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IMMERSED IN THE LANGUAGE AND CULTURE OF THE WORLD'S BACKYARD: A STUDY ON LANGUAGE MAINTENANCE AND LOSS

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IMMERSED IN THE LANGUAGE AND CULTURE OF THE WORLD'S
BACKYARD

A STUDY ON LANGUAGE MAINTENANCE AND LOSS

by

Lucilei A. Brigido

A THESIS

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University of Nebraska, 2012

Adviser: Jenelle Reeves

In this paper, I, as an educator and a language learner, examine the stories of immigrants and their immersion into a second language and a new culture as they maintain and/or create identities, while considering the society in which they are immersed, the United States, which receives people from all corners of the world. The theoretical framework I draw from is life-based narrative research, as well as literature exploring the role of identities and membership in society. Life-based narratives give real faces to the stories, helping school holders and lay people to develop awareness in regard to the complexities and challenges involved in learning an additional language. I collected data by interviewing and recording five participants, collecting their journals and observing them in social interaction. As a result of this study, the experiences of Ana, Sula, Olivia, Sofia and Peter reveal an intersection of influences altering or reinforcing the newcomers' multiple identities and their relationship with their first language.

Keywords: intersection of influences, linguistic market, newcomers, awareness, mother tongue, immersion, diversity, life-based narrative, identity, discourses, maintenance, loss.

Dedication

To the cultural brokers present in my journey immersed in a second language and culture.
My family, and especially in memory of my brother, Lucivaldo do Vale Brigido, my
biggest cheerleader.

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Introduction

Imagine a classroom where the majority of students are native speakers of the target language, and only a few are the target language learners. A teacher dictates words and requires the students to apply those words to sentences. The words are: *defeat*, *deduct*, *defense*, *detail*. The following is an example of the sentences constructed utilizing the words provided above, “The feet of the duck went through the fence before the tail.” What would your first reaction be? Would you consider the sentence completely wrong? Would you think the student was trying to be funny? Or would you possibly consider he is a second language learner, building a sentence according to what he had heard? It might be difficult to consider this situation, even imagining it impossible; however, considering the complexities of acquiring an additional language and its culture, such an experience and many others similar to it are likely to happen more often than we can imagine.

Language learners face unique experiences in their new society and in their new language. Their experiences shape their memories and the construction of their multiple identities. As an educator, I chose to learn a second language and experience immersion in a new culture. I faced many challenges and thought about giving up countless times. Through both my experiences and my exposure to literature narrating the stories of people who chose one language over another, I developed an interest in the stories of other people, especially regarding these people’s relationship with their first language while learning a second language.

In this study, I present the stories of people learning English as an additional language and their relationship with their mother tongue. Additionally with my

participant's experiences, I analyze some of my own experiences as an English language learner, ELL, and experiences that have helped shape my literary world. During my field experience in an ELL classroom and in a community center I met two of my participants. The first was Ana. I was observing one of her classmates for a project. In diverse situations she shared bits of her story. I found the factors involving the loss of her primary language, Bulgarian, in a short span of time intriguing. Yet more absorbing was the fact she still was an ELL student. The second, Sula, an Iraqi, in the United States accompanying her husband, was introduced to me by the director of the ELL program in a community center. I needed a student to tutor and Sula needed someone to help her with English. Additionally, she needed to fill the time she was spending alone at home, which was making her rather homesick.

I heard about Olivia and Sofia, the Brazilian sisters, at Brazilian get-togethers. People had mentioned that Sofia, the younger sister, avoids talking to Brazilians, and both of them had to be sent back to Brazil for a school year to reacquire their primary language. I thought this very conflicting, as both of their parents were Brazilians and often organized these get-togethers. I thought it peculiar that their daughters would have problems keeping fluency in their mother tongue.

My last participant, the only man in the group, was chosen randomly. Peter and I lived in the same neighborhood. I thought it would be noteworthy to have someone in my study whom I had heard nothing about, including his experiences with language acquisition. The only information I had about Peter was his country of origin, Bulgaria.

Examining Peter, Ana, Sula, Sofia and Olivia's stories, my own experiences became noticeable. I became acutely aware of how a new culture and academic

environment strongly interfere with shaping and constructing the newcomers' multiple identities. An intersection of influences is involved in the acquisition of an additional language, altering or reinforcing the relationship and the feelings towards the first language, and resulting in the maintenance or loss of a mother tongue.

With the intersection of influences in mind, my inquiry relates to questions such as the following: What are the factors related to the loss of a language?; What factors can be related to the feeling of keeping a language as part of a person's identity?; What kinds of experiences in the process of learning an additional language influence someone to stop using his mother tongue? The purpose of this study encompasses the challenges speakers of English as an additional language face in regard to their cultural identities and the use of their first language.

Through the study of life-based narratives, we as school holders may learn more about the challenges faced by second language learners. Their challenges can then be used for complementing and/or modifying teaching approaches that may help educators to smooth these students' difficulties. Additionally important is the knowledge of certain concepts such as bringing the outside in, by bringing in home culture's influences into the classroom, the use of prior knowledge (Freire, 1997), and the presence of the symbolic power created by the linguistic market (Bourdieu, 1977), as well as the influence of these concepts in the factors involving the maintenance of the mother tongue.

Review of Literature

First Language Maintenance and Loss with the Acquisition of English

English Acquisition

I am an ELL, an English Language Learner, and always will be. From this theoretical framework you are about to read, I assume my “interest,” which you may call it my “bias,” in the intersection of influences involved in the acquisition of English, altering, reinforcing and or creating identities related to the maintenance and loss of a first language. My experiences have definitely played a crucial role in the subject I chose to research. Residing in the United States for the last three years and experiencing the diversity of language and culture has fueled a desire in me to understand more about similar groups of immigrants and how they maintain their language and culture while living in an English-speaking society, and moreover to carefully research those factors that influence the loss of a mother tongue in early generations. In my academic life, I have noted the increased number of studies detailing not only the acquisition of a new language, but also the parallel growth of the primary language loss during that acquisition period, in this case, English being the acquired language (Fillmore, 2000; Fishman, 1996). Among these readings, life-based narratives illustrate a variety of factors which may influence the maintenance and/or the loss of a first language. Primarily these are two fold: the relationship a second language learner has with his mother tongue and his feelings of acceptance from the new culture. Both factors certainly play important roles in the learning process of an additional language, influencing how the learner perceives himself when using his mother tongue.

While studying English, I frequently attempted to connect it to my mother tongue; this caused me to reflect on other second language learners. I asked myself what kinds of experiences may be similar for us all when learning an additional language. Once more, my academic life has exposed me to life-based narratives and research that describes a polarized process of language acquisition, generally in one of two directions: additive or subtractive (Fillmore, 1991). I was immediately intrigued by the possibility of learning a language as a subtractive process. What kinds of experiences would language learners face that would ultimately steer them in one of these directions or even toward a highly undesirable middle ground, where the learner does not acquire proficiency in either language?

Forces that direct language learners toward additive or subtractive second language learning may be explained, in part, by Bourdieu (1977), in concepts, such as cultural capital and the linguistic market. Bourdieu's (1977) linguistic market has standards of acceptance: the way people speak, the language people speak, and the sounds made when people speak. All of these will influence how they are perceived by others. This is not only a matter of communication but also a matter of distinction. There is a symbolic power involved in this, a power of suggestion of what the linguistic market will accept as competent.

The awareness of a linguistic market becomes apparent to newcomers when introduced to these distinctions while acquiring a language. Newcomers soon become aware of the linguist privilege of native speakers of English (Goldstein, 2003). As an adult learning English, many times I was, and still am, self-conscious of my accent. This led to the self-limited critiques as I tried to express myself effectively. Fearful of certain

conversational situations I found myself summarizing and convincing others that I understood what was being said. I wanted to be part of the linguistic market, able to pronounce words without having people furrowing their brows and struggling to understand my accent. I wanted to function with distinction to express myself critically without having my thoughts lost or fragmented while figuring out which words to use and how to organize the sentences. The following quote succinctly illustrates the symbolic power the linguistic market exercises over speakers.

The recognition extorted by this invisible, silent violence is expressed in explicit statements ... to which dominated speakers, as they strive desperately for correctness, consciously or unconsciously subject the stigmatized aspects of their pronunciation, their diction... and their syntax, or in the disarray which leaves them speechless, tongue tied, at a loss for words, as if they were suddenly dispossessed of their own language. (Bourdieu, 1977, p.52)

The experiences English language learners have in an ELL classroom are completely different from those they might experience in a regular classroom. The transition from an ELL classroom, with a supportive environment, to the mainstream may cause a shock to newcomers (Miller, 2003). It may drive them to believe they have been misled, thinking their English was adequate for their immersion within the mainstream. It is additionally in the mainstream that newcomers experience language as social action, making meaning of the discourses in which they are a part (Gee, 1990). As an English Language Learner, I remember the feeling of progressing with English, learning how to communicate better and use the rules of the language, such as sentence structure and applying appropriate grammar to it. I could perceive the development of my skills and

was gaining a feeling of confidence to speak publicly among other English Language Learners. When I was finally immersed in a regular classroom with native speakers of English, the symbolic power, cited by Bourdieu (1977) in the above quote, took place. The fluency which I had thought to have acquired in the ELL classroom was now insufficient to feel confident among native English speakers. Organizing the sentence structure in my mind of what I wanted to say and preparing myself to speak in public made me ““speechless” many times, and made me feel “dispossessed” of my own language” (Bourdieu, 1977, p.52). Fortunately, being fluent in my first language and having reached achievements both academically and professionally in my home country, helped me to understand that the process of learning a second language happens progressively.

Identities are discursively constructed (Goldstein, 2003; Miller, 2003; Haneda, 2009). Acquiring English shapes and construct the newcomers’ multiples identities. Immersed in the new language and culture, newcomers are constantly introduced to the new discourses¹ within it. Newcomers are constantly trying to fit categories and as a consequence defining their multiple identities. The immersion in the new culture brings an awareness of the new modes of description, driving them towards action while considering the new possibilities (Hawkins, 2005; Freire, 1997). Acquiring English plays an important role in the relationship of newcomers with their first language. It plays an important role in the maintenance or loss of a first language. It influences the construction of their multiple identities. In fact not having the mother tongue acknowledged in school or receiving negative messages concerning the first language

¹ Discourses, the social, cultural and linguistic interactions. The norms and requirements to be part of a group. Or simply, the new reality around a person’s experiences.

may also influence the learner's relationship with his culture and first language.

Language is a powerful way of getting support, of bringing people to us, such as when a crying baby understands that he will get some attention through this action. A speaker knows that to get attention, to be heard, he needs to be part of the linguistic market, understanding the hierarchy present in discourse and being a competent speaker within it. Learners may gain this confidence through the acknowledgement from the host society of other languages and cultures being as important and valued as English, understanding that there are many advantages in becoming bilingual, and that the process of being recognized as a competent speaker in the linguistic market will come with time and practice. When the host society expresses sensitivity to the learners' backgrounds, their connection with their homeland culture and language is affected positively (Chan, 2006).

