

American and European students agree: languages open our eyes to the world

How did you feel the first time you were able to understand someone speaking in another language? Wasn't it exciting? Five students around the world tell us about their vision of language learning.



Melissa, Janet and Carly, three American college students from Pennsylvania, deeply believe that “by knowing and studying multiple languages, you are able to better understand other cultures and traditions”.

All of them learned Spanish, one of the most common languages for people in the USA to learn. However, their level in Spanish is quite low. “I speak a little bit of Spanish, but not enough to have full-on conversations with Spanish-speaking people,” Melissa admits.

Foreign language learning is not widespread in the US. As we all know, English is considered to be a universal language which is spoken and understood all around the world. Thus, foreign language acquisition isn't a necessity for English-native speakers. “I know a few people that speak more than one language but most people I know only speak English,” Carly says.



However, if you have already lived or travelled in Europe, you have probably realized that the situation is quite different. First of all, in many European countries, language education starts from a very early age. “I started learning English when I was 7 and French when I was 10 years old,” explains Georges, a Greek student living in France.

Consequently, people are usually willing to speak to you in English and even in other languages too. “In France for example, you can easily find people who are able to speak to you in Spanish, Italian, German or even Chinese and Arabic,” according to Elise, a French student in Paris.

For the Americans, being plurilingual can be a real asset in the work place, even for English-native speakers. “Language learning can definitely give people an edge over those who only speak one language,” Melissa says. For Janet, who wants to become a journalist, to be able to understand another language is proving to be crucial: “If we can't communicate with someone because they don't speak English, a good story could go to waste”.

But both American and European students agree that languages are something more than a professional asset. “By knowing and studying multiple different languages, someone is able to better understand other cultures and traditions. The way that people speak offers a gateway into the history of those who have lived before them,” Melissa says. Elise expressed the exact same point of view: “languages aren't only a useful tool for everyday communication; they are key for you to discover and understand the world”.

Written by Maria-Zampia Baxevani and Cynthia Potisk