BORN IN BETWEEN

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Going to the doctor with her mother has always been a hassle for Biftu Tullu '19. Her mother speaks Amharic and Oromo, languages native to Ethiopia. However, she does not speak English. Although Tullu had the ability to translate for her mother, by law and according to the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC), using a minor as a medical interpreter is prohibited unless in an emergency situation. Therefore, in adherence to the Affordable Care Act (ACA) which states that medical providers must arrange for qualified medical interpreters and translators, the doctors had to provide a medical interpreter for Tullu's mother. "They would have to get someone who speaks our language on the phone," Tullu said. "It would take forever, I don't know why. And then once they do get them on the phone there was always some problem."

Historically, educators, researchers and policymakers viewed learning a second language as a cognitive obstacle that would interfere with people's academic development. However, this belief has since changed. Recently, research is showing that being multilingual, or knowing more than one language, forces the brain to deal with internal conflict which provides a workout to the mind by strengthening cognitive muscles. Spanish teacher Nora Olguin agrees with this. "Being bilingual opens doors and opens minds," Olguin said.

Before entering the English Language Learners (ELL) classroom, Emily Kenny has an infographic posted on the door that explains the benefits of being multilingual. "I think it creates a whole other dimension in their learning which can sometimes be seen as a barrier, but really it's not," Kenny said. "It's just different wirings and connections. From a cognitive standpoint, it's great. It's also an advantage, I think here, in term of employment. They can engage a whole community of customers that would not be engaged without that bilingual support or just that, 'Oh, that guy's last name, he's Bosnian. I'm gonna call him because I feel comfortable with that type of relationship.'"

For many bilingual students, knowing two languages forces them to serve as a liaison. This is more apparent for those who often have to act as translators for others, such as their parents. "I grew up a ton," Zenudin Omerovic '20 said. "When I was like eight- to 10-years-old, I would always call internet companies or insurance companies. And just what they would tell me I would have to translate [for my parents]. And they would give me a paper with information, and whatever the people on the phone would ask for, I would tell them."

At times, translating for parents can be a big commitment and can greatly impact students' schedules. "My parents, they usually randomly call me and tell me, 'Get ready cause we're going to pick you up.'" Maria Sutuc '19 said. Her parents had scheduled a doctor's appointment and needed her to interpret for them. "I'm like, 'What? Why?'"

For Lal Siama '19, translating for his parents is just a regular part of his life. "I translate things a lot," Siama said. "That's kind of the perk, or drawback if you're talking about time commitment with school and stuff. If you're bilingual and your parents don't speak English. You have to translate everything from a doctor's appointment to the mail."

While translating for his parents is time consuming, Omerovic is able to benefit from it at times. "I loved [parent teacher conferences]," Omerovic said. "My parents would ask me what they said, so if I was bad in class, and the teacher was telling them, 'He was really bad in class', and I had to translate, I would tell them, 'Oh he was great in class.'"

Jason Guo '19 would also have to translate for his parents when he was younger, though this has recently begun to change. "It doesn't happen nearly as often now because they'll just start looking stuff up instead," Guo said. "Before we did that very often, I would try to help translate back and forth if they're having a conversation with a colleague or something that they needed help with. Also like emails and grammar and stuff, I would help my dad with that since he would have to email a lot of people for work."

While not speaking English sounds like it would make everyday life much harder, there

> "What is American culture, though? We're supposed to be a country built on immigrants, so I feel like we should embrace what the immigrants bring with them, rather than force them to assimilate to the standard we have. Because we made our own standard. So can't we make a new one? That's what America should be."
>
> -Angel Nyaga '20

are times where translations are not needed. "[My parents] don't need an interpreter to go to the store or anything like that," Siama said. "When there's finances involved or some doctors or medical things involved, that's when they need help. It's not every second of everyday type of thing."

Even for students whose parents do know English, it is common for their native tongue to be spoken most at home. This is the case for Shreya Shrestha '20; her parents do not want her speaking English at home. "Since a young age, I've spoken Nepali," Shrestha said. "I don't remember a time where I necessarily didn't. I do remember going to school and kind of dropping it almost. And once I started going to elementary school and talking more English, it kind of came back with my parents being like, 'Oh, we should speak Nepali at home.' If I ever spoke in English at home, [my dad] would always be like, 'I don't understand English! Speak in Nepali!' It just became a habit and we just ended up growing up like that."

Vedad Kavazovic '20 also speaks his native tongue at home, though he struggles at times to remember certain words. "I'm a little bit guilty because I feel like I know English more just because I'm in school everyday, and I learn new words," Kavazovic said. "I kinda feel ashamed though cause I feel like I should know more Bosnian because that's what I grew up learning. There's some words in English that I can't say in Bosnian and I'll just have to give my parents a phrase and I'm like, 'I gotta learn what that word is.' Because I feel that by the end of my life, I should know more Bosnian than English."