Connected to Bourdieu's (1997) ideas, the constitution of a linguistic market and "habitus," the way we will react to situations, is found in the work of Paulo Freire (1997) in *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. In his book Freire (1997) argues that people may live in a silent group when they do not have an awareness of the world surrounding them. This means that sometimes people accept their condition of oppression according to the experiences they face. Freire (1997) claims that one way to liberate these people from their condition is by using their experiences to help them learn about themselves. Using their experiences, bringing the outside in, connecting the learning of a new language with learners' first languages and cultures, and letting them share their experiences and stories from their home countries may be ways to help with their development of confidence with the new language. Freire (1997) illustrates the use of students' experiences in the classroom as the simple use of words or situations which are part of the students' daily

lives. In the process of learning a second language, the learner needs a connection with his culture and language to make sense of the new environment, to have a feeling of confidence, of belonging, of being part of a global community and to not feel “oppressed,” as Freire (1997) would say.

Learning an additional language is not a linear sequence, such as nouns first, then verbs, etc. The process happens through “chunks” of language in meaningful contexts. Both Freire (1997), through the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, and Andrews (2006), in *Language Exploration and Awareness*, agree that meeting the needs of the students aids in successful learning. Andrews (2006) also calls for the need for changes in education, due to who our clients are. He states that a decade ago, small towns were more likely to have students whose first language was mainly English; however, this has changed, and now if a teacher has never had a speaker of English as a Second Language before, this will soon happen.

Arnot, Pinson, and Candappa (2009), in their article, “Compassion, Caring and Justice: Teachers' Strategies to Maintain Moral Integrity in the Face of National Hostility to the ‘Non-Citizen’,” stand side by side with Freire (1997) and Andrews (2006) in regard to caring about who the learners of a second language are, along with speaking for justice, giving opportunities for every student to learn. In their research in London, they analyze the responses from teachers to asylum seeking refugees in schools. One of the teachers in the article expresses her respect for the refugees and imagines how the refugees might feel when they sit for the first time in a British classroom and do not speak the language. The authors focus on social justice and try to differentiate the treatment of these children from that of Immigrant Law Practitioners with the emphasis

that immigrant children are, first and foremost, children and not immigrants. From this standpoint, the authors focus on the need to give the refugee children the support they need, just as any other child would need, concluding that to have compassion is to have respect for others.

The ideas of caring and using students' experiences to teach them about the world in which they are immersed and helping them make sense of their own existence connected me to my childhood memories. I helped my mother and two cousins, who were just a few years older than me, in learning how to read and write. I was probably seven or eight years old when I started teaching my mother through the activities I had learned at school, but mostly by teaching her through her needs, such as signing her name in public or writing a letter to our relatives in the northeast part of Brazil. The activities I was doing in school, the simple words and children's stories, were interesting both to me and to my mother. In my mother's case, this was because these activities were part of her daughter's life. She started to learn through her own reality. I was fourteen when I started teaching my cousins, two young adults. I had no experience, except as a student and as my mom's instructor. I recalled what I had learned from my teachers to teach them. Signing their names was probably the most exciting practice; however, the system I had gone through as a child was not sufficient for them or interesting for their reality and needs. Understanding the documents from their work, such as descriptions of their paychecks and extra hours they had worked, was further motivation for my cousins to learn more about the literary world. They would also ask me for specific words. As I had done for my mother, I would help them to write letters to their family members. I had to teach the basics to them, such as the alphabet and sounds of the letters; however, using

childish activities that had worked for me would not work for them. Those memories illustrated to me what Dooley (2009), Freire (1997), Andrews (2006) and others cited above mention in relation to understanding more about students' backgrounds to teach them from a meaningful context (Chan, 2006).

Dooley (2009), for example, in her article, "Re-thinking Pedagogy for Middle School Students with Little, No or Severely Interrupted Schooling," deals with the challenges, such as illiteracy, that teachers face in Australia with the arrival of new students who are refugees from Africa with little or no literacy at all. The study also illustrates the need for caring and justice, while still recognizing the necessity for new pedagogies that can reach the needs of these students who come with deficits in the curriculum that vary from country to country with interrupted or no schooling. As a result of these deficits, these students' ages are also not compatible with the grades in which they should be placed. The study illustrates the strategies of some teachers in the use of prior knowledge in order to teach these students, while other teachers focus on only teaching regular skills, not deepening their lectures.

Additional analyses of the feelings that speakers of another language can have both towards English and their mother tongue when suffering prejudice can be found in "The World Outside and Inside schools: Language and Immigrant Children," by Valdes (1998). Valdes specifically analyzes students who come to school with "zero" English. The author describes the differences between regular classrooms and sheltered classrooms (ESL), with the latter ones having instruction that tends to be trivial, such as teaching commands in folding a paper, with whom to sit, etc. Valdes (1998) describes the school as being two different schools in one building, one for the ESL students and the

other for the native English speakers. Both Valdes (1998) and Freire (1997) illustrate the idea of caring about students' experiences in order to immerse them in Bourdieu's (1977) linguistic market as competent members.

Acquiring English as an additive process is adding one more resource to newcomers' arsenal. It is language choice, as studies, such as Pavlenko's (2004) have shown that language learners codeswitch to establish an affective stance. Language choice is connected to express emotion, mark distance or simply to signal intimacy. Miller (2003) writes, "We represent and negotiate identity, and construct that of others, through speaking and hearing" (p.294). Reflecting on this idea of constructing identities through language choice connects to Freire's (1997) concepts of silent groups. Newcomers sometimes may become voiceless in certain contexts, as the result of intimidation, real or just imagined. Important here is the influence of the new discourses, directing newcomers to establish a relationship with their first language, that may drive them towards the maintenance or to an undesirable outcome of the loss of the mother tongue along the way. One of the factors that may influence this undesirable outcome is language policies along with the beliefs within them (Tse, 2001; Chan, 2006).

Examining language policies in the context of the United States, it is possible to observe the argument of two opposing groups: linguistic pluralists and assimilationists, in regard to U.S. language policies and the value of linguistic equality (Schmidt, 2000). Pluralists claim that the social inequality of minority groups in the United States is connected to the issue of language policy. Language policies are not an issue only in the United States; there are conflicts and dilemmas toward language policies in other continents, as well, such as Africa, where English or another tongue is the primary

language. Assimilationists state that there is no question that English is the language of power in U. S. society, communication, commerce, education and political life.

Assimilationists consider that the way to assist a minority language group toward greater equality is through the mastery of the English language. One point on which both sides agree is that English is the primary language of the United States, and U.S. residents are advised to master it. While both sides agree that everyone has the right to learn and speak a non-English language, they strongly disagree about the appropriate terrain on which to use the non-English language. Schmidt (2000) states that pluralists and assimilationists claim to respect the diverse ethnic origins of the American, but the protagonists, themselves, tend to not recognize their areas of agreement.

While pluralists and assimilationists debate where a foreign language could be used, Tse (2001) explores the many beliefs surrounding the use of the first language in the process of schooling. Many of these beliefs include that immigrants resist learning English, their children fail to learn it, and immigrants segregate themselves linguistically from the mainstream of society by immersing themselves in their home language community. The author also states that such beliefs were and are the support for the amendments of the Official English Language. These beliefs are also some of the reasons given against bilingual education in the United States. Another consequence that these beliefs bring is the influence on school holders in the English as a Second Language programs to not use an important tool in the education of second language learners, their mother tongue.

Research from Hatoss and Sheely (2009) analyzes the maintenance of the first language among refugees who face prejudice because of their status and identity as being

refugees. They explore the belief that refugees tend to reject their first language and culture in order to be free from labels and stigmas. Conversely, even though students might suffer prejudice because of their mother tongue, the authors gather evidence of a strong feeling toward maintenance of the refugees' mother tongue for different reasons. In this research, students report the use of their mother tongue in different environments and groups. They cite that their mother tongue connects them to their culture and families, and if they lose their language, they also will lose their culture. Another point made by the students is the fact of their ability to help their community, especially those who do not know English. The students in this study also claim the importance of knowing English, because English is an important language, since it is spoken in many parts of the world and is the language of mutual understanding.

Language policies and the speech of different groups influence the pedagogies utilized in schools and the way people perceive speakers of another language other than English (Tse, 2001; Chan, 2006). Cummins et al.'s (2005) article, "Affirming Identity in Multilingual Classrooms," explores the use of prior knowledge as not only information or skills acquired during formal instruction, but the totality of experiences in shaping a learner's identity. Cummins et al. (2005) illustrate that, different from some language policies, the student's home language is an essential piece for school while facilitating the flow of knowledge between home and school and across languages. This project, called "Dual language text," is one in which students tell their stories in English and in their home language, involving parents, as well as peers and teachers who are also speakers of the students' first language.

Language Loss and Maintenance

The possibility of losing the language that connects me to my extended family is a sad thought to me. It is definitely something that had never been a concern, in relation to learning an additional language, until the time I was exposed to this issue in my academic life. With the number of immigrant children and children of immigrants losing their mother tongue, language loss is an issue that has recently raised concerns. When a mother tongue is lost, with it goes the connection to the mother culture, and sometimes the family's ties are affected, as well (Rodriguez, 1982). Fillmore (1991) explores the problem of subtractive bilingualism in children of immigrants, especially within the program of Early Education. Subtractive bilingualism is happening more rapidly today in comparison to earlier times.

Face-touching: A Story Book, by Sandra G. Kouritzin (1999), illustrates the conflicts connected to subtractive bilingualism with life narratives of many children of immigrants (those born in the host country), as well as immigrant' children (those who immigrate at early age), and their experiences in the new country, learning a second language and losing their first. With their experiences, with their losses, come feelings of anger, discomfort, and the feeling of not belonging to either culture. Their narratives illustrate the lives of those who have lost contact with their extended family, because of their lack of fluency in their first language. In their narratives the struggle of some to communicate deeply with their parents, who did not learn English enough to be involved in deep conversations, is noticeable. Some of these people saw their parents pass away, and they tell of their sadness because of their inability to fully comprehend their parents' experiences, as well as not being able to give their parents a better understanding of their

lives, especially their careers. In their losses, they struggle with resentment, anger and a mixture of feelings, which follow them throughout their lives.

Similar to Kouritzin (1999), Fillmore (2000) proclaims the consequences involved in the language loss, such as the breakdown in communication among family members and identity conflict. An additional conflict is found in children not developing proper fluency in any language, considering that most of the time the models of speakers that children of immigrants have are within their peer group, consisting mostly of people of the same background as themselves. Fillmore (2000) additionally explores the dramatic change in the loss of the ethnic language occurring in earlier times between the second and third generations and currently happening among the first generation immigrants. Furthermore, the author claims that immigrant children receive the message that there is a problem being part of another culture, and the solution to this is to follow the American ideology of speaking English as a sign of loyalty to America and also serving as a synonym of individual acceptance in America.

Fishman (1996) goes further in his analysis of what is lost when someone loses his mother tongue. He points out that there is much more than a language that is lost; with it goes the culture and other aspects, such as its literature, greetings, proverbs, prayers, and so on. The author claims that culture is in the language.

