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SPAN 301S

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Embracing Biliteracy: Part 1

It took me a long time to figure out what I wanted to study. I had changed my major three times before finally changing it to Spanish, but might I add, it was always in the back of my mind because during that time it was my minor. I've always had an interest in becoming bilingual. I first noticed it when I realized that my grandmother spoke Spanish when I was about fourteen. I didn't know that she was of Latin American descent at all. Her name was Mary Bishop so I had no idea. After learning this new characteristic about my grandmother I got more and more interested to know her background. I found out that she was of Spanish descent, her parents before her lived in Mexico and her grandparents were originally from Andalucía, Spain. Her original name was Maria Luisa Antoinetta Robles de Ruiz, way different from Mary Bishop. But what I still didn't understand is if my grandma spoke Spanish, why didn't she teach my dad or my uncle? How the author of *Words Were All We Had*, Maria de Luz Reyes told us that during the 50's and 60's it was looked down upon to speak Spanish and that's exactly why my grandma stopped and even changed her name. I couldn't believe that it could have such a strong impact on her. In a sense I almost felt betrayed because if that wouldn't have happened back in the day, I would've spoken Spanish naturally, which I think of as such a gift. This was the majoring turning point in learning how to speak Spanish for me.

When I was fifteen my sophomore year of high school I was able to take my first year of Spanish and I was very excited. When we started reading in class out loud my teacher immediately asked me if I had any Spanish background at all because my accent was so good as compared to the regular gringo accent. And really my only influence was with the Spanish speakers I worked with at my restaurant. I would listen to them all of the time and I simply copied their accent. I had the accent down but it definitely took me a while to become anything of a Spanish-speaker. Ultimately, I took three years of high school Spanish and at the end of my senior year I met my current boyfriend who has definitely had an impact on my Spanish capabilities. He was thirteen when he moved to the U.S. from Mexico and at the time I met him he was eighteen. I met him because in my Spanish 3 class we had to interact with the “brand new” students who had just arrived from Mexico and my boyfriend was there to help translate. After getting to know him better we started dating and I became immersed into Mexican culture and I absolutely fell in love with it. I loved the idea of learning something new every day. The hardest part was communicating with my suegros y unos cuñados because they hardly knew any English. But that was almost the fun part because it was a challenge and there was a want to speak to each other. As time went on and I took more college Spanish classes and talked more with my boyfriend we ultimately started speaking Spanglish together and now sometimes even just Spanish.

The major turning point of changing my major was my decision to study abroad in Santiago de Chile. After being so immersed into the Spanish-speaking culture I knew I had to go somewhere to speak Spanish and continue to become bilingual. After the long process of applying to get into the program I finally was accepted and then it was off to Chile. Chile was the exact opposite of what I expected, it’s like they have their own language! Because I was so

immersed in Mexican culture I didn't realize that Spanish was spoken in different ways by different people and that I had to tell myself it's exactly the same in English; look at all of the English, Irish, and Australians, we all speak differently. Chilean Spanish definitely took a while to get use to; you think Mexicans use a lot of slang? No way Jose. Chileans can almost speak their own language with using barely any Spanish words. This was also a completely a different learning process for me because this time I was on my own, I didn't have a boyfriend to ask the silly questions to that everyone knows the answer to but me. I had to embarrass myself a lot more but after a while I didn't get embarrassed because I was so use to having to ask questions all of time. My Chilean grammar teachers were also a huge help as well teaching me Spanish from a different perspective.

After being back for six months I have really become appreciative to becoming bilingual. It makes me furious that someone would look down upon it, I think of it as the complete opposite, a gift. Being bilingual opens up so many doors for you and your perspective towards cultures and learning. I am thankful that I can call myself bilingual; it was a long process but totally worth it. I am happy I haven't studied Spanish for nothing; I speak Spanish every day and I learn something new every day, how much better can it get? I can't wait to finish my degree and get out in the world to help people in either English or Spanish or maybe even both.

Embracing Biliteracy: Part 2

My observations of bilingualism are that it is a gift and people should appreciate and express it as much as they can. But then I also see that sometimes there can be a negative side. I've seen the many different levels there are to being bilingual. What I have realized about Mexican-Americans that were born here in the US, at least the ones that I know have no idea

how to write. That have an idea but they don't know how to fully express themselves on paper. I think because my process was the opposite, I began with writing and reading before speaking, it baffles me. It always takes me time to think, why didn't they learn how to read and write? When learning a language as babies, we learn how to speak and then five years later we go to school to learn how to read and write. But by being Mexican-American that does speak Spanish as their primary language at home and then going to school to learn how to do everything else in English, it's like they've skipped a step in learning their own language. Because I learned the opposite way I really wish I could've attended a school that teaches bilingually. I've heard of some programs but because language isn't a popular subject throughout the country or California for that matter, it's hard to get the funds.

Some people don't appreciate being bilingual because it's just natural for them and that's how they grew up speaking and I urge them to learn more about their languages and express themselves as much as they can. Every day I'm asking questions and learning something new and I appreciate every bit of information that I can get out of a natural bilingual speaker. Overall, bilingualism is a gift, some people learn it naturally and some people have to work hard to get to that point.