

NTPU FLAL | SPRING 2025

TRAVERSE

A Journey through Languages, A Passage through Worlds



→CROSSING BORDERS OF
LANGUAGE, CULTURE, AND SELF

ECHOES ACROSS LANGUAGES

*To traverse is not merely to pass through
space, but to journey across borders
—of language, of culture, of the self.*

In this Spring 2025 Feature Project by the Department of Foreign Languages and Applied Linguistics (FLAL), we invite you to walk alongside students who have chosen to traverse the landscapes of Japanese, French, Russian, Korean, Spanish, and German. For each of them, these languages are not just academic pursuits, but living pathways—into new stories, new perspectives, and sometimes, entirely new versions of themselves.

To learn a language is to traverse the unfamiliar with curiosity as compass. It is to bridge the gap between classroom and lived experience—to connect what we read in textbooks with what we hear in a local bakery, a foreign classroom, or even a favorite song. Within these pages, you'll encounter stories of students who have wandered far without leaving home, and others who've crossed literal borders to find meaning in another tongue. Each journey is different, but they all share this: the courage to step beyond what is comfortable, and the joy of discovering new worlds—both out there, and within.

This is not merely a collection of language learning stories.
It is a chronicle of crossings.

A map of how interests become passions.

How struggles become growth.

And how language becomes a lens to see, to feel, to belong.

So come with us.

Read slowly.

And traverse.

Editor Zoey Jing



Connecting the Dots from Japanese Animations and J-pop Music



By Alina Huang



Learning Japanese is like trying to break through the cultural barriers, with the assistance of language, I get to understand the ethnic background and their life trajectory," said Miffy Wang, a junior at FLAL who has been taking Japanese courses for two years.

Struggling to improve her Japanese skills, Miffy began to notice that there was no longer a need for her to rely on translations at one time when watching videos in Japanese.

"I didn't put much effort into memorizing vocabularies," she said. "I've heard most of them in the past few years while watching animations or listening to J-POP songs, so it feels like the dots start to connect when I see them in person."

"It was a remote offshore island, and speaking Japanese was the only way to communicate with residents there," said Miffy, who on August 31st, 2023, visited さどがしま (Sado island) in Niigata with her family, twenty miles away from Honshu, the main island of Japan.



Miffy said that her competence in Japanese came in useful during their time staying at たびのホテル (Tabino hotel) and participating in tourism activities. "I happened to be the only one who was able to speak Japanese among the tour group," she recalled. "Therefore, I helped other people making purchases, asking for available payment methods whenever our tour guide wasn't there to help."

Admiring the scenery around the harbor in たらい舟 (Tarai boat) is one of the traditional activities for tourists. Miffy said the boatwoman seized every opportunity to portray the historical background and the architectural designs of that island through Japanese while rowing the boat.

"It's been a while since last time they met someone who speaks Japanese," she said. "Having the capacity to communicate in Japanese allowed me to gain a deeper understanding of this place from the perspectives of their citizens."

Learning Japanese is like trying to Based on her passion for baking, Solo Huang, a junior at FLAL, chose to take the electives of both Japanese and French as her second and third foreign languages. In contrast, she said, she now has other access to dessert recipes, many of which are written in Japanese.



"When running out of ideas, I get used to typing in keywords through Japanese on platforms like Instagram, YouTube, and Pinterest," said Solo. These sources, from which she observed how others combine their ingredients together, gave her the inspirations for making desserts.

"I got into the habit of doing so after having a matcha cake, whose flavor I had never tasted before, while traveling to Japan," she said.

On March 24th, 2024, Solo nibbled at a matcha gâteau chocolate in ハトリョウウシャ (Hatoya ryoyousha), a store located in Asakusa, Tokyo. It takes five minutes to walk to the Asakusa Temple from there. "Once I finished the last bite of the cake," she said, "I decided to look for its ingredients on their website."

In accordance with the recipe posted on the internet and the tutorial video she found on YouTube, both of which are only available in Japanese, Solo recreated the dessert on her own. "I wouldn't be able to make it without learning Japanese," she added.

Three days before Solo went to the matcha store, she stopped by a bakery, named オリーブの木 (Olive Tree), after visiting 東京スカイツリー (Tokyo Skytree). She said that curiosity prompted her to get inside and have a look around.



Captivated by the interior design and their homemade desserts, Solo got to know the background information of how they kept the business running through communicating in Japanese. "The owner told me that she made these pastries all by herself, including the cookies and scones," she said.

"In the conversation, I strived to put the words together to express myself, and she adjusted her speaking rate for me," Solo said. "I started to pick up the skills of speaking Japanese as I interacted with her," she added.

Jason Zhao, a junior at FLAL who attended the optional Japanese course due to his familiarity with the culture of this country, said that after developing his proficiency in Japanese, he became capable of figuring out the meanings behind the lyrics of songs as well as the lines in the animations.

In 2024, a series of manga known as じゅじゅつかいせん (Jujutsu Kaisen), whose cumulative sales exceeded one hundred million copies, captured his attention. "I was binge-watching the season one of that anime, during which I kept the subtitles on," said Jason. "Then it appeared to me that, without staring at the lines, I managed to understand the content through hearing."

"At those moments, when I got the punchline of the internet memes posted in Japanese, resonating with the context of music at first hand, I noticed that my dedication paid off," he added.

"To me, searching for the relations between what I learned in class and the reality has become a habit," said Paul Yeh, a junior, whose aspiration to settle down in Japan within five years motivated him to pick Japanese as one of his elective courses at FLAL.

"It was on a Friday afternoon in November 2024, the teacher provided a new list of Japanese vocabulary to learn, and I found myself recognizing some of them at once, including the word すわる (sit) and the articulation of several kanji," he said. "Then I thought of the dialogues I've heard from the animation, しんげきのきょじん (Attack on Titan), and the Japanese shop signs on the street, whose pronunciations I tended to rehearse in my mind out of intuition."



Paul said that, throughout the learning process, these ways of practice strengthened his comprehension of the phonetic system in Japanese. "In addition to the time I spent engaging in the course, it appears that I am making improvements day by day as well," he added.

Emma Liu, a senior at FLAL, said that she selected Japanese because her uncle suggested her to. "He told me that, two years later, after entering the workforce as a new graduate, I will understand the strength of learning Japanese."

"Though it didn't work out for me at first, unlike those who take this course depending on their interests," said Emma. "Comparing with my mother tongue, カタカナ (Katakana) and ひらがな (Hiragana) in Japanese are like Bopomofo in Taiwanese Mandarin, both of which, serving as phonetic symbols, cause difficulty in reading."

On a Wednesday in March 2025, when preparing for the Japanese weekly test with her classmate, Emma found her way out of coping with this unfamiliarity. "As I chewed on the definition of one vocabulary, it reminded me of a character, whose name is the same as the word しずか (quiet), in a cartoon from my childhood, Doraemon," she said.

"It seems like I underestimated the connection between me and this language," she added.

Learning French for the Dream Career as Pâtisserie Chef



By Angelina Yan



"If it were not for my love for desserts, I would never have learned French," said Solo Huang, a junior student at FLAL.

"Culinary institutes of desserts in Taiwan are few," said Solo. "I was thinking about learning to make authentic desserts in countries like Japan and France. In fact, the making of Japanese desserts was derived from France, so I decided to study in France."



Polan Lan, Solo's classmate, shared the dream of studying in France, now learning French basics. He planned to study not for desserts, but for a master's degree in business at Rennes Business School.

