Multilingualism: The Doorway to Appreciating Diversity

By Claudine Calaguian

Mabuhay.

Hello.

Hola.

Each of these words, like pieces, I have picked up, studied, and added to my collection of languages. I carry them. I carry them because I express myself through them. I carry them because they have become part of my identity (and to be honest, they have also helped me land jobs). But most of all, I carry these languages with me because they are a way by which I connect with others.

I grew up with Tagalog as my native tongue. Then, while I was still little, English came into the mix, introduced itself and shook hands with my Tagalog, agreeing to share the official title of mother tongue. It was not until university that I, (embarrassingly) inspired by the Latin-lover tropes and theatrics of telenovela, picked up an interest in minoring in Spanish. In my last few years of studying the language, not only have I learned to watch Spanish-language shows without the English subtitles, but I have also made new friends who helped me gain a better understanding and appreciation of the cultures that speak the language. This has led me to believe that the main reason to learn languages is not just so you can look smart and boost your resume. The reason to learn languages is that it opens a doorway for you to learn and appreciate the world, and most of all, the people around you.

This idea is so crucial especially for a diverse country like Canada, known for embracing multiculturalism and welcoming people from all over the world. Even here in Winnipeg, the annual festival of Folklarama celebrates that very multiculturalism. Yes, learning languages is beneficial from a business standpoint, especially if the language is French or Mandarin. However, multilingualism also leads to open-mindedness as well as a sense of kinship and comfort for someone, who, for example, might not know English or some other predominant language very well. Learning more languages makes it easier to connect with others and have a shared sense of perspectives. It lets others know that you are their friend and that you have an appreciation for where they come from.

Personally, I would like to learn more languages after Spanish. I am interested in learning Italian, Arabic, Japanese- and who knows, maybe I will stop treating French like an ex-boyfriend from high school and give it another chance.

I think it would be amazing as well for more students in the university to add more languages to their repertoire and learn more about the cultures they come from. One way this can be done is if the Faculty of Arts offered more language courses. There are many languages that have yet to be represented such as Tagalog, Portuguese, Punjabi, Vietnamese, and much more- especially since these are very commonly spoken in Winnipeg.

All in all, the main reason I stand for multilingualism is not just for the academic advantage, but because it invites everyone to share and celebrate cultural differences. Not only do you gain knowledge with gaining a new language, you also gain new friends and an appreciation for diversity.