

Spanglish: Expression in hybridity
My Interview with Karla

When trying to figure out who to interview for this project, I decided almost immediately that I should interview my friend Karla. She's an international student from Puerto Rico, and speaks Spanish, English, and French (4). She lived with me during winter break this past year, and while staying with me, spoke a lot about her experiences in Puerto Rico and brought aspects of her culture into my home. My experience over break learning about her culture and customs was truly special, so I figured that interviewing her to learn more about how she uses her languages to communicate differently would also be fascinating.

Karla grew up in Caguas, Puerto Rico, and still considers Caguas to be her home (3). She said that her experiences learning Spanish and English were relatively unique compared to her friends and their experiences learning English—most of Karla's friends from Puerto Rico are also bilingual, but learned their languages differently than Karla did. Karla learned English and Spanish at the same time growing up, but learned French when she was a bit older. What is very unique to Karla's experience learning language is that her mother spoke to her exclusively in English, and her father spoke to her exclusively in Spanish (5). Until Karla was a certain age, they would not talk in the opposite language. "Until I was 10 years old or something, I didn't know my mom spoke Spanish and that my dad spoke English. I really thought that my parents spoke different languages and couldn't communicate with one another!" In regards to her third language, while French is a large part of Karla's life along with her other languages, she does not view herself as fluent. She is proficient in French, and a native English and Spanish speaker (6, 18).

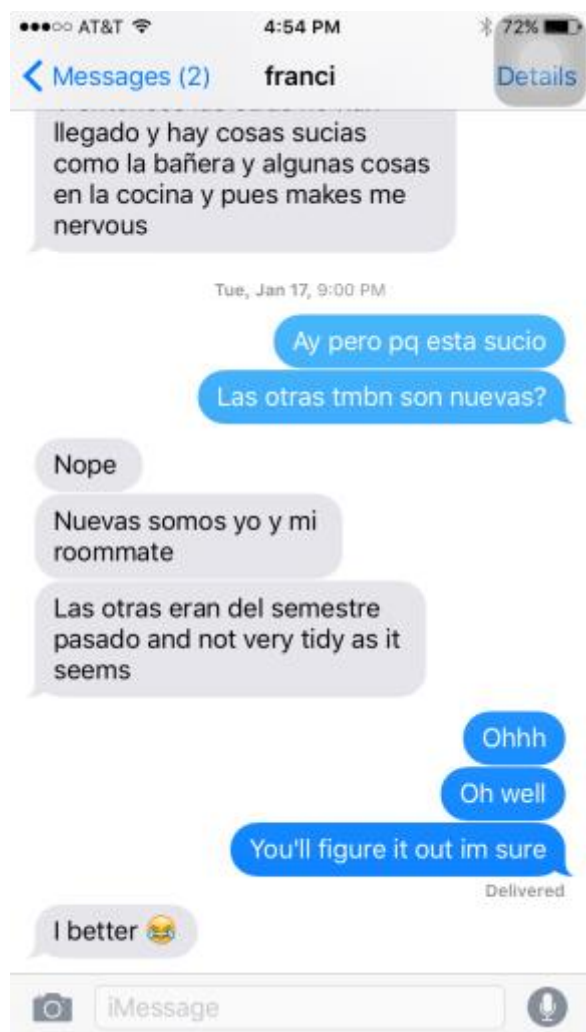
Although Karla’s parents spoke to her in different languages, she still mainly uses English to speak with her mother, her mother’s family, and her siblings. She speaks Spanish with her father and his side of the family, but explained that even with this side of the family they use *anglicismos* (English words, such as “cool” that have been adopted by Puerto Rican Spanish) (9). Where all of her languages intersect are when she thinks to herself and interacts with non-family members. When Karla spends time with her Puerto Rican friends, they exclusively speak Spanglish.

Karla and her friends both speak English and Spanish fluently, so naturally, they switch between the two languages mid-sentence, and even mid-thought. Karla explained Spanglish as coming naturally to her and her friends, being something they do not focus on too much or think about: “We don’t ‘intentionally’ use Spanglish or any one language specifically. It isn’t a conscious effort— it just comes out. [Spanglish] is comfortable—you say what you feel like saying in the language that just feels right. It isn’t anything more than that. (17)”

Karla noticed that I seemed a bit confused on the logistics of “Spanglish” and had a bit of trouble understanding how she and her



friends can switch so comfortably between two languages, but actually prefer to do so (30), so she provided me with some examples from her texting conversations with her friends. The



conversations consist of both Spanish and English, but do demonstrate that the switching between the two languages happens almost randomly mid-thought, as seen in the texting conversation to the left: Franci, talking about her roommate situation in Spanish, switches to English for the phrase “and not very tidy as it seems.” Regardless, the Spanglish conversations flow comfortably and naturally.

Karla feels most comfortable speaking Spanglish. As a result, she tends to be better friends with people who speak multiple languages—regardless of whether she can speak their languages fluently (28). As language is such

an important part of her life, Karla tends to make friends with people who *also* are multilingual or who are interested in learning other languages: “Most of my closest friends on campus are [international] students, so I can speak Spanish or French with a lot of them. One of them is teaching me Romanian and I’m teaching her Spanish, and I speak Spanglish with a lot of them. I also teach my English-only speaking friends Spanish.” One of Karla’s friends on her hall doesn’t speak another language fluently, but has begun learning Spanish from Karla. While he may only be able to say “*you are a window*,” or similarly nonsensical phrases, his friendship with Karla

reveals that she makes a very overt and conscious effort to introduce her various languages into any and all friendships, as she may then “express [herself] in a larger variety of ways since [she has] more words and phrases to express [herself] in (31).”

Being bilingual and learning new languages is incredible important to Karla, and has been for her entire life. Karla’s perspective on her bilingualism is interesting, as she feels as though it increases her opportunities in unique ways. Such opportunities are not necessarily academic or career-oriented, but to Karla, having access to various languages increases her opportunities for self-expression and her abilities to forge more meaningful friendships.