

# Walter & Arndt: Conversation Summary

## Grief, Therapy, and the Self That Speaks in Spanish

September 2026

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

### [00:00] Who Is Arndt

Arndt is German, born and raised, and has lived in the United States for more than 25 years, moving between German, English, and Spanish. German is his mother tongue; English became the language of his daily and professional life after the move. Spanish arrived last, during the pandemic, learned almost for fun. It became something far bigger than a language: through Spanish, Arndt built a deep, unplanned connection to Argentina, its culture, and its people, a connection that led him to create his podcast, *Jamás tan argentino*, where he explores Argentina, languages, and the bonds we build across them.

Walter opens by asking the question that anchors the conversation: what actually changes, in the body, when Arndt moves from one language into another.

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### [03:13] What Changes in the Body When the Language Changes

"It's a good question, because something happens in my body and in my mind too. I can tell you that the German who speaks German is a person with his own stuff, his own history. And when I speak English, especially US English, my behavior changes a little. I have more confidence, the kind some people have when they say, I have no idea how this is going to work out, but let's do it, like Nike says. But what really catches my attention is what happens to me in my body, in my head, in my soul when I speak Spanish, because I see a pretty interesting shift in myself."

He's been on this path for six years, since he started learning Spanish during the isolation of the pandemic. Friends who don't speak Spanish have told him directly: *Arndt today is another person.*

"It was a surprise for me too, when you said in your introduction, he has a podcast, and there I am, speaking in my third language. It's something strange, and it seems strange to me too, sometimes."

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### **[05:40] Finding a Different Version of Himself in Spanish**

Arndt describes learning Spanish less as a grammar project and more as an act of self-discovery he never set out to have.

"Normally you're not taking Spanish classes to change something, to discover something about your character, your personality. But from my point of view, there's been a change in me. My friends say yes, he's a bit of another person, and I don't know if that's true. The German Arndt already has those possibilities, but doesn't want to, or can't, use them. With Spanish, I can open up more."

"I'm an introverted person. The idea of doing an interview like this, the German Arndt, not even for money would he do it. But the Arndt who speaks Spanish has the desire to express himself more, to inspire others to open up to a language, to a culture, and see what changes in that interaction between person, language, and culture."

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### **[09:16] Therapy in Spanish, and a Message to a Dying Father**

Walter names what he finds most admirable in Arndt's story: that he used Spanish deliberately, not just to connect, but as a tool for his own transformation, including doing psychotherapy with an Argentine therapist.

Arndt started therapy in the US during the pandemic, after losing his job and his father within the same stretch of time. The fit with his English-speaking psychologist never felt right, in part because of how therapy itself is received there.

"If I tell a Yankee friend I have therapy tomorrow, something happens. I felt judged. Intellectually I felt good about it, but in that context, here in the US, I felt judged." That changed after a class with a teacher in Argentina mentioned, in passing, that she had a session with her psychologist the next day. "I didn't understand what it means to do therapy in Argentina. It's something normal. Almost all my friends there do it, or have done it. It's not looked down on. It's a tool."

After finding his therapist, Luz, in Argentina, Arndt describes an opening that goes beyond vocabulary: "I can open up much more speaking Spanish. I have the right words, and I don't mean that grammatically. I can open up as a person, with my soul."

He offers the story that anchors the whole conversation. His father was dying in Germany during the pandemic, while Arndt was in the US, at a time when travel was impossible. His sister called to say the family had decided not to continue his father's treatment. Arndt knew he needed to send a final message by WhatsApp, and reached for German first.

"The German Arndt couldn't find the words. I felt an enormous pressure, because I knew it was a matter of hours. And the most incredible thing happened to me: I was listening to music by an Argentine singer, Pity Álvarez, his song *Nunca quise*. Some of the lyrics helped me find the words. I was able to send my father something meaningful, thanks to my connection to another culture. It's very intense, but thanks to that connection, I had that song on my Spotify playlist. It's incredible."

"I can articulate myself better in Spanish emotionally. I'm not afraid. I can describe something very heavy in my life to you and your listeners, and I don't feel bad about it. It wouldn't come easily to me in German or in English."

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### **[15:54] On Being "Ready" for Coaching or Therapy in a Second Language**

Walter connects this to something he hears often, including from a coaching client who chose to do life coaching in Spanish specifically to practice the language while doing the work, "killing two birds with one stone." He asks

Arndt what he'd say to someone fluent enough, not native, who is considering therapy, coaching, or mentoring in a second language but hasn't worked up the nerve.

"I'm very German in that sense, I have that chip in my head, and the word is perfection, chasing perfection. That changed a bit thanks to my learning with Spanish. I'm not looking for perfection. I'm looking to articulate, to share something, with love and with heart. And when I do it that way, the fear of making mistakes doesn't hold me back as much. That's a liberation, because how many times do we stop ourselves thinking, if I can't do this perfectly, it's not worth it. And that's not true."

