

## **Speaking English and the Loss of Heritage Language**

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### **Abstract**

In this qualitative study, we explored the perspectives of three adolescent immigrants regarding learning English in an American High School. We learned that 1) academically English was the primary venue of instruction and considered the primary pathway to educational success. 2) The students claimed their ability to communicate in English had surpassed their ability to communicate in Spanish, and 3) Although they still appeared to maintain belief in the power of the English language as a pivotal point of access to success and upward mobility, they also began to question English's unequivocal priority in their educational careers.

### *The Issue*

To the immigrant student, learning English is one of the most important facets of participating in school. It is primarily through English that students tend to communicate with their non-immigrant or native English speaking students and teachers and participate in daily classroom activities. Without English, it is difficult to function in an American high school. According to Olsen (1997) socialization inside and outside of class, learning the rules of the school, gaining friends, and becoming familiar with the do's and don'ts to be accepted by one's peers all depend to varying degrees on their proficiency in English. For some immigrant students, learning English is the means, they believe, by which they can overcome racial boundaries, cultural differences, and linguistic barriers and ultimately become American (Perez, 2012). With this in mind, the purpose of our study was to explore the perspectives of three adolescent Mexican immigrants—Nelly, Lilly, and Marisol (three young women who grew up in Spanish speaking households)—regarding their experiences learning English in an American high school as well as their thoughts on maintaining Spanish as their first language (L1). Specifically, we interviewed these students with the goal of learning the following questions: 1) How and in what ways do the students respond to the focus of learning

English in the English as a Second Language (ESL) classroom? 2) What role do these perspectives play on their views of English and Spanish broadly?

### *Background*

The United States may be currently experiencing the end of the largest wave of immigration from a single country (Mexico) to the U.S.A. (Passel, Cohn, & Gonzalez-Barrera, 2012, 2013). From 1995-2000 nearly 3 million people from Mexico immigrated to the U.S.A. This is in contrast to the time period from 2005 to 2010 where it slowed down to only 1.3 million migrated to the U.S.A. (Passel et al., 2012). In regards to immigration as a whole, from 2000-2007, 10.3 million immigrants arrived to the U.S.A., the highest seven-year period of immigration in American history (Camarota, 2007), which accounted for “virtually all of the national increase in public school enrollment” (Camarota, 2007, p. 2).

Within the K-12 population, the fastest growing group of immigrant students has been the high school-aged immigrant (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001). During 1992-2002, this group’s number increased by 70% and now comprises 10.5% of the nation’s K-12 enrollment (Hoffman & Sable, 2006; Kindler, 2002). These numbers suggest an increase in the number of English Learners (ELs). For example, between 1979 – 2004 (U.S. Department of Education, 2006), the percentage of school-aged children who speak a language other than English at home increased from 3.8 to 9.9 million, or from 9 to 19% of all school-aged children.

### **Political climate**

Over the last one hundred and fifty years in the United States, legislators have consistently passed legislation to either limit rights of immigrants from certain ethnic/religious groups (e.g., Japanese internment camps; levying of taxes on Catholics to live in certain New England regions) or prohibit these immigrants from entering the country (e.g., the Chinese exclusion act, 1924 Immigration Act) (Spring, 2010).

With each new wave of immigrants, anti-immigrant U.S. citizens have repeatedly formed new barriers to access language and education for these immigrants (Crawford, 2004; Garcia, 2008; Wiley, 1996). Likewise, in recent decades, immigrants from Mexico and other Central and Latin American countries have been the targets of similar anti-immigrant legislation. For instance, in 1994, California voters passed Proposition 187 to establish a state-run citizenship screening system to prohibit immigrants without documentation from using health care, public education, and other social services in the U.S.A. Shortly after, this was found by the State of California Supreme Court to be unconstitutional. A few years later, Ron Unz initiated efforts to prohibit bilingual education within the K-12 system known as Proposition 227 (Unz, 2014). After Proposition 227 passed in California in 1998, Arizona passed similar legislation with Proposition 203 in 2000, and then “Question 2” in Massachusetts in 2002.