An interesting point made by Fishman (1996) is in regard to the resistance of a community to acknowledge that its language is in danger. A community with a language in danger tends to believe that their children will learn it when they get older, but then a new language has already been introduced to that generation, and the relationship with the community language will not be the same. The author also raises the point of it being

an unfair competition, trying to restore or maintain one language from a weaker culture to a stronger one. Additionally, Norton (1998) also explores subtractive bilingualism. Norton (1998) examines the acculturation model of second language acquisition by Shumann. In this examination, Shumann analyzes social factors of the target language group which influence the acculturation process. This polarizing process either drives immigrants to subtractive bilingualism, the loss of fluency in their primary language, or to a desired outcome of additive bilingualism. This last concept involves the normal process of increased language acquisition. Both Fishman (1996) and Norton (1998) mention the importance for teachers to bring to parents' attention the concept of subtractive and additive bilingualism, where subtractive bilingualism can cause not only language loss but an identity crisis.

Within a language is the development of others' ideas and unique expressions of a culture. Language is a social action, where people establish a relationship of power and accept discourses as meaningful (Gee, 1990). Why then, choose one language over another? Why not keep both instead of choosing? Language loss is definitely an issue of which school holders and policy makers should be aware.

In the book *Hunger for Memory: The Education of Richard Rodriguez*, Rodriguez (1982) describes his life and his conflicts in learning a second language, a public language, leaving behind his private language. Rodriguez (1982) tells his feelings about rushing back home after school and hearing that private language, which drew his family closer and gave him a feeling of comfort. He greatly describes his experiences of hearing English and feeling like an outsider of that culture. The author shares his story about being completely immersed in English, even at home, when his parents started to use

English, upon his school's request, and the changes it brought to his life, both positive and negative. This intriguing autobiography of Rodriguez and his education is an interesting illustration of someone who chose one language over another and, as a result, his family's relationship was affected by broken communication.

Another interesting narrative is described by Carger (1996) in her book, *Of Borders and Dreams*. In this book, the author relates the challenges a Mexican-American family, the *Juarezes*, go through to support their children in school, while the parents do not speak English and the oldest son, Alejandro, has the role of interpreter, though he has little proficiency in the target language. Alejandro, an 8th grade student, faces the struggles with the English language and the lack of empathy from most of his teachers regarding his slow development. The family also faces the abuse of the principal, who uses their religious beliefs to intimidate them.

Reading this narrative, I found myself being Alejandro, per se, many times. As a second language learner, I struggled, and still do at times to learn a language and feel part of the community I am in, without having to give up my identity. Learning a language is not really the biggest challenge, for soon second language learners start to communicate the basics to "survive". However, for me, the hardest was, and is learning about a whole culture. For instance, while I was simply an ESL student I felt affirmed by my teachers and I carried my culture along. Once I was immersed in the English-speaking world, I felt unable to demonstrate the skills that I had developed in my country. I felt like a slower learner and with some kind of deficit, as well. This was the way I thought people perceived me, because of my lack of proficiency in the language and my lack of knowledge in simple discussions about the culture. Many times I reiterated to myself my

goals and why I should not give up because later on I would have the reward and some knowledge about the culture. Along in this path, despite the fact that I am an adult with my personality formed and knowing what I already did in regard to teaching, I still needed affirmation from peers and teachers in order to continue on. I can imagine how hard it is for a child or an adolescent trying to negotiate his participation in this new “world”, since it has been greatly difficult for me, one who actually chose to experience it. Maintenance of a primary language may be challenged when second language learners feel unable to express their knowledge and skills through the use of their additional language.

Becoming aware that in order to succeed, especially academically, mastering English is not the only requirement, but learning how to negotiate participation in the new discourses may influence newcomers’ identities. The new discourses “invariably change the persons that students become since “coming to know is part of a larger process of coming to be a particular kind of person” in a particular community of practice” (Haneda, 2009, p. 338). Furthermore, the construction of language learners’ multiple identities towards a desirable bilingualism or multilingualism condition can be definitely reinforced by the influence of prior knowledge (Chan, 2006).

No one is a blank recipient; everybody has a story and experiences. It does not matter if a person is literate or not. Pre-existing knowledge is present within the experiences a person faces. In “Agency and Contingency in the Language Learning of Refugees and Asylum Seekers,” Baynham (2006) explores the movement that has been named “New Literacy Studies,” which emphasizes the use of students’ experiences in the new community for both the construction of knowledge and learning.

The author explores the students' agency in bringing the "outside in," as well as how the teachers approach these situations. The author points out the importance of having knowledge distributed among all participants and not just being the exclusive domain of the teacher. Even my basic teaching experiences from my childhood reminded me of this same fact, that knowledge is not an exclusive domain.

Cummins et al., (2005), in "Affirming Identity in Multilingual Classrooms," cited earlier, point out the use of prior knowledge as not only information or skills acquired during formal instruction but the totality of experiences in shaping a learner's identity. The student's home language is an essential piece for school while facilitating the flow of knowledge between home and school and across languages. The authors also state that through the projects cited in the article, educators have the choice to go beyond the curriculum, meeting both standardized tests, as well as acknowledging and respecting students' prior knowledge. Language learners bring a rich linguistic repertoire to school. Nero (2005) furthers this concept by pointing out that considering only a narrow part of this repertoire, such as their written and oral skills in English, considering placement, *per se*, may be problematic to the construction of identities.

In "Re-thinking Pedagogy for Middle School Students with Little, No or Severely Interrupted Schooling," Dooley (2009), cited previously, analyzes the use of prior knowledge to connect with conceptual knowledge. An example of this would be in connecting the students' experience as refugees to relate to situations that took place during the Russian Revolution. In "Language Maintenance and Identity among Sudanese-Australian Refugee-Background Youth," Hatoss and Sheely (2009), also mentioned earlier, explore the idea of the abandonment of the mother tongue in order to

exit from the refugee status. However, the authors' findings contradict their primary focus. Instead, Hatoss and Sheely (2009) discover a strong feeling toward maintenance of the mother tongue connected to the refugees' cultural identities, as well as being used for networking purposes. The use of prior knowledge is an effective way to include minority students in school during their learning processes. Important ideas about the use of prior knowledge and examples of it are discussed in these qualitative research studies.

Considerations

Throughout the literature review I have intended to analyze factors which are known about language loss and maintenance during second language acquisition. Along with the analysis, it is essential to realize that everyone brings with them life experiences (Chan, 2006; Cummins et al., 2005). In a classroom, instructional literacy does not start from ground zero. This is true both for native speakers and for additional language learners. People bring knowledge with them; some may be literate in their mother tongue, but even for those who are not, they bring a spoken prior knowledge from their stories of experience. Though my mother was not literate and my dad was semi-literate, my brothers and I loved to hear their stories of life. I could feel their confidence and happiness present in their voices during those moments of sharing. Today, I know those moments empowered them as parents, but especially as distinct speakers, possessing specific knowledge. Students' language has encoded in it pre-existing knowledge. Making use of students' prior knowledge is essential to help them make sense of their education and their values as competent members of the new group of which they are a part.

Language policies and beliefs, as well as, the way people feel they are perceived by others as being different from the majority, may influence the maintenance or loss of a language (Tse, 2001; Schmidt, 2000; Chan, 2006). Developing an awareness of simple factors involving language acquisition may contribute to better learning experiences. In the loss of a language, so much else is lost with it. Family relationships can be greatly affected by the lack of communication or broken communication caused by language barriers (Rodriguez, 1982; Fillmore, 1991; Fishman, 1996). A person may miss the opportunity of valuing his home country's culture, as well as feeling that his culture is not as valid as the one in which he is immersed. It is essential to realize that learning an additional language can be such a benefit when another language is not subtracted as a result. Learning another language brings to a person an awareness of other cultures and an understanding of his place in his own culture.

With the immersion into a new language and culture, especially considering English in the United States, language learners are introduced to new discourses (Hawkins, 2005; Goldstein, 1994; Haneda, 2009; Gee, 1990). In fact they are surrounded by influences. The power of the linguistic market soon finds its place with new modes of descriptions. These discourses have the power of imposition on newcomers, handing them a decision to either accept or reject its requirements. With the influence of the new discourses and concepts newcomers define their position within the new society of which they are now a part. Defining their position with the influence of these forces newcomers start to shape, alter and construct multiple identities, such as social, linguistic, and cultural interference in the relationship of maintenance or loss of a first language, as we

see in research by Hawkins (2005), Norton (1998), Pavlenko (2004) to name only a few scholars in this field.

Methodology

This study consisted of a qualitative approach, looking more in depth into the stories of speakers of English as a second language and their relationship with their mother tongue. I chose to use the life-based literary narratives research style to draw data for this study.

My option of life-based narratives was related to my experiences as a student and a teacher and the path of literacy in my own life. Reflecting back, I had always had a passion for school and for the literacy introduced to me there. Analyzing my family's narrative of experiences in schooling made me recognize the importance of students' stories to establish a significant relationship to their academic lives. My mother had three days of experience in school in her entire life. After a cow accidentally trampled her on a dirt road on her way to school in Northeastern Brazil, my grandfather said she was not going back to school anymore since from his point of view, school was not a place for women; women should be mothers and housekeepers. While my mother saw her dream coming to an end, at the same time, my father was faced with living on the streets at the age of eight, two years after his mother had died. Some years later, one of his aunts found him and took him to her house. My father had just a third grade education. Growing up listening to my parents' stories their struggles in life, while they were raising four children with low wages made me not take education for granted. This came especially because of my mom and her enthusiasm while observing us starting to read and write and her own struggle when she had to sign something in public, where she had to put her

thumb print in lieu of a signature. I remember, as child, trying to make her do the same activities my teachers had me do at school, when she used to tell me, “I’m too old to learn.” Overall, she started to read simple words and sign her name with some struggle. If she thought someone was observing her, she would strongly tremble. Watching my mother signing her name was much more than overwhelming; it was beautiful. Before she learned how to do this, it was extremely frustrating and saddening to observe her asking people if I could sign for her in her place (I was just a child); otherwise, she would have to assume her identity as an illiterate person. My parents’ stories and their motivation to take us to school were certainly the first sponsorships in my literate life. Their stories were, and are, of great value. In my experiences as a teacher, I empathized with parents who were unable to help their kids with school assignments. I knew what it was like for the parents who felt embarrassed and for the children who would not have the help to bring in “well-elaborated projects.”

Life-based narrative research does not give a general overview of an issue; it gives faces to real stories to sympathize with or not. My parents’ story and other narratives of people going through different issues give individuals, such as myself, an opportunity to develop an awareness of issues we may not personally experience. Through these narratives, people may develop a sense of respect for other people’s choices. They enable individuals involved in the stories to develop an empathetic understanding, where self-examination takes place about the real experiences of others and the surrounding world. We cannot be empathetic with imaginary stories, though we certainly may dream about them; however, the effect that life-based narratives bring to our lives has a longer scope than do imaginary stories.

