

# Linguistic Autobiographies

A COLLECTION PREVIEW  
CIRCE EU PROJECT  
2023-2025



Co-funded by  
the European Union



(1)

Io sono \*\*, sono nato a Poggibonsi, e ho sempre vissuto qui. Mio padre e mia madre sono entrambi toscani. E in casa mia non si parlano molto dialetti. Tuttavia alcuni miei zii sono napoletani, altri addirittura siciliani, per cui durante le cene di famiglie si sentono varie tipologie di accenti, anche se coi miei genitori si parla toscano (senese soprattutto). Conosco alcune lingue oltre all'italiano, come l'inglese, il latino e un pò [sic] lo spagnolo. Li ho ovviamente studiati a scuola anche se devo dire che italiano e inglese li parlo fluentemente, mentre latino e spagnolo no.

Anche se si parla toscano in casa mia, i miei non hanno mai vietato altri dialetti, per quanto ogni tanto qualche battuta (anche da me), viene fatta.

Io ho sempre saputo che esistevano altre lingue, tuttavia la prima volta che ho sentito altri accenti è stato alle elementari. Infatti c'erano alcuni miei compagni che erano senegalesi, albanesi, pugliesi...

A me piace molto il Veneto, lo trovo parecchio simpatico e molto divertente, non mi sta particolarmente simpatico invece il Calabrese, poiché lo trovo incomprensibile. Mi sento molto capace a riconoscere i vari dialetti (non capendo a volte cosa dicono) riesco a riconoscere dal dialetto se una persona è del nord, centro o sud.

(2)

Vivo a Castelfiorentino una cittadina a metà strada tra Firenze e Siena. Vivo quindi in Toscana con i miei nonni e la mia mamma. Loro non sono originari della Toscana. La mia nonna e la mia mamma sono nate in Puglia, il mio nonno invece è originario della Calabria. In casa non ho nessun problema a parlare la lingua toscana con la “c” aspirata. La mia mamma la usa. I miei nonni no invece ma non parlano molto i loro dialetti, o meglio con me non gli [sic] hanno mai parlati. Mi ricordo che da piccola mi dava molta noia quando la mia famiglia forzava la consonante “r”. Era un suono che mi innervosiva molto perché mi sembrava molto aggressivo. Ora invece no. Questo sicuramente perché sentivo mamma parlare “normale” ma i miei nonni no. Ho utilizzato la parola “normale” ma le lingue del mondo sono tutte normali. Derivano dal latino, sia i dialetti che la lingua italiana. Hanno una loro struttura, si possono scrivere, hanno loro accenti. Semplicemente quando arrivò il momento di formare il nostro stato Italiano i politici si sono trovati in difficoltà per i troppi dialetti.

Per definire lo Stato c'è bisogno di un prestigio linguistico e è. Stato scelto l'Italiano. Essa non è ritenuta sbagliata perché parlata dalla maggioranza. Esperienze di discriminazione non le ho vissute ma mia mamma sì. Mio nonno era un \*\* e si spostava con la famiglia molte volte. Mia mamma quando arrivò in Campania frequentava le medie. A Italiano aveva voti molto alti quando arrivò a Napoli la prof. Iniziò a non correggerle i temi e a metterle un altro voto. Ciò fa capire che la vera persona ignorante era la prof. e non mamma.

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Mi chiamo \*\* e sono nato il \*\* del 2008 a Firenze. Sono cresciuto a Certaldo ed è il luogo dove tuttora abito. Ho imparato a parlare la lingua Italiana e il dialetto Toscano. Mia mamma però è sempre stata attenta a l voler farmi parlare “l’Italiano corretto”, anche se spesso in casa dei miei nonni materni ho imparato molti modi di dire e parole in dialetto. Sin da piccolo mi è sempre piaciuto il dialetto Toscano, anche se sono sempre stato attento al parlare l’Italiano in luoghi più formali. Con il crescere, a scuola, ho imparato, e lo sto tutt’ora facendo, l’Inglese, una lingua che mi è sempre piaciuta.

Nelle ultime due estati mi è capitato di fare dei viaggi fuori dalla Toscana e fuori dall’Italia. Il primo viaggio è stato in Puglia e li ho visto per la prima volta come può essere simpatico e bello parlare dialetti differenti, ognuno con i propri modi di dire e le proprie parole caratteristiche. Il secondo viaggio è stato a Londra, dove ho confermato la mia idea sulla lingua Inglese, ovvero che è molto importante averne la padronanza, dato che è la lingua usata per la comunicazione internazionale.

