

Walter & Adela: Conversation Summary

A Story of Permeability, Polish Roots, and a Rioplatense Life

April 2026

Audio version: <https://www.walterfreiberg.com/adela>

[00:00] Who Is Adela

Adela Jablonska is a Polish-born UX designer and content strategist who has lived between Buenos Aires and Punta del Este for eleven years. Originally drawn to the Spanish-speaking world through her studies — she trained as a Hispanic philologist at university — she arrived in Argentina in 2015, brought by love. Today she works across the entire Spanish-speaking market, helping digital products become clearer, more intuitive, and more human. She speaks Polish, English, and Spanish, and is returning to Portuguese.

Walter met Adela in Punta del Este in March 2026. His first impression was striking:

"When I heard her for the first time, I genuinely thought she was Argentine. Not just because of her pronunciation and intonation, which are excellent, but because of the way she carries herself when she speaks in Spanish."

Adela received the compliment with characteristic self-awareness:

"It surprised me, because I always felt my accent was somewhere in the middle — a bit Argentine, a bit something else. People usually ask me where I'm from with this look of intrigue, because they can't quite figure it out."

[02:30] Love, Language, and the Move Across the Atlantic

Adela had expected to settle in Spain. She had spent significant time on the Iberian Peninsula, was comfortable with European Spanish, and had

built her first professional footing there. What changed everything was a relationship.

"It was love that brought me here. I met my partner in Poland, in the city where I was studying at the time. And life itself decided for me that I'd end up in Buenos Aires."

Eleven years later — twelve, approaching — she describes the choice not as a sacrifice but as something that simply became her life.

[06:00] From Salamanca to the Río de la Plata

Adela's Spanish began in a Polish secondary school bilingual program run by the Spanish government — taught entirely in the Castilian variety. She continued through university as a Hispanic philology student, again with the Salamanca standard as the reference. When she arrived in Argentina, the gap was immediate.

"At first people asked if I was from Spain because of the accent. And then, after years, I felt it sticking to me fast. I don't make a deliberate effort to take on an accent that isn't mine — but when you're immersed in a context, I find it easy to absorb that context, including the accent."

She notes one place the shift hasn't fully landed: verb conjugation.

"I have to put an asterisk there. I still find the voseo a bit difficult — the *vos podés* construction doesn't come as naturally to me. What I have is a mix — somewhere between Castilian Spanish and Rioplatense. Though professionally, I apply all the grammatical rules used here. And another asterisk: I work for the entire Spanish-speaking market, so I also have to stay aware of the differences and subtleties of each country."

[10:00] The Unfair Advantages of the Non-Native

Adela entered the Argentine advertising industry as a copywriter — and quickly became a reference point in linguistic discussions within her agency. Her philology training gave her an unusual authority in a field where native speakers often operate entirely by instinct.

"I actually became a reference point for grammar and syntax — because I knew *why* things were said the way they were. There were these very nerdy, very linguistic conversations about how to phrase a slogan or express a concept. And even though I was Polish, my opinion carried more weight in the argument, because I had the linguistic training. I had a degree that said I was a Hispanic philologist."

Walter names what she's describing as an "unfair advantage" — and Adela agrees there are several stacked together. The philology degree is one. Another is the non-native's relationship to simplicity.

"In UX writing, being clear and concise isn't optional — it's the whole job. The user shouldn't have to think. And I feel that as a non-native, I have this natural tendency to reach for the simplest possible form. I'm not drawn to pompous or complicated language. I want the message to land."

She adds a distinction she finds important:

"I'm much more concise in writing than in speaking. They're different worlds for me. In writing, the brain works differently — you put focus in different places."

[16:00] Impostor Syndrome and the Permission to Not Know

Walter asks about the internal experience of building a professional voice in a second language — whether there were moments of doubt, of impostor syndrome.

"Impostor syndrome never fully goes away. If it did, I'd be a little worried, honestly. It's more about getting better at working with it."

Being a non-native, she explains, actually gave her a kind of structural permission that native speakers sometimes don't allow themselves.

"I have the comfort of being able to say 'I don't know' — to ask, to look something up, to verify. A native speaker sometimes feels they *should* know. I don't carry that pressure in the same way."

When Walter asks if there was a single moment that shifted her confidence, Adela resists the idea of a turning point.

"I don't think there's one particular moment. As an expat or immigrant — whichever word you prefer — there are so many moments where you have to be more open, more receptive, more outside your comfort zone. It's difficult to say *that* was the key moment. It builds over time. And after each uncomfortable moment, you see that it wasn't so bad — that you gained experience, confidence, learning, and positive feedback from the people you taught or spoke to."

[22:00] In Which Language Are You Most Yourself?

Walter asks the central question of the series: in which language is she most herself, and what does each language give her access to?

The answer surprises her as she says it.