In this way, Arizona’s Proposition 203 mirrored many of the common beliefs of many of the teachers and much of the general population in that immigrants should be taught in English, with little to no native language instruction (Crawford, 2000). The education the three students in this study received exemplified this sentiment. Moreover, when the

students reached high school, a new anti-immigration wave was sweeping the U.S.A. Despite numerous marches across the nation and the intended advocacy for supporting immigrants, both documented and undocumented alike, Arizona ultimately passed the most restrictive anti-immigrant law passed in recent history of the United States (SB 1070 in 2010).

### **Purpose**

With such a large group of individuals entering our schools in such a politically divisive context, it behooves us to understand how the immigrant students themselves think about their educational experiences here in the States. Doing so provides a more thorough understanding of the school environment and their experiences within that environment (Cook-Sather, 2002; Schultz, 2011). Frequently, adolescent immigrants' perspectives of their schooling environment denote frustration due to the lack of challenging work given to them by their teachers (Cohen, 2008), which in turn fails to prepare them for mainstream program classes (Palmer, 2007). Moreover, immigrant students often become discouraged after experiencing the American high school (Suárez-Orozco, 2000).

### *Theoretical framework*

We examine the perspectives of three Mexican adolescent ELs through the lens of postcolonial theory. Postcolonial theory interrogates inequitable power relations originally resulting from global colonial domination by the major European powers, i.e. England, Spain, Portugal, and the Netherlands. As such, postcolonial studies challenges ongoing imperialist control maintained through continued economic dependence between the former colonies and their colonial powers, despite political and state independence (Young, 2001).

In the globalized world of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, political and economic hegemony extends well beyond early colonialist relationships, that is, colonizer and colonized, and into broader cultural and linguistic arenas as well, which is denoted as imperialism. Imperialism is "characterized by the exercise of power through direct conquest or... through political and economic influence that effectively amounts to a similar form of domination: both involve the practice of power through facilitating institutions and ideologies" (Young, 2001, p. 27).

In this geopolitical landscape, multiple terms have been used to designate these power differentials, which have included First and Third World, developed and developing, center and periphery. Following McEwan (2009), we prefer the designators North and South. In this case, North, or global North, is indicative of both the geographic relationship with the U.S.A. and transnational capital, while South, or global South, refers to impoverished and disenfranchised peoples, regardless of geographical location (Dirlik, 1997; Mohanty, 2002).

Part of this context is the recognition of the linguistic hegemony of English. We understand that the primary purpose of ESL classrooms is to teach English; however, it likewise behooves us as critical educators to attend to the multiplicity of ways that the significance of English plays out in both local and global contexts. Although not the official language, English does serve as the principal language of power in the United

States (Crawford, 2000; de Jong, 2011). Strong instruction in standard American English serves as one of the fundamental points of access to enhanced resources and social mobility (Delpit, 1995). At the same time, effective language planning and policy that can lead to social mobility need to demonstrate an exploration of the relationships between language, power, ideology, and social organization (Pennycook, 2001). That is, planning of English instruction in U.S. ESL classrooms particularly needs to account for implicit and explicit associations between language, racial and class ideologies. But in addition, educators and language planners of ESL classrooms (and their variant forms) in the United States, where Mexican immigrant children are predominant, need to consider the ways in which language interacts with race, nationality, and immigration status, specifically in context of the North/South political and cultural dialectic. Finally, it is important to note that the intent of a postcolonial critique of English “is not to reject English, but to reconstitute it in more inclusive, ethical and democratic terms” (Canagarajah, 1999, p. 2). Thus, in ESL classrooms, it would be important for teachers to stress that students’ L1 has value. Students should be encouraged to continue and maintain their heritage language(s), alongside acquisition of English, as in the case with dual language programs (Genesee, Hamayan, & Cloud, 2000) at the elementary level or heritage language classes at the secondary level (Valdes, 2001).

