As someone who speaks “un poco español,” traveling to a country where very little English is spoken was quite intimidating. For some reason, the children understood what I was saying, and spoke slowly enough so that I could understand them. My theory: the kids were used to hearing their baby siblings learning to speak and I probably sounded similar… más o menos.

At one of our clinics, I was working “crowd control” outdoors, and I was hot. I’m practically albino, and I didn’t know how much more SPF 50 my skin could absorb on top of all of the sweat. I was trying my best. I didn’t know the actual word for “shade,” so I described it as best I could: “Donde el sol no es. Aquí.” Blank stares. The kids looked up, saw the sun, looked at each other and smiled like I was losing it. I kept going, trying to motion and act out “shade.” Really fun, try it. Finally a little girl who appeared to be about 9-years-old bellowed: “¡EN LA SOMBRA!” All of the kids ran into the shade and laughed. “¡Muchas gracias!” The little girl just gave a knowing smile and started playing the game with us. It was amazing to witness and participate in communication without sharing a language. I learned that even though my Spanish was full of errors, the children and the adults appreciated the fact that I was trying my best to speak the language.

“¡En la sombra!”
By Ann Sheddan

As someone who speaks “un poco español,” traveling to a country where very little English is spoken was quite intimidating at first. However, even with the language barriers, I found I was able to communicate “mucho con los niños de Nicaragua.” For some reason, the children understood what I was saying, and spoke slowly enough so that I could understand them. My theory: the kids were used to hearing their baby siblings learning to speak and I probably sounded similar… más o menos.

At one of our clinics, I was working “crowd control” outdoors, and I was trying to have the kids move into the shade to play a game. It was stifling hot. I’m practically albino, and I didn’t know how much more SPF 50 my skin could absorb on top of all of the sweat. I was trying my best. I didn’t know the actual word for “shade;” so I described it as best I could: “Donde el sol no es, Aquí.” Blank stares. The kids looked up, saw the sun, looked at each other and smiled like I was losing it. I kept going, trying to motion and act out “shade;” Really fun, try it. Finally a little girl who appeared to be about 9-years-old bellowed: “¡EN LA SOMBRA!” All of the kids ran into the shade and laughed. “¡Muchas gracias!” The little girl just gave a knowing smile and started playing the game with us. It was amazing to witness and participate in communication without sharing a language. I learned that even though my Spanish was full of errors, the children and the adults appreciated the fact that I was trying my best to speak the language.