Through the research style of life-based narratives, I analyzed the data, investigating the relationship of the participants both with English and their mother tongue, examining which language they felt more comfortable using and their experiences while acquiring the English language. I investigated factors, such as feelings of acceptance and experiences, which may have influenced the participants' relationship with one of their languages. I also investigated the influences of the new discourses on the construction of the participants' multiple identities (Gee, 1990; Cummins et al., 2005; Hatoss & Sheely, 2009). Data collection lasted from May 2011 to November 2011. Data collection included two interviews, varying from 19 minutes to one hour, one interview being at the beginning of the study and the other one at the end. Interviews were audio taped in order to present the information more accurately. Data collection also included observations of three of the participants. There was a maximum of two observations during the study, lasting from thirty minutes to one hour. The participants' social interaction, their dialogues, their vocabulary choices, and the influence of the first language on the second, and vice-versa, were the focus of the observations. Only the interactions of the participants were to be included in the study. The chart below designates more specific information from data collection.

Data Collection Chart

Participant	Number of Interviews/Duration in minutes	Observation	Journal	Additional Information
Sula	36 minutes	Informal observations- 3 or 4 times**	-	15 hours of tutoring – Fall 2010

Olivia	(2) 28 minutes and 48 minutes	-	-	Social – frequent the same church and meet occasionally at Brazilian get- togethers.
Sofia	(2) 22 minutes and 39 minutes	(2) 50 minutes each	7	
Peter	(2) 19 minutes and 32 minutes	(2) 90 minutes and 50 minutes	4	Sharing the same neighborhood- occasional chance meetings
Anna	(2) 65 minutes and 76 minutes	(2) 50 minutes each	4	Phone call and e-mails

** Informal observations happened as an attempt to do the formal ones; however, innumerable times I could not accomplish these for diverse reasons, such as Sula's baby crying, her husband being present and my concluding that she was not comfortable talking in front of him, or Sula having limited time and me feeling that it would not be adequate for a formal observation.

As a researcher, I was part of the conversations, when the participants chose to interact with me during observations. There were a total of four to seven journal entries, collected during the study. These journals were initially in the form of a short questionnaire, containing no more than four questions per week. In these questionnaires, participants were encouraged to reflect on their language use. Both the journal and the questionnaire could be answered with which the language the participant felt most comfortable. The work of a transcriptionist would be required in the event that the

Arabic and the Bulgarian speakers in the study had chosen to use their first language for the journal and/or questionnaire; however, none of the participants chose their first language for the journal entries. The participants' identities are kept confidential; they are identified only by their pseudonyms. In other words, any information that could identify the participants was excluded from the study or altered (as with the use of a pseudonym).

Considering myself today, as an educator, a citizen of the world, a daughter, a family member who wants to make a difference through my words and actions, and as an agent of social change, I remember the work of Foucault (1977), who said that “information is power,” and the work of Freire (1997), in *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, who explains that the best way for freedom of the oppressed is by creating in them an awareness of their real situation, something which will also cause the liberation of the oppressor. Through the awareness of other people's stories and the power that is given to us through language, through information, we are able to learn to respect other people's stories and choices.

Portrait of Participants

From this point forward, I introduce the stories of real people and their learning experiences while immersed in the United States: Sula, an Iraqi Muslim immigrant, Olivia and Sofia, Brazilian immigrant children, Peter, a Bulgarian and American citizen, and finally Ana, a Bulgarian orphan who was adopted in her teen years by an American family. Although their stories are very distinct from one another, all of them have had similar experiences while being immersed in the English language and in the target culture.

Participant's Information Chart

Participant / Age	Country of Origin	1st Language	Time in U.S.	Preferred Language*
Sula (35)	Iraq	Arabic	4 years	Arabic
Olivia (23)	Brazil	Portuguese	13 ½ years	English and Portuguese
Sofia (20)	Brazil	Portuguese	13 ½ years	English
Peter (41)	Bulgaria	Bulgarian	19 years	English and Bulgarian
Anna (25)	Bulgaria	Bulgarian	11 years	English

*The languages the participants stated to be more comfortable using.

Sula

Sula, a thirty-five-year-old Muslim mother and second language learner recently moved to the United States from Iraq. Sula is the oldest in her family among two other siblings, a brother and a sister. She is the mother of an eleven-year-old girl, Janna, her only child to experience the Arabic school system, learning how to read and write formally; a seven-year-old boy, Amal; a five-year-old boy, Farah, who has Down's Syndrome; and a 14-month-old boy, Ali, the only one of her children born in the United States.

I met Sula in a community center while tutoring her in English. She spoke almost as much English as I spoke my first year in the U.S. as an English Language Learner (ELL). She was really good at communicating what she wanted to say; however, her listening skills were not as well-developed. She had some difficulty understanding people's responses to her, adding that Americans speak too fast, and it often sounded as if

they were “eating” part of their words. In the span of over a year, Sula’s English skills developed at a rapid pace.

Sula is from Baghdad, the capital of Iraq, where she was a professor in the science department of the university where she worked. In Iraq, she obtained both a Bachelor’s degree in veterinary medicine and a Master’s degree in anatomy. She currently resides in Lincoln, Nebraska, having accompanied her husband, Manal, to the United States to work on his Ph.D in toxicology.

My first impression of Sula was that she greatly needed someone to talk to, not because she had problems, but because she did not know what to do with all the time she was left alone with at home. Television, magazines, and books in English did not get her attention, of course, because of the language limitations. She was also limited because she did not drive and it was winter. I remember our first meeting; I did not need to ask specific questions, as broad topics were enough to get Sula talking about her life and her family.

Being in America as a spectator, watching her husband and children being immersed in English and socializing with the diversity present in this town, was not really interesting for Sula, who only got to hear her family’s narratives of the world outside her apartment. Back in her country, Sula was never a spectator in her family’s development; she was part of it, as a mother who worked outside of the home, and as a student, constantly developing new skills (in the U.S., she had a scholarship from her country to be part of the new culture through immersion, but she did not have the language skills to experience it herself.). Moreover, she had her husband, children and

home duties to look after, vastly different from Baghdad, where her parents and other relatives would look after her children while she was at school and work.

Through the stories she shared with me, Sula demonstrated strong religious and cultural views as part of her life. She talked about her culture, marriage, and the significance of the *hijab* (headscarf worn by some Islamic women), among other topics. Additionally through her narratives, she broke certain stereotypes that Western culture may have in regard to the Muslim culture. While she was in college, she belonged to a study group. It was there that she met her husband. She did not marry him until the end of her college experience. This was an exigency of her parents, who were concerned about her education. During this time, she even participated in field trips with her husband, who was her fiancé at that time. Sula expressed her feelings about the use of the *hijab* in one of our conversations, as paraphrased below,

What really matters is what you have in your heart. I don't like when people come here, take the hijab off and color their hair, just to try to fit in. What matters are the reasons why you are wearing it or not. (Sula, Fall 2010).

Sula was twenty-one years old when, by her own choice, she started to wear the *hijab*. She chose to wear it because she felt more reserved and protected with it on. Before age twenty-one, she had worn the *hijab* just during the months of January and February, a holiday for the son of the prophet Mohamed. She mentioned her grandmother and an uncle on her father's side of the family, who persuaded her to wear the *hijab*. Her parents always told her that what really matters is her heart. She could wear it if she wanted to. In her close family, her mother did not wear the *hijab* until Sula started to wear it, and her sister adopted it when she was twenty-four years old. Sula had an opinion

connected to identity conflicts about other Muslims who chose not to wear the *hijab* when trying to assimilate to a different culture than their own, as she stated that she talked to some women here in the U.S. who gave this reason for not wearing it.

It is okay not to wear the hijab, if you do not feel like it, but some women come to America, take off the hijab and color their hair to fit into the America culture. I do not agree with them. It is not right then. (Tutoring Session, Fall 2010)

Sula's choice in wearing the *hijab* was, for her, a way of preserving herself, feeling less exposed. Sula's daughter, Janna, was encouraged to wear the *hijab* at age nine, as a way to preserve their culture while living in United States. Sula stated her daughter's pride while choosing which *hijab* to wear with her outfits. Sula was always very proud of Janna in diverse situations, especially when Janna would sit by Sula's side and be her interpreter.

More than a year had gone by since I first met Sula, one who was, at first, eager to have someone to talk to and to improve her English language skills. Within this year, a great deal of changes had taken place in her life. She now had no time to be bored or to think about what to do with her spare time. With the new addition to their family, a baby boy, Ali, Sula had pretty much all of her time filled up between her mother and wifely duties. We had to stop the tutoring sessions. We tried to meet at her home to study, to make it more convenient; however, we could not go more than ten minutes without her home duties and a crying baby interrupting our sessions.

During one interview, Sula emphasized the importance of language maintenance to her family and their efforts to keep Arabic as the language of the home. On this occasion, Sula mentioned the importance of the maintenance of their mother tongue. Her

mother-in-law was staying with her at the time. Additionally, Sula mentioned their plan to return to their home country in the near future. Sula spoke proudly of her children's abilities in English. At different times, she mentioned enjoying listening to her two oldest children playing and talking in English to each other. She loved to hear them playing and talking in English, making her proud of them for learning the target language so well. However, her seven-year-old seemed to be filling more and more of his Arabic sentences with English words. She and her husband required their oldest daughter to speak Arabic when playing with her seven year old brother. Sula was concerned with his education when returning to Iraq. Sula's youngest boy, Farah, was learning sign language because of his limitations, due to Down's syndrome. When Sula or Manal asked Farah to point to specific parts of his body in Arabic, Farah did not do anything; however, when he was asked in English, he pointed to all the parts correctly. Sula and her husband thought it was cute that he was learning English.

Farah, he only understands the English language. He refuses to use the Arabic language, you see the physician teacher say to us the English language is easier for his tongue around the Arabic (Interview –Fall 2011).

For Sula, Arabic was a difficult language for her “special” boy to learn how to speak, but she said he was getting better at understanding commands in Arabic, such as asking him to turn a light on or off.

Olivia

Brazil, it feels like it's a bunch of different little countries. Like every state you go, it has its unique culture and traditions and everything, so it's so interesting. I love that (Interview, May 2011).

Olivia is a twenty-three-year-old Brazilian, an immigrant child who moved to the United States when she was nine-and-a-half-years old. She moved with her family: a younger sister, Sofia, and her parents. Olivia was a third grader when she left Brazil. She could both read and write in Portuguese. Writing was one of her passions, as she mentioned her love for making up stories. The reason her father left Brazil was to seek higher education.

When Olivia first came to this country, she only knew a few words of English, sentences out of context, all difficult to use in practice. She had studied some English back home; however, the American accent was very different from the British accent she had previously experienced. Additionally, the speed at which people spoke made it impossible to recognize even the words she already knew. Olivia soon learned what she called “survivor sentences,” such as, “Speak slower, please,” in order to understand what people were saying.

