

Claire Darmstadter

Hey everybody, I am joined today by Geraldine Moguel Garcia, junior at Fort Atkinson High School who speaks Spanish and English. Thanks for taking a couple minutes to chat with me!

Geraldine Moguel Garcia

Yeah, yeah.

Claire Darmstadter

So first to start us off, it'd be great if you could give us just a really general overview of your linguistic and educational background, and maybe some ways you want to use your language skills in the future.

Geraldine Moguel Garcia

Well, first, when I was younger, Spanish was like my first language. But then in elementary, I would get bullied a lot for speaking mostly Spanish. So I stopped speaking it for a bit. And I only resorted to speaking English for a bit until about fifth grade or middle school. And then people started like, liking that I would speak Spanish sometimes, too. But some of my Spanish like, I wasn't able to speak it as well anymore, because I would not like speaking it. And like now in high school, we have like a club called Latinx Club, where we like, all, like, tell our stories or like, just like, hang out. And most of the people that go there are like us Hispanics. And like many of us have, like a similar story to what I just said. But others didn't learn it. And like, I was lucky enough to learn it, and then like, relearn it again after I didn't want to anymore. But others, I've heard that they were not so lucky to like to relearn it, or just learn it themselves. So they are taking classes, and many of these students that would like, bully me, are now taking Spanish classes, because some of the careers that they want to do deal with a lot of people that don't just speak English.

Claire Darmstadter

And so I don't want to dwell on bad memories, but kind of looking at that period early on in your life, do you feel like that was kind of representative of Fort Atkinson as a whole? Was it really confined to specific students or groups of individuals? And what kind of was that switch? Was it kind of like that utility you talked about where they realize like, Oh, shoot, maybe I can benefit from Spanish, and so now I'm gonna be nice to her? What kind of made that change in attitude?

Geraldine Moguel Garcia

Well, I believe that it was only like a certain small group of people. But it wouldn't be Fort Atkinson as a whole because many actually like that I would speak Spanish. And that was like my first language that I ever learned. And then I feel like they did benefit from it from knowing someone that didn't speak Spanish and English, because, like I said, many jobs do involve many of us that do speak Spanish and English, or just that speak Spanish. Like, I work in a store here nearby, and even just there, as a cashier, I get a lot of people that just speak Spanish. And some of the Americans that work near me, they'll have me translate for them. Or they'll have the people go through my line or others that speak Spanish's lines.

Claire Darmstadter

And so I wondered, I think you've mentioned that you participate in kind of like normal or standard High School language courses. As someone who might be a heritage speaker, or has a background in Spanish, do you feel like the teacher is often calling upon you to be the example or help other students? Or is it really supportive? Or how does the teacher kind of support students who are heritage speakers, but also ones who have never had contact with the language?

Geraldine Moguel Garcia

Well, I'm taking, I took a few language classes, and one of them was French. And the teacher said, *Oh, yeah, French and Spanish do resemble a lot.* So, maybe some of the students that speak Spanish could help out too with some of the things that they understand. Or then like students that would take Spanish, they would use me and a few others to help them with their homework.

Well, maybe the teachers that are like, our English teachers are like, you know, like, they'll speak a lot. They'll then ask some of us like, *Oh, yeah, did you understand what I was saying?* Just because they're not sure if we understood it or not just in case, you know.

Claire Darmstadter

And often people bring a lot of different varieties of Spanish or just different vocabularies and such to the classroom. So if you're in a language class, you might use a word that's not like the standard one or what the textbook says, is that supported or you marked wrong, like how do teachers respond to maybe differences in vocabulary or linguistic features?

Geraldine Moguel Garcia

Well, from what I've seen, most of them resort to like an old type of Spanish. And they don't go with like us who speak Mexican, the Puerto Ricans, or like all the other types of Spanish that there are. So students will ask us for help and the teachers will still mark them wrong, because that's not the Spanish that they're teaching. But then some of the students have also told me like, *Yeah, I've heard many of you guys speak. And half of these words that the teachers are showing us I've never actually heard any of you say.*

Claire Darmstadter

Yeah, I remember in my Spanish classes, it was like, textbooks from the 90s. And it was just like this terminology that just isn't used. And it's just not practical. So yeah, it's sad, but it's, I don't know, it's kind of interesting. And so I know, in the future, you said you're probably not interested in education, but might consider it like a backup option. Can you kind of talk about why you see that? Is it that maybe education isn't a super appealing career? Maybe the pay isn't great? Is there any reason why it's maybe kind of a backup opportunity, or...?

Geraldine Moguel Garcia

Well, for me, I actually really want to help people. So like, one of my main ones would be like, doctor, nurse. And then I do really like helping people. I prefer a medical way, before, like teaching. And then if that doesn't work, then I would like to do engineering. And then education, because I took a few classes that would help me with, like teaching young kids, and things like that, or I'll help my siblings, or nieces with their homework, or just like helping them study. And I actually really like it. But I would prefer to help people in a way that could save their lives first.

Claire Darmstadter

Yeah, most definitely. That is, like you said, like in education, there's a super high need for people who can speak more than one language, but in medicine too that is so important. So I really commend you for kind of taking upon that career path. So finally, in celebration of multilingualism, can you give me one reason, you can answer in English, in Spanish, in a mix of two, why we should be speaking more than one language as a superpower?

Geraldine Moguel Garcia

Well, I believe that we should view it as a superpower. Because, well, I don't know how to explain it. But I also took French freshmen and sophomore year. And I feel like I've benefited a lot from it, especially since I knew Spanish to where like, now I can, like, not travel all over the world, but travel around, and I'll know a lot of what people will be saying and how to speak well. But I also believe it's really good because, especially for us that are like, Spanish or whatever other language we spoke first was our first language. Many of the people that only spoke English or I don't know another language, we really want to speak our language. And some of us are turning that down, like I actually did. And I believe that they would actually like, some of them may be young and not understand. But when you're older, you will understand and you will benefit from this a lot.

Claire Darmstadter

For sure. Well, thank you so much for chatting with me. I appreciate all your perspective and for taking a couple minutes out of your busy school week to talk, so thank you so much and have a great rest of your day.

Geraldine Moguel Garcia

Thank you