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Language is the foundation of human communication and shapes personality. From birth, humans are exposed to different forms of language and sounds that influence their future language development. Like for nearly all people, language has been present in my life and has been shaped by personal experiences and social interaction. This linguistic autobiography will explore how it has shaped my identity, considering past experiences of my life. As I begin to construct my linguistic autobiography, it is necessary to cover some background information that shaped the overall experiences. At the time of writing this linguistic autobiography, I am currently 22 years old, female, and have just finished my Bachelor's degree in English and physical education in August 2023 at the University of Münster. To personally assess my level of English, I would say it is an advanced level.

Life experiences have a significant influence on the development of personality and language. I will therefore cover the basics of my life from childhood to today, that profoundly impacted my way of speaking. I was born and raised in Germany, where I lived together with my family – my parents, two sisters, and a brother in a small town near Bielefeld, Kreis Lippe. I started to visit a kindergarten near my home and moved on to primary school, which I also attended in Lemgo. After finishing primary school, I went directly to a secondary school, also in my hometown.

I remained at that school until the tenth grade, when I decided to go abroad. For three months I attended a school in Auckland, New Zealand, and after that returned to my secondary school in Lemgo and finished with the A-levels/Abitur. After graduation, I went to Australia for a year of work-and-traveling. In October 2020 I applied to Münster University to study English and physical education and therefore moved away from home. Until today, I live and study in Münster.

Growing up, my first language was German. In the context of acquisition, my family played a significant role. From birth on I was exposed to the German language, mainly hochdeutsche variety mixed with some words from the region “Lippe”. The German language plays a central role in our family household until today and serves as the primary means of communication among family members. We often communicate as a group of six during daily activities such as mealtimes, vacations, or family events. The German language is further used to connect with other family members, share stories, or express feelings, emotions, and beliefs. Especially when other parts of the family – who are also all of German heritage – come together and grandparents or other relatives come to visit, language is specifically necessary to keep the others up to date and to communicate casually.

An example dialogue at the dinner table might be “Wie war dein Tag Heut’?”, “War gut, besonders das Fußballspiel hat Spaß gemacht”, “Ah super, wie ist das Spiel den ausgegangen?“Wir haben 2:0 gegen die gewonnen”, when talking about the overall day or training (a very typical situation at our family). We also talk about plans and organizational aspects for the next day like “Wer ist Morgen Mittag zuhause und kann was zum Mittagessen kochen?”, “Ich bin zuhause und koche dann. Was soll ich denn machen?” “Du kannst aus dem Gefrierfach noch das Gemüse machen und im Kühlschrank sind noch Nudeln“.... „Und jemand anderes müsste dann noch die Nachmittagsrunde mit dem Hund gehen. Wer machts?“ “Ich kann nicht mit dem Hund gehen, ich muss heute noch mein Referat für die Schule vorbereiten”, “Okay, dann geh ich halt, hab aber auch eigentlich keine Lust”. This dialogue serves as an example conversation at the dinner table that is supposed to happen nearly every evening and includes very causal spoken language.

The language contact therefore shaped the use of vocabulary, basic sentence structures, sounds, and rhythm of today’s German. Additionally, I was also exposed to the German language through visiting a German kindergarten, primary school, and later high school. Especially when thinking back to my time in kindergarten and high school, I just remember having contact with teachers and educators from the same region speaking a similar German to my parents.

Also, regarding free time activities such as sports club or instrumental lessons, I only encountered German-speaking instructors from my hometown. German Regarding language pathologies, I did not experience any significant issues such as stuttering or lisping.

Other languages I speak despite German are English and French, but French just very poorly. The acquisition of my second languages occurred in a different context compared to my first language German. While my first language was primarily acquired within informal contexts such as family or everyday life, English and French were introduced to me through formal education. I started to learn English in my last year of elementary school when I was nine years old and continued having English lessons at secondary school until graduation. French was introduced in grade six and I stopped having it in school after grade nine. On my learning path, my language teachers played a significant role as they served as mentors and especially in lower classes also as role models. They provided me with opportunities for language practice and exposure.

In various social contexts, I find myself adapting my language use to suit a specific purpose or audience. This applies to both, my first and my second language. When communicating with friends or people I know well, I often apply a casual and mostly informal way of speaking. It enables a rapid change of information and helps to share personal details and emotions.

When I text them on Instagram or WhatsApp, the written informal language further includes the use of emojis, incomplete sentences, and general abbreviations. Also, grammar and punctuation might be used in an 'incorrect' way. In comparison to using rather informal language when communicating with friends, communication with authority figures and strangers focuses more on a formal style of speaking. When talking to professors from the university, my doctors, or other administrative people, I use language to articulate my thoughts precisely and clearly. I shift to using a polite tone and try to avoid incomplete sentences, abbreviations, and 'incorrect grammar'. This also applies when communicating via email.