"Enthusiasm for a language will help you persevere in learning," said Solo. "But mine is more intense. I am not learning French just for passion. I am learning to realize my dream." Having deep affection for desserts, Solo was determined to pursue her career in pastry.

Wendy Liao, Solo's classmate, agreed with Solo's perspective that passion does play a significant role for learning a language. Wendy learned French and Korean at the same time. Having always been interested in Korean, she kept on learning Korean instead of French.

"I think I am the kind of person who needs passion to keep going," Wendy added. "If I lose interest, I will have no motivation to learn and give up at last."

"I was interested in French and found it intriguing," said YuTing Chang, a sophomore majoring in law. She took Legal French in her freshman year. "But I was tired of memorizing vocabularies. I quit learning French for years until I took legal French and picked it up again."

Solo's passion never vanishes. With a Certificate in Level C Technician for Baking Food, Solo identified herself as not only a French learner but also a pastry chef. Every Sunday and Monday, Solo made different pastries, from dacquoise, mousse tart, saint-honoré to macaron.

Talking about the enchantment of the French language, Solo thought it should be pâtisserie, whereas Wendy held an idea different from Solo's. Wendy thought it to be the accuracy of mouth shape.

"Many pronunciations will become completely different if your mouth shape is slightly changed," replied Wendy. "The process of putting your lips in the right position is important when speaking."

Professor Aline Cheng has considerable expertise in French and lived in Paris for 13 years. In the French course at FLAL, she mentioned that the mouth shape of "eau" in beau is smaller and rounder than "ô" in côte and taught students to reach the most accurate mouth shape.

Solo studies French almost every second, trying to immerse herself in French. For instance, her phone interface and recipes are in French. In addition to the French course at FLAL, she takes Advanced French at National Taiwan Normal University on Saturdays.

Despite the efforts Solo has made in French, she still met obstacles. She admitted that listening comprehension is her biggest weakness because the French speech rate is fast, and her weakness can be further divided into “liaisons” and “numbers.”

“Liaisons,” a feature of French, means to link the final consonant sound of one word to the initial vowel sound of the following word.

“It is difficult to think of the correct combination immediately when two words are connected by liaisons,” said Solo. “I have no other methods but to do liaison exercises as much as I can.”

Another barrier for Solo is the French numbers. Unlike English, when counting in French, people need to calculate. Nineteen, for instance, is “dix-neuf.” Twenty-nine is “vingt-neuf,” twenty plus nine. Ninety-nine is “quatre-vingt-dix-neuf,” four times twenty plus nineteen.

“I remembered when I was taking the DELF test at the A1 level,” said Solo. “The examiner was a French. My oral test was about purchase and payment, but I didn’t understand any numbers from his mouth. I asked if I could pay by credit card and passed the test by accident.”

“For my dessert dream, I must conquer these barriers,” said Solo. Despite the difficulties, Solo’s abiding passion for desserts does not wear off her motivation to keep learning.

“Your purpose is what pushes you to learn,” said Victoria Li, a French tutor who graduated from National Taiwan University.



Victoria was an exchange student of French Literature at La Sorbonne Université, a prestigious university in Paris, and runs an Instagram account, “paris_rispas,” to teach French.

“My initial purpose for studying French was just to escape from Python classes,” she chuckled. “But it turned out that I made a close bond with this language.” So far, she has learned French for more than five years and obtained Level C1 in DELF.

Even with such proficiency, Victoria continued to learn French. She participated in a study group with other French learners every week. Every member is required to prepare and explain a piece of material.

“I loved the glorious weather, sunny like in Taichung,” shared Victoria about her study in France. “But the order was a mess. I didn’t dare to go out at night alone in certain areas. The pickpockets made me wary to the extent that I stayed guarded even if people were only passing by.”

Regarding her advice to French learners, Victoria said that she would encourage them to go to any French-speaking countries, like Canada, Belgium, or some African countries. “You will learn more from the locals,” she added.

“I believe a clear motivation is more important. Your patience, perseverance, determination, and purpose are crucial,” remarked Victoria.



“One of my reasons for learning French was that the exotic scenes in Emily in Paris fascinated me,” said Cal Chen, a senior at FLAL. Having learned French for seven years, he explained that another reason to learn French was that it is spoken in many European countries and in Africa.

However, Cal no longer made progress from learning this language because he has achieved his goal. “My curiosity about the world is satisfied by reading information in Mandarin and English. Even so, the essence of French culture has enriched my life to some extent,” said Cal.

For Solo, her passion for studying patisseries has turned into a strong goal that led her all the way. Perhaps right after graduation, she plans to study at Ferrandi Paris or École Ducasse Culinary School, both of which are esteemed culinary institutes in France.

Victoria said that there are two types of courses. One is CM, where the professor lectures with little interaction. The other is TD, where students have interaction and discussion with one another.

For Solo, theories and hands-on training are both crucial if she wants to be a genuine pastry chef. She expects herself to spend one year on training and one year on internship. Then she may come back to Taiwan and open a dessert shop.

“Running my own patisserie shop has always been my final goal in life,” emphasized Solo. “I live for desserts. It’s my destiny to make patisseries and share the joy they bring.”

The Journey in Learning Russian Is What Brings Us Happiness



By Celia Tsai

If there is no chance of using Russian in Taiwan, why do people still learn it?

"It's normal that people in Taiwan aren't familiar with Russian," said Prof. Ming-Shing Tsai, who has taught Russian at FLAL for over 20 years. "Instead, due to the locations, in Hokkaido and the northeast of China, there are many people learning Russian."

"The reasons are simple," said Prof. Tsai. "Just to be curious about it. Stay hungry, the pursuit of knowledge is radiant. Additionally, the significant sense of achievement appears when conquering untold rules as well as exceptions in Russian."

"I was obsessed with Russian Literature, especially the works of Anton Chekhov, that was my first step into the snow-covered Russian world and souls," Prof. Tsai said.



Like Frieren in *Frieren: Beyond Journey's End*, who reflected on memories with deceased friends, Professor Tsai could have a conversation and resonate with the souls through the literature.

"I couldn't tell my students that learning Russian may help them earn money," he continued, taking a deep breath, smiling, "Why we have to consider learning a thing or Russian in utilitarianism instead obtaining happiness?"

Over 2000 years old, *Frieren*, who has already been a formidable enchanter, learning magic was not a necessity to her, let alone small magic. The reason why she was so into exploring magic is simple. *Frieren* was eager to know more, asked no practicality but exploring the abundance, deeper understanding and secrets of the world like learning Russian.

"Learning Russian was quite enjoyable since I was able to comprehend the works more and more," said Prof. Tsai, whose eyes brightened up when recalling. "I always found mistakes in translation when handling comparative literature. The translators added something secretly."

"I couldn't wait to see how difficult Russian was since I've heard learning Russian is extremely challenging," said Emily Chen, a senior at FLAL. "Learning Russian



sounds very cool."

Just because Russian is challenging, like much advanced magic, Emily dived into the world like *Frieren*.

"If you asked me to define my Russian learning," said Emily. "That would be at my will, learning through special channels."

"Intriguingly, I've watched a guy playing volleyball from first-person perspective with GoPro, using Russian to communicate with his teammates," she continued. "I got to learn that 'хорошó' has different meaning from what we learned in class, which was 'nice play.' in volleyball."

"What's more, I started to play games with Russian guessing," laughed Emily. "Or, should I say Russian learning?"

"For example, when seeing a desk, I would wonder whether it is a masculine, feminine, or neuter noun in Russian," said Emily. "Sometimes I even guessed the gender of nouns with my friends, and we checked the accuracy."



