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## Lessons in Second Language

Lorna Van Gilst  
*Dordt College*

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# Lessons In Second Language

Lorna Van Gilst

I teach her to say "I'm" and "you'll" and "we're."  
I teach her to sink the teeth lightly to the tongue  
till she can say "thirteen" and "thirty."  
I teach her the possessive form "my daughter's child"  
when she says "the child of my daughter,"  
And "cloudy day" when she says "this day cloudy."  
And then she looks at me and says,  
"You my friend—I need a friend.  
I got so many problems.  
Next time, you come my house  
we have *sopa de menudo*."

\* \* \* \* \*

The bowl is *grande*—  
great chunks of gristled honeycomb  
soaking in a reddish sea.

"You eat!" she says, and shoves  
the bowl in front of me.  
With the spoon I nudge the morsels to the side.  
Then, proper as Ms. Manners,  
I dip the spoon away from me into the soup  
and taste the favored brew.

She sits beside me, watching, waiting—  
"*Me gusta*," I tell her—I like it.  
She smiles, then nearly drains her bowl.  
And with her spoon, she severs off  
a fatty slab of something from her bowl  
and slides it deftly into mine.  
"Another kind," she says, "from here—"  
She rubs her torso, eyes agleam—  
"You eat this piece—the best of all!"

I push the rubbery giblet 'round the bowl,  
Then lift it to my mouth and try to chew  
and chew. . . and chew. . . .  
Perhaps I have it wrong—  
Is pancreas edible, or is it meant instead  
for flavor in the broth?  
At last I feign a cough  
And quite discreetly slide the viscus to my bowl,  
"I've had so much," I say— "My appetite is small."—  
"Is good," she says, "and you my friend."

I cannot swallow so much gratitude.