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English 1A

12 April 2016

Secret Weapon

From running around playing tag with my friends during recess, to trying to fit in and be “Cool” was a big transition for me. I remember like it was yesterday attending middle school for the first time, I was really looking forward to it because I no longer would be attending elementary school and it was a big deal for me. Little did I know that being in a new environment was going to influence my life in many ways. When I was in grade school, I did not hear profanity and when I did it was weird since I was not used to it. My parents had taught me that profanity was bad, including the word “Stupid” was not allowed in my household. I had that mentality throughout my early childhood. To my surprise I adapted to middle school very fast, so I started doing what my peers were because I wanted to fit in. Before I knew it I was using profanity, slang and all this jargon on the daily which I never did before. I became a pro at “Code- Switching” which according to the Urban Dictionary is, “To customize style of speech to the audience or group being addressed.” I know it is bad and that is why I have learned to use it wisely. Depending where I am or who I am with, I tend to speak a certain way to better communicate and express myself without offending anyone. Using Spanglish, profanity, emojis and proper English have become a part of my daily life.

Being a Mexican-American I have the luxury of being fluent, both in Spanish and English. When I am with family and very close friends I tend to use a lot of Spanglish and it has

become a natural habit to me. “Spanglish is the combination of English and Spanish into a new language” (Canas). Unfortunately, since my parents do not speak English, I find myself incorporating both languages in our conversations, so they can understand me and not feel left out. They may not know how to speak English but they do know many words. For example, when I am going to the movies I say, “ voy a ir a las movies” which means “ I am going to the movies.” I find Spanglish very helpful because I sometimes forget how to pronounce certain words in English, so I just say it in Spanish or vice versa. I like to call it my “secret weapon” because I can use it to my advantage when I want to. As Canas stated, “This type of switching may also be used to exclude others who do not speak the second language from a conversation.” I like to gossip: who does not? At my old job, there was this girl who I did not like. My coworkers and I use to call her “Machete” which means” knife.” I do not know why we would call her that, but that was our nickname for her. Every time we would talk about her we would say “Machete” instead of her real name. She never knew we were talking about her because she does not speak Spanish. I know that is very mean of me, but I have learned that there are many things I cannot say in public. My intention is not to offend anyone nor do I want my parents to feel left out. That is why I only use Spanglish with my family and close friends because it is our way of connecting and I know they understand me.

Along with Spanglish using profanity is my way of expressing myself in a rebellious way. My parents do not allow cursing in our house they find it very vulgar. That is why I only use it when I am around my friends, or whom I feel very comfortable with. Every time I see my girlfriends instead of saying, “Hey, girl” I say “Hey, bitch.” They obviously know I am not trying to offend them, because that is our way of communicating with each other. I always joke around with my friends telling them that if I cannot call them a “Bitch” we cannot be friends.

Being surrounded by profanity has made it difficult not to use it. I love listening to rap music, listening to rap music is like literally hearing, “Fuck that bitch,” “Fuck this,” “Fuck that,” over and over again. It becomes very catchy after a while. As stated in this recent article, “When I get angry, it feels good to swear” (O’Conner). Every time I am mad, I turn my rap music on and listening to it gets me in a better mood. When I say “fuck” I mostly say it to express an emotion that I am feeling. For example, if I see a guy that I think is handsome I would say “ damn he’s fucken cute” or if I am angry I would say, “ I am so fucken mad.” For some reason I feel that adding the word “fuck” to an expression, adds more intensity to it. “Regardless of what sets a person off, profanity helps transform him or her from a civilized human being”(O’Conner). I find this quote to be very true because even a well-mannered person can sound like a completely different one when using profanity. Applying profanity to my vocabulary has become more of a second nature. I know I will eventually stop using it due to it sounding unethical.

