THE ADVANTAGE

Many times, people ask me what my first language was, but I am never quite sure how I should answer. Being raised by my immigrant parents and family from Dominican Republic, “Spanglish” was my first language.

For the duration of my schooling career, I had always felt that I had an advantage amongst other students. I had this gift of knowledge that not many others had; I knew an entire other language. For private school in New York, a secondary language is engrained in your curriculum as a pre-schooler and in my former school’s case, it was Spanish. The advantage of knowing two languages at the age of three set me apart in ways I couldn’t have imagined – it boosted my academic performance, it allowed me to empathize with other Latin children, and it gave me a deeper appreciation for Latin culture. As I passed through the grades, I realized that in many cases, the advantage I thought I had, really was just another irritating feature. I often find myself telling others, “I’m sorry, I don’t know the word in English. Could you help me out?” But the look on their faces when they see me scavenging for adaptation to their spoken tongue is appalling. My struggle to try to conform to this nation that is constantly being pumped with bleach was and still is constantly wearing me down, not just by frustration, but also by pieces of my soul eroding. Real shame is felt when you forget who you are and what you stand for. The number of times that I have forgotten my own language and my own culture is dreadful. My language, my culture, my physical appearances, how I present myself when I speak my *campo* Dominican Spanish, my inability to translate at times, my heavy New York-Spanish accent that entices people to compare me to Cardi B – these are just the portions of my soul that enable me to communicate with the world around me. Although it causes friction, it is, and forever will be, my advantage.