#### *Research Site, Methodology, and Data Analysis*

This study took place in Arizona at Aranda High School (all names of people and places are pseudonyms), which had a 97% Latino student body, approximately 30% of whom were enrolled in the ESL program at the time of the study. The ESL program was designed specifically to shelter (Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, 2007) the content for students whose English was not strong enough for the mainstream program. Teachers at Aranda High School in the ESL program had their ESL endorsement, which indicates they have had methodology, applied linguistics, and other second language acquisition oriented classes to better equip them to work with ELs in their classrooms. This article draws upon a larger study of four undocumented adolescent immigrant high school students—three young women and one young man. However, for this paper, we focus in upon the experiences and perspectives of only the three young women because the young man returned to Mexico for an extended period of time, impacting the acquisition of English language and his heritage language significantly differently.

Each of the three young women was brought to the U.S.A. by her parents as a young child without legal documentation. These three students were chosen because they spoke English well enough to be interviewed in English and had been in the U.S.A. long enough (at the time of the study) to have had at least five years of formal schooling experiences in the U.S.A. They are termed long-term English learners because they had been in the U.S.A. for at least five years and had not yet transitioned out of the ESL program into the mainstream program (Freeman, Freeman, & Mercuri, 2003; Freeman, Freeman, & Mercuri, 2002).

Because of our focus on the perspectives on their experiences in ESL classrooms of these three young women, we drew upon case study methodology, which facilitates the understanding and description of the particulars of a specific phenomenon (Merriam, 2001). Becker (1968) defined the purpose of case study research “to arrive at a

comprehensive understanding of the groups under study” and “to develop general theoretical statements about regularities in social structure and process” (p. 233). We chose case study design because of our interest in developing “insight, discovery, and interpretation rather than hypothesis testing” (Merriam, 2001, pp. 28-29).

Students were each interviewed five times via a semi-structured interview protocol over a four-month time period. Data was then transcribed and inputted into the qualitative data software program nVivo, used to assist with organizing and categorizing of data. Following constant comparative methods of inductive reasoning, data were organized into ever-expanding categories centered around our research questions until several themes began to emerge (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Lofland & Lofland, 1995). Data were grouped for instance by students’ perspectives on education generally, mainstreamed classes, ESL classes, specific pedagogical practices, peer influences, and family influences. Here we focus on the adolescents’ perspectives about language acquisition and loss for them personally, socially, and culturally, which led to the following themes: a) the importance of English, b) Spanish lost ground to English, and c) Spanish is important too. Throughout the entire initial collection and analysis of this data, the first author, who conducted the original research, conducted member checks (Merriam, 2002), took extensive field notes and personal memos (Erickson, 1986), and reviewed the data and ongoing data analysis with peers (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993).

Recognizing both the power and limitations of our participants’ perspectives, we situate their statements within a postcolonial framework. As such, we recognize Mazzei & Jackson’s (2012) admonition that qualitative researchers “think with theory” as a “guard against being seduced by the desire to create a coherent and interesting narrative that does little to challenge hegemonic discourses and (over)simplified knowledge claims” (p. 745). While case study methodology allows for deeply nuanced views of reality (Flyvbjerg, 2011), the students’ statements alone may not account for the power differentials based upon language, language policies, and geo-politics.

### **Lilly**

The first of the three students who participated in this study is named Lilly. Lilly had moved across the border of Mexico and the U.S.A. a couple of times. She was born in Ciudad Juarez in the northern state of Chihuahua, Mexico, and spent the first six years of her life there. At the age of six, she, her seven-year-old sister, and mother moved to Oklahoma where she received instruction in English-only in kindergarten, first, and second grades. But then her uncle asked the family to return to help out the family, so they returned and subsequently stayed for an entire year. Lilly remarked about not being able to understand much in her third-grade Spanish-only class in Mexico because her Spanish had already waned from being in the U.S.A. for three years.

The Maquiladora killings of women were in full swing when Lilly and her family moved back to Ciudad Juarez. At the time, over 520 young women had already disappeared or had been found raped and killed, thus prompting newscasters from all over the world to label Ciudad Juarez “the City of Death” (Newton, 2007). Pleased that they had left for Oklahoma and terrified that they returned to Ciudad Juarez, Lilly’s half-sister, who lived

in Arizona, convinced her mother to pack up the two kids and return to the States. So, Lilly and her family once again returned to the U.S.A.