"Imagine traveling the world without the biggest country on the map, just like putting together a puzzle without many pieces," said Jack Chen, who learned Russian at FLAL. "I want to travel around the world. However, most people are not willing to talk in English in Russia. If I could learn a language and travel to the biggest country in the world, it would be a great deal."

"To be honest, I learned Cyrillic script in the dorm when I felt bored. But actually, it was more than that. People would think I am amazing, that was just my vanity," said Jack, who drank some black tea and slowly put the cup down, as though declaring something. "The vanity soon disappeared, as I got lost in a grammar blizzard."

"However, I started to figure out how to survive under the harsh conditions by generalizing the logic behind it with ChatGPT," he said, calmly.

"Even though I could barely move forward in the blizzard, the direction was right," said Jack. "Going through the blizzard, I firmly believed that I may be able to see the aurora in Murmansk and fairy-tale St. Petersburg one day."

Songda Chiu, a senior at FLAL, said, "There must be something you want to accomplish before you run out of time, effort or money. That, in my perspective, is learning Russian at FLAL before graduating with a professional instructor, enough time and affordable costs."

He then added, "The Russian course was the only course I took with all my might, though there was a great deal of information on the course handouts."

"I used Russian almost everyday then," Songda continued. "To define my Russian learning process, that would definitely be 'extremely hard-working'. When I walked on the streets, I created sentences, thinking aloud no matter what others think."

"When I spoke in Mandarin," he noted. "Translating it into Russian in my mind became a daily routine. When I told my friend the food was delicious, I said 'Вкусно'."

"It's not like when learning French, I could barely generate a short sentence," Songda said, "I was surprised that I could express what I want to express in Russian. I could truly use it in daily life."

Songda's perseverance in Russian empowered his ability to use it, as Frieren's dedication empowered her incantations. Introducing Russian into his everyday life, as though it was magic, bringing surprises to something ordinary.

"I accidentally entered a mysterious world, at the right time, right place, and with a right teacher," said Jennifer Wu, a senior at FLAL, who wore a mysterious smile. "I was really curious and had a will to demythologize the mystery of Russian."

"I'll never forget the moment that I could recognize and pronounce all the Cyrillic script, those 33 alphabets no longer look like strangers to me," said Jennifer. "Gradually, I could read vocabulary and know a little bit of what the neighbors downstairs were saying."

"Bite the bullet and try to catch up

as hard as I can, that is the best definition of my Russian learning path," she said. "The teaching pace was as fast as lighting, I could barely catch up in the class."

"Nonetheless, I always found small happiness learning in class," Jennifer noted. "For example, 'борщ' means Russian soup in English. I read the word while looking at the yummy soup picture beside, as if I could smell the aroma and taste the deliciousness."

Jennifer got to understand the meanings when hearing some Russian, like Frieren gradually understood the emotions and intentions of human beings by listening and communicating.

"Devoting a great deal of effort and time, we could never forget Russian and something related to it longer than any other languages," said Jennifer. "We truly left something behind."

In Frieren: Beyond Journey's End, "It is that 'one-hundredth' of your lifetime has changed you. Isn't it interesting?" Eisen told Frieren.

No matter how far they have gone, or to be continued, the Russian adventurous journeys at FLAL carved in bones and engraved in their hearts just like the time with Himmel in Frieren's mind. That's all the more reason, to remind them of the time in journeys, from time to time.



The Best French Teacher: My Host Mom for an Exchange Program in Lyon



By Jimmy Ho

For some FLAL students, French carries a unique allure, often associated with romance and intellectualism. Kiki Chung, a senior at FLAL, for example, has been an enthusiastic French learner. Her passion began with a fascination shaped by media and aesthetics.

"I was always drawn to French," she said. "There was this fantasy I had about how romantic and elegant it sounded."

Kiki integrated language practice into her daily life, one of her favorite techniques being watching Netflix with French audio and English subtitles. "Since English and French share many similarities, it's a great way to train listening comprehension without relying on Chinese, which can delay reaction time," Kiki said. "I believe it's an efficient method for learning a new language."

However, Kiki faced difficulties early on, especially with speaking. "I could read, write, and listen fairly well, but I just couldn't speak fluently at first," Kiki admitted.

Rather than avoiding this hurdle, she tackled it during her time in France. "I asked my host family and classmates to speak French with me. I told them to correct me immediately whenever I made mistakes, and it really helped build my confidence."

Kiki participated in Rotary Youth Exchange Program from August 2018 to July 2019, and found herself captivated by the richness of local traditions and the beauty of French daily life. The city she went to was Lyon, the third biggest city in France, only 290 miles away from Paris. "It only took about two hours from Lyon to Paris by TGV, also known as HSR in Taiwan. The transportation system is quite convenient," she said.



Recalling those days in Lyon, Kiki pointed out that not only the immerse learning environment is important but also the teaching method of exchange school and the interaction between herself and her host family. "The teaching methods in France are very different from those in Taiwan. The instructors adjusted their speaking pace based on each student's level and patiently corrected their mistakes," Kiki said.



Some people may learn Korean by adoring K-pop stars. Arthur Kuo, a class of 2024 graduate of FLAL, began learning French three years ago for his love for basketball.

"I would love to follow Victor Wembanyama, a young and talented French basketball player, until he joined NBA," Arthur said. In order not to miss the first-hand information, Arthur had been watching him play since he was still in France. Arthur surprisingly found himself able to recognize words and phrases in French.

At FLAL, featuring small class sizes, teachers can provide more individualized feedback. "Whenever I have a question, I can get an immediate answer, which helps me a lot," Kiki noted.

Reflecting on her classroom experience, Kiki compared French I with French II courses. "The main difference lies in the complexity of the grammar," she explained. "In French II, the teacher gave us more opportunities to actively use the language."

Instead of focusing primarily on textbook reading and pronunciation, as was the case in French I, the second-level course emphasized practical usage. “We often worked in groups to do role plays, which allowed us to speak more spontaneously,” Kiki recalled. “It also helped the teacher identify our weaknesses and provide immediate suggestions.”

Kiki emphasized immersion as a way to improve her French. “Living in a French-speaking environment pushes you to use the language,” she says. “Even though I only lived in France for a year, I can feel that my French ability improved a lot.”

For Vivian Chen, a senior who took French as her second language, has a different perspective on her method. “Grammar is important for me in learning,” she said. French has many grammatical rules, including gendered nouns, verb conjugations, and sentence structures that are different from English. “It is not just about memorizing rules. It is about building a solid foundation for meaningful communication in French,” Vivian said.

William Chuang, another senior, also took French as his second language. William recalled how the French teacher helped build students’ pronunciation skills through structured classroom practice. “We would first read the text together, then take turns reading individually in front of the class,” he said. The teacher corrected mistakes on the spot, especially with nasal

sounds, liaisons, and unclear syllables. “It was nerve-racking at first, but I got used to it over time.”

At home, William followed the teacher’s advice to read aloud while focusing on meaning. “Sometimes I would record myself and compare it with the textbook audio,” he added. “That really helped me respond faster to sentence structures and speak with more confidence.”

For Alice Liu, a senior who participated in an exchange program last semester in ESSCA Management, Angers, the northwestern part of France, has a similar resonance. “The classes were mostly lecture-based,” she said, “but there were frequent discussions during lessons.” She appreciated how the instructors encouraged students’ participation. “The professors would ask questions and invite us to share our opinions, which made the classroom atmosphere more engaging,” Alice added.

