For the first three years of my life, I spoke Spanish, and that's all I spoke, actually. But when I started going to school, we only learned English. Spanish wasn't really promoted, so I didn't get to practice it, and I guess after that I just kind of lost the language entirely. I feel a lot more comfortable with English now. I use it a lot more often. I really only use Spanish back in my hometown, at the flea market, ordering things, or talking to my three uncles that don't speak any English. I never really use Spanish here where I live now. I never needed to.

I grew up in the South, in a border town between the United States and Mexico. It was very humid there, and the schools were not great. The people at schools did not seem to care much about education; they would just mess around. Other than that, I don't really remember much. I grew up in a rough area where houses were run-down, and nothing was clean. My grandfather's house, where I spent like a good amount of my life, was one he built himself. It had no AC, the tiles were falling apart, and the backyard had no grass. I lived with him during the summer and winter breaks when there was no school.

We did not talk much to people in the community unless it was for business, like at the grocery store. We had neighbors who would wave at us, but that was it. I did not talk to anybody outside of customer service or my neighbors. There is a big Spanish-speaking community in that area, but I would not say that I speak Spanish. People spoke Spanish around me, and everybody in my family speaks Spanish, my grandparent, my little cousins, but I never picked it up. I have one brother, but he cannot speak because he is disabled.

I spent a lot of time with my grandfather, who spoke Spanish, but he wanted to learn English, and he practiced it with me. So, whenever I was at his ranch, we would only speak English. Everyone else spoke Spanish to me, but I always replied in English because it was easier for me, and

everyone understood. I could understand Spanish, but I felt like I could never find the words fast enough, so I just stuck to speaking English because it was more convenient.

In high school, Spanish class was easy because you just had to say what your name was and build basic sentences. I was never intimidated by that. Outside of school, there were times that I hit a language barrier with other people. One time, I went to a junkyard to buy some parts, but the person working there only spoke Spanish. I did not know how to communicate with him since I could not understand what he was saying. It was awkward having to put the tools back because I did not know what was happening. Similar situations happen at the flea market, too. The market is really scary because nobody there speaks English. Situations like these remind me of how disconnected I feel from the language and culture.

I have been living here for about three years, ever since I came for college. It is very boring. There is not much to do, but at least it is close to places where you can hike. Since starting college, I have distanced myself from that side of my family. At work, my coworkers have told me learning Spanish would be helpful for jobs. Other than that, no one thought it would be important for me to learn Spanish since I was not planning to come back to my hometown. I feel like it was only important when I was a kid. I do not think anyone believes I can learn it now anyways. I think my family gave up on me learning Spanish by the time I started college. I think they were like, "oh, he's going to be like this forever, so why bother trying to teach him?".

Since my uncles only speak Spanish, I do not talk to them at all. I avoid certain family members for that reason. They might say something in Spanish, and I respond in Spanish, but as far as having real conversations, I do not talk to them. There is one time I felt bad for not talking to them, so I tried to speak to my uncle in Spanish, and it did not turn out so well. He was not upset about me not being able to speak Spanish like I thought he would be. He was trying to encourage me a bit,

but I also remember that he asked why I was trying to learn it now since I had moved out of my hometown. I guess in his eyes, speaking Spanish was not important anymore, now that I do not live around Spanish speakers, which I thought was weird. I made it very clear that I won't never move back there.

Regarding my relationships with my family, not speaking Spanish has cut me off from a lot of them. For example, those uncles I just mentioned I do not talk to because we cannot understand each other. So, even though I saw them all the time, I did not really know them as people. They did not even make an effort to speak English with me. They just wanted me to learn Spanish. It was like I am responsible for learning how to speak to them since everybody else in my family speaks Spanish. I am the only one that does not.

My family tried to teach me later in my childhood, but it was intimidating. When I would try and fail, they wouldn't try to correct me; they would just be mad at me for not being good enough. It did not feel like my parents ever encouraged me to speak Spanish. Instead, they would punish me when I messed up, and that was their way of trying to make me learn. They would make me feel bad for not knowing Spanish, thinking that would motivate me. Well, it did not. To me, encouragement means helping me in a kind way, but they never did that. They just would intimidate me to learn Spanish rather than explain why they want me to learn Spanish.

