

Transcript for "Totally Booked! A Penumbra Podcast"

Episode Six: The Language Circle and Multilingualism in Fiction
Hosted by Autumn Andersen, Andrea Wagner, and Maria Camarena

Autumn: Hi everyone, and welcome back to another episode of *Totally Booked!* a *Penumbra* podcast. I'm your co-host, Autumn, and I'm here today with my co-host Andrea.

Andrea: Hello!

Autumn: And she's going to introduce our special guest today.

Andrea: Yes, thank you, Autumn. Again, I'm Andrea and our special guest today is someone we work with and know quite well. Her name is Maria. Maria, if you'd like to introduce yourself and share what your different roles are at Stan State, feel free to. Go ahead.

Maria: Yeah, hi! My name is Maria Caramrena. I'm an instructor in the English department. I also work with the writing center. I do a lot of work with graduate students and graduate tutors, so I'm a coordinator for graduate writing. I also am the multilingual specialist and I'm also a faculty coach. So I also tutor graduate students mainly, from nursing and social work. So I'm happy to be here; thank you for having me.

Andrea: Aww! We're happy to have you too.

Autumn: Thank you for joining us.

Andrea: The reason that we invited you is you're starting something new at Stan State. Right? It's called the Language Circle and we're super excited to hear about it and anxious to know more, so I'll give it to Autumn to ask more specific questions about that.

Autumn: Awesome. Thank you Andrea. Maria, do you mind just kind of sharing what the Language Circle is and kind of a little bit about that? The details of it.

Maria: Yeah. So back in the spring our director, Paula, and I applied for our grant. It was sent to us, to apply, and, or I believe she found it, something like that. But we applied for it since this grant really focused on promoting diversity, equity, and stuff, so we applied for this, Paula had the idea of first, if we go back into our mission statement and the idea of a brave space, which I can touch in a little bit later, we wanted our space, you know, as you all work there, to be a welcoming space for everybody. A space that really focuses on the identities of our writers. So we thought about something called the Language

Circle. The name came later, but it's the idea that basically we hold a series of workshops where we invite anybody. It can be if you're a non-native speaker or a native speaker of Spanish, to come, in practice your Spanish conversational skills, or if you don't know Spanish it's okay, you can still come in and thankfully there's going to be, hopefully, we get people who are native speakers, and non-native speakers. So you're all going to be together at tables and when, I'm just gonna tell you here, say this, we're gonna scaffold activities. The first one will actually be about *quien eres*, so *who are you?* So greetings. So being able to talk about who you are, and when you meet someone, being able to introduce yourself to them.

So we're gonna take each topic and each topic will build on the next one. So the first one will be about *quien eres*, who are you; the next one will be about culture. So, tell me about your culture. But like I said we're not just gonna tell you "here, say this," we're gonna scaffold things. We're going to introduce the idea of each workshop. And then we're going to give you sample conversations. We're gonna have things on the PowerPoint with visuals, words, and definitions. So you can hopefully, if you don't know any Spanish, be able to at least use some of those words to be able to communicate with your peers. And again, we plan to have a native speaker at each table to, hopefully, help facilitate that discussion. But really what inspired us, like I said, is three years ago in the writing center. We worked on our mission. I think both of you were part of that. I think Autumn you were part of that, Andrea, were you, like before Covid?

Andrea: I don't know. Actually, maybe just Autumn.

Autumn: Yeah, I was there. I remember that. Oh, yeah, that was such an enriching experience. I really enjoyed that.

Maria: It really really was. Yeah. So three years ago, we began. Our director has been doing a lot of research on anti-racist practices. And we began crafting a new mission statement that would really align with who we serve at the university, and just you know, grow from that, right? So the Language Circle is really inspired by our mission. You'll see later, a little bit of what it's about, but more multiple literacies, and that's part of our mission as well. Valuing multiple literacies. And like I said we serve everybody.

So either if you're a student, a faculty member, a staff member, you can even be a guest. You don't have to be part of the university. So if you know someone who's interested, bring them in. We'll be happy to have you and you don't have to be a perfect Spanish speaker. I know myself that I am fluent in Spanish. But there are certain words or conversations that I struggle with. But for the most part, I understand and I can speak it well, so I'll also be there to encourage you.

Autumn: I love that. I know a lot of people, like DuoLingo, and people are excited about learning another language, but having the component of actually speaking it with other people is something that you just can't, like, you can't do it alone. You need a group, and so they have, like a safe space to do that is really exciting.

