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What is the Day of the Dead Holiday?

Source: <https://dayofthedead.holiday/>

A dedication to the deceased

Day of the Dead (Día De Los Muertos) is a two-day holiday that reunites the living and dead. Families create ofrendas (Offerings) to honor their departed family members that have passed. These altars are decorated with bright yellow marigold flowers, photos of the departed, and the favorite foods and drinks of the one being honored. The offerings are believed to encourage visits from the land of the dead as the departed souls hear their prayers, smell their foods and join in the celebrations!

Day of the Dead is a rare holiday for celebrating death and life. It is unlike any holiday where mourning is exchanged for celebration. "Day of the Dead is a holiday to remember loved ones by sharing a meal with them as one would when they were alive."

When is the Day of the Dead?

Nov 1st, 12am

Día de los Angelitos (Spirits of the children)

Día de los Angelitos (Day of the little angels) starts the holiday at midnight on Nov 1st, where the spirits of all deceased children are believed to be reunited with their families for 24 hours. Families construct an altar, known as an ofrenda, with the departed child's favorite snacks, candies, toys, and photographs to encourage a visit from their departed children. The names of the departed children will often be written on a sugar skull.



Nov 2nd, 12am

Día de los Difuntos (Spirits of the adults)

At midnight of the following day (November 2nd), the celebrations shift to honor the lives of the departed adults. The night is filled with laughter and fun memories, much like the night before. However, the Ofrendas take on a more adult-like theme with tequila, pan de muerto, mezcal, pulque and jars of Atole. Families will also play games together, reminisce about their loved ones, and dance while the village band plays in their town. Attend Parades and Ceremonies: Many cities and communities organize parades and ceremonies to honor veterans. Participate in these events to show your support.

Nov 2nd, Noon

The next day is the grand finale and public celebration of Día de Muertos. In more recent times, people have come together in their cities, dressed up with Calavera painted faces (Skeletons) and have parades in the streets. Cemetery visits are also common on the last day as families will go to decorate the grave sites with Marigold flowers, gifts, and sugar skulls with the departed's name on them. It's customary to clean the grave stone and restore the color.

How people celebrate Day of the Dead

Calaveras (Skulls)

Calaveras are ubiquitous during Day of the Dead. The skulls are often drawn with a smile as to laugh at death itself. They take many forms such as sugar candies, clay decorations, and most memorable: face painting. Sugar



November 2025 Calendar

Native American Heritage Month
National Adoption Month

- 2 – All Souls Day (Christianity)
- 4 – Election Day (US)
- 5 – Dev Diwali (Hinduism)
- 8 – National STEM/STEAM Day (US)
- 9 – World Adoption Day
- 10 – World Science Day
- 10 – Birth of the Bab (Baha'i)
- 11 – Veteran's Day (US)
- 14 – World Diabetes Day
- 16 – International Day for Tolerance
- 19 – World COPD Day
- 20 – Transgender Day of Remembrance (US)
- 21 – National Adoption Day (US)
- 27 – Thanksgiving (US)

skulls are decorated and placed on ofrendas of loved ones. A Calavera, or sugar skull, is a decorative skull made (usually by hand) from either sugar (called Alfeñiques) or clay which are used in the Mexican celebration of the Day of the Dead

Flor de Muerto (Mexican Marigolds)

Marigolds are believed to be the pathways that guide the spirits to their ofrendas. The flower's vibrant colors and scent attract the departed souls, as they return to feast on their favorite foods. They are called "Flor de Muerto" (Spanish for Flower of Dead) and they symbolize the beauty and fragility of life. Marigold flowers include around 60 annuals and perennials that are native to Mexico and Central America..

Ofrenda (Offering)

While the most recognizable aspects of Day of the Dead are the representations of skulls and skeletons, the tradition that holds the most meaning is the Ofrenda (Spanish for offering). The Ofrenda is what the whole celebration is about; it's a collection of offerings dedicated to the person being honored.

A brightly colored Oilcloth covers the table and on top of that sits a collection of photographs and personal items of the departed person. The lower portion of the altar is where the offerings are placed, from traditional Mexican cuisine to other items that represent the honored person's particular tastes.