The language I use differs in written and spoken forms in several ways in both, my native and my second language. In spoken communication, I tend to use a more casual and informal way of language. It contains several short forms and filling words such as 'ähm', or 'genau' which I would consider normal for everyday conversations. The spoken language allows spontaneous responses regarding the partner or setting and therefore enables the language to be very flexible regarding sentence structures.

The spoken language is additionally supported by body language and gestures. In contrast to spoken language, my written use of language tends to be more structured and planned (except short messages I write to my friends on WhatsApp).

The form of language has a higher focus on sentence structure and grammar. An additional aspect that does not matter in spoken, but only in written form, is the aspect of spelling. The more academic the situation, the more formal the language used gets.

Language may also incorporate the use of inappropriate vocabulary or expressions. In general, I would consider myself a speaker that does not use such expressions too often, but it depends on the context and people I am communicating with. I might use inappropriate expressions when I am with close friends to show personal, maybe also stronger opinions or emotions. These emotions may include excitement but especially anger or frustration. I find myself using “scheisse” or “shit” when I am not happy about something. Especially situations that I considered annoying I find my language use connected to such choice of words. When it comes to more professional settings such as work or academic environments, I would not use such language. As close friends primarily come from Germany, the inappropriate use in German is higher than in English.

Language use also differs among standardized and non-standardized varieties. Considering my first language – German, I would not consider myself a fully standardized user.

Even if my language mostly contains the ‘Hochdeutsche’ variety, my language also contains several forms and words from the region I was born in. Especially when spending time with my grandparents, there are some words used that are typical for the region Lippe. Such words may be “Puschen” referring to shoes be worn in the house, “Pölter” for pyjama, “Klotten” in reference to cleaning up one’s own stuff or “schlickern” for eating candy or something sweet. The language I use today was further shaped through friends from other regions in Germany, primarily Münster or friends from Munich. When communicating to people in Münster, I do not recognize much of a language difference, but when it comes to visiting my friends in Bavaria, I recognize different words used for different phenomena. Sometimes I cannot even categorize such words they use in their everyday life.

According to the English language, I also would not find myself as a standardized speaker. As far as I can think back, also the cultural content and overall topics within English classes covered mostly Britain, especially London and the USA until the Oberstufe. Therefore, at the beginning of learning English, I was majorly exposed to the British and American English variety due to my teachers and the materials they used at school. In grade 10 I lived in a host family in New Zealand and attended school there. Therefore, my English was enriched by New Zealand speakers.

These speakers included fellow students with partly Māori background and other students and teachers born and raised in New Zealand. After finishing high school, I encountered the Australian variety during my seven months abroad. In addition to talking to Australian English speakers, the language contact in hostels was international. People from South America, Europe and Asia came together and talked in English when cooking together in the hostel kitchen. This is from my point of view very typical for traveling. When traveling I often speak to non-native speakers that also influence the English I speak today. I think overall communication is way more important than speaking one standardized variety and I also would consider experiencing the world's Englishes as relevant and not negative. Throughout the past, I have not experienced any type of discrimination or specific comments regarding my languages.

Overall, language plays an important role in shaping identity and personality. My personality has been shaped by growing up in a German-speaking family near Bielefeld, through education and travelling. My first language is German, with influences from the Lippe region's dialect, while my second language is English, learned through school and enriched by experiences abroad in New Zealand and Australia. I adapt my language use to different contexts: I use casual and informal language with friends, including slang, abbreviations, and emojis, while opting for a more formal tone with authority figures or in academic settings.

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I grew up in a multilingual household, in which we predominantly speak German. As a child, I used to spend a lot of time with my Albanian grandmother, who does not speak German fluently. As a result, my language skills in German could not evolve as much as I had experienced with my mother, who came to Germany when she was 6 years old. Therefore, my mother decided to only speak German at home in order for me to be able to speak it fluently. Thus, other languages such as Albanian or Arabic were neglected in my learning process. We are only speaking albanian to refer to certain dishes that are known for albanian cuisine or whenever we are getting emotional. English, on the other hand, was a language that I still grew up with and had learned throughout my childhood. I used to play video games, watch movies and listen to music in English.

Especially due to my preference for Amercian Rap Music, I predominantly listen to Black Artists, which consequently means that my first contact with the English language was with AA(V)E, not to mention the colloquial language used in the songs. I had acquired that variety and spoke it in school. When I had attended the "Realschule", a less prestigous school form than grammar school in germany, it was highly appreciated and my English teacher gave me A+ grades. However, as soon as I attended grammer school, my grades in english declined, not only due to the change of required language skills, but also because of the utilization of AA(V)E in class.

My new teacher said that this variety is too informal and consists linguistic deficiencies, which then, as a result, would mean that I had to change my language variety for school in order to get better grades.

