

## L&D Loves Languages Podcast - English Transcript - Episode 3

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Katherine: I'm Katherine...

Sarah: ...and I'm Sarah.

Katherine: We love languages and learning...

Sarah: ...and we're curious about the intersection of language diversity and learning and development in corporate and higher ed spaces.

Katherine: We want to know, why is language accessibility for all important in learning environments? What does it look like when all languages are treated equitably? And what does the future hold for multilingualism in L&D?

Sarah: Join us in this podcast as we talk with experts about all things L&D and language.

Katherine: This is L&D Loves Languages.

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Katherine: Hey, we're here with Alinnette Casiano. Ali is a bilingual learning and development leader with over fifteen years of experience in education and leadership. She is building learning experiences through user experience research for Cloud Services Sales Enablement at Amazon Web Services. She recently started a doctoral program in public and nonprofit leadership. She is a Puerto Rican living in Texas and has a passion for emotional intelligence and community involvement through volunteering. Ali is fluent in English and Spanish. Welcome, Ali. We're so happy to have you on the podcast!

Alinnette: Thank you for having me. I'm excited to be here.

Katherine: Great. We're going to get right into it and start with our first question, which is, what is your language story?

Alinnette: Sure. So since I was a little kid, I grew up in Puerto Rico. All my classes were in Spanish. So I'm a native Spanish speaker. But I always was drawn to the English class. It was my favorite class when I was in elementary school. And then I started to bother my parents, please, I want to see my cartoons in English. And then I think that was the catalyst for me to start getting acquainted with the English language. And then every summer, my family from New Jersey came to Puerto Rico from May to August, three months, three or four months. And all that time I was spending with them, I had to learn conversational English to communicate with them. They knew little Spanish, so I had to talk in English with them. And I think that was the

catalyst for me. Every year for that amount of months, I was able to speak conversational English. And then the rest of the time, I just enjoyed the subject in school. And that's how I became bilingual.

Katherine: That's amazing. That's amazing. Did you study it formally after high school? Like, did you study it in college? Or was it all just by, you know, interacting with family or just being, you know, obviously, in Puerto Rico, there's a lot of, there's a lot of English around. Like, like post high school? What did that look like for you?

Alinnette: Well, I think it was through the assignments, the research at college, the most interesting ones or the most recent research that I needed to just work on my methodology courses in education, those were in English. There were little research in Spanish that was actually what I needed in order to move forward in my college classes. But I also have been always a huge movie fan. So I always went to the movies every week. Every week. And being such a huge movie fan and just walking into the theater with the English language and the subtitles in Spanish, that also got me very close to the English language and kept me always... familiar to it in those types of circumstances. I was able to exercise that, it was either cognitive or conversational.

Katherine: That's awesome. I also love the movie-watching, TV-watching way of learning a language. For me, it's also very powerful.

Sarah: Yeah. So that's really cool too that you were able to be taking your college classes and pull research from multiple languages. That's awesome.

Alinnette: Yes it was a privilege actually and also it helped me also be a good peer to my college mates and, and help them also in the assignments and it also gave me a lot of confidence when I was doing oral presentations. Nowadays college is mostly virtual so you don't get to experience that unless you're in a hybrid environment. But mostly you're virtual and you don't get to do that live as much. But I remember back then during college, during oral presentations, having the bi-literacy skill helped me a lot with confidence in my public speaking skills because I felt confident whenever I was talking about the results of a research and how that resonated with the topic that I was discussing in the assignment. It helped me greatly.

Sarah: That is very cool. And that actually I think leads into our next question, because I was curious, how have your language skills impacted your career path?

Alinnette: It has impacted me greatly. I feel like ever since my college experiences...because while you were in college, you're building up those professional career skills that are going to accompany you whenever you're a part of an organization officially as an employee...So since college, I was able to experience, I think, double the opportunities. And it was quite of...oh, this girl is bilingual. She knows English and Spanish. We can have her help in this area or another. For example, I remember I was doing my master's degree and I landed a gig at an institute. It was part of NYC University. And this program was new. It needed accreditation. And I was being

a professor, actually, of high school graduates. They decided to do one-year program vocational course. And I was part of the program. They handed it to me. And all of the documentation and the syllabus, everything was in English. So I was the perfect candidate just because I spoke English in a Spanish speaking community. And I think that gave me an edge of an opportunity over other candidates. And then once I was in that position, I remember the director of the whole institute or the whole campus, he wanted me to help with every other accreditation program in the institute. And they had over twenty five programs that they served in campus, all...

Katherine: Wow.

Alinnette: Yes. And I think that as a company, always, even now, I'm currently working in the big tech, in Amazon Web Services, I have the privilege to be among the worldwide field enablement team...I'm now helping with user experience research, and I'll be able to conduct interviews in Latin American sectors, and it has been the best experience. And I've been able to interview both. English speakers with all the Amer regions, which is American, and then the Latin regions, which is Latin America. And that has been the greatest experience. So far, that has been the greatest experience right now to get in contact with both of those audiences. How great, right?

