

▽ Myriam Marquez writes regularly for the Orlando Sentinel, and her columns are syndicated nationally. (We ran across this one in July 1999 in the Austin American Statesman.) In this op-ed piece, Marquez explains why she, a Cuban American who grew up in Miami, and her family use Spanish in public within the earshot of people who don't speak Spanish. As you read, consider the ways in which Marquez relies on arguments based on values, arguments from the heart, arguments based on character, and arguments based on reason to make her point.

Why and When We Speak Spanish in Public

MYRIAM MARQUEZ

When I'm shopping with my mother or standing in line with my stepdad to order fast food or anywhere else we might be together, we're going to speak to one another in Spanish.

That may appear rude to those who don't understand Spanish and overhear us in public places.

Those around us may get the impression that we're talking about them. They may wonder why we would insist on speaking in a foreign tongue, especially if they knew that my family has lived in the United States for 40 years and that my parents do understand English and speak it, albeit with difficulty and a heavy accent.

Let me explain why we haven't adopted English as our official family

language. For me and most of the bilingual people I know, it's a matter of respect for our parents and comfort in our cultural roots.

It's not meant to be rude to others. It's not meant to alienate anyone or to Balkanize America.

It's certainly not meant to be un-American—what constitutes an "American" being defined by English speakers from North America.

Being an American has very little to do with what language we use during our free time in a free country. From its inception, this country was careful not to promote a government-mandated official language.

We understand that English is the common language of this country and the one most often heard in international-business circles from

Peru to Norway. We know that, to get ahead here, one must learn English.

But that ought not mean that somehow we must stop speaking in our native tongue whenever we're in a public area, as if we were ashamed of who we are, where we're from. As if talking in Spanish—or any other language, for that matter—is some sort of litmus test used to gauge American patriotism.

Throughout this nation's history, 10 most immigrants—whether from Poland or Finland or Italy or wherever else—kept their language through the first generation and, often, the second. I suspect that they spoke among themselves in their native tongue—in public. Pennsylvania even provided voting ballots written in German during much of the

1800s for those who weren't fluent in English.

In this century, Latin American immigrants and others have fought for this country in U.S.-led wars. They have participated fully in this nation's democracy by voting, holding political office and paying taxes. And they have watched their children

and grandchildren become so "American" that they resist speaking in Spanish.

You know what's rude?

When there are two or more people who are bilingual and another person who speaks only English and the bilingual folks all of a sudden start speaking Spanish, which effectively

leaves out the English-only speaker. I don't tolerate that.

One thing's for sure. If I'm ever in a public place with my mom or dad and bump into an acquaintance who doesn't speak Spanish, I will switch to English and introduce that person to my parents. They will respond in English, and do so with respect.

Who are Marquez's intended readers? Who are her invoked readers? Her real readers? See Chapter 3 for more on how writers address audiences.

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RESPOND

1. How does Marquez explain and justify her behavior and that of many immigrants, including Spanish-speaking immigrants? What fear does she acknowledge on the part of those who don't speak Spanish? How does she seek to respond to it?
2. What are the specific ways in which Marquez relies on arguments based on values, arguments from the heart, arguments based on character, and arguments based on reason to make her point? What values does Marquez appeal to when she explains why bilinguals like her speak Spanish in public?
3. The last three paragraphs of this essay represent a clear shift in tone and emphasis from the rest of this selection, especially the previous few paragraphs. What is their purpose? Do you find that they contribute to or detract from the overall effect of the selection? Why?
4. Write an essay in which you define and evaluate the notion of public space with respect to speaking languages other than English as presented by Marquez. As Marquez notes, for her and many Americans, the public space is not a space where only English can be spoken. At the same time, there are limits to what is permissible. Thus you will need to define the public space with respect to language in the terms Marquez uses and then evaluate her definition or characterization of that space, depending on your own values and experiences.