Even though I felt more comfortable using AA(V)E in my free time whenever I talked to my friends or played video games with foreign players all over the world, I had to use a more “formal” variety: GA. That was the moment when I had to code-switch between two varieties. However, I used to code-switch even before I had attended grammar school. Whenever I talk to my friends, it always has been less formal than talking to teachers, strangers or elderly people. I tend to think it is a matter of respect to talk to them in a more formal way than one would do it with their friends, especially when it comes to more serious situations in life such as job interviews.

I also have to use English in my job in order to talk to Dutch customers:

Employee: Hello, how can I help you?

Customer: Hello, I would like to buy three cartons of cigarettes, please.

E: Okay, which brand and which size do you exactly want to purchase?

C: I would like to buy Brand X, the biggest pack you have!

E: Sure, anything else?

C: No, thank you, that's it! E: Alright, that will be X Euros, please.

C: By card, please.

E: Sure, do you need the receipt?

C: No, it's fine, thank you!

E: You're Welcome, have a nice day!

(6)

Languages have always been interesting to me, especially considering how important they are in shaping people's perspectives of the world. I believe that languages can bridge different cultures and bring people closer. I grew up learning three languages, so my interest in them began at a very young age. My mother tongue is Arabic, but since I was born in Sarajevo after my parents moved here, they believed it was important for me to learn the language of the country I live in as well. I learned English because it is considered a global lingua franca and is used widely around the world. Despite growing up speaking three languages, I mostly use Arabic at home with my parents and family. Both of my parents' mother tongue is Arabic. As a child, I had many storybooks and DVDs in different languages, which exposed me even more. Preschool helped me develop both Bosnian and English, especially since a teacher would come twice a week to teach us English. After I enrolled in school, I continued improving those languages, as many of our classes were conducted in English. Throughout high school, I also started absorbing different slang expressions from classmates.

During my middle school and high school years, I studied two additional languages: Turkish and German. Turkish felt easier for me because it contains many loanwords from Arabic and its grammar is relatively simple. German, however, fascinated me for a different reason – I found its grammar particularly enjoyable to study.

I have always been interested in grammar because, without it, we wouldn't be able to structure our sentences or communicate clearly. Somewhere between middle school and high school, I developed an interest in French. Its melodic sound attracted me, so I tried learning it. Although I am not fluent, I understand a few things; despite English not belonging to the same language family, I can still recognize some French words because many of them were borrowed into English. During my junior and senior years of high school, I studied Latin and realized that I could recognize certain French patterns, especially in verb conjugation. After high school, I began learning Spanish and Italian as well, and I was surprised by how much I understood due to the similarities among Romance languages.

In daily life, I use Arabic, Bosnian, and English regularly. I never formally studied Arabic grammar or syntax; instead, I learned the language naturally through listening, watching cartoons, writing words, and speaking it at home. Because of this, it is normal for me to occasionally mix up words or vowel markings. Nevertheless, I am fluent in Arabic and can read, speak, and write like any other Arabic speaker. At school, I mostly used Bosnian with friends during breaktime, which helped me learn slang. When foreign classmates joined our class, I used English with them, which further improved my pronunciation and confidence.

Today, I am fluent in both Bosnian and English, and I sometimes code-switch – conjugating English verbs in Bosnian, inserting English words into Bosnian sentences, or switching languages if I cannot immediately recall a word. This changes in university settings, where I use English for presentations and academic discussions. Since I live in a country where Bosnian is the official language, I naturally use it in shops, cafés, and other public places.

As someone who has spent their entire life reading books in English, watching movies, listening to music, and using English daily, I can say that I have truly come to love the language. This passion is one of the reasons I chose to study English Language and Literature. Over the years, my English accent has improved significantly: I went from speaking shyly to speaking confidently with an almost native-like accent. My teachers encouraged me to participate in English competitions, and later my university professors supported me in joining conferences and writing research papers. All of these experiences strengthened my knowledge and appreciation of English. This does not mean I value Arabic or Bosnian any less – I value them all equally, as these three languages have shaped who I am, and I am grateful that I speak them all. English simply feels more diverse and accessible, and I am proud to be part of a global community that uses English as a lingua franca.

All in all, language is more than a means of communication –it is part of my identity. Learning new languages and expanding my knowledge of the ones I already speak has opened new horizons for me and allowed me to see the world from different perspectives. Language is a bridge between cultures and a powerful way of bringing people closer together.

(7)

I was born in 1994 in Yugoslavia, which later became Serbia and Montenegro and, finally, Montenegro. I come from a small town called Rozaje near the border with Serbia in what is colloquially known as the Sandzak region (the Bosniak population has a distinct culture in that region), and I could almost say that I speak the Sandzak language (a variety of the Bosnian language, which due to its peculiar accents and non-standard grammar use could be argued constitutes a separate language, at least based on how we understand language in this area of the Balkans).