Maria: Yeah, and the reason why we chose Spanish, it wasn't just "let's do it Spanish" right? We use data to make this decision. So back when we were planning it, we looked at data from the university as to who we serve. A lot of our students, I forget the exact number, but a lot of our students do speak Spanish, and even if they're not fluent, as you know, we live in the valley, and a lot of people had to take Spanish in high school. So, there might be people who know some words, maybe the ABCs, just some random stuff, but that's why we chose Spanish as a language.

Moving forward, we do hope that we can expand, depending on how this goes. We do want to expand a little bit further into other languages as well that represent our students and writers.

Autumn: Exciting, I'm really excited about it. It's like one of those things where you don't know until you get there like you have, you can practice, you know, your Spanish but until you get into a room with other people, and I just think it's really exciting because I know some of us who are learning a language, or trying to get back in touch with maybe our language, may have a little trepidation, but having a place where everybody's there and there's different levels of Spanish-speaking individuals is so exciting. And yeah, it makes it really feel very safe.

Maria: Yeah, and those who speak almost nothing will not be alone. Like I said, you're going to have a native speaker there, and also the topics will be relevant, so *quien eres*, who are you, the second one which I'm excited about as well, is, if, I'm gonna do a little promotion here, the Language Club at Stan

State. So look them up and go on their Instagram. Selma, from the Language Club, and I met yesterday and we're going to collaborate on the second session, which is in, I'll tell you the date later, but it'll be about culture, and that is going to be focused on...you're still going to have a chance to talk to people and have conversations about your culture, but we're going to learn a little bit about some Spanish speaking countries, and how some historical events influence how Spanish came about. So it's going to be interesting. So we have the Language Club at Stan State, and we also have the Language Circle at Stan State, and we're going to be collaborating, so be there!

Autumn: Oh, that is so exciting! We'll put that info in the show notes too, so people can maybe have links to those web pages for the Language Club. That'd be really exciting. I was, Hispanic Heritage month is coming up and so, kind of learning, it's always a good chance to learn, and learning how many different countries fall under the umbrella of Hispanic heritage in America, is so, like all the dialects and different ways that Spanish became the language they use there is really interesting.

Maria: I just learned yesterday that there are 21 Spanish-speaking countries. So that's something new that I learned yesterday.

Autumn: Yeah, see, there's always something more to learn. Especially where language is concerned. So that's really exciting. I'm glad to hear about that collaboration and like I said, we'll put some info in the show notes, too, for people to click and learn about the club as well.

Maria: Yeah, and let me just expand a little bit on the aspect of multiple literacies. I was talking a little bit about our mission statement: if you'd like to look at our mission statement, you can go to the writing center website, it's there. Multiple literacies is an aspect of our mission. Like I said, we're a Spanish-speaking serving institution, so a lot of our students speak Spanish and other languages as well. So this term "multiple literacies," it's a concept; it's a broader view of literacy and oftentimes it's called New Literacies or Multi-Literacies, if you've heard that term.

It's based on the assumption that people, individuals, and students read the world and make sense of information by means

other than the traditional way. So just English, right? So I, for example, speak English and Spanish. There are times where I think in different languages, so I don't just see my world in just English right? So our students are the same.

So we really want to recognize there are many ways to receive and relay information and that students can be proficient in more than just one. This just basically goes back to the idea of a brave space. So the writing center is a brave space, which I'm sure you've heard about working in the writing center, but we really want to be a supportive place where people, students, and writers feel comfortable learning and sharing equally, and growing individually together, and where they can express themselves in whatever way they feel comfortable with. So we hope that with the Language Circle we can instill that in them, that we are a place to foster bilingualism, and for them to express themselves in a way that they feel comfortable with.

Andrea: Awesome, Maria. Well, you've talked so much about the Language Circle, and how excited you are, so you might kind of already answered this next question. What are you most looking forward to about this, like what's the *most* exciting part?

Maria: I think just like I said. I hope that we're able to see, I know we're gonna have some native speakers, and I think some non-native speakers, but I want to see the interactions that happen and how people can learn from each other. So a native speaker can maybe learn something from a non-native speaker. And then vice versa.

So I want to see those interactions happen, for sure. And then to see people, I mean, we've been in the pandemic for so long and I just want to see people interact and, you know, value languages and cultures as well. That's what I'm really looking forward to, I mean, I hope to see you if you can.

Autumn: Yes, I'm excited about it! It sounds like it's gonna be such an enriching experience and a really cool opportunity for all, for people from all across the board to connect about language. You were using the term "native speaker" and "non-native speaker." Do you mind just kind of talking about the difference between that, just for maybe our listeners who might not know?