In only four months, Olivia was able to communicate by using basic English. She could now interact with other American children. In only three to four years, she was completely integrated into regular classrooms, having no further need for English language learner classes. She remembers being assessed and her feelings of frustration. Those activities were more like kindergarten lessons, not asking for much use of her knowledge as a third grader. She felt her teachers thought she was “dumb.” Her view changed over the years, as she began to understand the complexities involved for those educators trying to assess the students’ proficiency in English and other subjects, students from all over the world, and trying to teach them another language while leveling them all at the same time. Olivia also sees the education methodology used to

learn English as a plus. As a child, Olivia was learning names by associating pictures, without having the translation to her mother tongue. She was learning as young children learn, and that was positive from her point of view. This approach also made her progress faster, since she did not rely on the back-and-forth style of switching from one language to the other. In comparison to their parents, both Olivia and Sofia were improving greatly in English. Their parents struggled, as they had to translate every word to Portuguese in order to make sense of the language.

Olivia mentions her disappointment in regard to her parents' English skills. She mentions that it was frustrating, at times, because they would not be involved in school as much as the other parents. She realizes that they had tried to socialize as much as they could, but the language barrier and the cultural differences were an issue. Helping her parents with phone calls, interpreting, ordering things, and innumerable other issues related to language acquisition were both rewarding and frustrating for Olivia and her sister. They were her parents, yet they needed their help, like "partners." Olivia wanted to fit in, she wanted her parents to make friends with the Americans who were integral in their lives here. She realizes, however, this was difficult for her parents, too, not only for her and her sister. She states:

. . . it's frustrating sometimes, 'cause you want them to know it, too. You know, you want them to be able to do the things that parents are supposed to do. And they do it, but they need all of your help, too. So, it was good 'cause it made us stronger and rely on each other more, but at the same time I just wanted to be a normal kid like everybody else. You know? (Interview, May 2011)

In middle school, a stage Olivia describes as cruel even for someone in normal circumstances, she experienced prejudice because of her accent and her cultural differences. Blonde-haired and blue-eyed, Olivia could blend in with her looks, but she communicated with a heavy accent during her first three or four years in the United States. Her American classmates and friends laughed at her heavy accent, making her more hesitant to speak. She does, however, see those experiences as normal for kids of those ages. She experienced cultural difficulties, as well. When she was invited to slumber parties or other get-togethers, she struggled with the themes. For example, one time she was invited to a *Grease*-themed slumber party, and she did not know of the movie or how to dress according to the theme. Olivia mentions the shocked expressions of her classmates that she had never seen the movie and did not know what they were talking about. Because of her experiences, Olivia feels that she tended to hang around the other foreign students more. They understood what the others were going through. With the other second language learners, she felt comfortable to speak and be herself.

Regardless of the prejudice Olivia faced with the language and the culture, the opportunity to be part of two cultures and two languages has always been greatly appreciated by her and her family. Olivia has always had the emotional support of her parents and the affirmation of how fortunate they have been. Having the opportunity to learn other languages and live in a different culture has been an enriching experience.

Her parents made sure both Olivia and her sister, Sofia, would have access to their first language. They had cable TV with Brazilian programs for children, they bought books in Portuguese, and they often hosted Brazilian get-togethers in their home. In high school, both Olivia and Sofia were sent to Brazil for a school year to have contact with

both the language and culture. In regard to other people's views over their "cluelessness" related to language and culture, Olivia had one thing to say:

But, it's just part of learning. It's growing pains, but it was fine. I mean, there will always be people that are mean to you when you're learning, and they feel like they know better than you, but that's just because they're ignorant. It really is. It's because they're ignorant, and they're uncomfortable around you 'cause they don't know how to deal with that situation. You will find kind people everywhere, too. So you just got to filter it out and keep going, not giving up.

(Interview -Fall 2011)

Olivia grew up in a very religious family. Her father was a pastor, and going to church for her was like having a second family. She mentioned that weekends were a time for a break from the new language and culture. They wanted to be in a place where they felt comfortable. They migrated to the comfort of the Hispanic community, which has a similar culture to the Brazilians, and the language, which was also closer to Portuguese. Olivia appreciates this opportunity greatly. It was through going to church that both Olivia and Sofia learned a third language, Spanish.

When asked about her identity, Olivia describes herself as part of both cultures. She says that she is part American and part Brazilian.

I've grown up with two different cultures, and it took a while to understand how it was okay to act and know how it was to be around American people and Brazilian people. I think that's the hardest thing to learn, is to not be offended and understand that it's just a cultural difference and it's not people trying to be rude to you or anything. (Interview- Fall 2011)

Olivia enjoys when people recognize the light accent she has because it gives her the opportunity to talk about her heritage. Yet, when she was in Brazil for a school year, she was called, *Americaninha*, little American. Between Portuguese and English, she feels comfortable with both languages, but she resorts to Portuguese to express her feelings in depth. She says that her sister is much more comfortable with English, but when Sofia is frustrated, she will also resort to Portuguese. Currently, both Olivia and Sofia are engaged to be married to Americans; they plan to keep their culture and pass on their language. Olivia tries to talk with her two-year-old nephew in Portuguese as much as she can. She says that it is easier to lose a language than a culture, and she wants her nephew to be able to learn about both.

Sofia

And I can speak Portuguese, and I understand it fine, but sometimes I'll like have to stop and think about what the next thing I'm gonna say is. Or, like I'll be saying something in Portuguese, and I'll say like one word in English. And so the only time I would speak Portuguese would be with my parents. And even then sometimes, you know, they understand English, so sometimes I'll just say stuff in English, too, and they like always answer back in Portuguese anyways.

(Interview, May 2011)

Sofia is a twenty-year-old Brazilian immigrant who moved to the United States at age seven. She moved with her parents and an older sister, Olivia. Sofia had little school experience in Brazil, but she remembers learning how to both read and write in Portuguese. Relocating to the United States was a big change for Sofia and her family. Seeking further education was the primary motivation for moving to the U.S. The family

chose to stay for several years, as the parents had better opportunities. Additionally, they were glad to have more time with their children and better financial resources.

Sofia remembers being afraid at school because of the language difficulties, and as she was so young, she was frightened when left with people she did not know. Learning English was not overwhelming for her. She remembers doing well, compared to the other foreign children, a fact she thinks was related to the similarities between English and Portuguese. Sofia recalls struggling to order lunch at the beginning of the school day. She did not know the names of the foods, and often people had to draw pictures of the meal to help her. A classmate of hers, a Brazilian boy, was of great help. He had been in the United States longer and could speak both English and Portuguese; however, it was only after they were placed in different classes that she started to do more for herself. Language acquisition was now a requirement, as she could no longer rely on him to translate for her.

Sofia quickly advanced through three levels of English classes and was then placed in a regular classroom. She was quite proud of this, taking only half of the time of most foreign students. Both Sofia and Olivia were able to communicate within eight months of living in North America, but their parents' fluency did not come at the same speed. Sofia explains that her father did better than her mother, at least with his accent; however, her mother had a broader vocabulary. She often becomes frustrated with her parents. Despite having been in United States for almost fourteen years, they still speak with unease, use improper grammar, and sometimes cannot be understood. She mentions that they often structure sentences as they would in Portuguese; however, translating word-by-word, sentences often do not make sense to anybody else except for her and

those fluent in both languages. Sofia feels her parents spend too little time with English, often speaking only at their respective jobs. When socializing with other Brazilians and in their time spent at home, her parents use mostly Portuguese. Sofia feels some resentment that her parents never really got involved in school as the other parents did. She recalled how the other parents were involved in activities, but not hers. Sofia is not quite sure if this was related to time constraints or to the fact they would have to leave their comfort zone, but either way it bothers her.

Even though Sofia is fluent in English and has no audible accent, she occasionally misspeaks by using odd Brazilian sayings in English. One time she was with her fiancée stopped at a traffic light. The light turned green and he did not go, so she said to him, “It’s open!” Her fiancé laughed at her and inquired if what she meant was, “It’s green.” She thought that situation was funny because she has been here for so long and did not know she was supposed to say, “It’s green.” She was repeating what she had heard in Portuguese. She had heard her parents innumerable times and thought “It’s open” was what she was supposed to say.

Sofia maintains much cultural pride. She adores her Brazilian ancestry and has a strong love for soccer. Each time she has an opportunity to eat at a Brazilian restaurant, she will do so with her fiancé, who also appreciates Brazilian cuisine. Sofia enjoys the closeness among family members and prefers to spend time with family instead of going out. She mentions that many of her American friends do not seem to enjoy time with their families. For Sofia, it is easier to lose a language than a culture; however, she would not feel completely part of the Brazilian culture if she had lost fluency in Portuguese.

Despite being fluent in Portuguese, Sofia feels more comfortable with English. This is the language she thinks in, and she mentioned that usually when she speaks Portuguese, it is with her mother. She will start talking in Portuguese because she has said something a couple of times in English, and her mother did not understand it.

Sofia is the mother of a two-and-a-half-year-old boy. She wants him to be able to learn the Brazilian culture and communicate with her extended family in Brazil. She occasionally speaks to him in Portuguese, but her parents are really the ones who speak to him in Portuguese. They often take him to Brazilian get-togethers, where he has the opportunity to interact with other Brazilian children, also born in the United States. Sofia thinks her son, who is speaking words and small sentences, seems to use Portuguese around her parents and English around her fiancé's parents.

Sofia got pregnant while a senior at a Christian high school, from the same denomination in which her father had been a pastor for ten years in Brazil. Sofia grew up with a strong religious background, going to church every week. Sofia and her fiancé could no longer study in the same school after her pregnancy was announced. She does not regret anything that happened because her son is the best thing in her life. Having to leave the school, though, affected the way she felt in church. Little by little, she grew less comfortable. Moreover, it made her feel as if she was being kicked out of the community. Those factors changed her view on religion. Although her faith remains strong and she still believes in God, she does not feel like "putting a label" on religion anymore, such as choosing only one church as the right one.

Although Sofia's early experiences in English are fading, a few of those experiences still shape her life today. She remembers feeling that a lot of the other

children looked at the children in the English program as if they were not as bright. Even today, she feels that some people act that way towards her parents, as she expresses in the quote below:

And sometimes I still feel like that, like for my parents, like that some other people think that they're not as smart as them or something because they can't communicate what they're trying to say, you know, efficiently. ” (Interview, Fall, 2011)

Additionally, Sofia feels that some Americans do not understand the complexities of learning a second language. They assume immigrants only want to speak their first language, not wanting to learn English. She thinks the desire to learn English should be of primary importance when immigrating to this country, but that should not mean immigrants should stop using their first language.

Sofia is an immigrant child who has acquired the English language similar to that of a native speaker. She is also proud to have a Brazilian heritage and to keep both cultures as part of her identity. *“I am an immigrant, a student, a mom, but mostly I am a mom”* (Sofia’s speech about Personal Artifacts in a Communication Class, Observation Fall 2011).

Peter

...I wouldn't really put much thought into that at all unless I was moving back there and living there, but – now if I lost my English that would be a bad thing because my life is here now, and you have to have the language. I wouldn't care if I lost my native language, and it would be tough when I got back to visit, but

since I don't plan on living there for a long time, then I wouldn't feel any different. (Interview - Fall 2011)

Peter is a forty-one-year-old Bulgarian immigrant, residing in the United States for almost twenty years. He has become an American citizen and is the father of four American-born children. When Peter first came to the United States, he located in Kansas. He was a twenty-two-year-old with an invitation to go to college, receiving a scholarship to run cross-country and track. Peter was quite the accomplished runner in Bulgaria, quickly catching the eye of college coaches.