Although Arizona at the time of Lilly returning to the U.S.A. had not yet passed the anti-bilingual education law Proposition 203, which prohibited native language instruction to immigrant children, it was still very common in the schools to offer an English-only education. Hence, once in Arizona, Lilly entered the fourth grade, where she returned to an English-only education taught by teachers who Lilly felt “sincerely cared about her.” She was extremely thankful and appreciative of the assistance the American teachers provided her. Like many immigrant children who come at a very early age, she did not remember when she learned English; however, by the time she was in fourth grade, she felt she knew “everything I needed to know” to function in English. When author 1 met Lilly, she was 15 years old, in the ninth grade, and had spent a total of eight years in ESL classrooms.

At the time of data collection, Lilly was taking all her classes in the ESL program except for Physical Education. She was enrolled in ESL Language Arts, ESL Physical Science, ESL Geometry, and ESL Algebra Lab. Because of her performance on the SELP test (Pearson, 2014) at the end of the semester, she was enrolled in the transitional ESL level the following year.

### **Marisol**

Marisol was born and raised for the first six years of her life in the mountains of Durango in central Mexico. She spent kindergarten and five days of 1st grade in Mexico and then came to the U.S.A. Once in the U.S.A., Marisol was kept home, effectively missing all of first grade because, according to Marisol, she “did not have the necessary shots or paperwork.” The next year, however, she entered the 2nd grade and was disappointed because she remembered “not learning any English.” She was enrolled in a transitional bilingual program where Spanish was still predominantly used as the medium of instruction. Because she was not learning English quickly enough, her mother transferred her to another school for her third grade, where she was enrolled in an English-only classroom. Throughout her elementary and middle school years, she was enrolled in English-only classes. However, in high school she was placed into the ESL program due to her level of English language proficiency. In the interviews, she exuded pride in her initiative to learn English, acquired she said, through hard work and interactions with her peers.

Marisol frequently spoke about her ties with Mexico and her desire to return one day to reacquaint herself with the family and friends she left behind eight years prior. With that said, Marisol loved being in the U.S.A. and the potential it provided her. Marisol subscribed to the idea that “making it” in America meant working hard and becoming financially successful. She clearly bought into the American hegemonic belief system of hard work and self-determination.

At the time of data collection, Marisol was taking Advanced ESL Language Arts, ESL Physical Science, Spanish for Native Speakers, and Business Computers. She was not taking a math class during the spring semester because she had taken a combined ESL Geometry/Algebra course the previous fall semester. Out of all of the focal students

participating in this study, Marisol was the only student to successfully manage to transition out of the ESL program for the following school year. In fact, because of her determination and diligence, some teachers noticed her and recommended her for the Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) program, which provides students who have demonstrated academic potential with the guidance to continue on to post-secondary education.

### **Nelly**

Nelly was born in Guadalupe, Zacatecas in the center of Mexico. She attended the first grade in her village, but claimed to have missed the second grade because the teachers in her state went on strike. Although the state provided a substitute teacher, Nelly recalled that the substitute teacher did not want to be there and “did nothing.” Nelly described having to read a “big book” at home that covered all the subjects and take a test on it at the end of the year. Because she passed this test, she was able to go to the third grade.

After spending third grade in Guadalupe, her parents moved the family to Guadalajara to be closer to Nelly’s maternal grandparents and uncle. Nelly’s father, tired of traveling around the country for the railroad company, quit his job and went north to the U.S.A. looking for work, leaving the mother, Nelly, and her two younger siblings behind. In Guadalajara, she was enrolled in a school that, according to Nelly, focused extensively on mathematics. A year and a half later, her father sent for them.

When Nelly arrived in Arizona in the fifth grade, she claimed that her math skills were at the “high school level.” In fact, she remembers being able to do math problems at a level much higher than the rest of the students in her class. At one point, she described in length an experience where the teacher did not believe that she was able to solve a specific math problem without a calculator. Subsequently, Nelly had to solve a few more problems on the board to prove that she knew how to do the work. Unfortunately, according to Nelly, the teacher did not modify instruction for her advanced ability.

However, because she did not yet know English upon her arrival in the fifth grade, the school assigned Nelly to the pullout program to assist her with the in-class work. That is, she spent her day in the mainstreamed elementary classroom where all instruction was presented in English, but was pulled out each day to spend time with a bilingual (Spanish/English) resource teacher to assist her in understanding the in-class activities. She spent the rest of her elementary, middle school and then high school years receiving some form of ESL instruction.