Maria: Yeah, so a native speaker is someone, for Spanish, it's someone who maybe grew up speaking Spanish. So like me, I grew

up in Mexico, and that was my first language. And then English is my second language now. A non-native is someone who did not grow up speaking Spanish. So I don't know if either of you can identify as such, but that's basically what it is, so even if you know a little bit of Spanish, but English or other languages were your first languages, then you're a non-native speaker of Spanish.

Autumn: Awesome. Yeah, I love the way Maria puts things. You put things so well, so, I would never have been able to say that. So, so thank you for sharing that. So we've talked a little bit about the Language Circle, and we're definitely gonna come back to that at the end. because we want to give everybody those details on where to find it and how to get there. But we do this little thing on *Totally Booked!*, you may have realized from the title that we like came up here, and we try to always kind of incorporate a resource from Stan State with also a little bit of book talk, we, I thought it would be fun, since we are talking about the importance of valuing multiple literacies to kind of talk about just that genre in general, or books that we think kind of really value those multiple literacies in a really an important way.

So for me, like a Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands* was a book that really kind of changed the way I viewed language, and the way I viewed myself as someone who, kind of as a Latina as just I mean it was just eye-opening for me in terms of like code-switching and everything like that. So that's a book I really enjoyed. Do you have any favorite books that you want to share? That you think really shows the value of multiple literacies?

Maria: I'm glad you asked.

Autumn: Yay! She brought her props too!

Maria: But no, I am a fan of, Sandra Cisneros, I've been a fan of her since high school. When I, the famous you know, *House on Mango Street*, right?

Autumn: Yes!

Maria: She sprinkles, you know, some Spanish in there, and I really love her authenticity, and how he just uses Spanish as well, and her writing, you know, the book is in English, but then she's Spanish as well.

Now, this book, *Caramelo*, which is caramel in English, it's really about, I guess a coming-of-age, a coming-of-age story, so

each chapter is like a story, and what I love about is that certain chapters like the titles are in Spanish. So you'll see in *El Destino, es El Destino*, so the future is the future which is pretty intriguing, but it's really like I said a couple of very well, a lot of just in the coming of big stories of **Soledad Reyes** is which is a woman, and her family and they're trying to move, they're moving from Mexico to Chicago and to San Antonio.

So it's a basically a trip, and basically this woman has a really negative relationship with her grandmother. I can spoil the ending if you want to but, anyway, I, I don't think I wanna do that for you, but you could read it. It's just such a beautiful story. She tells stories about her life in Mexico and Chicago, and it really portrays, like Mexico, Mexican culture, and her ideas in here. The Spanish as she throws in it's not just random, I think it, you know it has some meaning for each interaction she has but at the end, it's, it's really really sad but it kinda also highlights, relationships that I've had with family members that remind me also of these cultural aspects as well. So this is a book that really, I really really love again. It's mainly in English but she throws in a lot of English phrases, Spanish phrases, and words that are slang as well. So I really love this book. So Sandra Cisneros is really one of my favorite ones.

Autumn: I will definitely be putting that in the show notes and I'm gonna put it on my TBR list that keeps getting longer every time we do one of these I, I'm really, I what intrigues me about that is the book would appeal to both native and non-native speakers of Spanish right? And even people who speak, or no Spanish just they could, you know, learn a little bit about Spanish through those little phrases and, you know kind of, what it makes them. When I'm reading and I see sprinkles of Spanish it helps me kind of understand the brace better, because I, I know that context, so it kind of is a cool exercise too as well.

Maria: That's interesting, you say that, because when I learned English, I actually wrote a lot of books in English, and that's what I would do. I would just look things up, or just by context, I would understand them. But learning books in English really helped me understand more of the language, in a way, I was living here, so I was super young. But yeah, that's interesting that you say that, that you know just looking things up and by context can help you understand it.

So yeah, I think non-native speakers, native speakers can really enjoy this, especially like I said, if you are of Hispanic heritage, I think this book does a really good job of highlighting certain aspects of, just a Mexican-American heritage, Female strength for sure in Mexican cultures. The grandmother, or the matriarch, right? So they really represent the female strength in the family, so I recommend that.