Peter did not know much English when he moved. When he got the invitation, back in Bulgaria, he tried to take an English course for a couple of months but did not learn much. He said his experiences were quite embarrassing, at the beginning, because people would talk to him and he would just smile and say nothing in return. Living in Kansas was much different than he had expected the United States to be, given the American movies he used to watch that portrayed his view of America. He remembered the culture shock of spending his first night in the airport, trying to figure out how to open the door of the lavatory. He had not seen such handles in Bulgaria. He writes about it in the passage below:

Coming from a place with door handles on every door, I felt really stupid that I couldn't figure out a way to open the door. In the end, I had to go outside, which at that point was my only option. Thinking back to that first experience, it was all scary, comical, and excited at the same time. (Extracted from Peter's journals)

It took him six months to start to communicate in English. Peter believes that his English skills got better when he had the opportunity to live in a different place than with

his Bulgarian friend. The move forced him to speak more English, since he did not have his friend to translate and interpret for him anymore.

Peter does not consider the English language a challenge to learn compared to his mother tongue, which has an intricate grammar structure; however, he did struggle with spelling and pronunciation in English. He says that now and then, he still gets frustrated when he cannot pronounce somebody's name. Even though people usually tell him that it is unique to have an accent, Peter occasionally sees it as a barrier.

Peter and his wife, a citizen of the United States, met in college. Peter does not picture himself moving back to Bulgaria. His life is here now, in the United States. From his view, language has a functional use, and the language he considers important for his life is English, although he remains comfortable using both Bulgarian and English. He still uses Bulgarian to communicate once a month with his extended family back in his home country. He and his family have visited Bulgaria together, and he said it was helpful to translate the conversations to his family. Because Peter's area of work is not language-related, he does not think it would matter if somewhere along the way he had lost his first language.

Peter also mentioned that one of his biggest challenges in coming to America was not really the language but the food. He says it was very different, but he also states that he is someone who would be able to adjust to any place, especially after he discovered pizza, which he loves.

As an educator, Peter has taught students from other countries. He has not had to adjust his classes to those students because their English skills have been developed enough to communicate effectively. More to the point, he considers it very important that

ELL students be treated the same way as other students. He believes this is necessary, since this would help them to feel as competent as the other students.

Peter does not see teaching his children and wife his first language as a priority in his life. Now and then, he teaches his children a few Bulgarian words, but only as entertainment. He says the communication with his extended family is mostly confined to monthly phone calls and a couple of visits from his father. When they get together, Peter is the interpreter and translator. Peter is a Christian; he claims that his relationship with God is number one in his life, with his family coming second. It was very different for Peter, when he first came to the United States, to see a diversity of Christian denominations, compared to Bulgaria, where he says people are either Christians or Muslims.

According to Peter, some immigrants do not learn English because of the difficulty of leaving their comfort zone. They want to, but it is easier to be around people who share the same first language and culture than to take the challenge. Peter is a person who believes in trying hard in every aspect of life. The following is his description of himself:

I would describe myself as happy person that loves life and is successful and my family and work and church. Life is good. I have no regrets or complaints.

(Interview- Fall 2011)

Ana

I know. I just couldn't accept it what my mom and dad, but I knew in my heart I talked my language, so for so long, I don't remember having trouble. There is trouble saying the right way probably because of my speech problem that I was

born with my cleft palate, cleft lip. A cleft palate not connected. (Interview, May 2011)

Ana is a twenty-five-year-old college student who has been living in the United States since the age of fourteen. Ana was adopted by an American family. Originally from Bulgaria, Ana spent her childhood in a variety of institutions. She was left at the hospital at birth, and there she lived for three years. Ana was born with a cleft palate and limited audition. According to Ana, living in the hospital for the first three years of her life was necessary because she needed special care. After leaving the hospital, she faced three different foster homes and two different orphanages. Throughout the years, Ana has suppressed her painful memories from her time spent in orphanages. She remembers frequenting the shops to buy things for the older kids, being beaten by them if she refused. She even resorted to stealing food for them; however, it was while at the orphanage that Ana started speech therapy. In retrospect, she wishes she had known the importance of those sessions for her speech development. In the last orphanage, she was part of a program in which people from around the world sponsor children's educational programs in poor countries or those children living in orphanages. Ana's adoptive parents were, first, her sponsors. When she first met them, she did not know they were even considering adoption. Ana remembers meeting them with the help of an interpreter. They gave her books and audio CDs to practice English.

Ana was very excited and thankful with the idea of having a family of her own. She was immensely happy but never considered the challenges that would come with communication. Her adoptive parents spoke only English, and Ana's skills in English at

that time were limited to the words “mother,” “father,” and “hello.” Ana’s role as the new child in the family was to learn English. She demonstrates this in the quote below:

Again, being in the orphanage I didn’t get good care in feeling loved + be learned how to live like a normal kid in a family. I had to learn that in America + learn how their culture was + lived by. English was only thing I needed to do!

(Extract from Ana’s Journals)

When Ana left Bulgaria to live in the United States, she carried memories of some of the conversations she had with friends living in the orphanage. Some of these conversations were in regards to Ana forgetting her friends and her native language. She remembers being upset at them, telling them those things would never happen.

When Ana came to the United States, it was around Christmastime. She remembers that it was difficult to understand why the home they were visiting was not her home yet. It was her parents’ relatives’ house. Ana was used to crowded houses, limited food, and sharing everything. Being the only child in a house with a room of her own was very different for Ana. She recalls with amusement that everything in the bedroom belonged to her. The communication between Ana and her parents was challenging. They used the English-Bulgarian/Bulgarian-English dictionary and a small computer, more like a word translator, as she describes it. In addition to those resources, they gestured, pointed to things, and labeled them. Ana also had a tutor who could speak Bulgarian. The communication between Ana and her parents was limited to single words. In four months, Ana had acquired a considerable amount of English and could communicate better through single words and simple sentences without the use of the dictionary.

Even though Ana had a tutor who could speak Bulgarian, she started to communicate with her tutor in mixed English and Bulgarian sentences. One of their goals was to help Ana learn English as fast as they could. Their rule was “Speak English.” Gradually, Ana stopped using Bulgarian and lost her skills in her mother tongue. Later, Ana was told by her adoptive parents that one of the orphanage personnel told them Ana was never fluent in Bulgarian. She could speak, but most of her sentences were incomplete. Ana cannot accept the idea that she could never speak her mother tongue fluently. She believes that, perhaps because of her cleft palate, some people had more difficulty understanding what she was saying. She remembers talking to her friends at the orphanage at least three times a year. She remembers interacting in the orphanage. She remembers reading simple books in Bulgarian. She simply cannot accept the idea that she might not have been fluent in her first language.

When I came to American, I still talked whole sentence . . . a whole bunch, like a whole paragraph or more. I did. I did understand my friends, but I didn't know why my mom said that. I still sometimes _____ exactly what she said. I believe, but I can be wrong, the person, our translator, he didn't know me much. He didn't know who I was and he didn't understand that even though – he might had a hard time understanding the way I talk... Maybe that's why he thought when I listened and try to understand him or confused, like, 'What? Huh? What are you talking about? Maybe that's why. (Interview, Fall 2011)

Ana believes that her cleft palate sometimes makes it difficult for others to understand what she is saying. Ana believes that her speech may have influenced the opinion of the orphanage personnel who said she was never fluent in her mother tongue.

Another issue related to her cleft palate was the feeling of not being “normal” like the other kids. She struggled with the feeling of being perceived as not competent as the others in the American school, especially after one of her friends told her that when she first met Ana, she thought Ana had mental problems, but with time she saw that was not the case.

When Ana was finally immersed in American schools, she started as a sixth grader, even though she was a seventh grader in Bulgaria. Ana remembers being the only foreign student in the whole school. Educators and other students were nice to her and tried to help. She was shy, afraid of spending time with the other kids. Ana experienced public schools only for a short period of time from sixth to eighth grade. Her parents decided that home schooling would be a good option for Ana. She finished her middle school education and then did home school for two years, as her parents wanted to give Ana a Christian education. By this time, they found a high school academy 45 minutes away from their home. Ana says that it was only in high school that she was really able to be part of a project and work with other students. It was also in high school that Ana started to feel like a normal kid. After finishing high school, Ana was not accepted to college because of her low SAT scores, especially in English. The colleges in Tennessee and in the South where she had applied said that her English knowledge was not strong enough to go through college. Going to college was one of Ana’s dreams. She felt frustrated with the fact she did not do well with tests. Ana and her parents started to research available alternatives. At this time, they found out about the English as a Second Language (ESL) program at a Christian college that prepares students for academic life. Even though Ana had been immersed in regular classrooms for years and had been in the

United States for almost eight years, this was her first experience in an English language program with other international students. She knew the program is designed to prepare students for a year and most of them go to college afterwards. Ana did not want to spend more than a year in the English program, but she knew she would have to be tested again at the end of the year. Ana felt good about the classes she was taking and her progress in the tests, but, again, she could not pass the official TOEFL (language proficiency) test. Despite her score in the TOEFL test, Ana was able to register for college classes in the same school, since she had demonstrated great development in the English classes she had taken.

Ana is now a sophomore in college with a major in Elementary Education. She says most of her grades are As and Bs. She still struggles with people who speak too fast and use big words that she cannot understand. It makes her feel not as smart as them. She struggles with writing and feels sometimes people laugh at her way of speaking. She tries not to care about it because her real friends are nice to her. Ana sometimes says funny things and her friends laugh and help her to understand what she has just said. Ana believes it is important to be in a Christian school. She feels she can learn more about God and have a closer relationship with Him. Besides the closer relationship with God, Ana thinks that the people in Christian schools are more likely to treat others nicely. One of Ana's dreams now is to finish college and have the opportunity to go back to Bulgaria as a missionary. She believes once she is in contact with her first language, it will quickly come back to her. She sometimes searches online for videos in Bulgarian. She says she can recognize some of the sounds, the alphabet, and can still remember greeting words.

Findings

While examining the experiences of Sula, Olivia, Sofia, Peter, and Ana, a diverse intersection of influences revealed altering or reinforcing maintenance of the first language. Four categories, which will be discussed in turn, with supporting data, revealed how the role of immersion in a new culture and language shaped the newcomers multiple identities. The categories are as follows: Ethnic and Religious Identity, Linguistic Identities, Cultural Brokers, and the Power of Discourses.

