

Claire Darmstadter

Hi everybody. I'm joined today by Adrian H., UW-Oshkosh student who is an English Secondary Education major with minors in Spanish and Social Justice. Thanks for taking a couple minutes to chat with me.

Adrian H.

Yeah, no problem.

Claire Darmstadter

First, it'd be great if we could just get a general overview of your educational and linguistic background. So can you tell us what language or languages you are learning or speak or would like to learn? And in general what your language acquisition process has been like?

Adrian H.

Yeah, so my first language is English. And I've spoken that my whole life, that's what I tend to use in my own household. And, you know, throughout my education, but since sixth grade, so about 10 years now, I've been learning Spanish. [audio issues] so middle school, high school, and college level teaching. Recently, I've been working on Japanese, and then I'm interested in the future, trying to learn Ladino, which is kind of a hybrid of Spanish and Hebrew and some other influences as well. I would say, it's been fairly limited exposure, but Spanish definitely is coming along in that way, just from, you know, having, you know, a few hours a week, at least of class time for the past several years.

Claire Darmstadter

For sure, and if I understand correctly, you went through a pretty run of the mill, high school, middle school language learning sequence kind of experience, where you have just like, you know, Spanish 1-5, pretty standard. So, obviously, we love our teachers, and they're doing their best within the constraints of curriculum and policies and funding, but most of us don't leave high school very proficient or fluent in the languages that we take for like six years sometimes. So do you think there's a better way we can approach language learning or something that we could do that might yield higher results? Or are we just kind of stuck in our ways of going with what we've always done?

Adrian H.

I think there's definitely a better way to approach it. I think a big thing is definitely incorporating more like outside of the classroom opportunities for people to practice and improve their language. So at my middle school and high school, at least, it was very limited in terms of like, the study abroad opportunities, or like, you know, events in the community that were advertised by the school, I felt there weren't very many, like times when maybe teachers or administration would, you know, advertise those things to students or connect us with them. And that's definitely a very critical piece to practice listening and learning those languages. And then I think another thing is that a lot of the time, these classes, they end up repeating a lot of content from, you know, previous years or previous semesters. So, like you're learning preterite versus

imperfect in Spanish for like, the fifth time in a row. And that's something that always frustrated me as someone who, you know, felt that I had kind of gotten that down already. So I think, maybe incorporating some kind of like, placement testing between years, just to make sure that people are ready to like, go on to that next level. So that there isn't that need to like, repeat things too much.

Claire Darmstadter

For sure. And, you know, you talked a little bit about those abroad experiences that you might not have necessarily had. But obviously with COVID things are very difficult. So even if we wanted to, or had the means to, it's not really an option right now. And so for people who are working in the space of education, they might want to go into a field of education that involves languages, whether it is English as a second language or teaching languages or just interacting with students who have those language backgrounds, what have you kind of done to prepare yourself for kind of give yourself those opportunities when you can't necessarily be in a different country right now because that isn't an option?

Adrian H.

Yeah, I think for me, a lot of it has really come from like, just kind of consuming like news and and media from you know, those targets like cultures or languages. So like, you know, reading recent news articles in Spanish, both to practice the language and to expose myself more to the socio-political situation in like, you know, Latin America or in Spain. That's, that's probably the main thing I've done. But I would also definitely recommend for people to do the same with media in terms of maybe like playing a video game in that target language or watching you know, film in that language, reading books and that language. Definitely, it's not a supplement for immersing yourself in the culture or, you know, having that high-impact language learning experience, but it's definitely something that can, you know, help you practice or like listening to music, even in that target language. Those are the things I try to incorporate, you know, into my study of Spanish mainly, because that's the main one I'm working with right now. But for like preparing to teach people that or like, give them advice on how to learn English as well.

Claire Darmstadter

For sure. Yeah, it can be fun, right? It doesn't have to be studying grammar, you can engage with music and TV shows. And there's so many great resources. And I also have spoken with some great current and former professors in the School of Ed at Oshkosh who work in the fields of language education. Even though you might not be specifically on the bilingual ed track, are there any classes you've taken organizations you participate in, or activities that you've done while being at Oshkosh that have helped you better understand how language is kind of intertwined with education?

Adrian H.

I think I'm really like my Spanish classes themselves have helped with that. Because, you know, kind of looking more in depth at how those grammar rules function really helps you understand your own language as well. So for me, as someone who's interested in maybe teaching ESL in the future, that's helpful for me to understand how people learn a language and how to use

some of those rules and processes. Another thing that's really helped with that is that I work in the Writing Center at UW-Oshkosh. So I've interacted with writers who just need some help with grammar rules or with vocabulary, and I've worked with a handful of English language learners. But they, you know, it's very useful and helpful for me to practice explaining those things and like deepening my understanding of them you know, by explaining it in that kind of context. Even if it's not exactly like teaching them English, it is kind of supporting their process with learning it. And then the last thing, this one I've only really interacted with briefly so far, but there's an American Sign Language Club at UW-Oshkosh, and I think that's another thing that's really, you know, helpful for understanding how people acquire a language and kind of firsthand experiencing some of the challenges, but also the joys of learning it. Because ASL of course, you know, you have to learn this whole new, like visual alphabet, and differentiate between all of the different, like, subtle gestures that you're using to communicate. So it's definitely a good one for understanding, I guess, some of the more nuanced aspects of learning the language.

Claire Darmstadter

For sure. Well, thank you so much for chatting with me. I always love hearing about student perspectives and different programs and approaches and things that are going on around the state. So just to close us out, can you give us one reason why we should celebrate multilingualism? And why it is a good thing and an additive part of someone's identity?

Adrian H.

Yeah, I would say that really, like one of the things that really interests me about it, is just kind of seeing the huge diversity in the way that like, people will, you know, even just talk about the same thing across languages. So like, kind of this style of one language being very different from another and like, you know, what we think of as like untranslatable words and phrases that are, you know, unique to that culture and language. I find those things really fascinating. And I think that they really help us to, like, understand these different ideas that kind of apply to all people, but we kind of, we explain them to ourselves, and we describe them to each other in different ways. And I think that that's something really valuable, you know, especially as we're trying to reach a place where we aren't just valuing one person or one culture's explanations or, or values more than other cultures.

Claire Darmstadter

For sure. That's so well said. Well, thank you so much for your time today. And I hope you have a great rest of your semester.

Adrian H.

Yeah. Thank you. You too.