> I don't like it when people say you're born in America, you are an American. It's like both my parents are from the same country, their whole bloodline has been in this one city. I'm not American, I'm Bosnian. That's who I am. That's my genes.
>
> -Vedad Kavazovic '20

Lilly Doyo '19 speaks a South Sudanese language called Mabaan. Constantly being in school everyday has also affected her proficiency in her native language. "I'll have family members call me from back in Sudan, and I can't communicate with them as well because I don't know the language that well. And I'm hoping to go back and visit some day, maybe stay for a whole summer so that I could start learning the language again, because it's really important to me to keep that connection."

This seems to be a common problem for bilingual students - constantly speaking English at school can cause them to lose touch with their native language. "[My sister and I] like to communicate in English better than our language," Siama said. "Not that we devalue our language in any way, or not appreciate it, but communication comes easier in English. You have to say less words, you have to think less. Because that is the primary language that we speak in school."

When with her family, Doyo mostly speaks Mabaan whether it be at home or in stores. "I don't really pay attention to other people around us," Doyo said. "I have noticed with my siblings, my younger brother, when we are in public and we're speaking our native language together, or if I'm speaking with one of our other siblings, he'll kind of turn to me and be like, 'Be quiet, speak English.' and I'm just like, 'Why are you so ashamed to speak your native language?'"

However, in some instances, bilingual students struggle with both of the languages they know. "For me, it's like I'm not good at either language because I lived five years in Nepal and then I lived for six years in

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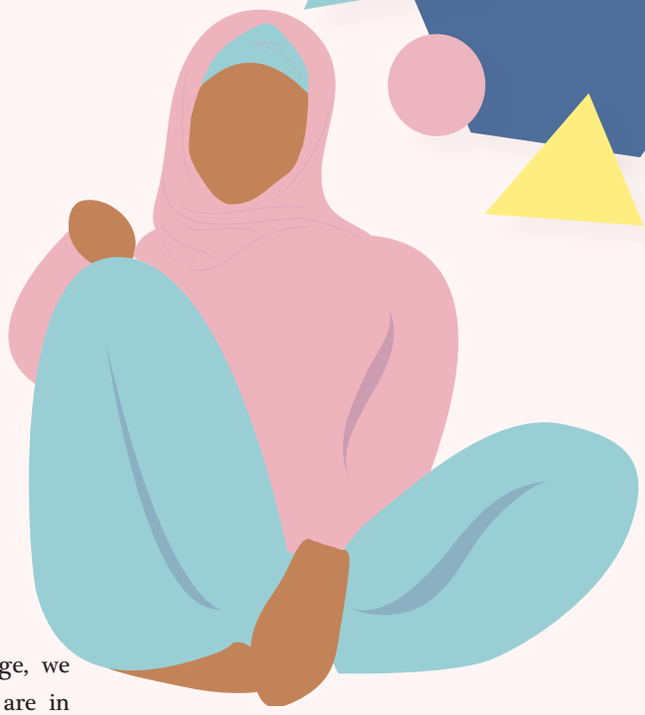
languages are spoken within the Johnston Community School District



America," Sanjana Amatya '19 said. "So it's like, I'm not really good at Nepali, but I'm not really good at English. I can pass off like as both, but like when someone asks me really specific questions about grammar on either side, I have no clue."

Contrastingly, navigating between two different languages comes easily for Shrestha. "I've always viewed it as a light switch," said Shrestha. "It's like you turn on the light switch if you need to talk English and then you turn it off. And sometimes it will be like everything is kind of a blurr."

At times the light switch malfunctions, typically during moments of high emotions. Amatya did not realize that she had transitioned from speaking English to Nepali when she was venting to her friends. "I was like really really angry at a friend and so like I went off in English at first and then I [switched over] to Nepali and then just started ranting hardcore," Amatya said. "Everyone at my table was just watching me and like nodding even though they had no clue what I was saying. At the end, I pass it off as like nothing happened. To me, I understood what I was saying but later on [my friends] were saying, 'What were you talking about?' And I was like, 'What do you mean?' and they were like, 'You were not talking in English.'"

Another problem that bilingual students occasionally face are words that do not have direct translations between their languages. "A few weeks ago, I went to the doctor with my mom and had to translate some things for her," Doyo said. "In our language, we don't have some of the words that are in English. So, the doctor asked my mom if she was depressed, and she didn't know what that was. I had to try to translate, because we don't have the word 'depression' in our language."

A common struggle that many people who learn a second language face is standing out from others due to their accent. Katie Michalski '19 speaks English and Polish fluently. "I don't speak with an accent so I don't think people know that I necessarily know [another] language unless I choose to tell them," Michalski said. "I do think that if you have an accent there's more of a stigma around that especially here in the United States or like in rural areas and cities where it's not as common to interact with people with accents."

No matter the struggles or benefits that come with it, being bilingual and belonging to another culture is a gift. "Without culture, and without knowing your native language, I think you're losing a pretty big piece of who you are," Siama said. "And that's something you really can't compensate for with another language. Because I think you're born into a culture for a reason, and so I value my language deeply."

1 in 10

people speak spanish

According to the latest United States Census Bureau American Community Suvey