



Malaysians are blessed. Not many would say it but being born in Malaysia is really a blessing because we live in a country with wonderful cultures, traditions and languages. Each family can choose to raise their own children with a language that is comfortable to them. More and more families are choosing to use English as the main language at home.

The reason behind this is simple - English is an international language. It will probably become **handy** in the future. However, that is not the only language Malaysians know. There are many different races in Malaysia. We usually learn our mother-tongue. Our "mother-tongue" is the language that our mothers teach us such as Bahasa Malaysia, Mandarin, Tamil, Iban, Kadazan and others.

Photo: tallypress.com



And then there are the different dialects that sound so different, they may as well be separate languages! For example, there is Kedah Malay, Kelantanese, Cantonese, Hokkien, Telugu, Malayalam and more. You can always find a **bilingual** or a **trilingual** person walking around in Malaysia.

Unfortunately, only a few people are able to speak their native language amongst the Millennials and Generation Z (children born from the year 2000). Chinese and Malay schools have a lower entry rate and it seems that English is slowly taking over as the language in Malaysia.

Is this a good thing?

In a way, yes, because that makes us prepared for the working world where English is very important.

But, is it a good thing to neglect our own mother tongue? Knowing your mother tongue is good because it helps you understand and love your culture more. There is always more to language than just the way it is spoken and the beauty of its sentences. When you study languages, you also study history, so it is an excellent way to know your roots.

Photo: worldofbuzz.com



Have you ever heard of the Guinness Book of World Records? Interestingly, there is no record holder for the “most number of languages spoken” but do you know why this is? Aren’t people interested to know who can speak the most languages? Well, it has something to do with a TV show and the definition of being “able to speak a language”.

This is what happened: a Liberian-born language teacher, Ziad Youssef Fazah was on a Chilean TV chat show, Viva el lunes. Before

that appearance, Fazah was once questioned for being a spy by the army because he was able to speak Mandarin and Russian. Until 1998, he held the Guinness record for speaking 58 languages! But then, the show happened and history changed.

During the show, Fazah was surprised with a language test.

In the audience were people brought in from different countries who asked him questions in various languages. If you watch the



Ziad Youssef Fazah



video, you'll see that Fazah was finding it hard to answer and he felt very shy. A few years later, Fazah finally explained about what really happened via a telephone interview. The TV show had not told him of the test and just said that it would just be an interview. Also, the edits of the video had only shown the wrong answers but not those that were correct. Poor Fazah.

This **controversy** then sparked the question – when it comes to languages, how do we know how well a person can speak it?

This is in fact a hard question and a personal one too. For most of us Malaysians, we can say we speak at least 2 languages but how well do we actually speak them? Do we know each and every word in the language? Can we speak without forgetting or saying a word wrongly? Even someone who has passed a language exam may not be as fluent as you'd expect.



So when someone says they are able to speak a few languages, it does not automatically mean that they are fluent in all of those languages. It takes a long time and lots of practice to become fluent. The good news is that there's never a down side to learning a new language, and the best way to do so is to immerse yourself into the culture. So if you want to become fluent in German, for example, you might join an exchange program, or plan a visit over there to practice your German!

Learning new languages is fun, and you never know when they'll come in handy. So why not give it a go? If you can't decide which one, just start with the culture you find most interesting.

LEVEL: B1

GLOSSARY:

Bilingual (adjective)

- able to use two languages

Controversy (noun)

- quarrel, argument

Handy (adjective)

- convenient for use

Trilingual (adjective)

- able to use three languages

