



*“Multilingualism is a key to open doors to the world. It is like a chemical to help us seeing the world more open-minded”*

Hello everyone! My name is **Hân Dinh**. I am a Vietnamese and I come from Vietnam. I used to live in Saigon, also known as Ho Chi Minh City. Via mutual friends, I got to know a Belgian man, we married and came to live in Belgium. My mother tongue is Vietnamese. I learned to speak English at University in Saigon. When you come to live in Flanders, it is almost impossible to live here without any knowledge of Dutch. So, when I arrived in Belgium, I followed Dutch classes. My knowledge of Dutch is still limited, but it has improved over the years, and I hope it still keeps improving.

I believe that knowing many languages is a competitive advantage for all of us. It is a ticket to enter the globalized world. The more languages you know, the more opportunities you have in order to learn more about other cultures, to get to know more friends from different countries or to understand what is happening every day in the world around you.

As already mentioned, I learned to speak Dutch since I live in Belgium. I think it is important so that I can communicate and integrate in the society here. Although it was and is still quite difficult for me to learn a new language, because I am not so young anymore and learning a new language at a young age is much easier.

One of the problems I faced when I arrived in Belgium, is that a big percentage of the older generation is not able to speak English and can only speak Dutch. Like my mother-in-law, she cannot speak any English and she only speaks Dutch, or better a dialect of Dutch with sometimes completely other sounds or pronunciations than I learned in school.

In the beginning, the communication between me and my mother-in-law was very limited, only “hallo” and “tot ziens”, besides some translated communications with the help of my husband. But after some time when my Dutch had improved a bit and my mother-in-law also did her best not to speak any dialect with me, we were able to communicate better. For instance, I asked my mother-in-law how to prepare Belgian dishes. She explained to me how to make rice cake (rijsttaart). She shared with me the ingredients: rice, sugar, butter, milk, vanilla extract and “dra äiren” (Dutch dialect for three eggs). Over the years, I even slowly got used to the dialect from my mother-in-law when we talked with each other. So, for me learning Dutch has helped me to improve the relationship between me and my family-in-law, especially with my mother-in-law.

By knowing many languages, you can communicate with other people in their languages, you can understand them better, understand their feelings and emotions. When a person talks with you in his or her mother tongue, the conversations will convey more sentiment, will be more comprehensive and coherent.

Briefly, in my opinion, multilingualism is important. It is a key to open doors to the world. It is like a chemical to help us seeing the world more open-minded. Multilingualism enriches not only our knowledge, but also remarkably contributes to the success of our professional life.