He points to his own podcast as proof: "I'm exposing myself with every episode, and the great majority of the comments people leave say, wow, that's great that you're on this path. So you have to have the courage to do it, from a place of love, sharing something useful. And that's already enough." Walter mentions that Arndt's example has already inspired a person, Stephen, to start a Spanish-language account of his own, as a way to practice and connect.

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## **[20:14] The Warmth of Argentine and Uruguayan Friendship**

Walter raises the reputation Latinos and Argentines have for warmth and closeness, and asks if Arndt agrees.

"You can't generalize that much, but yes, in my experience. My bonds with my friends in Argentina and Uruguay are warm. What's crazy is the distance is enormous. Some of them I've never met in person, always by screen or by voice message. But I can tell you some of them are among the best friends of my life. That's not an exaggeration."

He connects it to the weight the word carries in German: "If I say to you, this is my friend, that's something important. Not just, we're friends, we drink mate together. I have bonds with friends in Argentina that aren't superficial. They're deep." He offers one image: a friend, Sofi, from Rosario, whom he's known for six years entirely over video calls, now coming to visit him in person for the first time. "It's incredible because we've talked for six

years, through the screen. Now it's something else, and it moves me. I'm counting the days."

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### **[23:30] Gordo, Negrita, and Other Forms of Argentine Affection**

Asked for a specific gesture of that warmth, Arndt lands on the small vocabulary of endearment.

"It's very common for a friend to say, *te quiero mucho*, I love you. Translated into German, that gesture creates real confusion, especially the first time. It happened to me many times that people told me they loved me, and at first it caused me some confusion, like, does this person really mean that." He offers a second example, a friend who greets him with *bueno, gordo, ¿cómo andas?* "The word *gordo*, if I translate it into German, bothers me. In English, it bothers me. But between friends here, it's something else."

Walter adds that the same warmth applies to *negro* and *negrita*, terms of affection that can sound jarring translated literally. Arndt recognizes it immediately: "I had someone who wanted me to call her *negrita*, and I was shy about it inside. But she told me, no, it's fine, it's something good around here."

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### **[26:02] Uruguay and Argentina, Two Sides of the Río de la Plata**

Walter reflects on his own four years in Uruguay, and how his early assumption, that Rioplatense culture was the same on both sides of the river, gave way to noticing real differences: Uruguayans, generalizing, tend to be a bit more closed and traditional in their friendships, holding onto the friends made in childhood, compared to the more extroverted porteño.

Arndt agrees, and locates the difference in the culture itself rather than in individual temperament. "There are introverted people in Argentina too, but there's a warmth in the culture itself that receives you as a foreigner. It's a process, you don't realize it's happening, and then you're having mate with your Argentine friends over a screen. That's something really beautiful."

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## **[28:00] What Other Languages Still Hold**

Asked what he might still be missing, aspects of friendship he's found in German that he hasn't fully found in Spanish, Arndt points to a different kind of durability rather than a gap.

"I have some bonds with friends in Germany, even from a distance, and there's something there I can't quite explain. I know that with my best friend in Germany, if we don't talk for two years, nothing happens. But I only have two friends here in the US I'd really call that, because in German, the word friend carries weight." He's careful to add that the Argentine bonds aren't lesser for being newer: "I have bonds with friends in Argentina that aren't superficial either. They're deep, profound bonds. We can also just have fun, but in the context of a true friendship, you understand me. That's very important to me, and very strong."

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## **[30:47] Transformation, Then Expansion**

Walter closes by asking which version of Arndt is still searching for a language to express itself fully: German by birth, English by daily life, Spanish as the language of friendship.

"The northern German, let's say, has that, he wants to express himself, but he's a bit cold, as a German, and he doesn't like that. That's why everything with languages is something, and if tomorrow I take Portuguese classes, something else will happen to me for sure. You're going to learn a language, but also a culture, and you're always going to discover new tools along the way for living better, not just for solving grammar. More alive, in more colors, let's say."

Walter reflects the image back to him: language as a tool of self-discovery, and of expanding the palette of colors available to a person. Arndt takes it further: "In my case, transformation first, and now expansion. I love that word, because I feel like I'm in another era. The transformation already happened, and now I can enjoy the expansion, and I do it every day."

Asked what that expansion looks like, he describes an internal conversation between his two selves: "When I look at the German, he's a good guy, but a bit cold, holding back his desires sometimes. And now I say to that German, let's go talk to the Arndt who's a bit Argentine, and see what we can discover together to live better. I don't say I hate my German side, I'm German, gladly. But thanks to my connection to Argentina, life is better. And I hope that can inspire your listeners too, whoever is on this path, whichever language it's in. That path is beautiful, incredible, and my life is different, and better, thanks to that connection."

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

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