This dialect of Bosnian is spoken by everyone in my family and town, and I've never spoken any other dialect of Bosnian. Depending on where a person comes from (different villages and cities), the dialect changes and, surprisingly, has a lot of variety (a person from Rozaje speaks very differently from a person from Novi Pazar). Additionally, from a very early age, I was exposed to German (through cartoons I used to watch with my late brother) and English (through video games, movies, and music), and I have used English fluently since the first or second year of highschool. I also studied French for 8 years (4 in primary and 4 in high school) but I cannot speak it now.

I've had mixed feelings about my dialect throughout the years. In school, we were told we were speaking improper and wrong language (mainly due to the fact we don't use all grammatical cases and that we accentuate words "wrongly"), which made me have an inferiority complex (which coupled with my speech flaw and skin tone made my primary school years a challenge). Despite being a very good student who always had something interesting to say, I felt my social status was lower than my peers from the capital or rest of the country. Thankfully, though, I wasn't in very many situations where I had to speak publicly, so it did not matter that much from that point of view, but the feeling of insecurity and inferiority persisted. In school, I would try to speak properly, but, at home, my dialect did not change that much. However, I gained the ability to "code-switch" – I could easily speak "grammatically correct" in formal situations and switch to the "improper language" with my friends and family. During my high school years, I had a rebellious spirit, and I chose to retain my accent even in formal settings. I would, however, use the cases correctly, and have been doing so since then. For instance, in the sentence "daj mi vode" ("give me water"), I accentuate the second syllable in "vode", not the first. On the other hand, I sometimes say "evo me u kuci" and sometimes "evo me u kucu" ("I am in the house"), depending on my mood and setting (if the interlocutor is not from my place or if it is a formal situation).

I also spent 4 years in Sarajevo, which, perhaps, made my dialect a bit less “rough” and more “sophisticated”, but I have never used a Bosnian accent during my studies in that city. In Sarajevo, I could easily speak “grammatically correct” with my classmates and the people living there, but I never really changed my accent (I never faced any discrimination because of my accent, people just found it either funny or attractive). Strangely enough, I viewed only my accent (not the whole dialect) as a source of pride, and I used it to establish an identity living in a foreign country. With my ability to code-switch, I faced no issues during my stay, and have only benefited from my accent, because it made me distinct, funny, attractive and unusual.

With regards to English, my second language, I’ve always wanted to speak “proper” English. I have tried not to make mistakes in the so-called standard variety of English, using my idiolect (some people say it sounds Spanish, some people say it sounds British, I like to think it sounds Nail-ish) and modeling my speech after the characters in British TV shows I used to watch. There was a time when I cared too much about my accent (I did not want to sound foreign), but I’ve stopped caring about that, and I just focus on speaking “grammatically correct”, especially because I teach standard English.

On a different note, I sometimes suffer from an impostor syndrome – I teach a language that I do not speak perfectly (from time to time I make a grammar mistake or lack vocabulary to express myself), but I suppose that's the nature of non-native English teachers. I always try to improve my language use and brush up my grammar understanding of English. I also think that it is important to be immersed in the language, and that is why I consume content almost exclusively in English. Additionally, because I sometimes stutter, I have to pay attention to my breathing and need to carefully select the words I know I can pronounce easily in a particular moment. I often struggle with pronouncing words that begin with plosive sounds (both voiced and voiceless), and if I cannot pronounce a word with ease I try to think of a synonym or rephrase the sentence to save myself the embarrassment of stuttering, which, in a second language, is not always an easy task. However, on the whole, I feel positive about my English use.

To conclude, I feel great about speaking both my local dialect and my idiolect of English. The first is a source of pride and an identity marker for me which I do not intend to get rid of and the latter is an incredible resource that has opened many doors in both my private and professional lives.

(8)

I was born in Sarajevo to two parents of Bosnian origin, so my native language is Bosnian. The first foreign language I started to learn was English in primary school, precisely in the second grade, when I was 8 years old. I think that I spoke it with the same development as any younger child. I indeed loved learning this language, and that continued in high school, where my level of English increased. I was spending a lot of time analyzing and translating texts and poems in English since I attended the language department in high school. In general, I have never encountered any difficulties in studying English, neither in speaking nor writing it. At that point in my life, everything around me was in English: music, movies, talk shows, videos, all (for me) meaningful literature, all vital information and expanded knowledge was sourced in English; the English language surrounded me. I got used to it and accepted it as it should be just that way.

The second language I was introduced to is German. I chose to learn German during the fifth grade in elementary school when we had to choose our second foreign language. This language allowed me to travel abroad for the first time in my life, where I went to Germany when I was 14 and stayed in Köln during the summer. It was an unforgettable trip that allowed me to improve my level of communication, but only for that phase of my life; I continued to learn this language until I graduated from high school.