The Cognitive Gifts of Learning a New Language

Source: <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/cognitive-gifts-learning-new-language-upama-goswami-ksode/?trackingId=gEYy0ySsQQ%2BJmUAI0QShmw%3D%3D>



"You live a new life for every language you speak. If you know only one language, you live only once." — Czech proverb

Learning new languages can transform your life in an unbelievable way. It's a journey that you choose for yourself. The journey of learning a new language is discovering a new world and being a part of it. As Federico Fellini (an Italian filmmaker and screenwriter) observed, "A different language is a different vision of life." Throughout history, we find famous people around the world who learned and achieved proficiency in several languages.

Did you know that Cleopatra, the Queen of Egypt (69-30 BC), was a famous polyglot? According to Plutarch, Cleopatra was proficient in many languages in addition to her native Greek language. She could speak Latin, Egyptian, Ethiopian, Troglodyte, and the languages of the Hebraioi, Arabes, Syrians, Medes, and Parthians. Al Farabi, an ancient Islamic philosopher, knew seventy languages. Modern English poet John Milton knew English, Latin, Italian, French, Spanish, Greek, Hebrew, Dutch, Aramaic, and Syriac to varying extents. Indian philosopher and poet Sri Aurobindo (1872–1950) was proficient in Bengali, English, and French. He could read and write Sanskrit, Latin, and Greek; speak and read Gujarati, Marathi, and Hindi; and read German, Italian, and Spanish. If you want a recent instance, there's a recent news report about the extraordinary linguistic abilities of Mahmood Akram. the extraordinary linguistic abilities of Mahmood Akram. A 19-year-old boy from Chennai, Akram can read and write in as many as 400 languages and speak 46 fluently.

In a world where artificial intelligence is changing the ways of the world and globalization is redefining identity, learning new languages becomes an essential act of adaptation and success. It can be called a "cognitive gift." Language learning sharpens our thinking skills and the way we feel and connect with the world. The act of learning a language is one of the most powerful and rewarding human pursuits.

New Languages, New Cognitive Pathways

Languages are not just codes for communication; they're unique systems of meaning. Each language shapes the brain in distinct ways. Multilingual learners often demonstrate:

- Improved pattern recognition skills: Learning multiple languages requires recognizing and understanding new grammatical structures, lexical patterns, and pronunciation rules. Multilingual learners develop a heightened ability to detect patterns across different systems and subjects, including music, math, coding, and even social dynamics.
- Enriched memory: Multilingual individuals are able to manage two or more language systems which trains the brain's executive functions, such as working memory, task management, and self-regulation. They become experts at analyzing multiple pieces of information, filtering irrelevant input, and retrieving the right word or rule at the right moment, often in milliseconds.
- Enhanced mental agility and abstract reasoning: Mental agility is essential for switching between languages. Multilingual learners have skills like thinking in abstract terms, solving complex problems, and adapting to new or unfamiliar concepts easily. Because each language frames the world differently, learners become comfortable navigating ambiguity and considering multiple interpretations simultaneously.
- A stronger ability to multitask and change perspectives: Speaking in multiple languages involves frequent code-switching, moving between different systems of meaning. This sharpens the brain's ability to transition smoothly between tasks or viewpoints, leadership, creative problem-solving, and intercultural communication.

Learning and engaging with multiple linguistic systems force the brain to become more adaptable. As you learn more languages, your cognitive ability increases exponentially.

Languages shape perception and enhance insight

A speaker of Guugu Yimithirr would not say, "There is a fly on your right leg," but rather, "There is a fly on your southeast leg." Different languages perceive and define the world in different ways. In the same way, learning many languages introduces you to the art of seeing things in many different ways. A multiverse of different emotions, time, space, and identity opens up before your eyes as you glide through different languages.

The way we perceive the world is intricately linked to the language we speak. The examples of Russian, with its distinct words for light and dark blue, and Hopi, with its unique conception of time, are powerful illustrations of linguistic relativity. This principle, also known as the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, suggests that the structure of a language influences its speakers' worldview and cognitive processes. Here are a few fascinating examples from languages around the globe that demonstrate this profound connection:

- The Russian language has separate words for the shades light blue (goluboy) and dark blue (siniy), influencing how speakers perceive colors.
- In Hopi, a Native American language, time is expressed without fixed tenses, leading to a radically different understanding of the concept of time.
- The Himba people of Namibia have a fascinating color vocabulary. Their language has fewer basic color terms than English, and their color categorization differs significantly. For instance, they use one word to describe many shades of green and some shades of blue.
- The Guugu Yimithirr, an Aboriginal community in Australia, use cardinal directions (north, south, east, and west) instead of relative terms like "left," "right," "front," and "back." This linguistic requirement fosters a remarkable and constant awareness of one's orientation, a "mental compass" that speakers of languages like English do not need to cultivate.