“The French love to greet people,” she remarked with a smile. “Whenever you walk into a store, you’re expected to say hello, and when you leave, you should say goodbye.” Alice noted that this kind of interaction reflects the strong social energy of French people. “They’re very socially engaged,” she observed. “It surprised me at first, but I came to appreciate it as part of the cultural charm.”

In Taiwan, teachers may ask students to apply new words in conversations and daily situations, saying that it would help us remember them more effectively. “But to be honest, I never took that advice seriously,” Kiki admitted. “It wasn’t until I began learning French during my exchange in France that I realized how different language learning could be.”

“When I arrived, my host mom took it upon herself to help me learn French through everyday life,” said Kiki. She began with the very basics. “I still remember our first lesson at the kitchen table, where she patiently helped me pronounce each letter of the French alphabet,” Kiki recalled.

“One of the most memorable moments happened while we were cooking together,” Kiki said. I was helping my host mom prepare dinner and chop vegetables at the counter when she suddenly asked me, “Comment on dit ‘pot lid’ en français? Et ‘carrot’?” I froze for a second, carrot in hand, unsure how to respond.

“We both burst out laughing, and then she taught me the words: couvercle and carotte,” Kiki recounted. “It was such a simple moment, but I remember it because I learned those words through experience, through laughter, and through real life.”

“I believe the greatest benefit of studying abroad isn’t the academic experience, but the cultural one,” she added. “Being able to explore places I had only read about in textbooks gave me a deeper understanding.”

“Compared to knowledge in books, life exposure left a lasting impression,” Kiki reflected. “If given the chance, going abroad is not only a way to travel, but a powerful way to learn and grow.”



K-pop and K-drama Are Not Enough for Learning Authentic Korean



By Joanne Hsueh

“My interest in Korean started in middle school with TWICE,” said Dino Lai, a senior at FLAL. “I first enjoyed their music and then explored songs by other K-pop groups. Starting with mishearing, I gradually learned accurate pronunciation.”

“By high school, I could read Korean characters and later began to understand song lyrics and some grammatical structures,” Dino continued.

From upbeat melodies of K-pop to captivating narratives of K-dramas and Korean comedy shows, this wave of South Korean pop culture has gone viral all over the world. Echoing far beyond the peninsula, the K-pop culture resonated at FLAL, with students immersed in the K-pop culture.



For two of them, this initial spark of Korean learning evolved into a deeper engagement, culminating in the life-changing experience of studying abroad in South Korea, further solidifying their linguistic as well as their cultural knowledge.

“Korean webcomics became my stress relief during senior year in high school,” said Joey Lin, a class of 2024 FLAL graduate, who completed an exchange program at Sungshin Women’s University in South Korea in February 2025.

Recalling those days, Joey said that she visited a Korean comic platform called Webtoon almost every day. “Though I didn’t understand a single word of Korean, reading a few episodes became my daily routine,” Joey stated.

Later, she observed faster updates of Korean originals, bypassing translation wait times. Crucially, she recognized Korean nuances, like varying address terms and honorifics, often lost in translation. To experience the comics’ emotions and cultural context, a desire to read Korean versions grew. This passion for Korean comics ultimately fueled her decision to learn the language.

Inspired by his desire to comprehend K-pop lyrics and subtitles, Jonny Kuo, a junior at FLAL, embarked on a self-study journey with the help of YouTube. “I self-studied Korean initially via a Korean teacher’s YouTube channel, where the lessons are clear and basic,” said Jonny.

Without additional books or websites, Johnny grasped consonants, vowels, and basic words solely through YouTube. “I find



Korean easy to begin with yet rich in knowledge, and since most of my interests are Korean-related, applying what I learned brought a great sense of accomplishment,” Jonny said.

Jessica Chiu, a class of 2024 FLAL graduate currently studying at Sungshin Women’s University, shared the same experience of self-learning Korean. “Interest motivated my Korean learning,” she recalled. “Around my third year of junior high, watching K-dramas and listening to K-pop led to daily contact with the language. Without formal studies, familiarity with some vocabulary grew through repeated exposure.”

While FLAL does not offer Korean language courses, the Language Center provides crucial pathways for students. Jessica recalled the challenge of enrolling in regular Korean classes, necessitating waiting until senior year. However, Language Center’s non-credit study groups proved valuable.

These weekly studies offered a relaxed introduction to Korean.



During the Summer of 2021, Jessica engaged in Yutnori, a Korean traditional game, trying on Hanbok, alongside learning basic characters and vocabulary

The Language Center also facilitated online courses. In 2021, both Jessica and Joey participated in a week-long online Korean summer camp organized by Dongguk University, renowned for its film art program and located in Namsan Park, Jung District, Seoul, South Korea.

“Besides Korean lessons, there was a daily hour for language exchange. Teachers grouped us with Korean students who knew some Mandarin,” said Jessica. This summer camp provided them the first chance to interact with native Korean speakers.

For those who progressed to the formal curriculum, the quality of instruction proved significant. Jonny appreciated Professor Ka-Hyun Kim, who taught him Korean I, II, and III, for her detailed explanations, clear Mandarin, patience, and ability to create an engaging learning environment through interactive questions about students’ lives and interests.

“Professor Kim asks questions that evoke students’ interest in learning,” said Jonny. “For example, questions about a concert would have you engage more deeply.” Jonny also praised Professor Kim’s instruction design for fostering students’ interest and participation.

While K-pop and webcomics ignited FLAL students’ initial interests,

their self-study experiences unavoidably presented challenges. Dino primarily relied on listening to K-pop and watching Korean variety shows online, lacking structured materials or guidance. “I mainly learned Korean by listening to songs, which I strongly advise against.”

The absence of an instructor posed inherent challenges for Dino’s self-learning. Without a native speaker to correct pronunciation or explain grammar, his progress was largely based on repeated exposure. Jonny, who also began with self-study via YouTube, quickly encountered a lack of direction after mastering the basics.

Jonny contrasted his unstructured self-learning with the organized curriculum of courses at NTPU. He described his initial approach as a shot in the dark, learning random phrases. In contrast, university courses offered a systematic progression through vocabulary, grammar, and sentence structures, complete with regular reviews and assessments.

This total immersion demanded a different approach to learning. Unlike their experience in Taiwan, where they could often rely on Mandarin for peer communication, interaction in the KLI, both inside and outside the classroom, required Korean. “If you wanted to interact with classmates, some of whom didn’t speak much English, you had to communicate in Korean,” Jessica recalled.

While The Language Center provided the foundation, Jessica and Joey’s exchange experiences in South Korea offered contrasts in language learning. Jessica pointed out that, in contrast to the full Korean immersion at Sungshin Women’s

University’s KLI, teaching in Taiwan, even when done by native speakers, frequently involved Mandarin. This prior knowledge, however, proved a crucial stepping stone, allowing her to navigate basic situations upon arrival. “At least when I arrived in Korea, I wasn’t completely unable to read Korean characters, and I could understand a little bit,” Jessica explained. Joey echoed this, valuing the structured curriculum in NTPU that built a solid base for her later studies.

One memorable experience for Jessica during her exchange was a gathering that highlighted the unexpected ways language skills could be utilized. At an international student lunch, she found herself seated with two Japanese students, both Korean language majors in their home country, and a French student with limited Korean proficiency.

A communication barrier arose as the Japanese students had limited English, while the French student’s Korean was basic. Jessica became an interpreter, translating English questions into Korean for the Japanese students and then relaying their Korean responses back into English for the French student.