Autumn: that's super exciting. I had, and not read that one by a Cisneros, so I'm excited about that and when I was kind of preparing for today, I was with some recent r like ones that came out this last year. So I was really excited to see that the list is getting longer and longer, of books that are making such an impact that really value you know, multiple literacies and we're speaking, you know we're talking about, kind of focusing on Spanish in this episode. But you know, there are many across, you know we can find them in many languages. But, so I was gonna ask you that heard about *My Broken Language*.

Maria: I've heard, I've heard, I've been not, I have not read it, yet.

Autumn: I'm really excited about that one and it does a lot of similar things to what you were talking about, about kind of, being primarily in English, but some dialogue being Spanish and really powerful. So I'm excited about that one, we were just, I thought I'd find some, and then we have a lot of listeners who like, like YA or coming-of-age. So I found another recommendation. I thought it would be a good one and it's called *The Lesbiana's Guide Catholic School*.

Maria: Ooo that sounds interesting.

Autumn: Yeah, by Reyes and it's her debut novel. So a fun kind of, if you got time for a quick YA read, really fun, and spanish dialogue in there, and really kind of mixes in culture with religion, and all of those influences on, on us as we're coming of age.

Maria: Sonra Reyes?

Autumn: Sonra Reyes, and her debut novel. So, it just came out in May.

Maria: Yeah, this is interesting. So I, you know, I read a lot of like old, just older, older books, came out years ago, but this will really, I don't know, I'm, I'm excited about this just these are new authors right? I'm not...

Autumn: Yeah! These are within, so *My Broken Language* by Hudes came out last year, and *Lesbiana's Guide Catholic School* just came out this year, just this May. So I'm really excited to see like a new, and more kind of like breaking through, that incorporate multiple languages in the book, but also just a celebration of culture and kind of in-depth look at it.

Maria: I agree. Yeah, and really the use of Spanish. But really any other languages besides English, I think, you know language represents who we are as part of our identity, and I think that's really valuable as someone who, you know, I speak English and Spanish, but another person can speak Spanish and something else. I think you see yourself in those folks and you feel represented, so I think that's really important to have that mixture of dialects within a book. For sure, especially a book that really highlights specific cultures and identities, and so on.

Autumn: Yeah, I think that's so true that the point of feeling represented in, what we read because so much of what we read, especially as students, is kind of chosen for us you know, that's out of our hands, right? So when we get a chance to read something that maybe we get to choose, or it happens to be something that's assigned to us, and we can see ourselves in it. It, just really kind of, I think, opens up so many doors for readers. Reading is just one of, I don't know, we're all nerds here. We're here talking about books, so that's like our thing. but you know it's just so essential to, and to not leave language out of that because sometimes we think about, like books, and, you know, we're kind of thinking about it just in one way, right like "entertain us," but the language of a book. The dialogue, and there is so important and so the fact that these authors are incorporating their own value of multiple literacies and, and putting it into their books is so important.

Maria: That's what I really appreciated when I was doing my undergrad here at San State. I think it was Dr. Winter, Sledge, and they had just different types of authors throughout their courses, even Dr. Marshall as well. So that's what I really appreciate about their classes is it wasn't just a specific view. It was books that interpreted, you know, stories in different ways. It wasn't just what was assigned to me back in high school. That's really important.

Autumn: Yeah, that is, I think that makes a big difference too, you know to be interested in what you're reading.

Maria: Yeah, for sure. Andrea, what are you reading nowadays?

Andrea: Oh, gosh! Well, I mean, what do I have around me? I actually, you mentioned Dr. Winter, who I love, Dr. Winter is amazing.

Maria: We love you, Dr. Winter!

Autumn: Yes!

Andrea: And she recommended, I actually have with me, this book, this book right here. Haruki Murakami's "Men Without Women" and it's a Japanese author. And I actually, I took Japanese in high school. I took a year of Spanish and was so bad that I was so embarrassed, and said "I'm gonna stop." So, that's because—that's my performance anxiety talking like "Oh, I can't even roll my R's. Let me get out of here."

Autumn: Come to The Language Circle!

Maria: Come to the Language Circle, Andrea!

Andrea: I know, I know! I'm so glad that you're doing it and, but anyway, I have, I'm so guilty, I haven't got to reading it. But I'm so glad that you, that we all seem to agree, it's so important to read different perspectives, and like expanding your knowledge, your brain, like pushing yourself. I find that, as a reader and someone would like to eventually teach literature courses, to really encourage that, like don't get stuck in one mindset. Really just, challenge yourself and make yourself ask questions like "Oh, I didn't think of doing it that way," or "I didn't think of that idea, that perspective." So it's, so it's so important. And I'm so glad Maria that you're starting this and Paula's backing you and it's so exciting I'm, I'm so glad for you. So now that, I don't know, did we wanna talk more about books or any more of a book, book recommendations?