Develops Empathy, Humility, and Multicultural Reciprocity

Every time you learn a language, you also learn its cultural rhythms, its emotional subtleties, and its unspoken codes. The more languages you learn, the more you realize how meaning changes with context, how and why translation is never perfect, and how deeply we are shaped by the words we use. This generates not only empathy but also intellectual humility. You begin to realize that no single language holds all the truth. This insight is profoundly humanizing and deeply needed in a diverged world.

Language Learning in the Age of AI: The Biggest Question

Why bother learning many languages when AI can translate anything? The simple answer to this question is because AI can translate words, not worldviews and emotions. It can translate a haiku, but it will miss the cultural stillness, symbolic connotation, and seasonal subtlety a haiku evokes in Japanese sensibility, where a falling leaf is never merely a leaf.

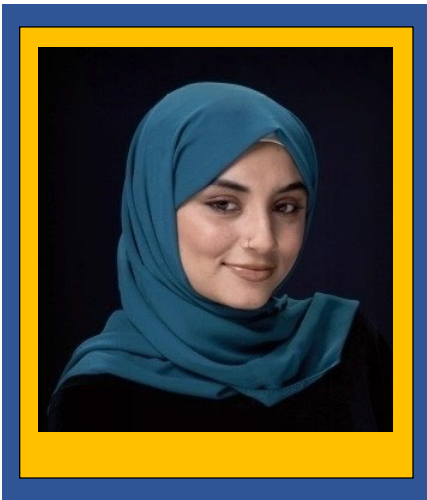
While AI can translate "Waldeinsamkeit" to "the feeling of solitude in the forest," it cannot transport you to that quiet, moss-covered stillness with the magical weaving of words. AI may be able to explain that the Korean word "jeong" signifies deep emotional connection, but it cannot convey the layered loyalty, time, and sacrifice woven into its essence.

Learning a language transcends mere vocabulary and grammar acquisition; it's about creating a soulful connection with a new culture, its people, and its unique worldview. This profound connection is something AI will never replicate.

Final Reflection: Becoming Many Selves

Speaking many languages equals to living many lives. You learn to think in different metaphors. You can express love and emotions in different ways. By mastering new languages, you learn to laugh, write, and dream in shades shaped by syntax. You become your smartest self. In a world where AI is trying to take over our creative pursuits, let's fall in love with learning again.

New Staff Profile: Shameem Azimi



Shameem is the new staff member in our Dari-Farsi-Pashto-languages team at MIS. She is a pre-med college student, currently on the BSN nursing path with hopes of becoming a Dermatologist one day. She was born in Afghanistan and immigrated to the United States at the age of eight. Growing up between two cultures has given her a deep appreciation for language, communication, and diversity. She is fluent in Farsi and Pashto - her native languages - and she also learned Urdu and English growing up in the U.S. Additionally, she completed five years of Spanish coursework, which has helped her develop a basic understanding of the language. Shameem has always loved helping people communicate and feel understood, which is what inspired her to work as an interpreter. Before working professionally, she often interpreted for friends and family at school and in the community all of which are experiences that taught her how powerful language can be in connecting with people.

Shameem chose to work as an interpreter because it allows her to meet so many different patients and experience a wide range of healthcare settings, from Pediatrics to Urology, Hepatology, Dermatology, Oncology, and beyond. Every day brings new opportunities to learn and grow, and she truly enjoys observing how nurses and doctors interact with patients. These experiences motivate her as she works toward her future in medicine.

In her free time, she usually studies to stay ahead with school, but when she gets some downtime, she loves going on long drives with friends, exploring new coffee shops, and enjoying little "girls' days out." She also loves spending time with her family and cooking new recipes from around the world for them to try.

Welcome aboard, Shameem! We are glad to have you as a part of our Medical Interpreting team!