The Presence of Ethnic and Religious Identity in the Lives of Language Learners

Immersing in a new culture and experiencing an additional language certainly shapes a person's identity, as my own experience as a Brazilian living in Lincoln, Nebraska attests, and the identity choices a newcomer is required to make during immersion has a decided impact on the maintenance or loss of that newcomer's first language. The stories of the people I met during my research illustrate the awareness these people acquired of themselves while learning the target language (Freire, 1997). Sula describes herself as an Iraqi Muslim, Peter as a Bulgarian, who now feels the need to choose a denomination for his Christianity. Sofia chooses to show her love for soccer and for Brazilian food and exerts her choice of being a non-denominational Christian. Olivia enjoys each opportunity she can to speak Portuguese or simply talk about her home country. Ana carries with her the fading memories of Bulgaria and the desire of relearning her mother tongue. Since that has not happened, she feels confused, uncertain to say if she is Bulgarian or American. She now knows the American ways, which includes using English like a native speaker, and the connection with her home country and first language are now parts of her remote past.

Listening to several stories from Sula, she illustrates the constant presence of her home culture in her current life while in the United States, and yet she has a strong feeling of homesickness. There was a special light in her eyes while talking about her home, as if she were discovering her culture herself. At times, she would ask me a single word in my first language, and after my response, she would teach me the same word in Arabic. I remember the week of Valentine's Day. Sula brought me some chocolate and candy from her culture. The chocolate led us into a conversation about how she celebrates Valentine's Day in her country. She told me about the cards her children had been making at school, and she remembered her country, as if she were tasting the sweetness of those moments. Sula could not codeswitch with me, something that she would certainly do if she could. Her stories were filled with affective feelings towards her religious and language identity (Pavlenko, 2004). During the holiday back home, they would make cakes and celebrate Valentine's Day as a friends' day, with a picnic outside. Her eyes had brightened again and she was smiling. I thought about the withdrawal and the homesickness newcomers go through, without relatives or friends. I also remember the language barrier present in the different culture in which they are immersed. I thought of myself when I arrived in this country and my inability to communicate. It brought back memories of how lonely I felt being apart from my loved ones, and my culture; however, I especially missed the comforting sounds of Portuguese. Considering one's background experiences as valued as the experiences in the new culture impacts the development of multiple identities (Chan, 2006; Pavlenko, 2004). When one is able to share in regard to his religious and ethnic identities, he reinforces the value of maintenance of his mother tongue.

Interactions with diverse environments shape, alter, and construct the multiple identities within us (Zine, 2001; Goldstein, 2003; Hatoss & Sheely, 2009). This made me reflect on the influence of a host culture on newcomers. Sula, here in America, presents herself as an Iraqi Muslim. Her nationality and religious identity are strong ways to represent her country and religion in Western society (Sarroub, 2001; Zine, 2001). Similar to Sula, both Peter and I discovered our religious identities were much stronger once we found ourselves in a society with a diversity of beliefs. I found myself not being part of the religious majority anymore and Peter was amazed to find out there were so many religions out there. The construction of a person's positive linguistic identity connected to the maintenance of the mother tongue is within the new discourses introduced to that person. Taking a stance with both religious and ethnic identities within the immersion in a new culture reinforce a person's linguistic identity (Hawkins, 2005).

So when I was growing up, the people were not prohibited from going to church, even though it was Communism, 'cause I remember my grandma used to go. I know I was baptized – it was not a big deal – at church. When I came here, the shocking part was that there's so many religions. That was the shocking part. When I told people I was a Christian, they asked me, "What do you mean a Christian? What kinda Christian?" I knew one kind of Christian when I was growing up. You're a Christian or a Muslim. That's it. So that was kinda shocking that there are so many different types of Christians here, which is really weird to me. (Interview, Fall 2011)

The immersion of Sula's family in the United States reinforced their religious identity as Muslims. Wearing the *hijah* is a symbol of religious identification and

modesty (Zine, 2001). While in her country, Sula made a decision to wear the *hijab* at age twenty-four. Her daughter started to wear the *hijab* once she turned nine years old. She emphasized her daughter's pride and happiness while choosing the *hijab* to match her clothes for the day. Perhaps I am assuming this was not her daughter's choice as Sula told me that in her husband's family, women start to wear the *hijab* when they turn nine. From my view, Sula and her husband were influenced by the need to pass on their identity to her daughter while living in a Western society. Wearing the *hijab* represents an affirmation of their cultural and religious identities. It is a continuity of their Muslim identity. The development of positive multiple identities connected to a person's homeland helps one to also desire the maintenance of their mother tongue (Chan, 2006; Sarroub, 2001; Zine, 2001)

Being part of a minority group, as evidenced by my participants, seems to influence newcomers to alter their social identities. These new identities include a stronger sense of nationality and religion, as in the case of Sula, Sofia, and Olivia. Along with this shift in national and religious identities comes a new relationship with one's native language. For example, in Sofia's case, she has a strong sense of pride for her culture and language but does not fully feel comfortable with her Portuguese skills. Sofia chose to change her religious identity within the new discourses in her life. Once she became pregnant outside of a marital status, she altered her religious identity to one that would accommodate her new position as a single mother (Miller, 2003; Hawkins, 2005; Zine, 2001). Ethnic and religious identity choices may strengthen a person's first language maintenance, but not in all cases. For instance, Peter has a strong religious identity connected to his homeland; however, he chooses to identify more as an

American, and as a consequence, this choice is leading to first language loss in his family.

The sisters, Sofia and Olivia, also have had their ethnic and religious identities shaped by their experiences as immigrants. Both Sofia and Olivia came to the United States at very young ages. It is difficult to define their ethnic identity as belonging to only one place. They consider themselves part of both American and Brazilian cultures. Sofia loves every opportunity to frequent a Brazilian restaurant. Soccer is such an important part of her Brazilian ethnicity that she placed her two year old son in soccer lessons. Sofia does not feel very comfortable with her Portuguese skills, and will only resort to them when trying to explain something to her parents, if they do not understand it in English.

Olivia loves every opportunity she has to converse about her home culture, the diversity of music, the different kinds of food, and especially the chance to speak Portuguese. Their father was a pastor, and both girls grew up attending church. When Sofia and Olivia moved to the United States, their family continued to attend church as it made them feel closer to home. Because they were experiencing English all week long, on weekends they would go to the Spanish church, where the language was similar to Portuguese and their culture was similar to the Brazilian culture. This provided a break from the new culture and language in which they were immersed. It was also in going to the Spanish church that Olivia and Sofia learned a third language. The Spanish church provided a feeling of welcome for the girls, creating an environment of learning. The immersion in their new culture impacted both Sofia and Olivia to construct new identities

as Spanish speakers. The girls' prior knowledge of Portuguese became their main resource for the acquisition of a third language, Spanish (Cummins, 2005).

Sofia and Olivia demonstrated a strong religious identity, related to the fact that they both went to church school and their father had been a pastor. Experiences shape people's views of themselves and their position in a community. Sofia got pregnant in high school and could not register for another school year because of the rules of the school. She felt unwelcome in the community, and not living with her parents made her aware of other beliefs than the church in which she was raised.

And then when I left high school, I would still go sometimes to church, but I felt less comfortable, I think, going, because I was kicked out of the school. So I almost kind of felt like they were kicking me out of their community, you know? So I think my view changed a lot because I didn't live with my parents and I could learn about other religions and stuff like that. So I don't really feel comfortable any more saying that I'm a... (church denomination). I feel like maybe putting a label on a religion isn't really what's for me anymore. (Interview, Fall 2011)

Different from Sofia, Ana chose to be part of church school. She felt much more comfortable. People in the Christian school were more accepting of her limited English proficiency. Ana had no choice but to lose Bulgarian and replace it with English, though she still struggles with this. Her religious identity was also shaped by her immersion in a new culture. Ana experienced public schools, but for her, people were nicer in a Christian school. Ana had, and still has, difficulty with speech and feels that sometimes people laugh at her way of speaking. In a Christian school, however, she made more friends. Ana felt that a Christian school was a safe haven, because outside of there, she would

have to face some kind of prejudice related to her language skills (Baynham, 2006). It was through the new situations in Ana's life, because of her adoption, that Ana constructed a religious and a monolingual identity. English language became meaningful within the discourses Ana faced when immersed in the new society. In Gee's (1990) words, "The multiple ways in which language becomes meaningful only within Discourses and how language within Discourses is always and everywhere value-laden and Political in the broad sense of "political" where it means "involving human relationships where power and 'social goods' are at stake" (p. 183).

Linguistically Speaking: The Situations Behind Language Learners' Linguistic Identities

It is common to hear stories of teachers telling parents and children to speak only English at school, as well as at home, such as is cited in Rodriguez's story (Rodriguez, 1982). In other stories, children have been punished for speaking their first language in schools (Carger, 1996). Although some might think this is an effective strategy in which to learn English, more often there are negative implications to being completely immersed into the English speaking world, not being able to integrate both. A student's identity and family ties to her culture can be greatly affected by the loss of the first language (Goldstein, 2003; Rodriguez, 1982). There are many beliefs surrounding the use of the first language in the process of schooling. These include the idea that immigrants resist learning English, their children fail to learn English, and immigrants segregate themselves linguistically from the mainstream of society by immersing themselves in their home language community. Such beliefs were and are used as support for the amendments for the Official English-Language (Tse, 2001). These beliefs are also the

foundation against Bilingual Education; however, this is a related issue, which was cited earlier in the literature review section.

Ana illustrates a story where the people around her, concerned with her assimilation into American society, decided that English should be her language of communication, even with her tutor who could speak Bulgarian. Ana's loss of Bulgarian was almost inevitable, as she was adopted by a couple who could only speak English. As soon as Ana would be able to communicate with them, she would be immersed in the new society in which she was going to live and to call home from that time forward. Acquiring the target language at a rapid pace would help Ana to feel part of her new culture. She was granted citizenship by adoption; however, this is now contributing to her struggle with her linguistic identity. During the fall of 2009, I met Ana while observing a class for English language learners. I was intrigued by the fact she was an American taking English classes for foreign students. It was not until a few months later that I heard about her Bulgarian nationality and the loss of her language. For Ana, it is confusing sometimes to introduce herself as Bulgarian but not able to speak her native language anymore.

During Ana's first months in America, her family hired a language tutor for her. Her tutor was a native Bulgarian speaker, and her job was to help Ana learn the new language at a rapid pace. The process consisted of filling Ana's Bulgarian sentences with English words in order to expand her vocabulary. At home, Ana's parents would introduce new concepts little by little, a process similar to the one parents use to teach their young children to speak. They would put labels around the house and sometimes gesture to make themselves understood. Ana gradually stopped speaking Bulgarian. Her

memories are fading, and Ana believes that in a span of three years she was not able to speak Bulgarian anymore. Ana kept little contact with her home culture and language. In her first year, she remembers calling the orphanage to chat with friends three times, but unfortunately those phone calls were the last and only contact she had with her mother tongue. In her native language, Ana still keeps greeting words and the familiar sounds when she searches for videos online. For Ana, it is disturbing to think she might not have been fluent in her mother tongue. In conversation with her parents, they told her that she did not lose her Bulgarian skills but, in fact, had never acquired the language. For fourteen years, Ana lived in Bulgaria. She had conversations with friends in the orphanage, and was beaten by the older kids. All those experiences would not have been possible if she had not been fluent in Bulgarian. Perhaps her speech challenge and her audition limitation were part of the reasons for people's conclusions regarding Ana's Bulgarian skills.