At the time of data collection, Nelly’s class schedule included one class outside the ESL program and four classes within the program. She was enrolled in Advanced ESL Language Arts, ESL U.S. History, ESL Algebra, and Spanish for Native Speakers. The one mainstreamed class was child development, which was her favorite class because she learned how “children think and behave” and interestingly, “where children come from.”

**Table 1. Personal and Programmatic Information**

|         | <b>Grade entered U.S.A.</b> | <b>Grade enrolled when interviewed</b> | <b>Number of years receiving English assistance</b> | <b>Types of programs received throughout k-9/10 school experience</b>                                                                                                               |
|---------|-----------------------------|----------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Lilly   | 4 <sup>th</sup> grade       | 9 <sup>th</sup> grade                  | 5 years                                             | Grade 1-2: English only<br>Grade 3: Spanish only in Mexico<br>Grade 4-9: English only                                                                                               |
| Marisol | 1 <sup>st</sup> grade       | 9 <sup>th</sup> grade                  | 8 years                                             | K-1 (5 days of 1 <sup>st</sup> grade): Spanish only in Mexico<br>Grade 1: No school in U.S.A.<br>Grade 2: Spanish/English transitional bilingual program<br>Grade 3-9: English only |
| Nelly   | 5 <sup>th</sup> grade       | 10 <sup>th</sup> grade                 | 5 years                                             | Grades K-4: Spanish only in Mexico<br>Grades 5-8: English only with a few years of bilingual pull-out<br>Grades 9-10: English only                                                  |

### *Findings*

In this study of three Mexican adolescent ELs, we focused on their perspectives of their language use, both in L1 and L2, as corollary experiences to their ESL classrooms. In doing so, we observed the unequivocal power of language for these young women as they navigated multiple social and cultural terrains. We discuss in the following sections their perspectives of their acquisition of English, the corollary deterioration of their heritage language, and their efforts to reclaim their linguistic and cultural heritage.

### **Importance of English**

Not surprisingly, being immigrants to the United States with a different linguistic heritage, the perceptions of these three young women regarding the acquisition of English figured heavily in their overall perceptions of their ESL experiences. The acquisition of English was important to the students from both academic and social/functional standpoints. Academically, English was the primary language of instruction and considered the primary pathway to educational success. Of the three,

Marisol was the most determined to take advantage of the opportunities afforded her by being in the United States:

I came here to be somebody, to become somebody. You know I told my mom that when I grow up I am going to try my best to be a nurse. And I'm going to buy her a house because she really wants one.

Learning English also created opportunities to make new friends. For instance, Marisol commented, "I can speak to them [English-speakers] finally. I can speak to them [her peers] you know in English or Spanish; I can talk to them. So, I do have a lot of friends." Likewise, all three students indicated that they spoke English to function outside of the home. Lilly stated that she spoke English, "with teachers and friends who only speak English." In this way, speaking English served important support functions, often translating for family members to English speakers. Nelly, though, summarized the basis for learning English simply: "Cause you have to learn English to be here, to learn the language."

More significantly, these young women correlated ideal ages to immigrate to the United States with the optimal age to learn English. Indeed, for example, Lilly commented:

I think if they come as a kid, a little kid, they will learn more English, read and write and at the same time they will know their Spanish and English, whatever. And as they grow up, I mean it will be easier for them. They won't be asking what did they say? What does it mean?

Lilly continued by saying:

[A] child, I think they will learn more, more than a teenager. Cause right now there are girls I have in my classes, or guys who don't know anything in English because they came here as a teenager grownup. So they don't really know. And little kids. Even kindergarten kids that come from Mexico already know better than the freshman, ninth grader.

Nelly added to this sentiment when she stated that it would be easier to immigrate as a child because as an adolescent "you don't understand anything, but see everything." In other words, an adolescent would observe all the social and cultural interactions inherent in schooling systems, but would understand little, because of the language barrier. Moreover, Marisol, Lilly, and Nelly reinforce the importance of English by highlighting the most opportune time to immigrate.