“We navigated the entire lunch and even a subsequent coffee break with me acting as this cross-cultural translator, juggling languages that weren’t even my native tongues,” Jessica recalled. Despite the occasional mental freeze, the experience was surprisingly rewarding, a testament to the practical application and unexpected value of her growing Korean proficiency.



What gives? The everlasting craze for Japanese



By Joe Wang



In Taiwan, Japanese culture isn't just consumed—it's cherished. From the soft glow of anime scenes to the subtle elegance of Japanese design, traces of Japan are deeply woven into the fabric of daily life. For many, this cultural affinity goes beyond surface-level appreciation. It becomes a personal journey of discovery.

Unlike English, which is often pursued for global utility, Japanese is chosen out of love—for the stories, the food, the aesthetics, the memories.

For many, the memories of their first interaction with Japanese starts from their childhood days. After a succulent dinner meal, Ian Huang would wait for channel 31, the Star Chinese Channel to air his favourite show at the time, *KochiKame: Tokyo Beats Cops*, which was allegedly prized by the Japanese senior demographic as their after meal comforts.

As for Paul Yeh, an active athlete from FLAL, he recalled fondly his memory of watching *Slam Dunk*, the acclaimed basketball shonen series by Takehiko Inoue. Incidentally, the works of this manga artist also captivated Zhe Yang, a NTPU law student, who speaks of *Vagabond* (a martial art epic retelling of Miyamoto Musashi) with high regards.

Although most films were dubbed, they nevertheless were able to tell Japanese stories in their stylized way, capturing and resonating with the hearts of many alike.

"I'm surprised to see people just stopped and stood there to appreciate the cherry blossoms during the season," Hui Ling said, an insightful observation from one of the diligent students of Japanese language class. It was during one of her visits to Tokyo, Japan, she saw the sight of people on the street taking pictures with the cherry blossoms.

The seasonal sensibilities of the Japanese and their appreciation of nature enabled her to do so too without feeling like the odd one out, she explained. "Personally, I don't get to feel that quite often here at home," she added.

On the topic of travel, Paul held great admiration for the beauty of order of Japanese cities and way of life. "It's the order and uniformity, the underlying well thought out structure of urban design that afford me the calmness and serenity even in the busiest of places," he said.



"It just felt safe and comforting to walk and there is less clutter and chaos," Hui remarked. Wesley Liao, also a student at FLAL and avid Japanese learner, gave the example on how the order also stems from Japanese people respecting rules and regulations. That's why things can run smoothly and everyone can enjoy the benefit of social cohesion and have less conflicts, as collectivism is a core value Japanese prize.

Ian Huang, an economics major studying Japanese to improve his competitive edge, reflected on his trip to Fukuyama where he stayed with a family there for a culture exchange program. He was able to experience many local attractions like tasting the Hiroshima styled *okonomiyaki*, having a drink at the local bar, and attending kendo lessons at the local dojo. "They were courteous and welcoming, and showed me more things than I can remember," he said.





“I really get to see how this Japanese family live their day to day and it’s an unforgettable experience,” said Ian, who also shared that learning Japanese really gave him a closer look at the Japanese way of life, from the way they converse to the way they go about managing work and interpersonal relationships. Not only he realized there’s much more in common than he expected, but it also gave him a new perspective after coming back.

Another reason why Japanese is learnt by many is the abundance of Japanese media in Taiwan. Although there are also other prominent foreign influences like the westerns or the Koreans, none of them seem to reach the dominant status of the Japanese.

“I think if I were to compare and contrast, Korean mainstream culture came to me as more forceful and bolder, it is driven by contemporary sensationalism and the gears of marketing. But Japanese culture had a more subtle way of permeating through our lives,” said Zhe Yang. However, it’s not difficult to see his point.

Japanese culture has a longer history with Taiwan and have greater proximity. Ian also talked about the same point using Hofstede’s model of cultural dimension and showed why Taiwan and Japanese are close.

This meant that their media will also likely be more well received with Taiwanese audiences. Hui said, “I love listening to Japanese music, some of their sentimentality really resonates with me, it helps me process my own melancholy and the vicissitudes of life like no other, that’s why I want to learn more.”

Although subtle, this affinity is also another driving force for people to learn Japanese. Paul and Wesley shared that they both took inspiration from the Japanese when it comes to fashion and clothing. That explains the prevalent of Japanese clothing franchises in Taiwan, as it really is a powerhouse when it comes to fashion.

“Sleek, functional and minimalistic, it’s a go to for many, not just the youngsters,” Wesley added. Zhe Yang and Hui on separate occasions revealed their interest in one day trying on the traditional Japanese garments kimono and yukata and attending the summer festival, albeit they both laughed as it’s a perceived stereotypical response.

For Ian, he actually said that he enjoyed Japanese products too, in addition to fashion like the others, for their aesthetics, like Muji and Daiso.

To be sure, the nature of that appreciation wasn’t blind adoration, nor a tendency to place Japanese culture above their own. “I can see how in the past, people might have had rose-tinted glasses when it came to anything Japanese,” Paul admitted.



Zhe Yang added, “I do think sometimes people romanticize Japan too much, but as we educate ourselves, we can move past that and begin to truly appreciate our own culture as well.” These insights revealed a more grounded and evolving relationship—one that values Japanese culture not at the cost of Taiwanese identity, but alongside a deeper awareness of it.

Ultimately, the love many Taiwanese feels for Japanese culture is not a fleeting trend, but a layered connection rooted in personal experience, shared values, and aesthetic appreciation. Whether it’s the delicate pacing of a cherry blossom season or the neatly folded simplicity of a Muji notebook, there’s a sense of order, sentiment, and quiet beauty that speaks to something deep within.

For those who choose to learn Japanese, the language becomes more than a tool—it becomes a pathway into a world they already feel part of. In the words, the sounds, and the silences of Japanese, learners discover not just a second language, but a second lens through which to see themselves and the world.



A Dream in Voice Acting Sparked by Japanese Anime



By Paul Yeh



When Joanna Lin, a FLAL student, first encountered Japanese, it wasn't from a textbook—but an anime. While watching *Nura: Rise of the Yokai Clan*, she was attracted by the performance of the voice actors.

"They delivered their lines with such emotion—I wondered if I could be like them one day," she recalls. This fascination soon developed into a serious pursuit: mastering Japanese with the ultimate goal of becoming a voice actress and studying abroad in Japan.

Her story echoed a wider trend among young learners globally. According to a 2023 survey by the Japan Foundation, anime and pop culture are now considered as the top motivation for over 60% of first-time Japanese learners under 25.

Lin set a clear target—passing the JLPT N2, a requirement for her university's exchange program. According to Japan Foundation's JLPT Can-do Self-Evaluation survey, N2-level proficiency corresponds to being able to read articles on general topics and understand conversations at natural speed. Reaching this level requires an estimated 1,100 to 1,600 hours of cumulative study.

"I told myself I had to pass by July 2024," Lin said. "It wasn't just about the exam—it was about proving to myself that I could accomplish something difficult."

She created a plan at the start of the year: studying grammar and vocabulary from textbooks on weekdays, and spend weekends reviewing through mock tests or listening practice. When she fell behind, she adjusted her pace instead of giving up completely. "I tried to keep it flexible," Lin said. "Some weeks I did two grammar units, some weeks only one."

Her main study materials were *Minna no Nihongo*, *TRY! N3*, and *Step by step ! N2 grammar*. She also made personal grammar charts, kept a handwritten mistake notebook and even recorded herself reading sentences aloud to improve fluency. While she didn't use popular language apps like Anki or Duolingo, she relied on online dictionaries like Mazii.