"I now live, think, and dream in Spanish. I noticed when I realized I was dreaming in Spanish — that was striking. It's the language I feel most comfortable in."

Polish remains her mother tongue, but her relationship to it has changed.

"When I speak with my parents, words come to me in Spanish or English instead of Polish. My brain stalls a little. And my friends in Poland tell me I have a Spanish melody when I speak Polish now — that my stress patterns and rhythm have shifted."

With her Polish friends who live in Montevideo or Buenos Aires, the language of conversation becomes a fluid mix of all three — Spanish, Polish, and English — sometimes all within a single exchange.

"I embrace that completely. I'm not a purist. If a word in English or Spanish carries more information, more weight, and my interlocutor will understand it — I use that word. It's nourishing, not a problem."

[28:00] Permeability as a Way of Being

Walter names something he observes across many multilinguals he speaks with: a quality of permeability — not just to accent, but to language itself. The willingness to let the environment in.

"I always say that to learn a language is to spend time with it. And to unlearn a language might simply be to stop spending time with it. Nothing is guaranteed in the world of languages."

He extends this to Adela's eleven-year relationship with her Argentine partner, conducted entirely in Spanish. She picks up the thread:

"At the beginning it was challenging. There's love, which is wonderful. But then there's also the reality of daily communication — every message, every conversation. I remember the Sofía Vergara meme: *if you only knew how smart I am in Spanish*. That was me."

The gap she felt wasn't just vocabulary. It was the inability to play.

"In Polish I can make jokes, invent words, play with the language. When you're learning, you're still working from the grammar book — you don't yet have the muscle to play. That frustrated me a lot at first."

Beyond language, there were also clashes of cultural model — ways of seeing the world so internalized that neither partner initially recognized them as cultural rather than personal.

"What would sometimes cause disagreements, we quickly realized, wasn't a personal problem — it was a different worldview, a different posture toward life. Recognizing that early was something I'm grateful for."

[34:00] Integration and the Argentine Welcome

Walter asks about what it felt like to integrate into an Argentine family — to enter that world culturally, not just linguistically.

"Immediately. I'll generalize, but I feel Argentines are incredibly warm from the start. There's even research suggesting

Argentines have the smallest interpersonal distance — your personal bubble is smaller here than almost anywhere. In Poland, you'd need at least sixty centimeters. Here, twenty-five, maybe. That closeness is real and daily."

Coming from Polish culture, where friendships are earned slowly and meeting a partner's family is a formal, high-stakes occasion, the contrast was profound.

"In Argentina I felt part of the family from day one. The closeness, the genuine interest, the warmth — I felt very welcomed from the very first moment."

[38:00] What Stays Polish

Walter asks what part of her Polish identity has remained intact, even as Spanish has become her daily language, her dream language, her professional language.

Adela laughs before answering.

"The first thing that comes to mind — maybe I shouldn't say it. But the slippers. I will never get rid of that. It's deeply Polish, deeply Northern European: you don't walk around your own home in the shoes you wore outside."

(Walter notes for the listener that Adela is, in fact, wearing slippers during the interview.)

"Guests at my house know: you take your shoes off at the door. Slippers or socks — those are the options. And I've had to gently enforce this with Argentine and Uruguayan visitors, because walking around your home in outdoor shoes is genuinely viscerally uncomfortable for me."

[42:00] The Decision to Leave — and the Return That Remains Possible

Walter invokes Miguel Najdorf — the Polish chess grandmaster who came to Argentina in 1939 for a tournament, the war broke out, and he never

went back. Adela's situation is different: she left by choice, and the door to Poland remains open.

"Very early on I knew I wanted to live outside Poland. Having so many countries within a few kilometers makes you more open to that. And knowing home isn't far makes the leap easier — it's not a severance."

She acknowledges the distance between her experience and that of those who migrate by necessity rather than choice.

"By the time life brought me to Argentina, not going back to live in Poland wasn't something that scared me — because I had never wanted to stay there in the first place. And today, with all the technology available, the distance is manageable in a way it simply wasn't twenty or thirty years ago."

[46:00] What She Would Tell Someone Just Arriving

Walter closes with the question he asks each guest: what would you say to someone who has just arrived in a new country, is learning the language, and doesn't yet know who they'll be there?

"I'd try to help them lose the fear of speaking with errors — and to just speak. Go out, meet people, be open to conversations, read the culture, learn its rituals and unwritten rules, understand and accept them, and maybe eventually become part of them."

She connects this to something she recognizes as a specifically Polish tendency — a cultural bias toward grammatical mastery before speaking.

"We were taught: first get the language right, then start talking. And I feel it's exactly the opposite. First, let's talk — even with mistakes. Let's immerse ourselves in the culture around us and loosen up."

Walter distills it into a line: *connection before perfection*.

"Exactly. That's it."

Conversation conducted in Spanish. Quotes translated into English and lightly edited for readability while preserving Adela's voice and meaning.

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