How do my experiences as a heritage speaker of Spanish affect my sense of self as a global citizen?

My experiences as a heritage speaker at first were built upon changing my accent and learning more English. Living in Oregon, I was actively told not to speak Spanish and to only embrace inglés, the only language I “needed” to have. I grew up feeling conflicted on who I was. At home I was my mom’s hija and Tata’s nieta, but at school, my name was mispronounced and always shortened. As a young girl in the suburbs of Portland, speaking Spanish set me apart; it left me between two cultures and my experiences at that time made me feel stuck. Spanish was my connection with a place that was no longer there, and I was unaware of the potential to connect on a greater level all through Spanish. My connection as a global citizen when I was younger was feeling the effects of diaspora.

As I grew older, I soon discovered that Spanish was a tie that connected me to many people sharing a similar journey. I always felt that Spanish gave me a special connection to a place that as an immigrant, I had long ago physically given up. My global identity was developing around my experiences of solidarity with people forced to say goodbye to their homelands and having to call a new place home. That connection was through my ability to speak Spanish. I began slowly realizing that I didn’t just want to speak Spanish, I needed to speak Spanish, I could be connected and feel a tie with people all over the world near and far. Spanish allows me to have a sense of belonging; it gives me a sense of home and of community.

In Spanish I can talk about my Tita’s huitlacoche recipe without having to translate the beautiful word into “corn smut,” I can share una platicadita in the halls of PSU, I can hear where people are from by listening to the different acentos y palabras que usan. En español puedo hablar con alguien de España, la República Dominicana, Chile y Guatemala y poder tener una conexión, compartir algo en común, sentirme parte de algo más grande. Spanish allows me to feel a global connection with people all over the world. Being a Spanish speaker allows me to have a global identity of survival, struggle and connection.

My experiences of being a heritage speaker were not always easy, but they taught me to be proud of possessing something that allows me to share a bond with millions of people. I feel part of a global community made up of a rich and diverse group of personas.

It makes me happy that more than 350 million people speak Spanish as their native tongue, and it fills me with greater joy to know that I am part of that global community.

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