"Anime is slower than dramas, so it helped me build listening skills at my own pace," she explained. Research has shown that consistent listening to audiovisual content boosts both vocabulary recognition and parsing speed, especially for intermediate learners.

Choosing the N2 level over N3 wasn't a casual decision for Lin. "At first, I considered starting with N3," she explained. "But I knew that wouldn't be enough to qualify for most exchange programs."

She researched the test levels carefully, comparing sample

questions and reading requirements before committing to N2. It was a deliberate leap of faith. "I didn't feel fully ready, but I wanted a challenge. I thought, even if I failed, I'll learn so much more in the process." This mindset—focusing on progress rather than perfection—became a key of her approach.

Among the four core language skills tested, reading, listening, vocabulary, and grammar. Lin struggled most with grammar. "Messing up one particle, and the whole meaning changes," she explained. A 2022 study from Waseda University found that over 70% of JLPT learners identified grammar, particularly particle usage and sentence structures, as their weakest area.



Lin also battled with procrastination. “I aimed to study one chapter a week, but often crammed two due to delays,” she confessed. Her strategy included writing out patterns repeatedly, highlighting common grammar traps in color, and summarizing each week’s study into flash review pages.

Her experience is shared by many others. Jason, one of her friends preparing for the JLPT N3, said, “I never thought grammar would be so hard—it’s nothing like English or Chinese. What helped me most is writing short diary entries in Japanese every night. I think the key is to keep using the language in small, personal ways.”

Likewise, Lee, a senior who failed N2 once, reflected, “I didn’t focus enough on reading speed and grammar accuracy. Now I’m approaching my studies differently—less memorizing, more application. Speaking with Japanese friends online helped me think in Japanese instead of translating in my head.”

Exam day was intense. “At first, the room felt calm, but as more people came in reviewing notes, the atmosphere got tensed.” Lin found the listening section easier than expected. “It felt slow at times, and I understood most of it.” In fact, JLPT data from 2023 showed that the average score on the N2 listening section was higher than reading or grammar.

Reading, however, posed a real challenge. “I hadn’t practiced long-form Japanese passages, so I struggled with time,” she said. Reading comprehension has consistently been the lowest-scoring section for N2 test-takers. To manage, Lin skipped longer questions and returned to them only after answering the quicker ones first.

Still, she completed all sections and passed. “My listening score was strong, and reading weaker—exactly what I expected.” She now planned to challenge JLPT N1, the highest level, which demands full comprehension of complex academic and professional texts.

Her experience is echoed by Ivan, a senior who passed N2, “When I passed N2, I finally felt like I could survive in Japan. Reading menus, understanding train announcements—it all became possible. But the hardest part wasn’t the language itself. It was the pressure of proving I belonged in this environment.”

For students preparing for JLPT, Lin suggested beginning reading long texts early, building a study routine that works for you, and not obsessing with perfection. “If you delay, you’ll end up rushing through vocabulary and grammar just to finish the reading section.”

In her current routine for N1, Lin shifted her materials and approach. “I use native-level resources now. I read NHK articles, editorials, and even light novels,” she said. “I also joined a Discord server for language exchange. Speaking with real people makes a huge difference.” She timed herself regularly and kept a digital notebook of academic vocabulary. “It’s not just about the score anymore—it’s about becoming truly fluent.”

Jenny, another student now aiming for N2, agreed, “The texts are so dense, with so many specialized terms. What helped me pass N3 was having a fixed routine—and a lot of self-talk to stay calm before the test.”

According to the CEFR-J (Common European Framework for Japanese), learners at Lin’s level are capable of handling complex daily situations and understanding news programs



and essays. JLPT N2 is more than a certificate—it’s a marker of readiness for real-world communications.

Beyond the exam room, Lin also looked forward to using her Japanese in more meaningful ways. “I want to be able to work or intern in Japan one day, maybe even try something in the voice acting industry,” she said.

While JLPT scores are one benchmark, her true focus was on fluency and confidence in communication. “Whether I end up translating, teaching, or doing something completely unexpected, I want language to be a bridge—not just a skill.”

For those who are still at the beginning of their journey, Lin’s story is a reminder that starting small, staying consistent, and staying true to your original passion can take you further than you think. “You don’t have to be perfect,” she said. “You just have to keep going.”



Paris Is Where Romantic Fantasies Turned to Real Life Lessons



By Yomina Yu



France is a romantic country that sparks imagination. Students who learn French have a deep fascination with France's romantic ambiance and rich cultural heritage. Some are even inspired to travel or study in France.

"I have fantasized about strolling through the charming streets in Paris, feeling the breeze..." said Jinny Wang, a senior at FLAL. Her passion for French culture motivated her to learn this language, but she encountered challenges along the way.

Although she learned some basic French vocabulary, like *Aéroport*, through the course at FLAL, she found that classroom learning did not prepare her well for real life communication.

"In the summer of 2023, I took an Uber to the *Aéroport Paris-Charles-de-Gaulle*, the driver was an elderly French man who spoke no English at all," said Jinny.

"When he started speaking a long sentence in French, I could only recognize the word '*Aéroport*' from the course. Therefore, I guessed he was confirming our destination, so I simply replied '*oui, oui*,' and luckily, we arrived safely," she recalled.

This experience made Jinny note that taking a French course for one year was not enough to build a solid foundation. However, since she started to learn German, she may not continue studying French for the time being.

Antony Yen, another senior at FLAL, shared, "I was first intrigued by *Arsène Lupin* and *Emily in Paris* during high school, which opened up opportunities for me to explore French culture."

Although Antony's fondness for French culture remains strong, he felt that classroom learning was overly focused on memorization and grammar, which didn't help much in practical conversations.

"It was mostly rote learning," he said. Nevertheless, he hopes one day to pay a visit to France and experience the culture in person. In the meantime, he continued to enrich his vocabulary through self-learning resources like *French Helper*, *frdic.com*, and other online websites.

Kiki Chung, also a senior at FLAL, traveled to Paris, France during junior high school and later participated in the Rotary Youth Exchange Program, spending a year living in Lyon, France. Therefore, when she entered FLAL, she already had a foundation in French.

"Professor Cheng adapted teaching methods based on our levels and patiently corrected our mistakes, which helped strengthen my French skills," Kiki said.

One vivid memory from France left a lasting impression on her. "My friends and I arranged to go shopping, but they showed up almost an hour late. Later, I learned that in French culture, being exactly on time can be seen as impolite," Kiki said. "Arriving 30 minutes late is normal." This cultural insight aligned with what the professor shared about her own experiences in France, making the course more personal and meaningful.

Kiki believed that having an additional language skill will enhance her competitiveness in the job market, and she planned to continue studying French after graduation.



Alice Liu, a senior at FLAL, studied at ESSCA Ecole De Management in Angers, France as exchange student during her senior year. The real experience in France has deepened her love for the French culture.

“The course mainly focused on reading and repeating rigid contents. It didn’t really improve my speaking skills,” she said.

Alice remembered that she was asked to memorize the texts like, ‘Bonjour. Je suis Alice Doucet. vous êtes Madame Falco?’ (Hello, my name is Alice Doucet, Are you Ms. Falco?)

‘Bonjour. Oui, je m’appelle Nicole Falco. Aldo, mon mari.’ (Yes, I am Nicole Falco. This is my husband, Aldo.)

However, none of the students in class had a husband, so these contents cannot help students in going exchange or traveling. As for those important practical skills, such as ordering at a bakery, were not covered in the class.