However, my level of German in high school somehow decreased, I was pretty lost, and I found it more and more difficult even to construct a sentence in German. Maybe the reason is that the classes were usually very formal, practicing mostly from a textbook, and my willingness became less and less, so finally, I ended up knowing a lot of German in the way of grammar and verbs, but unable to speak very well.

The third language I love to speak is French. I chose to learn this language as L3 when I had to choose an option as a third foreign language in high school. Flashing back to the primary school period, I still regretted not having chosen French as L2 because I found at the time that everyone had chosen German by default since the students had prejudices about French; its complicated etymology, orthography, orthoepy... but I overcame that problem quite easily by practicing through dictations, endless writing, listening, repeating, and repronouncing of words. Honestly, I wish I had chosen to go beyond these prejudices in the past. However, maybe that brought some good consequences because, in the third grade of high school, I was able to study French with a certain maturity and in a small group with a teacher very passionate about teaching this language. Also, a few of us were participants in student exchange, so I spent one year in Clermont-Ferrand with a lovely foster family. I have been working with the active use of the French language for years 6 now, so I can say that at this particular moment, I am proficient.

My high school period allowed me to discover another language - Italian. I only studied it for a year through courses, but it is a language that I actually enjoyed learning. My primary goal was to capacitate with knowledge of at least reading, writing, pronunciation, and especially of Italian culture, but I got an opportunity to upgrade my Italian and learn it through six-month courses at Università per Stranieri "Dante Alighieri" - the University for Foreigners. So, after finishing high school, I spent two years in Reggio Calabria in Italy. The grammar is very, very similar - almost the same as in French, so basically, the major problem with Italian for me was proper accentuation (which is absolutely different compared with French), but it became much more familiar and adoptable after I moved and spent time in Italy.

Back then, I was also interested in the Latin language and Roman literature and culture. Unusable language nowadays - true, but also inevitable in learning romance languages since it represents their basis. I think that it is wrong to declare that one can "speak" Latin, so I would say that I can understand and use it within the limits of today's world. I can also communicate with a few simpler sentences in Spanish, but very little. I can understand a bit when it is spoken, but I can only produce a few conversational sentences - totally limited. The more up-to-date I stay with some language, the more my ability to speak it remains.

(9)

Hello, I am \*\*, but for legal and academic reasons my name is \*\* \*\*. I was born and raised in Ecuador, to be specific I was born in Ambato when my mother was visiting her family and lived in the capital, Quito, until I was 9 years old and my parents divorced; from that point onward we, my mother, sister and I, started living in Ambato with my mother's parents. My family, both parents' sides, are no stranger to migration, my grandmother (Father's side) was born in Chile and was forced to move to Ecuador when she was little and after having three kids with her husband, they all went to live in Mexico for a long time before having to come back and settle down. My grandmother (Mother's side) was born in Manabí, a region in the coast of Ecuador, but after many tragedies she ended up in Ambato, where she met my grandfather, married and had a family. I could go on and on about these stories, my mother left her hometown to go study in the capital with her sister, her brother went to Italy for his master's degree, a cousin from my father's side came to study in Portugal as well, etc. the point is that my family has never had deep roots in any place, life has taken us to all kinds of places and gave us opportunities to meet all kinds of people. Now, while my family has been from place to place, one thing that has been consistent is the language.

Let's ignore the last generation that moved to Europe for a moment and take a look at the most spoken language of the countries I mentioned: Chile, Mexico and Ecuador all have a majority of Spanish speaking population, this might make some people believe that communication and understanding was easy for everybody, but the truth is that while the base language is the same, the dialects can be wildly different to the point of almost making it impossible to understand some people. There is a joke within the Latin-American community that Chilean people speak a secret language, and while not true, the dialect spoken in Chile sounds almost alien even to native Spanish speaking people. In Mexico while the accent is not a problem for understanding, the meaning attributed to words differ from other parts of the same continent. Ecuador is not safe from this problem either, my country is pluricultural, meaning that there are myriads of different native cultures with different cultures, customs and even languages that seep into the everyday Spanish. In Ecuador it is almost expected to hear people use words from Quíchua while speaking, terms like Taita (Father), Gũambra (Yong person), Atatai (Disgusting) are common in the speech of the vast majority of the population, and it is something that unites us as a nation even as generations come and go. This might make somebody think that Ecuadorian people are at least bilingual, being able to speak Spanish and Quíchua, but in truth less than 50% of the population knows Quíchua outside of the few common words and expressions that live in the collective culture's mind.

