

The Strength of Spanglish

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The voices around me sounded warped. 'The heiarcryh of the life cycle fluosish stadeily.' If that didn't look right, that's exactly how I heard English when I was young. Looking around, I knew I was in school. The teacher was clearly speaking, however the words that were coming out of her mouth sounded alien. I could only understand some words in English, however some words were foreign to me. I grew up in a Hispanic household, where both of my parents only spoke Spanish. While my older sisters went to school and learned English, I couldn't properly grasp the English language until I was sent to a class specialized to teach English to kids who are unfamiliar with the language. That is where Spanglish was first introduced to me.

Spanglish has been a code-switching language for a couple of years now. Mainly used among the younger generation of the Hispanic community, it mixes English and Spanish into a form of language that makes sense to those within the Hispanic community. At first, "[Spanglish]... was a hybridity of Chicano/a experiences" (SánchezMuñoz). It was a simple way to communicate with young Hispanic kids as an advantage tool. However, as years started to pass, the use of Spanglish seemed to also develop. It started to develop from a tool of communication to an advantage to connect the two generations of the Hispanic community.

Many bilingual and Hispanic students get thrown into two very different cultures when we are young. All my life, I knew my hispanic culture and its language, yet I was

at the same time being introduced and forced into American culture by the environment I was socializing in for my education. This same experience is pretty common for many people in the Hispanic community. Spanglish was slowly inching as a common part of the Hispanic community language. However, it was especially seen within the younger generation, with the “Hispanic Americans...[becoming] more assimilated” while still embracing their bilingualism (Walczuk Beltrao). As mentioned by Domnita Dumitrescu, Spanglish is a way to “...code-switch as a powerful communicative resource” among the younger generation.

There are two main ways that Spanglish is used, one more common than the other. The most common way is weaving Spanish or English words within your sentences, especially when you can't think of a better way to say a word or phrase in a language. This use of Spanglish is mainly seen among the younger hispanic generation. Often, you would hear kids quickly switch between English and Spanish in their sentences, especially in the classroom settings among teenagers. One very common way that you would find this being used is to emphasize points when telling a story-or even to simply gossip. As Dumitrescu had mentioned, Spanglish is a way for students to embrace the “complex linguistics and ethnic issues” of two language cultures in an innovative way (Dumitrescu).

The second way to incorporate Spanglish is often used among the older hispanic generations, which is mixing English with Spanish to make a word. A common example of this is phrases like “*parquear la troca*” or “*vacunar la carpeta*” (Cashman and Stavans, “*Spanglish: The Making of a New American Language*”). While these words aren't an actual Spanish or English word, it is used often by the older generation to talk

about parking a truck or to vacuum the carpet. The proper words in Spanish would be “*camión*” and “*alfombra*”. I know in my community, these spanglish words were things that kids were taught as if the words were the actual way to say the items in Spanish. Commonly, it is the older Hispanic generation that uses this form of spanglish when communicating with others in the discourse community. Often, these people who use this version of Spanglish are members that have a language barrier in English, and instead incorporate what they know of the foreign language into their hometown language.

One major thing that may have been noticed is that within the Hispanic community, there seemed to be a division on the use of Spanglish between the older and younger generations. Before, Spanglish was simply seen as a tool among the Hispanic community. The ability to mix and switch languages mid-conversation was an advantage for many younger members in the community. In a country where there are many people who, while they are monolingual, speak either English or Spanish, it becomes a useful tool to get a job. As mentioned in an interview with Evelyn Delgado, who is a part of the younger generation of the Hispanic community, for the younger generation, Spanglish has become a “resourceful” tool in searching and getting hired for a job. Meanwhile, for the older generations, it is used almost like a learning tool to improve a foreign language. Even so, Spanglish was commonly used among the younger generations a lot more often than with the older generations. Although recently, even more so with the kind of political climate the United States has recently found itself in, Spanglish has gradually begun to be used as a way to connect the two generations of the Hispanic community together. This form of communication has gradually gained

more importance in making sure that the Hispanic community doesn't drift apart. With the younger generations now being exposed more early on to English at a younger age, it is easier for them to communicate and understand the English language at a much quicker pace. However, the older generation still tends to struggle with learning English, as an example being my mother. Delgado mentioned that Spanglish has started off as an isolating branch of Spanish. With the majority of younger latinos using spanglish, it left out the older latinos that are struggling with learning English. However, it seems that recently Spanglish has slowly evolved as a way to create a "comforting environment that includes everyone", no matter their language barrier (Delgado).

As I had mentioned before, Spanglish is an essential part of my own life in order to not only fit into the community that I am surrounded by, but it has increased its importance in my life whenever I interact with the people around me, especially with my family. Patricia Solis, not only is she my mother-but she is a part of the older generation of the Hispanic community who struggle with English. In an interview, she mentioned that as someone who doesn't understand English, the use of Spanglish from other people, like her daughters, who are also a part of the Hispanic community, has allowed her to feel "confident and comfortable...to understand" what is happening around her (Solis). As someone who had previously struggled with learning English in my early school years, I understood how my mother felt. Living in a country where the language of the majority is English, it comes with a feeling of isolation. In a way, it was almost like being stuck in a crowd, where everyone had their own secret language, and meanwhile you are desperately trying to make sense of what is being said around you, in order to properly communicate with others. Spanglish was a way that welcomed inclusion and

prevented that feeling of isolation. In the same interview with my mother, she had commented how “Hearing it [spanglish], it can help when someone is speaking English, and they suddenly say something in Spanish, it gives an insight of what they are saying for me to understand” (Solis). Having to walk into settings where, if you have a language barrier, it is essential to understand what’s going on in order to properly communicate with those around you. Spanglish has been able to grant Spanish speaking individuals who have a language barrier the opportunity to be able to communicate with people around them. Even more so with the younger generation, who is slowly beginning to use English a lot often from Spanish.

As the years pass by, Spanglish is becoming more and more essential in the Hispanic community. Even more now with the members that live in the United States these recent years. Being in an environment where Spanish speaking individuals have a language barrier, simply speaking Spanish can put them in a dangerous position. This danger puts people, like my mother and other elderly hispanic individuals with a language barrier, in an even more isolated box. Being discriminated against because of the language that they speak from English-speaking individuals, it can push these members of the Hispanic community to strive away from learning English and becoming even more excluded from the rest of the community. That exclusion then leads to a risk to create an even bigger division within the different generations in the Hispanic community itself. Spanglish being used a lot more often among the younger generations, it has become a powerful communication tool for the Hispanic community as a whole. While it may not seem as much, it allows to pave a pathway for the isolated members to be welcomed, no matter the amount of growing discrimination that is rising

in the country. Spanglish, while at first was a division between the younger and older generations in the hispanic community, it has become an anchor that connects the Hispanic community further.

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Abstract: This essay takes a look into the use of Spanglish and how it can be a powerful tool to connect the Hispanic community together. Using my own personal experiences and interviews, I take a closer look at how each generation uses Spanglish to their advantage in blending into their environment. I also take a look on how it can be used as a powerful tool in unifying the two generations together, especially when looking at the type of climate the Hispanic community is currently finding themselves in.

Bio: My name is Kelsey Solis, I am a first year, first-generation student at WOU. I'm currently majoring as a Pre-nursing student, striving to get into a nursing program in hopes of soon becoming an Emergency and Forensic Nurse. I come from Newberg, Oregon, but choose Western because of it being close to home and the different program opportunities it offers. Outside of my academics, I am a huge art lover of all forms. I especially enjoy dancing, and am currently a part of the WOU dance team.