“The course contributed about 30 percent to my learning, while the remaining 70 percent came from myself,” Alice added. Therefore, she used Duolingo, French Helper, and other French learning social account on Instagram to broaden vocabularies and strengthen listening skills. She also aimed to take a language proficiency exam after graduation.

Emily Yang, also a senior at FLAL, studied as an exchange student at Skema Business School in Lille Campus, France during her sophomore year. Initially, she imagined France as a gourmet paradise and a hub for art and dashing gentlemen.

However, her exchanging experience

broadened her view. “I realized my impression was mostly limited to Paris. France’s different regions have distinct cultures, and even regional rivalries,” Emily noted.

Emily did not take the French course at FLAL because she initially thought English would suffice. Later, realizing the importance of French language skills, she took external French classes and used apps for self-study, which she found very helpful.

Although Emily considered enrolling in French course at FLAL after returning, she decided against it due to the short two-hour-per-week class time. “If I have more time, I’ll go back to a language center to strengthen my French skills and take a proficiency test,” she said. Despite the students’ strong interests, several obstacles hindered their long-term French learning journey.

Alice felt pity about the course enrollment and prerequisites at FLAL. Some beginners wanted to continue to French II, but insufficient enrollment led to course cancellations. Non-beginners had to start from the basic level due to credit requirements and later had to face class schedule conflicts.

Some students from Professor Cheng’s class mentioned the teaching structure and content. They prefer systematic and objective teaching methods, while the course heavily emphasized grammar



and memorization over practical conversation skills.

According to the study from Center for Applied Linguistics, adults tend to know why something needs to be learned and how they are going to learn it.

The French course, two hours per week, also made students struggle to build real proficiency. Beverly Baker, associate professor at University of Ottawa accept BBC interview in 2019, pointed out that “An hour a day, five days a week is more beneficial than a five-hour blitz once a week.” Similarly, Alliance Française stated that reaching basic conversational fluency requires around 180 study hours.

Even though the formal course contributed only partially to their French learning, most students found that personal efforts and real-life experiences played a much important role.

Alice and Emily, who studied in France, both found their passion for French culture deepened significantly and aimed to pursue proficiency tests. Kiki also remained determined to continue learning French for personal and professional growth. Jinny and Antony, though not planning immediate further studies, still cherished their love for French culture.

In the end, after leaving the structured classroom environment, sustaining enthusiasm and finding new paths to continue learning became the next challenge for those earnest language learners.

One Language Away from an Unexpected New Life



By Yuson Teoh

Zoey Chen never thought a simple elective in high school would one day take her across the world.

In high school, German was simply one of the elective courses on her schedule. The class emphasized pronunciation, basic vocabulary, and cultural activities rather than formal grammar. Students learned through hands-on experiences, including baking German bread and discussing aspects of daily life in Germany. While Zoey didn't take the course too seriously at the time, the exposure left a lasting impression.

Years later, during her third year at NTPU, where she majored in Business Administration and double-majored in FLAL, Zoey took up German again. She enrolled in two semesters of language study, not because it was required, but because she was genuinely interested. She found the structure of the language intriguing and different from both English and Chinese, and she wanted to explore it further.

This decision led her to apply for an exchange program at Hochschule Landshut, a university of applied sciences located in southern Germany, about an hour by train from Munich.

There, she is currently spending a semester abroad. Most of her courses are conducted in English,

but she continues her German studies and is fully immersed in a new cultural environment.

"If my German continues to improve, I will consider applying for programs taught entirely in German," said Zoey. The opportunity gave her a fresh perspective on what language learning could mean for her future.

As a student interested in data and business analysis, Zoey began to see how German could give her an edge. Many international companies based in Germany value bilingual employees, especially those who understand local language and culture. "German companies don't necessarily require you to know the language," said Zoey, "But once you do, it really opens up a lot more opportunities."

For Micco, learning a new language opened up an entirely new career possibility.

"This wasn't just a language class," said Micco Leong, a junior at NTPU, double majoring in Sociology and FLAL. "For me, it felt like studying a course on cross-cultural history."

Micco is an international student from Malaysia. Although her double major program didn't require her to take a second foreign language, an unexpected turn of events led her



to enroll in Spanish. "I already spoke English," she said. "But as an FLAL student, I wanted to expand my language horizon."

At first, she hesitated between French and Spanish but eventually chose the latter. Spanish, she realized, is spoken by more people around the world, and around the same time, she happened to be watching the Netflix series *Elite*, which is entirely in Spanish. The language caught her ear and her curiosity.

Micco's Spanish-learning journey began with struggle. Her professor, a native of Spain, had high expectations and moved quickly through grammar-heavy materials, often assuming that students had a solid foundation already.

"There were times I really questioned whether I had made the right choice," Micco admitted. But she persisted in taking detailed notes and working hard and ultimately earned the highest score in a class of thirty.

As a Malaysian, Micco began to notice unexpected similarities between Spanish and Malay, especially in sentence structure and phonetics. These connections sparked her interest in the deeper histories behind language—colonialism, migration, and cultural exchange.

“One time, our professor joked, ‘There’s only one Spanish interpreter in Taiwan, and I’m it. I’m raking in the money, hurry up and replace me,’” said Micco. While the comment was lighthearted, it planted a seed. She began to seriously consider interpretation and translation as a real career path.

Originally, Micco planned to return to Malaysia after graduation. But learning Spanish has shifted that trajectory. Now, she’s considering staying in Taiwan to explore work opportunities related to foreign languages and cross-cultural communication.

Through the language, Micco found more than just vocabulary and grammar. She discovered a potential career she hadn’t imagined before. Spanish became not only a subject of study, but a doorway to a different future.

Just as Micco didn’t anticipate how Spanish would shape her future, Wang Chin Ke, too, a junior FLAL student, began learning Japanese with no idea how profoundly it would influence his thinking. Wang saw Japanese as just a boost for his



college application. He never expected it would change his life.

In Taiwan, high school students preparing for university are often encouraged to submit a learning portfolio that includes certifications demonstrating academic or practical skills. For Wang, who was then in his final year of high school, studying Japanese wasn’t about passion or cultural fascination—it was simply a calculated decision to strengthen his application. He figured that passing the Japanese-Language Proficiency Test (JLPT) could help him stand out, so he began self-studying.

“I really only did it to get into college,” Wang recalled. But as the weeks turned into months, something shifted.

While Japanese and Chinese share many written characters, Wang started noticing how the meanings of those characters changed depending on context. That subtle semantic difference piqued his interest and deepened his appreciation of classical Chinese texts, too. “It gave me another lens,” he said. “I could suddenly interpret the same word in different ways.”

By the time Wang entered university, he had already earned the highest-level JLPT N1 certificate. He thought his language learning journey had ended—until his junior year, when he signed up for a completely new challenge: German. This time, his motivation was different.

His decision to learn German stemmed from a personal interest in World War II history and the intellectual ties between Germany and Japan.

“A lot of modern Japanese thought was influenced by German philosophers,” he explained. “I wanted to understand those connections through the language itself.”

Unlike his experience with Japanese, which was entirely self-taught, Wang took German as a formal course. Although the grammar was complex and the class moved fast, his past experience learning Japanese sharpened his language instincts. It wasn’t long before he adapted to the rhythm of German and began to uncover the cultural layers embedded within.

Learning German gave Wang access to information he had never seen in Taiwanese media. He began reading German news, forums, and commentary, which revealed starkly different perspectives—particularly on immigration and domestic policy. “Mainstream media only shows part of the story,” he noted. “But once you know the language, you can see what gets lost or simplified in translation.”