Now this is a perfect time to put myself in the story, skipping over Spanish and very little Quíchua as those can be considered mother tongues, the first language I was exposed to was, as is for most Spanish speaking kids, English. I was very lucky to have very good teachers in my school because that set me up for success in language learning, the bases that I learnt were enough to put me well ahead of my peers in other schools I went to and even in high school the advantage I had could be felt. While the Ecuadorian education system promises to kids that they will achieve a B2 level in English by the end of high school, the reality is that many kids that don't study in high level schools stay far from that level, so I am grateful for the amazing teachers I had in my first years. Still, learning in school will only take you so far and practicing conversations with English speaking people was out of the question, so I had a very long period where my understanding of grammar and vocabulary was good, but my pronunciation and listening were falling behind. This problem haunted me and I was unable to solve it because of my circumstances, but weirdly enough it just disappeared one day; I can remember the day I clicked on an English YouTube video and the words did not sound unintelligible, I was weirded out for a moment, but from that point forward, I could consume media in English and understand it as well as media in Spanish.

Now, while obviously being a huge improvement, my new found ability to understand English speech without problems came with some problems as well, mainly the fact that my vocabulary and speech patterns were coming from every English variation with no regulation whatsoever; British, Southern, Aussie, Canadian and many more variations did not, and some still do not, have any distinction in my mind, meaning that my speech was riddled with almost every accent under the sun and a slang combination that could be a language of its own.

Over time I have refined my mental dictionary and accent, but when I have casual conversations with friends, all the lines get blurred again and it worsens the more excited I get. I feel like languages are amazing and one of the greatest feelings is to be able to talk to somebody in their own native tongue, and while I haven't had many chances to do that with English, it still allows me to connect with a great number of people. Sometimes I miss hearing the Quícha diluted in everyday conversations, now it has been replaced by hearing English or internet slang in the speech of my Portuguese friends and colleagues, but I am not complaining, I love mixing and matching different languages to be able to talk more precisely about anything.

(10)

My name is \*\* \*\*, I am 29 years old, and I was born in Almada, Portugal. From what I know about my family history, my mother's side comes from a village in the north of Portugal that I never heard much about, while on my father's side, I know a little more. My great-grandfather, Fernando, who was the son of a renowned noble but abandoned by him, decided to build his own legacy. Out of pride, years later, he ignored the man who had rejected him and dedicated himself to fixing metal musical instruments, a craft that lasted for three generations in my family. As far as I was told, my family has always lived in Portugal, though the knowledge I have only goes back around four generations and only on my father's side. Even then, the information is very limited. My family has always been terrified of change and risks. Words like "don't try," "stay near the family," "you don't know what's out there," and "what if something happens to you" are repeated often. They only ever considered moving if the whole family went together. That being said, in 2022, the entire family moved to Tomar. This decision was inspired years earlier, after my sister's wedding in 2019, when they found the city "pretty and calm" and decided to make it their home.

2) Both my mother and my father were born in Portugal, and their mother tongue is Portuguese. The same is true for my grandparents; everyone around me only ever spoke Portuguese family-wise, that is. If there were any dialects or regional differences, I never really noticed them; to me, it all sounded the same. At home is where the complications started for me. Even though Portuguese was the language spoken around the table or with relatives, I always felt more at ease with English, despite it not being my mother tongue. Since I was a child, I consumed everything in English, from cartoons to movies, series, games, and even books. Many of the games I played required me to talk to people in English so we could work together and win, which pushed me to learn and use the language actively. Because of all this, my vocabulary in English grew much wider and faster than in Portuguese. Most of the time, my family didn't talk much or spend a lot of time in conversation, so I absorbed far more from entertainment than from the people around me. When it comes to mixing languages, I'm the one who does it the most in my family. Often when I'm speaking Portuguese, I suddenly forget a word, or it doesn't come to mind, so I naturally drop in the English word instead. One of the most important memories I have about language is from when I was very small. I used to run into my sister's room, bothering her while she was busy, pulling her away just so she could help me understand the cartoons I was watching. She would explain what was being said, and thanks to her, I began to connect the words and meanings.

That memory stays with me as the first time I really felt the bridge between Portuguese and English being built.

3) Despite everything, my mother tongue is still Portuguese for better or worse, even if I'm not very good at it, haha. The other language I use is English, which I learned from many different sources, but especially from entertainment. Movies, series, games, and casual conversations with people online or even with clients and friends helped me build my English. Over the years, I also tried to learn other languages like Norwegian and French, but the flame didn't last as long as I wanted, and my lack of discipline was my undoing. More recently, for the last four months, I've been lightly exploring Finnish, just scratching the surface with Duolingo and series. It has been exciting, to say the least. Daily, I really just use Portuguese and English. Where and with whom I use them depends on the situation; switching between languages is something that happens often, especially when I have neighbors whom I only need to speak in English to communicate. As for a personal language ritual, mine is simple: I always go with the first greeting that pops into my head, no matter the language.

4) My parents and grandparents don't really have strong opinions about language. They speak Portuguese and don't care much for any other language. When I was younger, this sometimes caused problems at home because I couldn't always make myself understood.