Katherine: Yeah, it's amazing. That sounds awesome. So did you...So you mentioned that you felt like you had double the experience or double the access, double the opportunities. That's really cool. And I love what you're saying about being able to use your language skills to connect with multiple audiences in different regions, like through your user experience research. Can you talk to us a little bit more about that? Like, what does it look like for you to use languages in your work? Can you get it granular with that? What does that mean when you're saying you're doing the user experience research for multiple audiences?

Alinnette: Yes, I can talk to you a little bit about that. Well, when I'm working with only English speaker users, I'm working and recording the meetings, transcribing the meetings, and working in that process. And that's about it. It has one, two, three steps. And then coding whatever we pulled out of the information from the transcripts. But then when I speak with the Latin American users, I have to do a couple of more steps, translating and localizing practically the content and then doing it and maybe using tools to do so. But I also have come to realize that because dialects and accents vary, there's also the cultural differences within the Spanish language. The words practically mean the same, but the way that they say it, it might not be the same, even though we're talking about the same concept. So I always double check that, even though that I'm doing multiple steps to understand the information in the English, because that's how I'm going to report the findings. I need the information in English. I also make sure that whatever I'm translating also makes sense in grammar, syntaxes. But it also gets the same impact. And I'm able to do that. And I think I'm the only one just because I speak Spanish.

Katherine: So that's super interesting to me. Were you hired in that role specifically because you're a bilingual? Okay, can you tell us a little bit more about that? I'm sorry, I'm going a little bit

off script. We always have the same five questions, but then I get curious and I'm asking some more.

Alinnette: No, of course, of course... There's been a lot of changes within the organization. And we flow more of the need of the business. And there's like this step process. We want to bring the best learning experiences, but we also need that foundation and get that information from the field, from the customer. So that's where I am working right now with my team in user experience research. But it's also aligned to how they will experience that learning that eventually will be modified or will be newly created. So that's how I am currently working in user experience research. And this is the opportunity that I've gotten the most to use my bilingual skills, actually. So it has been meant to be. How great, right?

Katherine: That's awesome. That's amazing. That's great. What role does technology play in your day-to-day work?

Alinnette: So right now, technology is an important part. Like I mentioned, I use several steps in order to get the information that I need to make the most sense, to report findings in whatever information I'm working on from the different sources that are these different persons that work with different audiences. So it's kind of very complex. So technology is very much needed in to productivity, getting those steps done quicker and efficiently. So right now we're working a lot on generative AI tools, discovering and how to quad processes and being able to have that extra help when it comes to, if we have a question, we have this tool that will help us extract and summarize. So right now we're leveraging technology mostly on generative AI tools.

Sarah: Alright. That makes a lot of sense. So in your experience working with the technology and the generative AI, do you find that it's so far like living up to what you need it to in terms of its sort of language ability, so to speak? Or are you still seeing that there's...a ways to go? How does that interact with - or impact - what you do?

Alinnette: Well it certainly helps us speed process and it also helps find um concise details that I might have missed. But I always I double check from my end. I think always the need of a person to, to reiterate whatever it's produced from generative AI, whether it's translation, whether it's codification, whether it's localization, I think that human aspect is always going to be needed just to reiterate that everything that's being produced is actually accurate from a logical and human standpoint. So it helps the speed of processes, it helps us be concise in a way, but always to confirm the reiteration. I always make sure that I double check.

Sarah: That makes a lot of sense. It's really interesting to hear how it plays into your process, but how that human touch still has a strong role. So then I was wondering too, how do language power differentials reveal themselves in your organization and how does that impact your L&D work?

Alinnette: I think it comes down to cultural differences. There's a lot of the way that people do things in one region, not necessarily it's the same that the others do it, even though they're

being exposed to the same resources and tools. I think culturally there's a lot of differences, even though in the English-speaking community or the Spanish-speaking community... So bringing that into consideration and having some sort of standardization is kind of a challenge still.

Sarah: Sure.

Katherine: Yeah, for sure. I'm wondering about... I'm wondering about... Have you ever encountered in your user experience research, you mentioned some of the differences, like the cultural and linguistic differences in Latin America. Has there ever been like a, like, can you tell us a story about like if there was ever like a misunderstanding or like a miscommunication or maybe, or even just like a connection across cultures? Like, can you tell us a story about that? I am intrigued by that.