With the rapid growth of technology I have found myself utilizing emojis to my benefit every day. I personally would have to say that emojis have been one of the greatest inventions ever. When I am having a conversations with my siblings and friends, emojis have helped me express myself more. They also make a conversation more interesting. As stated in this recent research article,

An emoticon, such as ;-), is shorthand for a facial expression. It allows the author to express her/his feelings, moods, and emotions, and arguments a written message with non-verbal elements. It helps to draw the reader’s attention, and enhances and improves the understanding of the message. An emoji is a step further, developed with modern communication technologies that facilitate more expressive messages. (Kraij, Novak)

When I am texting I have an obsession with putting emojis after everything I have to say. For example, when I am sad instead of just saying, “I am sad,” I would say “I am sad “crying emoji,” “heartbroken emoji.” Adding all those emojis at the end of my sentence gives whomever I am texting the impression that I am “very sad.” I feel that inserting an emoji in a simple sentence gives it more emotion and life. When I am texting someone and they do not put an emoji, I get the sense that they are mad or they do not want to talk to me. I would not reply back to “Hey” but I would to a “Hey (:”. By simply adding a “happy face emoji” to a sentence makes a big difference. It actually makes me want to continue the conversation which is really ignorant. I know I should not judge a conversation over an emoji but I do. They are also more convenient because they save me time. Let’s say I am texting my sister and she asks where I am, instead of replying in a full sentence I would reply with emojis. For example, I would put “beach emoji,” “friend emoji,” “food emoji” which means, “I am at the beach having lunch with my friends.” I know not everybody may understand what I have to say due to some emojis having different meanings. That is why I use certain emojis depending who I am talking with. For example, a “kissy face emoji” is my way of saying “thank you” or my way of “complimenting” my girlfriends. I obviously would not use a “kissy face emoji” with any of my guy friends due to its actual meaning, which is a kiss. Although, emojis have been a positive thing in my life they sometimes do affect me negatively. For instance, I use emojis to show my feelings so much that when it comes down to me actually, having to sit down and write them out, I have difficulty finding the right words. Eventually, as I get older my use of emojis will ultimately become less due to me wanting to sound more professional.

When I am around strangers or elders, I use proper English. I will not speak to strangers how I would with family and friends. As stated in this article, “[For] Many people...non-

standard English is not a question of ability, but reserving Standard English for the right social situations” (Dewey). I would never use profanity with an educated person because I find it very disrespectful. I feel that they would think I am vulgar. My parents have taught me to always treat strangers with respect because I never know who I can be talking to. For example, when I am at work and I am handing an item to a customer I would say, “ here you go ma’am” or “sir.” instead of saying “ hey dude here’s your stuff”, how I would with my friends. It is sad to say, but many people are judgmental on how others speak. I feel that many people who speak poorly are not taken serious. I cannot speak at work how I would speak at home because it is very unprofessional. At work I get paid to speak a certain way and if I do not, I get in trouble. But If I am around people who I am comfortable with such as family and friends, I can speak my mind without being judge. Speaking proper English when I am around strangers and elders is my way of showing respect. In the long run I know speaking proper English can bring me many benefits, such as getting a raise or moving up to a new position. Even though slang, and profanity are part of my daily vocabulary I still want people to know I am educated. After all, impressions really do matter to me and that is why I am careful with my words.

In order to express myself without offending anyone I code-switch. By code-switching I can prevent myself from those unwanted situations. Speaking Spanglish is a way I can incorporate both languages into one conversation. It is a special connection I have with my family and close friends. Although, using profanity is my way of being a rebel. It is my personal way of venting, since I know I cannot use it when I am around my family. The advantage of having emojis in my life, has made communicating through text message more convenient and fun. To seem like an educated person I have to speak proper English in order for people to take me serious. Furthermore, writing this assignment has helped me realize that I am unconsciously

switching roles every day. Even though I feel like a hypocrite at times, I have learned that there are certain things I cannot say in public. When I have children in the future I want them to know that there is a time and place when to use slang. Everyone has different ways of expressing themselves in different situations and code-switching happens to be mine.

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