My sister often became the translator between me and the rest of the family, explaining what I was trying to say and vice versa, which was funny in its own way. As for hidden practices, unfortunately, there are none in my family. The closest thing we have to a family joke about language is that when we want to say something is cool, we say “fish” in Portuguese, and when it comes to dialects, my family doesn’t really see them as valuable or incorrect, they just don’t have any opinions about them at all.

5) The first time I noticed people speaking differently was when I talked to many Portuguese people and realized they spoke in a way that felt strange to me. Not like me or my sister, often they seemed to struggle with words, which I found really interesting. As for being judged by the way I speak, I can’t say I ever felt judged negatively. Quite the opposite, many foreigners have told me I speak really well, and that always made me feel good about myself. Moving to new places definitely changed the way I think about language. I went to Dublin, Ireland, twice, and it was a fascinating experience where I learned a lot just by being there and talking with people. One of the moments I felt proud and included because of language also happened in Dublin. I was able to communicate with people without any issues, and that gave me a real sense of confidence and belonging.

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(11)

Hello, my name is \*\* \*\*, I am 18 years old and I'm from Viseu, a city in Portugal. My family is also from the district of Viseu, although my mother was born in Nazaré because my grandparents were working there at the time of her birth. As far as migration is concerned, my family always stayed close to home, except for my father's mother. She migrated to Germany in her youth to pursue a job because the working conditions in Portugal were not that good at the time. As far as I know, she was the only one to leave Portugal for more than a vacation. My parents both speak Portuguese and, as you know, my mother was not born in Viseu, but my father was. We speak Portuguese at home, as it is the language we most use daily, and also because my dad doesn't understand English. In my family, the only person that we really need to use another language is the husband of my girlfriend's sister, because he is American. I do have some funny memories related to language. One time, my grandpa was invited to work at the Marché Noël in Strasbourg, a city in the border of France and Germany. The thing is, he doesn't speak a lick of French or English even. So, he went around during the whole month the market was open speaking in gestures or in "PortuFrench", while his French employees just guessed what he meant by those grunts and hand waves.

As far as my own use of language, I usually speak Portuguese in my daily life. It's far easier to speak with friends, family and even strangers because then they will always understand what I am saying without needing to translate everything. Also, it's more convenient for me because it's my main language, after all. The only time I use another language, such as English, is online. It's really nice having a common language to speak to almost anybody, even if they are not from an English-speaking country. The first time I noticed dialects was when I went to the Azores islands with my family. Before the trip, I already had heard that the people there did speak with a strong accent, making Portuguese almost impossible to understand when it is spoken by them. When we arrived, it was almost instantly proven by the driver that took us from the airport to our hotel. Funny thing is, his accent wasn't even the most prominent we heard, that title goes to a shepherd that crossed path with us on the road. He was asking my parents if we wanted to see his cows and maybe let us milk them, but my father didn't understand a bit of what he said. After maybe 10 minutes of him repeating the same phrase, he just took us there and showed us the cows, then calling me and my brother to milk them, making gestures the only language understood in that conversation.

Starting studies in Leiria made me understand that I actually have an accent, not as prominent as others, but present. Contact with people from the north, south, even the islands made me understand that even speaking the same language, we don't speak all the same way. In my early school years, I learnt some basics of English, making it the first contact I had with a language that was not Portuguese. It was a great feeling, starting to understand movies, videogames, even messages, and since then I consume most of my online content in English, without even needing subtitles because I became so used to listening/speaking the language. Since then, languages have become a thing that I enjoy understanding. Knowing the basics of every language near our home country, just simple things like "Hello", "Thank you", "Good day", are essential to have when we are in public spaces abroad. Outside of school, I have dabbled in Finnish, German and Spanish. These are just some languages I thought were interesting, without any real reason. I just know some basics, greetings and questions. So, this was my linguistic autobiography, thank you for reading!



Co-funded by  
the European Union

THIS PROJECT HAS RECEIVED FUNDING FROM THE EUROPEAN UNION ERASMUS+ PROGRAMME UNDER GRANT AGREEMENT N. 2022-1-IT02-KA220-SCH-000087602. VIEWS AND OPINIONS EXPRESSED ARE HOWEVER THOSE OF THE AUTHORS ONLY AND DO NOT NECESSARILY REFLECT THOSE OF THE EUROPEAN UNION OR THE EUROPEAN EDUCATION AND CULTURE EXECUTIVE AGENCY (EACEA). NEITHER THE EUROPEAN UNION NOR EACEA CAN BE HELD RESPONSIBLE FOR THEM. FURTHER INFORMATION IS AVAILABLE AT [HTTPS://WWW.CIRCE-PROJECT.EU/](https://www.circe-project.eu/).