

Finding Fluency: Katie Clancy

I grew up surrounded by Japanese media without realizing it because everything was either translated or dubbed into English. Today, Japanese media especially anime, manga and video games are beloved worldwide and Japan has become a major tourist hotspot. This has led to a lot of people becoming interested in learning Japanese, me included.

I originally started studying Japanese by myself at 14 years old and thus, began my relationship with the Japanese language. Self studying a foreign language in rural Ireland, especially a language with three alphabets (one of which has thousands of Chinese characters) at the age of 14 unsurprisingly proved difficult. Because of this, I studied on and off over the years and then eventually decided to study Japanese in a more traditional sense at university. At university I did an internship in Tokyo for six months and then after graduating moved to Japan permanently.

I have had many struggles over the years with Japanese. I think something that is a bit unique to Japanese learners is there can be a lot of elitism and competition in the community. There are some people who love to show off how knowledgeable they are about the Japanese language and culture to put others down. I have felt inferior at times, however, I think it is important for not just Japanese learners, but any language learners to remember that language learning is not a race or a competition. We all have different mother tongues, different opportunities and experiences that can influence the language learning process. That is to say, everyone gets discouraged and frustrated at times and that is okay! Taking breaks, indulging in what got you into the language in the first place and remembering how far you have come are some things I do to get over these feelings of frustration. I have also met so many people with much better Japanese than me who have inspired me so much and motivated me to keep pushing myself to improve.

I think my 14-year-old self would be proud of me for becoming fluent in Japanese, and to be honest she is the only person I have ever felt compelled to make proud. At that age, my biggest desire was to watch anime without subtitles and read manga in Japanese, and having achieved that really felt like a monumental moment in my language learning journey. I think if you do not have some sort of personal goal with language learning it can get daunting. A lot of people wish to become fluent, but fluent is a very subjective term. Your definition of what constitutes as fluent may vary from mine. Therefore, instead of having a vague goal like becoming fluent, it is better to have achievable goals for the language you want to learn and go from there.

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