

Nathan's first language was **Chinese**, which he spoke until he was about four years old, but he later transitioned to speaking mostly **English** at school and home. As a result, **English is his dominant language**, while his **Chinese proficiency is at a basic level**, comparable to that of a third grader. Although he took four years of Chinese in high school, his reading and writing skills declined due to a lack of practice.

Nathan is not actively learning Chinese at the moment. However, due to family connections in China, he wishes he could converse more fluently with relatives. His mother encourages him to improve, but he does not really want to and does not have many resources he could get access to either (his household speaks English now).

Nathan's strongest skill in Chinese is **listening**, as they can understand spoken language using context clues and pinyin knowledge. They prefer passive learning, such as listening to conversations, rather than actively searching for words. Their weakest skill is **writing**, with reading also being a challenge to some extent. While typing is manageable due to pinyin, recognizing and writing characters is difficult, and they struggle to recall vocabulary and characters due to limited practice.

Nathan's exposure to Chinese came from different sources. In his early years before preschool, he spoke Chinese at home. During high school, he learned through textbooks that covered topics like weather, school, and business, with role-playing exercises helping to reinforce vocabulary. In later years, he explored more cultural aspects, such as Chinese holidays and media, which added depth to his learning experience.

One of his key challenges was **writing Chinese characters**, which required repetitive practice. However, without consistent use, he often forgot them. **Vocabulary retention** was another struggle, as he found it difficult to remember words without frequent exposure. Additionally, **textbooks felt uninspiring**—while they provided structured learning, they lacked the engagement of real-life, organic conversations.

Among the most useful resources, **conversations with native speakers** were the most effective for improving listening and speaking skills. On the other hand, **textbooks were the least engaging**, as they primarily focused on reading and writing, which felt tedious. The biggest limitation in his learning experience was the **lack of organic exposure**—structured lessons and forced topics were not as effective as naturally engaging with the language in everyday situations.

Nathan has not achieved his ideal fluency and is not currently focused on learning Chinese. He believes **being in an immersive environment where everyone speaks Chinese** would push him to improve. However, he prioritizes other things in life over language learning.

Nathan's ideal learning resources would provide **more natural exposure** through conversations and media, such as TV shows, cartoons, and short stories, allowing for a more immersive and engaging experience. He would benefit from a **more interactive approach to learning vocabulary and writing**, moving beyond rote memorization to methods that reinforce retention through meaningful use. Additionally, he prefers **resources that align with his personal interests**, making language learning feel less like an obligation and more like an enjoyable, integrated part of his daily life.

Khanh grew up in **Germany** until the age of 18, where **German** was their native language. They learned multiple languages over the years with varying levels of fluency:

He is fluent in German, his native language, and English, which he mastered after moving to the U.S. at 18. He has conversational fluency in Vietnamese but struggles with specialized vocabulary and reading/writing. He has basic proficiency in French from school, intermediate Japanese from high school, community college, and UCLA, and basic fluency in Chinese after a year of study at UCLA.

His language learning goals have varied over time. He achieved fluency in English out of necessity after moving to the U.S. and studied French in school purely for academic requirements. His initial interest in Japanese stemmed from anime and culture, studying alongside his sister, and he now wants to resume learning for everyday conversations. He learned Chinese due to friendships and a past relationship but lacks consistent practice despite enjoying the language.

His strongest skills are speaking and listening, particularly in conversational languages like German, English, and Vietnamese, where exposure played a key role. He picks up conversational fluency quickly and improved his English significantly through visual novels and subtitles before moving to the U.S. His weakest skill is writing, especially in Japanese and Chinese, as well as to some extent in Vietnamese and French. Kanji memorization in Japanese was challenging, and flashcards were not very effective. In Chinese, pronunciation and grammar required corrections from a native speaker.

His language learning methods varied by language. Vietnamese was learned passively from family without formal study. English classes were ineffective, but he improved significantly by looking up words while playing visual novels like *Zero Escape* and using English subtitles. For Japanese, he used blogs, online textbooks, Anki flashcards, and classes, with anime reinforcing his learning. In Chinese, he relied on corrections from a girlfriend but lacked practice outside of class.

His key language learning challenges varied by language. In English, early struggles with vocabulary made learning frustrating, and speaking felt unnatural as his mouth adjusted to new sounds. In Japanese, memorizing Kanji was overwhelming—flashcards helped short-term but lacked context for long-term retention. Motivation was also a challenge, leading to significant forgetting over time. In Chinese, a lack of practice outside of class weakened retention, and pronunciation required corrections from a native speaker.

His most useful language learning resources included visual novels and media with subtitles for English, which naturally expanded his vocabulary, and online casual textbooks, listening practice, and structured classes for Japanese. Speaking with native speakers was the most effective way to improve fluency across languages.

Less effective resources included Anki flashcards for Japanese, which helped short-term but lacked context for long-term retention, and his Chinese studies, where a lack of motivation prevented meaningful progress.

He wishes he had access to more bilingual books to reinforce both English and Japanese learning, as well as Kanji resources that provided detailed context rather than relying solely on memorization. Additionally, to him, a contextual approach to learning kanji and Chinese characters would have been more effective than rote memorization, and an immersive language environment would also help him maintain consistency.