All three young women entered the United States in elementary school, with Nelly being the oldest upon entry, in fifth grade. Learning English was a given, as Nelly so aptly stated, "Cause you have to learn English to be here." They understood the importance of learning English for its various academic, social, and cultural purposes. Like many other immigrants before them (Veltman, 2000), these young women clearly understood English as an important vehicle for functioning and succeeding in the United States.

Although the young women focus their comments on the social and utilitarian aspects of learning English, underlying these comments is an implied power dynamic about what it means to speak English, or not, in their context. More significantly, the English language

serves as a linguistic marker of who belongs and who does not. They learn English in school; and at the same time they hear and attend to the debates around strict anti-immigrant policies being discussed. In such a political context, the importance of learning English for these young women carries significant consequences.

### **Spanish Lost Ground to English**

Because of the importance of English as indicated in the previous section, the three young women indicated that their ability to communicate in English had surpassed their ability to communicate in Spanish. All three noted that they had difficulty translating things into Spanish and back into English. Marisol attributed her lack of proficiency to her childhood education conducted mainly in English:

Like right now I am having trouble with my Spanish. Like writing, because like I didn't do a lot of stuff [in elementary school]. I didn't practice a lot of my Spanish, so I have trouble reading it and writing it. Like where it goes, and stuff.

Nelly commented that she didn't "talk too much Spanish" and that "reading and writing in Spanish [are] difficult, because of the rules that they have in Spanish. They are different than the rules in English."

Similarly, Lilly recounted the teasing she received from her 32-year-old half-sister when she tried to write a letter to her boyfriend in Spanish.

...when I was trying to write a letter to my boyfriend in Spanish, I let my sister read it first. I'm like is this good enough? She's like, oh you misspelled that and that and that. Well o.k. shut up (laughs).

As noted in the previous section, translating English served an important social function for these young ladies. In fact, their ability to translate helped mediate the social worlds of their Spanish-speaking family members to the English-speaking world. However, the decline of their Spanish also negatively impacted this important role. With eyes downcast and trembling voice, Lilly powerfully demonstrated this as she recounted her efforts to translate for her mother:

Well, helping my mom with her English, well, I don't know. I'm just trying to help her. Sometimes she doesn't understand me either, even though I am explaining it to her. Cause sometimes I can't say the words in Spanish either so. She doesn't understand sometimes. And so when my other sister goes with us, [she] will translate for [my mom]. She'll translate for me because I don't know. Sometimes I don't know.

Lilly expressed such sorrow and regret that she was no longer able to adequately translate for her mother. Frequently characterized as language brokering, many first-generation immigrant young adults demonstrated a correlation between higher frequency of translating and lower self-concept (Niehaus & Kumpiene, 2014).

Marisol reiterated this dilemma that many immigrant children experience in regards to the promotion of their L2 over their L1 (Veltman, 2000). Again discussing the question

of the “ideal” age to immigrate, Marisol highlighted the resulting difficulties: I don’t know really because if you come really young over here, then you really don’t know nothing about your culture. You don’t know Spanish. It’s going to be kind of harder to speak to your parents because if you are over here you are learning more English than Spanish.

As Marisol aptly remarked, for immigrant children in the United States, the development of English often comes at too heavy a cost: the loss of one’s ability to communicate with one’s own family and by extension, the loss of one’s own culture. This phenomenon is clearly paralleled in the literature as far back as 1974, when Lambert introduced the concept of subtractive bilingualism, the idea that the longer an EL is in the U.S.A. enrolled in English only classes, the worse his/her L1 becomes, effectively allowing the proficiency level of the L2 to surpass the L1. In addition to decreasing L1 proficiency, subtractive bilingualism also acknowledges diminished pride in their heritage culture by these immigrants as well (McKeon & Davies Samway, 2007).

### **Spanish is Important, Too**

Despite the deterioration of their ability to read, write, and communicate orally in Spanish, these young women clearly recognized the need to maintain and enhance their heritage language. Their motivations for improving their heritage language varied, but included the need to translate for others, their own future success, personal pride, and familial connections.

