

November 2025

LANGUAGE LEARNING JOURNEYS

Меня зовут Дилан. Мне 31 год. 13 лет назад я решил изучать русский язык. Я ни о чем не жалею !

(My name is Dylan. I am 31 years old. 13 years ago, I decided to study Russian. I have no regrets!)

Like many typical secondary-school students, my journey began in first year when I chose to do French for my Junior Cert. It set the foundations for enjoying foreign languages in the classroom and on holidays. Fast forward a few years and through sheer coincidence, I first encountered Russian through a TG4 documentary called *Radharc na Rúise*. At the time, I was revising for the dreaded aural component of Leaving Cert Irish Exam. **I was captivated by several Russophones speaking Irish and it dawned on me, if they could communicate as gaeilge so well, what was stopping me from doing the same with Russian?** Encouraged by my sixth-year French teacher, Ms. Hogan of Saint Benildus College, I decided to pursue not only French but Russian too at third level. *Большое спасибо* to her too to reassure my parents I wasn't mad for doing so.

Russian felt intimidating to me as a complete beginner. Its Cyrillic alphabet has 33 distinct letters, some of which look like Latin, others like Greek. For my 18-year-old self, it was a code that I was determined to crack. Just like a junior infant with their ABCs, I sounded out and traced each letter and muddled through until eventually it made sense. That achievement was only the tip of the iceberg, but also a small victory that motivated me keep going. After that I was hooked!

Everyone's language journey is different and presents its own obstacles. One that used to plague me, was shyness in unfamiliar social situations (even in English this still makes me feel a bit awkward and self-conscious at times). So, interacting with native speakers can be a real challenge for me. Inevitably you get tongue tied or misuse words. However, through trial and error, and years of experience, I've come embrace my mistakes and even treasure some of the clangers I've come out with. You may feel a bit exposed at first, gambling on uncertain words and improvising phrases, but usually your efforts are appreciated. **The more you venture beyond your comfort zone, the more opportunities you have to progress.** The worst that ever happened to me was a botched haircut in Moscow, from jumbled up instructions. Thankfully no photographic evidence survives...

Languages can also find a way into your routine. I try use each as often as possible. With French I am fortunate enough to converse with partner or my manager on a daily basis. Russian, however, requires a bit more creativity. I'm no saint or scholar and am guilty of spending too much time on my phone, aimlessly scrolling. Eventually I realised, I could turn this bad habit into something productive. My social media feeds are now jammed with Russian-speaking content creators of all walks of life and nationalities. It's a simple switch that goes a long way. On the flipside, languages are a great excuse to put my phone away and engage in something mindful. I keep a dictionary on my bedside locker, and just before bed, I'll often have a browse in the hope of finding new words or consolidating old ones.

My advice for those considering a foreign language for the first time would be: **start small but think big. Languages are not mastered in a day.** Begin with something you can relate to or find enjoyable. I'm really interested in folk music and love discovering songs from other countries.



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Admittedly I am more the type who sings in the car or in the shower, but nevertheless it works for me to expand my vocabulary, train my ear and hopefully fine tune my accent and pronunciation.

My own language journey is not at an end. Recently, I enrolled in an advanced Russian course in an effort to polish up on some rusty grammar. I approach with more focus and discipline than that Leaving Cert student who impulsively placed it on top of his CAO form in Spring 2013. Where would I be now without his curiosity?

Kató Lomb, a pioneering Hungarian interpreter and polyglot once said : *A nyelv az egyetlen, amit rosszul is érdemes tudni* which translates to *Language is the only thing worth knowing even poorly*. I take continual inspiration from these sage words. We all have different aptitudes and reasons for using foreign languages, and regardless of our fluency a little bit can go a long way.