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Frijochuelas Reading Response

Jasmine Mendez's poem "Frijochuelas" discusses the blending of Spanish dialects and the exhaustion that comes with having to adjust your native speech in order to communicate with others. The poem has several emerging themes such as marginalization, and territorialism, which contribute to the concept of having to abandon one's native language in order to appeal to others, which can feel like the erasure of one's culture.

Language is a large part of anyone's culture, and can be representative of one's pride for the region, country or nation in which they are from. And though different languages and dialects represent national pride to many, it seems as though in the United States, there is a general lack of national pride. While there are many reasons for this, most of which are historical and political, the result is that Americans don't understand how important pride in one's culture and language can be to people from other countries with rich cultural heritage. The U.S. is a melting pot in which we more so pride ourselves on our current situation rather than our ancestors and tradition. Other countries are much more exposed to different cultures, languages, and beliefs, whereas the U.S. is mostly homogenized. While other countries take pride in their language because of the culture it represents, it doesn't seem to be quite as valuable for Americans in the U.S. Perhaps this is exacerbated due to the idea that generally Americans assume that English is the standard in most places, and because of this can be ignorant of other cultures. However, the result is that Americans don't hold as much pride in the English language because to us, it is just

the standard, effortless and normal. And though there are many who stand for the pledge of allegiance or put American flags in the back of their trucks, as a whole the national pride in the U.S. is nowhere near the levels of pride in other countries, especially many hispanic countries such as Panama, Nicaragua, Venezuela, Mexico, and so many more. That's one of the reasons why the stereotype many Americans have that all hispanic countries just eat tacos and burritos and speak the same language is extremely insulting, because it erases all the rich culture each hispanic region and country is not only full of, but is also proud of. My abuelita who is from Veracruz never even tasted a burrito until she came to the United States, but she can make you some of the best picadas you've ever had. Food is so important to many hispanic countries, in the same way that language is. Many people in the U.S. are ignorant or unaware of the fact that not all Spanish is the same, and that even within one country, there are different Spanish dialects as well.

While it's important to recognize the marginalization of Latinx people in the United States as a whole, it's also important to recognize the marginalization of Latinx people in other hispanic countries, regions, or even within Latinx communities in the United States. With the pride that many hispanic people have in their countries, culture, and language can come a sense of territorialism, or loyalty/ defense to or of one's region (this is a feeling people of all nationalities have, not just Latinx people, this is just relevant to the poem being discussed). And because of this, many people whose dialects of Spanish, that are not as widely used in the U.S. or even in other hispanic countries, can tend to feel isolated when coming in contact with others who do not share that same dialect. As Mendez discusses in her poem, she, as a Dominican, feels possessive over her own dialect of Spanish while being in Texas, which she refers to as "Little Mexico." Because of the many differences between Tejano Spanish and Dominican Spanish, she

feels the need to “slow down for them,” adjusting her own native tongue to suit the ears of her Tejano peers, despite the pain it causes her within to, in a way, disrespect and even insult her own language which she is not only familiar with but also proud of. She describes Dominican Spanish as her “childhood language,” which conjures imagery of dear childhood memories, something that is sacred to her and holds a lot of meaning. However because the people around her cannot understand her, she feels obligated to adjust this nostalgic language of hers so as to not be mocked or misunderstood; just to fit in.

The feeling of needing to abandon one’s native language to be heard or accepted by peers is something many people face when arriving in a new place, especially those who come to the United States. And because the majority of people here speak English, there is this sort of expectation that because someone is not from here, they must be the ones to adjust their language or even abandon it completely and learn ours instead in order to communicate with us, even though a lot of Americans are more than capable of and even have relatively easy access to learning other people’s languages. This concept does not solely pertain to the United States, though it is an extremely common mindset here. By describing the pain she feels when having to adjust her native language to appeal to others, Mendez brings up this question of whose responsibility is it to be the one to have to adjust when facing someone who speaks a different language? Because, though it may seem logical to expect to have to be the one to adjust when you visit a place in which the majority of the people speak a different language, it can be quite ignorant and selfish to expect other people to adjust to your standards, despite the pain it can cause them to abandon the language they have spoken all their lives and which represents the pride they may have in their culture or place that they’re from.

At the end of the poem, Mendez uses the term “frijo-chuelas,” a blended word for “beans,” of both Mexican Spanish and Dominican Republic Spanish, as an embodiment of home, a natural mix of both cultures and languages. Neither is correct or incorrect, and yet she feels deemed subordinate by her natural use of Dominican Republic Spanish. Because of this she feels obligated to assimilate, at least in some capacity, to Mexican Spanish. This way she lessens her chances of being criticized or ridiculed and increases her chances to be accepted. Mendez also refers to the term “frijochuelas” as being a “new, decolonized, virgin language,” referring to this combining of terms to be free of the sense of territorialism one may hold over their own language, and that expresses the unity of creating this “language” that is inclusive of both dialects. By combining both dialects she still holds onto her native language that is dear to her, while also appealing to the other dialect, creating a language that educates the other side of what her meaning of the word is, and at the same time expresses that she has put in the work to understand their meaning too. Overall I think Mendez’s poem “Frijochuelas” brings up many important discussion topics of understanding the importance of language regarding one’s culture, and just generally expressing the pain that many Latinx people face having to abandon their language in order to fit into society which should not be normalized. Mendez contributes the idea that we as people have a duty to educate ourselves on other people’s culture instead of forcing them to erase theirs, and the importance of understanding what it means when we force others to adapt to our own standards.