

hard work. "The immigrant who comes here isn't so arrogant, so envious, as someone who is born here," Valderas says, "He knows what sacrifices he had to make to achieve what he has. That's why what he has is worth more."

Valderas notes that it is harder for Latino immigrants to learn English when they live and work within a Spanish-speaking community. "They don't practice, and that's not good. We should practice more in English. For example, in my work, I have American friends, and I speak with them to learn more. But I stopped speaking [English] for a while, because I haven't practiced much. It's a bit difficult."

Valderas recognizes the critical value of speaking English in the U.S. "When you speak two languages, there are more possibilities ... for employment, for the future. It's an advantage to speak both languages, English and Spanish."

Though he hopes to become an American citizen one day, Valderas considers himself "completely Mexican." He says, "I'm content. It's fine here, but I'm not going to change my customs."

If he has children in the U.S., adds Valderas, they will definitely speak both English and Spanish at home. "They should never forget their country," he asserts. "They should never forget where they come from. They should never forget their language. This is the mistake that I think Hispanic-Americans have made — to forget their roots. More than anything, where they come from and their language are very important."

BEING BIRACIAL

Candice Coots hurries into the resource center at the UO School of Journalism, still glowing from her workout. Wearing a UO baseball cap and a fleece jacket, the 20-year-old undergraduate sips on a Pepsi and cheerfully discusses her life as a biracial Mexican-American.

Coots is the only child of a Mexican-American mother and a white father. Though she spoke some Spanish with her mother's family as a child, she says that most of her Spanish-speaking abilities deteriorated when she moved to southern Oregon at age 8. English was the predominant language spoken at home. It wasn't until she visited Mexico last year that Coots renewed her study of the Spanish language, and she says she's far from fluent.

Coots is the first member of her family to go to college. An electronic media major, she aspires to document minority life in the U.S. She is especially interested in the role of Latinos as the largest ethnic minority in the U.S. "I would like to do some kind of bicultural reporting," she says. "That's really interesting to me ... Are we going to become a bilingual country?"

Rather than focusing on her ancestral roots in Mexico, Coots celebrates her identity as a biracial Mexican-American. She is the external director of the UO chapter of MEChA (*Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlan*), a political group of Mexican-American students. "I like being biracial," she says. "I like having the two cultures, having to compare. It's an advantage in some aspects, and in others it's not."

Coots cares deeply about the welfare of Spanish-speaking Mexicans in Eugene, but

she is sometimes frustrated by the language barrier. "The boundary, I think, is speaking," she says. "I'm not looked upon as different, unless [other Latinos] come up to me and they're like, 'Hola! Buenos dias!' and they [continue speaking], and then sometimes I can't understand, and I'm like, 'Oh, there's a boundary.' But I find, for the most part, they appreciate you being out there. I think I find the boundary more than they do. I want to be fluent. It's gonna happen, and I'll feel better."

Still, Coots doesn't regret growing up in the U.S. "If I was born in Mexico, I think we would've been a poor family — not that we're rich now, we're still low-income ... but I definitely wouldn't have the opportunity to go to school and educate myself and be empowered as a female. America has a lot more opportunities, and I wouldn't take it back, but I'm sure that if I were a full Mexican citizen, my life would be a lot different."

Coots' reality is far removed from that of Mexican immigrants in Eugene. "But I feel like I have a connection," she says. "I know how I can help you if you want help; I know places where you can go if you want to get involved here ... so different worlds, but I can still relate. I feel their needs, maybe?"

ERECTING BARRIERS

Hulick-Baiza says that language politics can divide Latinos. "Social groups are often formed on the basis of who has the skills in which language," he says. "Those are boundaries we put up to belittle other people."

Rosa Lopez, a 24-year-old graduate student at the UO, agrees. "It's a class thing," says Lopez, who once resisted speaking Spanish. When her Mexican-American parents spoke Spanish to her, "I'd speak English back," she says. "I'd be like, 'Don't speak Spanish to me. I speak English.'" In high school, she struggled to distinguish herself from the Mexican-Americans who spoke Spanish among themselves. "I felt like, 'I'm Mexican-American, but I'm not like those Mexican-Americans.'"

As she got older, however, Lopez's attitude changed. She married a man who speaks very little English, and she speaks Spanish at home with him. Her career focuses on helping Spanish-speakers to learn English and find work here.

Lopez says that people who speak only Spanish have an extremely difficult time finding work in the area. "Here, as far as the job market goes, it's really hard for people to look past accents," she says. "They think that if you speak with an accent, you work with an accent."

For jobs that don't hinge on constant communication, says Lopez, the discrimination is unfair. "How you speak a language has nothing to do with your competency at your job."

On the other hand, she adds, Mexican-Americans who speak only English should not be made to feel like they are betraying their culture. "You can be Mexican-American and not speak Spanish at all," she says. "One doesn't have to mean the other."

OUR HOME, TOO

Despite the tension that divides Latino Americans with differing language and cul-

'I'm not looked upon as different, unless [other Latinos] come up to me and they're like, 'Hola! Buenos días!' and they [continue speaking], and then sometimes I can't understand, and I'm like, 'oh, there's a boundary.' But I find, for the most part, they appreciate you being out there. I think I find the boundary more than they do. I want to be fluent. It's gonna happen, and I'll feel better.' — Candice Coots, UO Student



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