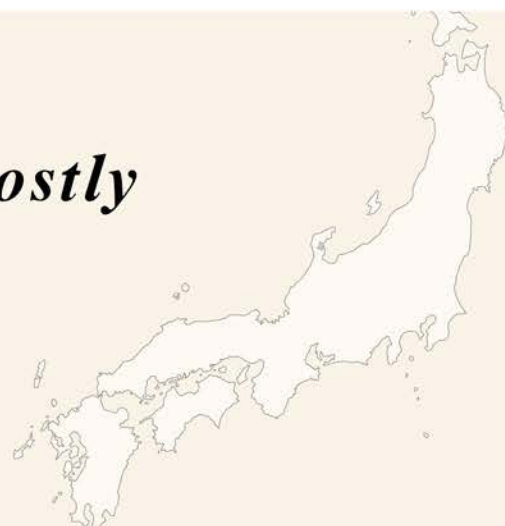
Through German, Wang encountered opinions and narratives that are rarely discussed in Taiwan—such as how many German youth view immigration, the diversity of thought in European politics, and unfiltered conversations from native speakers online. These new viewpoints profoundly reshaped his worldview.

Wang now believes that language is more than a tool for communication, it’s a key to understanding society from the inside. “When you understand the language, you become something like an insider,” he said. “You can hear what people won’t say to outsiders.” He may not have taken language learning seriously at first, but now he understands just how powerful it can be.

Top Japanese Learners Are Mostly Addicted Enthusiasts



By Zoey Jing



For students at NTPU, learning Japanese doesn't begin with pressure. It begins with interest. Whether it's sparked by anime, music, or historical curiosity, what starts as a casual fascination often grows into something deeper.

"It started with anime marathons with my older brother," said Michelle Chu, a senior at FLAL who is studying Japanese II, remembering her first brush with Japanese. "We'd binge series like Attack on Titan during summer break."

At first, it was just bonding time. But over time, Michelle found herself shouting entire lines before the subtitles even appeared. "My brother turned to me and asked, 'Did you just say that right?' I had no idea I'd absorbed so much," she laughed.

Eventually, Michelle began writing down common expressions, mimicking lines aloud, and looking up grammar points. "I kept a notebook next to the couch. I didn't even think of it as studying. It was more like collecting things I liked."



Joanna Lin, a senior at FLAL who once dreamed of becoming a professional voice actress, had a similar story. "I was obsessed with voice actors like Yuki Kaji," she said. "I'd watch an episode of My Hero Academia, then go on YouTube and watch interviews just to hear their voices in real life."

Joanna even recorded herself mimicking characters, sometimes spending hours trying to match their tone. "I think my parents thought I was nuts," she chuckled. "But it helped me develop an ear for natural phrasing."

Joanna later enrolled in classical Japanese literature classes and began asking grammar questions out of curiosity. "I remember staying after class to ask about sentence-final particles. I just wanted to understand why things worked the way they did." She started reading bilingual texts and annotating unfamiliar structures, often diving into native grammar blogs. "The moment I started learning grammar for its own sake was when it stopped just homework."

For Rin Lin, a senior musicaholic at FLAL, it all began with music. "I grew up listening to LiSA and One OK Rock. I wanted to sing along but had no idea what they were saying."

That curiosity eventually led her to try translating songs by ear. "One



time I got stuck on a single word for half an hour. I was frustrated, but when I finally figured it out, it felt like I cracked a code," said Rin.

Eventually, she launched a personal challenge titled "Reading Japanese Every Day Until I Pass JLPT," on Threads, getting thousands of people watching and interacting. Each day, Rin recorded herself studying for the JLPT test in front of the camera. "The camera made me feel accountable," she said. "Even on days I didn't want to study, I'd still do it."

Jennifer Wu's route into Japanese was unexpected. After her junior high exams, she stumbled upon a kana chart and decided to memorize it out of boredom. "Then I started trying to read snack packages and shampoo bottles," she said. "It was like discovering hidden layers in everything."

Her interest deepened when she encountered Japanese history, particularly samurai culture and traditional beliefs. "I'd visit

Japanese shrines and try to read the inscriptions,” she said. “That’s when I realized how much more there was to understand.”

To strengthen her reading skills, she explored Japanese folk stories like “The Land of Yomi” and “The Grateful Crane,” which helped her connect language with culture. “While reading, I also learned about the way Japanese people think,” she noted.

Jennifer also shared the same interest with her siblings, anime. Growing up, she and her siblings all enjoyed watching anime, such as Kekkaishi, Noragami and Nura: Rise of the Yokai Clan. Jennifer soon noticed that her listening skills, pronunciation, and vocabulary retention were noticeably better than theirs.



“We all liked anime, but I would repeat the characters’ lines over and over mimicking their tone and rhythm,” Jennifer said, giggling. “My siblings thought I was being noisy, and my mom joked that her ears would grow calluses.”

Celine Chen, a class of 2024 FLAL graduate, didn’t start off with interest, she was enrolled in a cram school by her parents. “I was just doing it because I had to,” she recalled. But after watching Japanese dramas and traveling to Kyoto with her family, something clicked.

“I remember sitting in a café, hearing people talk and realizing I could catch parts of the conversation. That feeling was addicting,” said Celine.

She eventually passed JLPT N1 before graduation and secured a full-time job with Japan Airlines. “That’s when the real challenge began,” she said. “JLPT tests reading and listening. But speaking and navigating cultural subtext? That’s a whole other skill set.”

One time, a staff-only restroom was indirectly made off-limits with the line, “It gets really crowded.” Celine chuckled. “You learn fast to read the air ‘kuuki wo yomu.’” Now, she continues to refine her skills by chatting with colleagues, writing business emails, and even assisting in onboarding new hires who don’t speak Japanese. “Fluency isn’t just vocabulary,” she added. “It’s reading intentions.”

Prof. Ming-Shing Tsai, a Japanese instructor at NTPU, observed firsthand how interest fuels success. “In elective classes, the most driven students aren’t those chasing credits. They’re the ones who watch anime, who want to understand lyrics, who come to office hours with their own grammar notes,” he said.

“In elective courses, students who choose Japanese despite it not being required often end up doing more,” he said. “They ask questions after class, email me for extra materials, or bring in their own learning tools.” He recalled a student interested in fashion design who once explained the precise Japanese term for “peach yellow” fabric.

Prof. Tsai emphasized the power of customization. “Some students are preparing for HR roles, so we read Japanese case studies. Others want to work in fashion, and they’ll learn color-specific adjectives and retail

vocabulary.” He encourages them to keep their own word banks, write sample sentences, and even build their own glossaries. “Language becomes real when it’s relevant,” he said.

Prof. Tsai noted that many top students started as hobby learners, watching anime, collecting vocab, or translating fanfiction. “They weren’t the fastest at first, but they stuck with it,” he said. “Only students who care enough will stay.”

Compared to other languages, Prof. Tsai believes Japanese has a special advantage in Taiwan. “It’s everywhere, anime, music, food, travel,” he said. That cultural saturation naturally feeds motivation. Whether it’s cosplay, karaoke, or calligraphy, students find their way to Japanese through the things they love. And when learning is rooted in passion, it’s no longer a chore. It’s part of who they are.

Whether they began with anime, perfume commercials, or music, these students have all followed the same thread, curiosity. And once curiosity matures into commitment, language no longer feels like a foreign object. It becomes a familiar voice, a lens for understanding, and sometimes even a career path.



Where's your next stop?