Alinnette: It's just words. It's just words. [laughter] Like, for example, in Mexico, they talk about the *ahorita*, but then I understand that it's like, it's not now, but it's later. So *ahorita*, it comes from the word *ahora*. But then when I tell, okay, I'm going to start recording now, *voy a estar grabando ahora*. So they mean *ahorita*, they mean they think that it's another term. But it's something that I have experienced from my culture, because I am Puerto Rican. It doesn't necessarily happen with them. But I've seen... So getting exposed to that moment and then also knowing that it might differ actually has been, I think, an advantage. And I'm also careful when I'm speaking with... For example, I've spoken to Brazilian users and they speak Spanish. That's how we do the interview in Spanish. They're Portuguese speakers, but they also speak Spanish. So we do the interview in Spanish. So whenever they're talking in Spanish, I am very, very aware that some of the words that they might express are... not necessarily I'm familiar with either. But I'm open to understand that. So everything flows naturally. I'm able to get the information I need. Everything flows very, very smoothly and very amenable. Yeah. Regardless of I know the accent maybe or the way that they pronounce words also can vary. So I think those have been more of what I've encountered. If it's a word that means differently or the way that they pronounce it. But that hasn't limited to whatever we're trying to gain from the discussion.

Katherine: So it's funny. I've been learning French on Duolingo. I mean, I also speak Spanish, as you know, but I've been trying to learn French on Duolingo. And I was... And I was reading an article that like, you know, Duo pushes articles to you sometimes on the app. And it was saying that... the topic from just last week, a couple of weeks ago, maybe, is learning a third language easier than learning a second. And it was saying one of the advantages that people who already have a second language have is that you've honed "linguistic detective skills." I have it up right here. But it says "The more language learning experience you accumulate, the more tuned in you are to cues or patterns in the languages you're exposed to." So I thought that was a really, in my experience, I feel like I'm super sensitive to language. And it sounds like you're also, you have that, your bilingualism, Ali, is like your superpower because you're able to kind of, like you're more open-minded, you're kind of able to intuit when there might be a communication

problem or like, um or understand kind of where the other cultural or linguistic frame that people are coming with. So I think that's pretty cool what you just described.

Alinnette: Yes and I like that...that that doesn't bring any type of conflict within the conversations even though...

Katherine: ...yeah...

Alinnette: ...some of dialect differences or concept differences or expression overall...uh it's pretty amazing. Um I like what you said just now about you're keen to languages, sensitive... What is it that you said?

Katherine: I think I said I'm really sensitive to cues and languages, to details in languages. I'm very sensitive to it....yeah...to nuance.

Alinnette: I'm a mom, too, and I have a teenage daughter. She got me to have her start a third language. So she speaks English, Spanish, and now she speaks Portuguese. And she's in moderate to advanced. So she told me, mom, after we're done with this one, I want to learn Italian. So she's passionate about languages as I am. Although I haven't set a time to, like you have done, to learn French. But because of her also being drawn to it, I might even get into Portuguese. Because I've seen it that it's something frequent that we use at work. Like currently in my job. So what if...instead of two languages, I get to also speak Portuguese. And it's really, really admirable. And what I saw in her as a mom is like she learned it quicker because of her biliteracy.

Katherine: Yeah. Yeah, I believe it.

Alinnette: And I've seen it up close, I hope, as well.

Katherine: I think it's so awesome that she's learning a third language and she wants to learn more. I was, I was, it's a podcast, so no one's going to see, but I was like cheering with my hands. Like I was really excited for her. I think that's awesome.

Sarah: That is really neat. I was thinking so often you hear about how it can be a challenge to raise kids to be bilingual, even if there's bilingual parents. Um, it's on my mind because like in my family, my husband, I speak different languages, although we don't have kids. Um, but anyway, I was thinking like, that's so cool. Not only is she already bilingual, but she's using that to jump into other languages. Like, wow, what an amazing thing.

Alinnette: How amazing.

Katherine: Yeah. So speaking, I mean, speaking of the younger generations and the future, Ali, what do you think the future holds for multilingualism and L&D?

Alinnette: Well, I've been frequently exposed to the ways that we serve learning, and that's been revolutionized. And it's the way that we provide it in personalization. We're always talking about learning styles. We're always talking about the way that we're going to serve the learning. And I think multilingualism also will be in there in personalization. Not only we're going to serve it in audio form, we're only going to serve it in the visual interactivity scripts. There's also going to be a part where we're also going to add, okay, and you can also access this in this language. And I think that personalization and also it has to do with learning for all. Learning for all, can we also include multi-languages so we can give what we're offering also to more broader audiences? So I think it's kind of a global thought more than so. We can impact with the learning that we create, we design, we develop, we create, and we can impact on a global scale through multilingualism offering of the learning that we build.

Sarah: I love those points you're making about the way we can increase personalization in a global mindset and interaction. That's just such an exciting thing to think about and work towards.

Alinnette: Absolutely. I'm very passionate about this. I'm so glad that we got to meet and talk about it and get together with thought leaders that are also passionate in this subject.

Sarah: Yes. Thank you so much for joining us. Those were all of our questions, although I could easily keep talking for hours because what you have to say is so interesting. It's been such a joy to have you on the podcast. Thank you!

Katherine: Thank you so much, Ali. It was so awesome to hear from you. And thank you again so much for joining us.

[Music]

Sarah: Thanks for joining us for this episode. You can find important links in our show notes.

Katherine: This episode was produced by us, Katherine R. Matheson...

Sarah: ...and Sarah Kosel Agnihotri.

Katherine: Our music is by QubeSounds.

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