

## Language Learning is an Adventure

A couple of years ago I was traveling around Spain with three of my best friends in a summer program. One day after touring Barcelona, I forgot the time I was supposed to meet up with my friends. I missed the bus and wasn't able to get in touch with my friends because my phone's battery had run out. I found myself all alone, trying my best to use every single Spanish word I knew to borrow a phone in the streets of Barcelona. I was so exhausted at the end of the day, but the experience showed me how far I could push myself out of my comfort zone.

I was fortunate enough to have attended a high school in China that offers Spanish classes as one of the elective classes. It was a valuable opportunity for students like me who wanted to improve their language skills. Besides, being a huge fan of FC Barcelona, I had always wanted to learn Spanish, so I enrolled in the elective class immediately.

For nearly three years, I put a lot of effort in studying the grammar in my Spanish class, hoping to get my Spanish Diploma level B1, an internationally recognized European language certification exam for young learners. I would summarize the crucial grammars point after every class and compare the different conjugations to see through their differences and similarities. I would also visit professors during office hours to learn topics beyond the textbook. However, when I took the Spanish Diploma level B1 test, I failed because of my low grade in listening and speaking tests. During the speaking test, the interviewers spoke so fast that I couldn't

understand all the questions. Even when I was able to answer the questions, I spoke nervously and hesitantly.

In order to prepare myself better for the exam, I tried to turn to a Spanish tutor to get more practice. However, it was hard and costly to find a Spanish tutor in China. When I sought support from my parents, they refused because they did not want me to spend too much time on an elective class. It seemed that there was nothing I could do for the test and I felt very depressed and helpless at that time.

To my surprise, one day my Spanish teacher announced that there would be a scholarship offering a free travel opportunity to Spain. I literally jumped for joy upon hearing the good news. After I learned that applying for the scholarship required a video about a Spanish city, Cuenca, I gathered three of my friends in my Spanish class and started working on the video immediately. We were thrilled about taking on the project and the opportunity to travel around Spain.

My friends and I decided to show the cultural similarity between Spanish and Chinese culture to make the video stand out. Having brainstormed together, we chose football and ceramics, two elements that can be found in both Chinese and Spanish culture. In the video, while playing football, we introduced the origin of football in ancient China and talked about the national enthusiasm towards football in Spain. Also, we also showed the making of ceramics together in the video and pointed out that the ceramic production was both crucial for the development of Spanish and China in history. After we submitted the video, we were on the edge of our seat and checked our emails every day. Three months after, we were finally informed we were

awarded the scholarship. We were so happy to know that our hard work and unremitting efforts were not in vain.

In summer 2015, the exciting trip to Spain finally took place. Having to use Spanish on a daily basis was an entirely new experience for me. In Cuenca, I stayed with a host family, which meant I had to use Spanish to tell the family what I wanted to eat for dinner and where I wanted to go on the weekends. It was not easy at first, and I had to learn a lot of new vocabulary words and expressions which helped me express my thoughts more clearly. In Barcelona, while appreciating the beauty of Spanish culture in the Prado National Museum, I used my cell phone to snap a few pictures, which resulted in it being confiscated. I had to apologize to the museum staff and luckily was able to get my phone back. These successful experiences in Spain made me become more confident about my Spanish skills as it was clear that my oral and listening skills were improving dramatically.

The unforgettable experience in Spain made me understand the best way to learn a new language is to keep oneself out of the comfort zone. Focusing only on grammar is not the best way to master a language. Although grammar is the critical foundation of any language, our ability to communicate and think clearly is even more crucial. Three months after I returned to China from Spain, I took the B1 test again and successfully passed it. Listening and speaking Spanish was no longer a challenge for me. I believe that if we have a positive attitude, a willingness to work hard, and

the courage to put ourselves in the environment that pushes us to use the language,  
mastering a new language can be within everybody's reach.

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