Prompted to take a Spanish for heritage speakers’ class, Marisol commented that it was her “favorite class,” because she was learning the importance of bilingualism. At one point, she wrote an essay on the positive aspects of being bilingual for her Spanish for heritage speakers’ class and was struck by how essential it was for her future. She saw it as an important tool that would make her more marketable in her future college scholarships and employment. Moreover, Spanish was a necessity in the home, as neither her mother nor stepfather could effectively communicate in English.

Nelly also enrolled in a Spanish for heritage speakers’ class, but for a different reason. Nelly noted that she would like to improve her Spanish because of her dislike for code switching while speaking. She wanted to be able to speak English well and Spanish well as separate entities, without “mixing the two.” While Nelly evokes a hegemonic dislike for Spanglish and code switching, viewing the use of “Spanglish” pejoratively, becoming completely fluent in both languages was a matter of personal pride. Furthermore, working in her family’s business, she often needed to translate for customers and employees with limited English skills and connected this ability with her future success. Nelly, by necessity, had to maintain and attempt to improve her Spanish to both communicate with her parents, who also spoke limited English, and work at her parents’ restaurant.

Although Lilly did not enroll in Spanish for heritage speakers classes, she was making a concerted effort to both maintain and improve her Spanish by practicing speaking and writing with her family and friends on a regular basis. Nevertheless, on numerous occasions, Lilly expressed remorse that she was unable to communicate with her mother in Spanish as effectively as she would like. Lilly commented that her mother

wished that only Spanish was spoken at home so that she (mother) could understand everything that was being stated. To Lilly, Spanish meant maintaining her connection with her mother with the potential of improving her relationship with her. As Lilly remarked, "It's (Spanish) really important because if one day, it's not that it's going to happen but, if I forget it, how am I going to speak to my family? How am I going to say something to them?"

### *Discussion/Implications*

The students in this study placed emphasis on and acknowledged the importance of English in regards to its functionality to survive in American society as well as a means to communicate with friends. This runs parallel with most studies looking at ELs' perspectives on and experiences with English. Vasquez, Pease-Alvarez, & Shannon (1994) documented their case study participants implementing functional uses of English such as translating for their parents. This is a common response for most immigrant students who live in multilingual environments. Without the linguistic assistance of their children, many non-English speaking adults would have a much more difficult time than they already have adjusting to the ways and means of the U.S.A.

Likewise, the major concern of the students interviewed in a number of other studies (Daoud, 2003; Derwing, DeCorby, Ichikawa, & Jamieson, 1999; Gunderson, 2007) was that they were not able to interact with native English speakers. Marisol's comment that she could now have more English speaking friends because she could communicate in English speaks to this same theme – English provides a means by which immigrants can communicate with and make new friends with non-immigrant or native English speaking students.

The students also claimed their ability to communicate in English had surpassed their ability to communicate in Spanish. This is despite the fact that Spanish was the dominant language spoken in their homes. All three students were raised speaking Spanish in the home, and all three students attended English-only education upon arrival in the U.S.A. This finding is similar to the finding in Gunderson's (2007) longitudinal study, where he documents that the students who had spent time in Canada the longest "tended to communicate most often in English" (p.182).

This connects to the phenomenon of subtractive bilingualism (Fillmore, 1991; Lambert, 1974) where immigrant students learn English at the expense of losing their first language. Subtractive bilingualism is common among immigrants who come at a young age to the U.S.A. It does not take long for students to realize that English is the dominant language in the U.S.A. and want to only speak in English, often times at the expense of their native language. This is due to "[English's] hegemony in American economic and cultural life, along with its high social status, mak[ing] it irresistible to younger generations" (Crawford, 1999/2008, p. 24). Immigrant students see the value placed upon English as the status language in contrast with the low-level status that their native language often holds (i.e., Spanish). As a natural response, young people begin to reject their native language and prefer to live their lives speaking in English. Moreover, since their academic instruction is often entirely in English, their native language is not supported. If their native language is not supported in the home, not

having native language instruction in the school is all but ensures subtractive bilingualism (Lambert, 1980). Portes and Hao (1998) surveyed first- and second-generation immigrant students in San Diego and Miami and found that 64% of 8th and 9th graders knew English “very well;” however, only 16% knew their native language very well, thus demonstrating the shift from native language usage to English.