One time I really wanted to speak Spanish was with a coworker who only spoke Spanish. He was a nice guy, but we couldn't communicate well. I regret not talking to him more. There were times we were alone, and I wished I could hold a conversation with him, but I just could not. When I am back home and need to speak to someone, that is when I am forced to use Spanish because everyone there speaks Spanish. At small shops or restaurants, people almost always speak Spanish first. I reply in English, and depending on their reaction, I either switch to Spanish or continue in

English. Sometimes it feels like they are just stubborn because I can tell that they can understand English, but they still choose to speak Spanish. Sometimes it makes me feel lost when I do not understand what they are saying, and they only switch to English after realizing I'm struggling to understand. It feels like they're forcing me to use Spanish even though I do not want to. For example, sometimes I go to a vendor and ask for something in English, they respond in Spanish, and then I respond in English. Then, from what I said, they respond in Spanish again. So, I know they understand; they're just using Spanish as a preference. They only use English when they realize that I'm not picking up some of the words that they say, or if they decide I'm too slow.

I think people in my hometown see speaking Spanish as a way of keeping the culture alive. If you don't speak it, they think you're becoming too "Americanized. They look down on you if you can't speak it. I have been called stupid for not speaking Spanish when I was working at a restaurant. It's insulting to be judged like that. People give you bad looks, too, like you're worthless if you don't know Spanish. A coworker even complained to the manager because I didn't know how to speak Spanish. I got two complaints from not speaking Spanish over the course of two months. So, you could tell that people just don't like it when I only speak English. I have also heard coworkers making fun of me for not speaking Spanish, but I mean, people working in construction make fun of you regardless. They've said worse.

It feels like not speaking Spanish means you don't belong. I still love Mexican food, music, and dancing, but it doesn't matter to them. Even though I have all other aspects of the culture, speaking Spanish is what makes you part of the community, and without it, I feel disconnected. Even when I try to make friends here, if they find out I don't speak Spanish, they stop talking to me; I find it quite strange. My Spanish isn't good enough to be accepted by my community, and it's obvious when I try to speak that I'm not fluent.

I'm not as comfortable with using Spanish because I feel embarrassed. I first remember feeling that way when I was young, probably in first or second grade. I previously mentioned that from birth to three years old, I only spoke Spanish, and then from three on, it was all English. Today, even when I'm just listening to someone speaking Spanish, I must pay full attention and actively translate to understand. If people are speaking Spanish in the background, I don't really notice it.

I don't feel uncomfortable or intimidated buying things or going to the store anymore. I just understand that I'm not part of the community. I feel like in my eyes, I know I'm an outsider, like I don't belong there. Because of that, it makes it easier just to tell myself that it's not them, it's me. Once I get that, it's fine. It's just an easier way of not caring, because no matter what I do, I still haven't met a Spanish-speaker that was nice to me. I used to get anxious before I talked with someone that only spoke Spanish. But after a point, I just stopped caring. They're usually just old, so I think that they're just stubborn. I see it as a one-time interaction, so I don't really need to worry about it.

I lost all confidence speaking Spanish, so I just don't bother speaking it anymore. I mean, I know I can. Sometimes I could actually speak sentences, but, at the end of the day, even if I do say the right words, I'm still going to sound like I don't speak Spanish. That's still enough for people to give me those looks. So no matter what I do, I'm stuck in this spot. When I was a kid, I was able to speak without much of a problem. I used to sing a lot of songs too in Spanish. I knew how to enunciate back then. I don't think my confidence is holding me back as much as how my Spanish sounds. I just think it sounds bad because I haven't practiced it.

I think that I feel the way I do about using Spanish because of the bad looks and the judgment that I get from speaking it with other people. I don't like feeling like that, so I avoid it. Even here where I live now, people come up to me speaking Spanish. When I don't respond back, they give me

those same looks of judgement. Before, it used to give me a very negative feeling towards the language. Now, though, I feel like I just understand that it doesn't matter anymore. I don't feel it. I don't really care.

I think growing up, I just learned it’s better not to speak Spanish at all since it had a pretty big impact. I used to try to speak it, but now I have just given up. The one thing that would motivate me to continue using Spanish would be that if I have a kid, I don't want them growing up having to go through what I went through. Only in that situation do I think that I should learn Spanish. That's the only case where I think it would be necessary. I think if I really try, assuming I have 9 months to learn before my kid is born, I could become fluent in Spanish in about 5 months. That is possible based off of the knowledge that I have so far.