

**Claire Darmstadter**

Hey, everybody, I am so lucky to be joined today by Abhi Janamanchi, sophomore at Washington and Lee University who was a classmate of mine in Sun Prairie. So thanks for taking a couple minutes to chat with me.

**Abhi Janamanchi**

Yeah, absolutely. Claire. Glad to be here.

**Claire Darmstadter**

Yeah. So first would be great. If you could just give us a rundown of your linguistic and educational background and if you think language will figure into what you may be looking to do in the future.

**Abhi Janamanchi**

Yeah, so I was actually born in India. So English was not my first language. Telugu was my first language. And my grandmother was a school teacher who actually taught languages at a private school in India. And so when I was very young, she would sit me and my cousin down and teach us at home Telugu, Hindi, and English. So really, I started off as a trilingual baby. Have since forgotten Hindi because we don't use that at all anywhere. You know, came to the US, focused really on English and speaking Telugu at home, although I can't really write or read and in Telugu because it's a very complex language. And then when I got to middle school in high school, kind of, you know, I knew I wanted to take on another language just seemed like a fun thing to do. My parents are all for it. You know, because English is pretty universal, I think, in the world right now. But like, it's always helpful to learn other languages and other cultures. And so we picked up Spanish. And I finished that through college. And now I no longer take a language but I have, I think, a decent understanding of Spanish.

**Claire Darmstadter**

And so with Telugu, since it's obviously not a language that's spoken in the wider some prairie or community at college. So is that a very effortful process where you have to constantly work to maintain it? Is that not really a priority for you? How do you kind of relate with the language nowadays?

**Abhi Janamanchi**

Yeah, we speak it at home all the time. But honestly, it's a mixture of Telugu and English whenever I'm talking about him, like it switches back and forth. You'll hear me on the phone with them like that. Honestly, they're like game shows in India that are purely about answering questions in Telugu because it's so hard like, and that could be applied to like any language honestly, because like, English is so ingrained in like other countries, especially in India. The people kind of use like, think about Spanglish, like Spanish English, it's like that, like English stuff for me for a lot.

**Claire Darmstadter**

And so you also participated in a pretty run of the mill High School Spanish program. So I can attest that we always had a good time in Spanish class, but we didn't necessarily learn the most when it came to the actual language. So would you have liked to see Sun Prairie approach language programming a little bit different where it is perhaps more intensely focused on language acquisition? Or does it seem like most kids aren't going to walk away from high school with any long lasting language skills anyway, so we should just focus on the celebration of a culture? Or how do you kind of feel about your high school experience?

**Abhi Janamanchi**

I think starting far, far earlier will be a lot more beneficial, like elementary school is legitimately like the best time because language, I think, for me, like the act of like, my grandma teaching me Telugu with Hindi as a kid, even if I don't remember and can't like fully apply them. I feel like that made me as a person, like a lot better equipped, just to like, learn how to learn, right, going through that struggle I think as a kid helped me wrap my mind around things like, become much better at learning a wide variety of things. I think that's applicable in so many different ways. But definitely starting in elementary school. I think having maybe, like we had that one intro to World Languages class experience, having a more in depth version of that, because honestly, I took Spanish and I was like, three years into Spanish in high school, when I realized, like, I did not want to take any more Spanish, I actually wanted to switch to German. But at that point, I was like, I've been it's been a long haul, like, too late now. I'm so kind of stuck with it. But I think the cultural aspect is very, very important. Like, I'd love to learn about cultures in other countries, period. Like that should be a thing we do. But as far as language itself, I think starting very early, and giving people the option to explore multiple languages.

**Claire Darmstadter**

And so comparing the different places you've lived, do you think they've all been hospitable to language diversity and individuals that speak in non-English or multiple languages, does it kind of depend on the setting or where you are in the city? Or how do you kind of feel like your personal linguistic abilities are viewed by the wider community?

**Abhi Janamanchi**

So it's something I hear like, buddies back home in India a lot from like, other people that have lived there a year and things like that were like, and when I visited India to like, my cousin was like don't speak in English. Like around here, people are like, *Oh, it's one of those kids*. Like, it's a weird kind of dynamic, where, like, I think that she has to do more with living as an Indian American, sort of, that's like a broader thing. I think more than just language, but it's like, you don't quite fit in there. You don't quite fit in here. And it's weird. I think all the places I've lived in the US like, I don't think language is necessarily an issue. I've moved around a lot, but mostly in the Midwest area, I don't think I've encountered many problems.

**Claire Darmstadter**

Yeah, so finally, we tell little kids all the time that it's a superpower to speak more than one language. So can you give me one reason you can answer in English, in Spanish if you want to try, in Telugu, whatever you want, why it's a superpower to speak more than one language?

**Abhi Janamanchi**

Considering I don't know the word for superpower in Telugu, we're just gonna go with English. I don't know the word Spanish either. So clearly the language system needs to be improved. I think speaking multiple languages is a superpower because like, I think, you know, just communicating is like in and of itself like a superpower. Being able to speak with people with vastly different experiences, right? I was looking at like some like, video on Instagram the other day, she explained it really, really it's like, how crazy is it that you can convert data from your mind into someone else's mind simply by making vibrations, different sorts of vibrations through your throat and that's what speaking is, so that's what having conversation is, right. And so I think language is a superpower because it allows you to convert ideas from like mind to mind to connect with people in a way that if you really think about it, it's kind of crazy.

**Claire Darmstadter**

Yeah, it's crazy. You look at a chair. And there are 1000s of words for chair and I only know two of them. So it's just crazy how there's so many different ways that people can communicate. And it can mean absolutely nothing to somebody, but it could be an entire person's life of emotions to another. So that is really, really cool. I really appreciate you talking to me. I know that you're not currently in Wisconsin, but I think you do have a very interesting perspective related to it. And hope you have a great rest of your school year.

**Abhi Janamanchi**

Absolutely. Thanks Claire.