However, upon entering high school and college, when students are better able to appreciate their heritage and language along with the commercial and social value of being bilingual, immigrant students often lament the loss of their native language and begin to make an effort to either maintain what they have or improve their ability to communicate in both written and oral forms by enrolling in heritage language classes. Similar to a study on college students who chose to improve their heritage language abilities (Jensen & Llosa, 2007), Marisol and Nelly shared this sentiment by enrolling in Spanish heritage classes.

We understand this phenomenon in terms of the postcolonial critique of the linguistic hegemony of English. Scholars such as Phillipson (1992) and Pennycook (2001) have described this form of cultural domination in terms of linguistic imperialism. Linguistic imperialism refers to “the dominance of English [as] asserted and maintained by the establishment and continuous reconstitution of structural and cultural inequalities between English and other languages” (Phillipson, 1992, p. 47). For example, the international spread of English has been tied to the acquisition of power of the globalized North over the globalized South, the hindrance of literacy development of heritage languages, and even the disappearance of other colonized languages (Breton, 2003 ; Pennycook, 2001). English linguistic hegemony specifically involves the “explicit and implicit beliefs, purposes, and activities which characterize the [English Language Teaching] profession and which contribute to the maintenance of English as a dominant language” (Phillipson, 1992, p. 73). Current English-only language policies in the U.S.A. exemplify this ideology in that such language policies contrive to eliminate other languages in the public schools from being used and taught in service of ESL instruction (Tollefson, 1991).

While the young women recognized the significance of learning English, they came to lament different personal losses associated with their L2 acquisition. Although they still appeared to maintain belief in the power of the English language as a pivotal point of access to success and upward mobility (Delpit, 1995), they also began to question English’s unequivocal priority in their educational careers. Because as Lilly poignantly pointed out, if she learned English to the complete exclusion of her heritage language, as has been the experience of many other immigrant children, then how was she going to speak to her family?

The three young women in our study are clearly aware of the functional and social significance of English. They are aware that in order to obtain academic and financial success in the United States one needs to know English. However, it is uncertain the degree to which they are able to articulate and critique the significance of that linguistic hegemony in their lives. On the one hand, they seem to intuitively resist the far-reaching expectations of English-only instruction at the expense of their cultural and linguistic

heritage. On the other hand, they do not recognize this English-only instruction as a form of English hegemony.

What we have demonstrated in this manuscript is both the hegemonic power that English has over Spanish according to these three young women and their ability and desire to counteract this hegemony by either maintaining or improving their L1 (Spanish). These students went from buying into the dictates of society as young children to taking a proactive stance as young adults to better their futures. One implication of this is to naturally question the experiences these students had during their educational careers. Should they have been allowed to have an English-only education? Should they have been afforded an education where both their L1 and L2 are respected and validated? If they had been enrolled in solid bilingual programs, would they still be enrolled in ESL classes at the high school level?

As noted earlier, there has been an increasing wave of English-only and anti-immigrant legislation across the nation. Since Arizona passed SB1070 in 2010, several other states have followed suit (i.e. Georgia, Alabama, Indiana, South Carolina, and Utah) (ACLU, 2013) with arguably more stringent stipulations. Fortunately, many of the elements of these laws have either been deemed unconstitutional or have been challenged in court. While these laws focus on undocumented immigrants, ultimately they have a direct impact on all immigrants who 'look like they can be undocumented.' This anti-immigration fervor further propels similar English-only legislation and language instruction policies.

Thus, despite a growing body of research against English-only (anti-bilingual education) instructional programs (Mahoney, MacSwan, Haladyna, & Garcia, 2010; Wentworth, Pellegrin, Thompson, & Hakuta, 2010), states are often choosing ideology instead of solid empirical research to support their programmatic decisions. While not explicitly challenging the presence of 'immigrants' (undocumented or otherwise) in the U.S.A., English-only programs (as well as other anti-ethnic studies initiatives) limit the recognition of the full humanity of these immigrants. In doing so, these programs likewise demonstrate a fervent desire to disavow the significance of these cultural influences, even as they have shaped (and continue to do so) the face of the U.S.A.

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