Autumn: Any more books, book recommendations—

Andrea: Anything that fits in this category—

Autumn: Anything else we want to throw in?

Andrea: Yeah, anything else, Maria?

Maria: Not right now. I can send you more later, but looking at my books in the back. I have a lot of Edgar Allan Poe, but I love Edgar Allan Poe, but that's beside the fact, yeah I can recommend a few things later.

Autumn: I know there's, Andrea, you're a poetry girl, so Ocean Vuong, just released another collection and he's really, he's a Vietnamese-American poet and author, and his really kind of dives into language, and the importance of language, and him and his mother speaking two different languages. And so, if you're interested in, kind of like, books, that books or poetry, that also kind of talk about the focus of, I mean, we're talking about incorporating multiple languages within the work, but also works that are focused on the power of language, and how we communicate. But Ocean Vuong, he has a book, and then also he just released a poetry collection called *Time is a Mother*.

Andrea: Yeah, we'll be writing a blog post, we're gonna get busy. Autumn and I. Writing blog posts. Awesome! Oh, that's so cool. I always forget...Oh, Maria, yes!

Maria: I know I mentioned, you know, I talked about a book, but I also do read short stories. So Amy Tan, I'm sure you're familiar with her, she has a lot of short stories where she explores her language or her and her identity. So I recommend *Mother Tongue*. It's one that I actually have my freshman comps students read quite a bit to explore their identity and language, so Amy Tan, *Mother Tongue*. Great, short story.

Autumn: I'm writing that down.

Andrea: No, that's good! That's so awesome, that you do that for your students. Okay, Alright, if we, I know well, we're not running on time. But we value your time, so just so that our listeners and watchers know, when is that first meeting of the Language Circle again?

Maria: September, 26 at 5 pm. in the Writing Center.

Andrea: Awesome, thank you so much. We'll make sure to like, write that somewhere, to make it clear.

Maria: And the second one, which is October 3rd, that's the one where we are going to collaborate with the Language Club, so for updates and information about Language Circle you can...I feel like I'm, I feel like there are like, a, you know, like a Youtuber. "Follow me right now," you can follow us on Instagram, Stan Writers. It's our writing center page at CSU Stanislaus. So Stan Writers. I will, I have already promoted the Language Circle, but I'm going to do it more as we get closer to the date. But Stand Writers and just look at Language Circle information on there. So September 26th, the second one is

October 3rd, and I can give you those dates as well later, if you wish, as well.

Autumn: Yeah, we'll put those, we'll add those into the show notes too, and at what time, what time is it at?

Maria: It's from 5 to 6 on Mondays. It's mostly Mondays, we're skipping a few, but it'll be mainly on Mondays.

Autumn: And the writing center, for listeners, if you are Stan Students, the writing center is always open after next week. So if you want info, you can always walk in and talk to us.

Maria: Because no one writes alone.

Autumn: Look at Maria's Shirt. Our Writing Center slogan.

Andrea: Yeah, in that writing center, second floor of the library. What? L-222? There you go. 221?

Maria: There, you go 222, one yeah. So when you come in, and to those doors, it'll say L-222. You go inside and take an immediate left that's the writing center. On the right is a tutoring center. Yeah, we'll go immediately to the left, we'll be there nice.

Andrea: Yeah, we'll be there. me neither. we'll be happy to share it.

Autumn: Yeah, we got flyers, I think, hanging around there, too.

Andrea: So okay, cool. Well, thank you so much, Maria, for having, having us, for letting us have you, you're so busy, and you do so many things with this is so exciting. We just would love to share, and we did share we, we're happy to share with as many listeners as we can, so they're doing great things.

Maria: Thank you, you two are also doing great things with this podcast, so thank you so much for having me. I appreciate both of you so much.

Autumn: Very excited to have you back, halfway through, or at the end of the semester to talk about how it went.

Maria: Yeah, I'd be happy too.

Andrea: Yes, and you can like, talk about that book.

Maria: Yeah, I'll look for more books. I know I have more. but I'll look for more and be Yeah.

Autumn: we appreciate you, Maria. Thank you so much.

Maria: Thank you.

Autumn: September 26,

Maria: at 5 pm. at the Writing Center.

Autumn: Yeah. The Writing Center, be there, and thank you for joining us on *Totally Booked!* and we will talk to you guys soon.