the target languages. It was extremely challenging but we all advanced in the skills.

By the time third year of uni came, we had to decide on our placements abroad. I chose to complete my third year of studies in Germany, in a gorgeous city in Bayern, living, studying and working in the country. It's a scary concept, being completely alone in a foreign country, not knowing if you can fully live without being fluent in the language. **It turns out**, you can. I'm fortunate to have English as my native language and with so many students also able to speak in this, I could always get by in case of emergencies. I tried to do everything in German, including university enrollment, legal migration documents for living in the country for the year as well as the business and language classes themselves, which were in German. I learnt a huge amount and started to feel confident communicating in the language.

On my ERASMUS year abroad, I also met my future husband. I didn't know it at the time but 8 years later we'd be married and living together in the UK. He's Ecuadorian, with Spanish as his native language, although had the basics of English and German so we could communicate. **Little did I know**, Spanish would go on to be my third language and one which I speak almost on a daily basis today.

My approach to learning Spanish was entirely different to the education system I'd used to learn French and German. This time, I taught myself. I set out translating basic words and phrases to have simple conversations with my **then-boyfriend** and his family. I listened carefully when we spoke (**albeit** very slowly) to me and started

to pick the language up. My understanding of how languages work, having learnt French and German, helped enormously. To this day, I've never learned the grammar of Spanish and recognise I occasionally have difficulties expressing different time phrases in the language but I'm grateful for this life opportunity to add to my tally of languages.

Upon graduating from university, I decided to go into the world of languages. Despite my knowledge of French, German and Spanish, I truly believe native speakers are the best form of teacher so I stuck to English instead. I completed my EFL teaching qualification and soon after worked in academies and in private classes teaching students my language. Alongside all my teachers at Virtually Fluent, I work with immersion meaning we don't translate words or phrases but train students to "think in English" and "speak like a native" instead.

Sadly, without using my French and German on a daily basis, my skills have lessened and, although I understand speakers in these languages find it challenging to communicate in speaking with them without practising for so long. So, in my own personal experience it's certainly possible to "forget" a language without practice.

All in all, I love working in the industry of languages. I find it truly interesting to learn the language itself but also the culture of countries with these languages and how people express themselves differently using the boundaries of their language.