**Legal Alien**

**Pat Mora**  
   
        Bi-lingual, Bi-cultural,  
        able to slip from “How’s life?”  
        to “*Me’stan volviendo loca,*”  
        able to sit in a paneled office  
5      drafting memos in smooth English,   
        able to order in fluent Spanish  
        at a Mexican restaurant,  
        American but hyphenated,  
        viewed by Anglos as perhaps exotic,  
10    perhaps inferior, definitely different,   
        viewed by Mexicans as alien  
        (their eyes say, “You may speak  
        Spanish but you’re not like me”),  
        an American to Mexicans   
15    a Mexican to Americans    
        a handy token  
        sliding back and forth  
        between the fringes of both worlds  
        by smiling  
20    by masking the discomfort   
        of being pre-judged  
        Bi-laterally.

**Extranjera legal**

**Pat Mora**  
  
        Bi-lingüe, bi-cultural,  
        capaz de deslizarse de “*How’s life*?”  
        a “Me’stan volviendo loca”,  
        capaz de ocupar un despacho bien apuntado,  
5      redactando memorandums en inglés liso,   
        capaz de ordenar la cena en español fluido  
        en restaurante mexicano,  
        americana pero con guión,  
        vista por los anglos como exótica,  
10    quizás inferior, obviamente distinta,   
        vista por mexicanos como extranjera  
        (sus ojos dicen “Hablas español  
        pero no eres como yo”),  
        americana para mexicanos  
15    mexicana para americanos   
        una ficha servible  
        pasando de un lado al otro  
        de los márgenes de dos mundos  
        sonriéndome  
20    disfrazando la incomodidad   
        del pre-juicio  
        bi-lateralmente.

“Legal Alien” From Chants by Pat Mora, Arte Publico Press

“Pat Mora is a Mexican-American poet and writer who has won numerous awards for her books and poetry. She holds the Kellogg National Leadership fellowship award, the National Endowment for the Arts award, the Southwest Book Award and the Aztlán literature Award.

She was born El Paso Texas, January 19, 1942.  Her family settled there during the Mexican revolution. She writes on many topics, from poetry to children's books. She has taught at the University of New Mexico as a distinguished visiting professor. Her most popular books include My Own True Name (1984-1999), Aunt Carmen's book of Practical Saints (1997), and Auga Santa (1995).

Mora also has been a museum director and consultant for U.S.-Mexico youth exchanges. She is now retired and spends most of her time writing and traveling to schools and other events to teach young writers.

This poem, "Legal Alien," captures an important quality of our evolving and emerging multi-national, multi racial, and multi-ethnic culture.”

# Case, John. “Poem of the week: Pat Mora's ‘Legal Alien.’” *People’s World.* Online. 25 October 2010.