

**Claire Darmstadter**

Hey everybody, I am joined today by Rishav Roy, Sun Prairie High School grad and current student at UW-Madison studying physics that has a background in French and Bengali. Thanks for taking a couple minutes to chat with me.

**Rishav Roy**

Of course!

**Claire Darmstadter**

Yeah, so even though we went to high school together, the only classes we really overlapped with where math and language doesn't come up too much in those classes. So could you just share a little bit of your background in languages and education and kind of your experience with all of that, and then while you're studying your particular degrees here at UW, and if languages are any part of that.

**Rishav Roy**

Well, growing up in my family, we speak Bengali, some of the time, that is like my native language, my mother tongue. And in high school, I took French classes. And, you know, not exactly the most fluent person in French, but I kind of like you know, I remember the alphabet and stuff like that. And so to elaborate on my Bengali knowledge, I don't know how to read or how to write them in Bengali, but I am very good, pretty good at talking and listening in Bengali. Yeah, and right now I'm studying physics at UW Madison. I am getting a Bachelors of Science, meaning that I don't, I've already satisfied all my foreign language requirements, so don't take any more French or any other language in college.

**Claire Darmstadter**

And do you feel like, if you're comfortable sharing, your language skills growing up, were seen as like an additive positive part of your identity? Or do people ever make you feel ashamed if you weren't speaking in English? Or how was that like, when you were speaking in non-English languages, whether in the community, at home, all those different, like places, I guess?

**Rishav Roy**

Yeah, definitely an additive thing. I kind of feel like *cool, like, oh, my gosh, I speak another language* like, I guess like something to be proud about, or something that like, excited me having like this other method of communication, like a secret language that only me and my family knew.

**Claire Darmstadter**

And you mentioned that growing up, you participated in French in high school. And it was, you know, in Sun Prairie, very nice teachers, of course, are doing their best, but we have a pretty run-of-the-mill language program. And so like you said, you didn't reach a super high level of proficiency. So do you feel like there was something that could have been different in Sun Prairie's program that would have maybe led to higher levels of attainment? Or is it just like, we are so stuck in our ways that high school language is just like, you don't expect to be fluent and

that's okay. You just do it and walk away? How did you feel about that experience? And was there anything you would change?

**Rishav Roy**

I guess like, I feel like that's like the best thing you can do, starting to learn a language at such a late point in your life. I think the only way to like, guarantee, that you reach a higher level of attainment in foreign language is to learn it from an earlier age. Like, in India, you're expected to be, oh sorry not in India, in Canada, you are expected, like if you are outside of Quebec, you're expected to be conversant in French by the eighth grade, I believe. And then in Quebec, it's the opposite, you're expected to be conversant in English by eighth grade. And you have similar things in India also in regards to like English and Hindi and Bengali. Yeah, but also like saying that I assume learning language and like in high school, I suppose like elementary school, like flexes different parts of your brain, teaches you different strategies. Yeah, I guess like, yeah, there's nothing really like surface-level that I think can be easily changed about the way foreign languages are taught in high school. It's just more of a fundamental thing that we start teaching in high school instead of beginning to teach in elementary school.

**Claire Darmstadter**

And so your Bengali is more of a heritage language. I would say, some people may call it a heritage language, where you're growing up kind of speaking in the family, but you don't necessarily have like literacy skills or other areas of that language development. So did you feel like it was ever an effortful process to learn how to speak the language? Or is it just you are growing up hearing it around you is pretty easy, you just like caught on, but you didn't ever have to, like, actually practice anything?

**Rishav Roy**

Oh, definitely mix them both. I mean, it sounds like that heritage language description is like completely perfect. Like, at the beginning in like the first like, 10-15 years of my life, it was like, yeah, like caught on pretty easily. But more recently, as I realized, like, how much knowledge I'm lacking in Bengali, I've been asking like a ton more questions like making sure I'm getting the pronunciation, right, like my tongue is like going in the right directions and pronouncing certain vowels. So now it's become more of an effortful process. And not a bad way, like in a fun way. Like for me, I just have gotten much more curious about other aspects of the language I guess.

**Claire Darmstadter**

And lastly, can you give me one reason, if you can boil it down to one, we tell little kids that speaking more than one language is a superpower. So you could answer in French, Bengali, in English, or all three, one reason why we should celebrate speaking more than one language as a superpower,

**Rishav Roy**

Ooh, oh man, that's a good question. Um, and I can answer like in other languages?

**Claire Darmstadter**

Yeah, that'd be great.

**Rishav Roy**

[Bengali] Oh man, I'm not sure how to say this in Bengali. But I guess it's like, it's good for your brain to know another language. And it also increases the, I guess cultural awareness you have like it implicitly increases, it necessarily increases the knowledge of the world if you're learning another language, and you are realizing how varied linguistics can be, how varied like human culture can be. And I think that's an important thing to keep in mind. Like the way that you do things is not the only way that things can be done, like such a variety of ways in our species, like on this tiny little blue dot.

**Claire Darmstadter**

Great. Well, thank you so much. I appreciate all your opinions and all you had to share with us. I think not many people know or speak Bengali. So I think it's great to have that perspective. I hope you have a great rest of your semester.

**Rishav Roy**

Yeah, thanks Claire!