Imagine visiting a country where you don’t speak the native language. Everyday tasks that you could do very easily in your home country instantly become difficult – you cannot communicate with local people, or ask for directions when you are lost. You can’t order your favourite drink at a café, or even read the menu at a restaurant. You are forced to constantly search for someone who speaks the same language as you, in order to communicate.

Travelling is one of many instances that make you realise just how crucial a role languages play in society. Knowing the language of a country makes you feel included and a part of its culture.

The Many Languages, One World contest promotes language learning and multilingualism, as it challenges university students around the globe to write essays in one of the six official UN languages, which can be neither the student’s first language nor his/her primary language of instruction.

2017 marks the fourth year of the Many Languages, One World Essay Contest, sponsored by ELS Educational Services and the United Nations Academic Impact (UNAI). Northeastern University (Boston) was the host of the 2017 Many Languages, One World Global Youth Forum, which took place between 16-25 July 2017.
This year's contest asked contestants to write essays on global citizenship and cultural understanding, and the role that multilingual ability can play in fostering these. Out of more than 6,000 individuals who applied from 170 countries, 60 winners were selected for an all-expenses-paid trip to Boston and New York City, in order to attend the Global Youth Forum and speak at the United Nations in New York.

Third year French and Spanish student Nicholas Bloom from the University of Bristol was one of the winners of the 2017 contest. Nicholas's mother tongue is English, so he chose to write his essay in French. His essay focused on the subject of Linguistic Imperialism, and the dominance and threat of English.

At the Many Languages, One World Global Youth Forum in Boston, Nicholas and other delegates created action plans related to the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development before addressing the United Nations General Assembly in New York.

Nicholas said: “The UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development will have an impact on every human being on the planet. I’m thrilled to represent the University of Bristol at the conference and stand for values I believe in, promoting multilingualism and defending gender equality.”

So what did he make of the experience? “Presenting at UN General Assembly on Friday was nerve-racking, surreal, inspiring... I could go on!”

“I guess my main feeling now is that the work doesn’t stop here. Sharing my views at the UN is one thing; driving change in the UK and in the international community is another”.

Watch the students’ presentations at the UN General Assembly from 21 July 2017 here.

Listen to Nicholas’s interview with UN Radio here.

For more information about Many Languages, One World, visit ManyLanguagesOneWorld.org.

Join the conversation on social media using #MLOW2017.