

Claire Darmstadter

Hey everybody, I am so lucky to be joined today by Maya Kakegawa-Fernandez, who is trilingual in English, Spanish and Japanese, and is the daughter of Tomomi Kakegawa, and Manuel Fernandez, both of whom I had the opportunity to interview as well, so feel free to check out their interviews if you're interested in hearing the parent perspective. But thank you so much for taking a couple minutes to chat with me today.

Maya Kakegawa-Fernandez

No problem.

Claire Darmstadter

Yeah, so first, it'd be great to just get a general overview of what it was like growing up in a trilingual household and how that kind of interacted with your education. I know, I've learned that you did some like weekend programming, and you had some opportunities. Can you just kind of talk about what that experience was like?

Maya Kakegawa-Fernandez

I guess. It doesn't feel different. But like, I guess, I went to school normally. And then on Saturdays, I would go to — we'd drive like an hour and a half, so that my brother and I could go to like, like a Saturday school thing where we would do like, Japanese literature and math in Japanese. And for Spanish, we didn't do much, which is probably why my Spanish is a lot worse than Japanese. But, yeah, I guess. I speak to my mom in Japanese. I speak with friends in English. And I speak to my dad mostly in Spanish, but sometimes English. Yeah, I don't know.

Claire Darmstadter

And I guess, so it's honestly a big undertaking to try to learn three languages simultaneously.

Maya Kakegawa-Fernandez

Yeah, I guess, I think, I feel like I didn't really do much, but like, cuz, like, my parents probably put more work into being able to speak three languages than I did, because I just sort of like, did whatever they told me to, and sort of spoke to them. And that was about it.

Claire Darmstadter

Do you remember being when you were younger, maybe like around 5, 6, 7, was it ever really confusing trying to separate different languages and figure out what to speak where or did all pretty like easily organized in your head?

Maya Kakegawa-Fernandez

For me, it was pretty easy. I know. I think my brother had some issues with like, learning stuff, but I didn't really, I don't I was, I wasn't ever really put in any, like other classes like this. Yeah, my English was always fine. And my other languages, and I could speak to my parents. So that was all that was really necessary.

Claire Darmstadter

And I've also heard from him that you've had some opportunities to kind of travel or visit family internationally, being like, in a country where maybe there is a higher rate of people speaking those languages. Was that --

Maya Kakegawa-Fernandez

I think that really helped. Especially with my Japanese, because we go to Japan every year, and especially when I was younger, like they would send my brother and I to Japan to go be with our grandparents. And they don't speak English. So we just would be forced to speak Japanese all summer. So I think that really helps my Japanese and I think not having that for Spanish probably. Like, we got, obviously we got to go to places — we went to Costa Rica, Mexico, apparently, I don't really remember it. But so that I think when we went, my Spanish definitely improved. But we don't go every year like we do to Japan, and we don't really have anybody that like we have to talk to like we do with my grandparents. So I think going to Japan every year and being forced to speak and be surrounded by the language really helped my Japanese.

Claire Darmstadter

And obviously, you're in a little bit more of a unique situation where both of your parents are professors of language, right? Like always a topic of conversation. Do you ever feel like they're studying the way you speak or is there like research that's like constantly being mentioned and brought up in your conversations? Or is it just totally normal to you?

Maya Kakegawa-Fernandez

With my mom, I like languages I really enjoy thinking about like, why do I say the things the way I do? Like why sometimes I'll exclaim something in like one language when I'm speaking in another language. So I like that, so it never really bothered me. But one thing that always sort of got on my nerves was, when I'd be, I'd be trying to, like, say something serious, in usually Spanish, but my dad, like I would say something wrong grammatically, and he just has to, like, say something. And, like, I'm just talking casually, it's great, like to get corrected. But when I'm trying to convey a message and he, like, stops me, and it has to, like, explain what I did wrong and like, why, like that was past tense. Like it was really frustrating. But other than that, I think like, studies about like, bilingual stuff, and like language stuff is really interesting. So that never really bothered me.

Claire Darmstadter

And do you think language is something that's a part of maybe your future career path? Or if you're going to college, college studies? Or how do you think that might fit in with what you're doing post high school?

Maya Kakegawa-Fernandez

Yeah, I've thought about doing stuff with languages, but also, I like learning languages, but I feel like if it became like a job or something I had to do, I would lose interest in it, or it'd be less fun. So I sort of want to do something that's less, maybe something like that I do as a hobby, so that I can keep things that I'm actually interested in. That's things that like I can have fun doing

instead of making it like a job. But definitely for college and stuff, I would love to learn more languages better.

Claire Darmstadter

Oh my gosh, that is incredible. So finally, in celebration of multilingualism, if you want to tell us in Spanish, English, Japanese, a mix of all three, whatever is best for you. Can you just give me one reason why we should celebrate people who speak more than one language?

Maya Kakegawa-Fernandez

Because it can be really funny. I don't know. I think there's a lot. I think multilingual people come up with really funny jokes that sometimes only a couple other people understand. But I think the more that people can like, learn that stuff and understand it just opens up a whole new area of humor that you could use and also just for communication, I guess that's also fun.

Claire Darmstadter

Well, I love that answer, because everybody always says, you know, like what you mentioned opens up doors, you can meet new people, but the humor side is like a really cool perk where you have those inside jokes where just people who speak the languages can understand. So thank you for including some of the fun things that maybe people might not say as much. And I really appreciate your time, just taking a couple minutes to chat. I think your language background's very unique and people will find it quite interesting.

Maya Kakegawa-Fernandez

Thank you and have a great day you too.