In contrast to the Brazilian sisters, Sofia and Olivia, as well as Peter, Ana struggles to claim her first culture's identity, which, in Ana's case, is Bulgarian. Ana has feelings of embarrassment, telling people that she cannot speak her native language anymore. It is as if with the language loss, she additionally lost her cultural identity (Hatoss & Sheely, 2009). Ana has a unique narrative. She has always felt grateful for the opportunity to have a family of her own. Her role in her new family was to learn English. Immersed in the public schools and observing the other kids made her eager to be like them. However, being the one and only foreign student in school made her feel even more like an outsider. She wanted to be part of the new community introduced to her through television, education, her new home, and the new world surrounding her

(Fillmore, 1991). As a consequence, maintenance of her mother tongue was not possible. Though Ana started to communicate in English, it was not with the proper fluency and skills expected for academic purposes. More than ten years have passed since Ana moved to the United States. She has finally been accepted into college after taking a year in their English program for language learners. Ana confided in me that she still struggles to follow lectures and fast-paced conversations. Often times she repeats the same questions other people have already asked. She also struggles with the use of formal “big words” that, according to her, make people look smarter but make her feel less knowledgeable.

For Sofia, Olivia, and Peter, it seems they are more at risk of losing their first language than their first culture. The three of them do try to maintain their native languages, but the loss of the same would not necessarily be an impediment to continue claiming their cultural identities. Sofia, though, believes it would be challenging to tell people she was Brazilian if she were not fluent in the language anymore. I can definitely see their points of view regarding language loss. Cultural loss, however, seems much more ambiguous. It is very complex to define a culture. A person can probably imitate his family traditions, but he cannot feel the culture for himself. How about the next generation in his family? Are they going to be limited to a culture by his family traditions? In my opinion, they will probably be influenced by the new culture they are immersed in. Fishman (1996) explains, “We can talk to people who are no longer alive through the language, literacy, as well as with the ones not yet alive” (p. 88). It is difficult to experience and appreciate a culture, in its depth, without the maintenance of a mother tongue.

Thinking about the relationship between culture and language, makes me wonder about Sula's family. What will their adaptation be like when they return to their home country, Iraq?

When I ask my youngest son in Arabic, 'where are his eyes?' he only stare at me.

When I ask him in English, he shows me his eyes. (Sula about her youngest son, Farah, Tutoring Sessions, Fall 2010)

When I met Sula, she was the mother of three children, waiting for her fourth at the end of June, 2010. All of her children had been attending American schools, including her three-year-old boy, Farah, who has Down's syndrome and spends half of his day at school. They had been experiencing English as much as they were experiencing Arabic. The two older children spent most of their day at school, but Arabic is the language they use at home.

Sula spoke proudly of her children's abilities in English. At different times she mentioned how she enjoyed listening to her two oldest children playing and talking in English. Janna was the only one of her children who had attended Arabic school in Iraq. The others were too young to attend when living there. She mentions conversations where Amal, a five year-old at that time, filled sentences with words in English during conversations in Arabic. Sula mentioned an episode when her husband took her two oldest children to the laboratory at the university. One of his professors emphasized how well her children spoke English. The professor even mentioned to Sula's husband that their children spoke as if they had been born in the United States.

Sula's children's acquisition of English upon coming to the United States was a point of pride, but their acquisition of English also eventually became a threat to their

maintenance of their first language, Arabic. Sula's youngest boy, Farah, is learning sign language. When Sula or Manal ask Farah to point to specific parts of his body in Arabic, Farah does not do anything; however, when he is asked in English, he points to all the parts correctly. Sula and her husband thought it was cute that he was communicating in English so well.

Sula's narrative makes me think about Richard Rodriguez (1982) and his story, of learning English and leaving Spanish behind. Will Sula's children somehow feel like outsiders of their culture when they return to Iraq? How will they communicate with their extended family? Rodriguez (1982) describes in his book, *Hunger for Memory: The Education of Richard Rodriguez*, his experience within a new culture and a second language. The loss of his first language influenced the relationship he had with his family. The closeness of familial interactions was changed by the adoption of English as their primary language. Sula's family did not adopt English as their home language; however, the immersion of her children into the English language is shaping Farah's identity as a speaker in sign language in English.

Sula's linguistic identity had consequences for her children's use of first language, Arabic, and second language, English. I met Sula while tutoring her in English. In the interim, almost two years have gone by. Both Sula and her husband have developed different approaches to their choice of language at home. Sula has become more aware of her second child, Amal, now seven. He was substituting his Arabic for English more consistently, resulting in broken conversations with the extended family in Iraq. Farah, her five year old, who has Down's Syndrome, only responds to English. Sula's concerns grow larger as they plan to return to Iraq soon. At home, Sula and her

husband required their oldest daughter, Janna, to speak only Arabic with her siblings, especially when they are playing. In the past, Sula truly enjoyed watching her kids playing and talking in English, but now their play time is also an opportunity to practice their mother tongue. During the time of Sula's concerns regarding her children's choice of language, her mother-in-law was staying with her. Sula believed that her mother-in-law's presence was a good influence on her children, especially Amal, who was becoming more fluent in Arabic. Sula's role in her family here in the United States was that of a spectator of her family's interactions in their new culture. While her children acquired English well and even began to substitute English for Arabic, Sula's first language was not endangered by her move to the United States. Sula's intermediate English level has led to difficulty understanding people. She even said once, *Americans eat part of the words they are saying*. (Tutoring sessions, Fall 2010) Sula was referring to idiomatic phrases and the short way of saying things, which is difficult for language learners to associate with the literal form of the word. English, then, was a threat to the future generations of Sula's family, and this was a threat of which she became increasingly aware.

Occasionally, the message the host society sends to newcomers is not always the most welcoming. In his work, Bourdieu (1977) explores cultural capital and the linguistic market². The linguistic market, written about by Bourdieu (1977), has standards of acceptance, which means that the way people speak, the language they speak, and the sounds made when people speak often interfere with how they are perceived by others.

² Linguistic Market- For definition, see p. 5-7

Newcomers analyze these new discourses and concepts in which their linguistic identities will be received as valued (Goldstein, 2003).

Participants' accented English played a role in their linguistic identity choices and options. Peter has spoken English for almost twenty years. He feels comfortable with both English and Bulgarian, but for him, his accent still gets in the way. Peter expressed his frustration when he tries to pronounce a name and he struggles, in spite of others telling him it is nice to have an accent. In despite of having an accent, Peter has chosen English as his main language. He has chosen not to teach Bulgarian to his children, considering that English is the language his children will need to dominate to be competent members of this society. On rare occasions, people notice Olivia's accent. She loves when that happens, because it gives her an opportunity to talk about Brazil and the diversity of cultures present in her native country. For Sofia, people never inquire about her origins. Her looks blend in with Americans' blue eyes and light brown hair. Her accent is not noticeable, perhaps because she started to learn English at age seven. According to Sofia, her father's accent is less noticeable than her mother's. She feels frustrated at times because people look at her parents as less knowledgeable, only because of their broken English. Sofia's frustration is compounded as well with her parents' lack of initiative in spending time learning English. Every opportunity they have to socialize is within the Brazilian community.

So they kind of distance themselves from people, like native people, from here.

And then it makes it harder for them to learn, because they're never interacting in the new language. (Interview, Fall 2011)

Most of Sofia's dialogue with her family is in English, but she resorts to Portuguese when she cannot make herself understood. Both Sofia and Olivia remember with frustration that they started to communicate in English before their parents. Their abilities in English gave them both responsible roles in the family. They had to translate mail, answer phone calls, write e-mails, interpret, and so forth. Sofia finds this frustrating even today, as she still has to write e-mails and text messages for her mother. Olivia had a somewhat different view of the situation. Olivia felt it was nice to have responsibilities helping her family, but at the same time, she just wanted "to be a normal kid" (Interview Fall 2011). Olivia remembers her struggles to learn English and her difficulty in understanding other people's accents and the speed of their speech. Olivia soon learned what she called "survival sentences". Among these were sentences such as "Could you speak slower, please? Can you repeat it?", etc. Peter, however, did not feel it necessary to acquire any new tactics to help him understand the conversations around him. He stated without much thought, that he would not ask people to speak slower, but he would "try harder to listen faster" (Interview Fall 2011).

Accents and language speed are certainly unique features of a language. When we learn an additional language, we bring to it the features of our native country's culture. Olivia feels her accent is noticeable both when she speaks Portuguese and English. Both Sofia and Olivia have had the support of their parents while trying to maintain their mother tongue. Their parents made sure they would have access to Brazilian TV, books, and contact with other Brazilian speakers. Both Sofia and Olivia were sent to Brazil for a year while in middle school. This was helpful to experience the culture and the language in their natural environment. When in Brazil, Olivia remembers receiving the nickname

of “Americaninha,” meaning, “little American”. People noted her American accent when speaking Portuguese. Olivia thought the nickname was cute, helping to demonstrate who she is, being part of both cultures. Olivia talked about her identity as a Portuguese speaker with brightness in her eyes. She will resort to Portuguese when she wishes to express excitement, because even though she feels comfortable with both languages, she is not able to express these extreme feelings in English. Sofia, who feels more comfortable speaking English, will also resort to Portuguese in such situations. Olivia described her relationship with Portuguese below,

At home. At home or with Brazilian friends. Or like if I'm with a family member, I just – I crave to speak Portuguese. I just crave it. It's like a comfort thing. Or sometimes it's crazy. When I get mad, when I get – or really like intense feelings, like I need to speak my mind, 'cause I'm a very opinionated person, sometimes I start speaking Portuguese and I don't realize it. I don't know why. You just start – and I'm like, “Oh, wait. There's people that don't speak Portuguese here. I need to” – you know? (Interview, Fall 2011)

Olivia shows deep pride and warm feelings towards her heritage language; however, when speaking Portuguese her American identity is revealed through the presence of her accent. Acquiring an additional language is not the only way to develop an accent, however. My accent for example, is a mixture of Northern and Southern Brazil. People usually cannot correctly guess the area of my Brazilian origins. I enjoy this feature about my accent because it gives me an opportunity to share my heritage. My accent in the United States though makes me struggle. I still have a heavy accent, and people who are not used to me sometimes struggle to understand what I am saying. It

bothers me when they remain silent after I say something or squint their eyes and furrow their brows, when they cannot follow my discourse. It bothers me that I cannot make myself understood after almost four years of speaking English.

I still make use of my “survival sentences,” even though they have changed a bit. I used to ask people to speak slower. An experience I had while teaching swimming lessons, during my first semester speaking English, made me think about intonation. We can recognize what kind of conversation people are having through intonation. I had experienced this while I was trying to help one crying child get used to the water. My boss was trying to tell me what to do; however, I could not understand one single word that she was saying because of her intonation. She sounded really loud and not very friendly. The only message that my brain was able to decode was that she was yelling at me. After this situation, she apologized. She explained she was just trying to be clear since I was a beginner with the language. What many people do not understand about someone who is learning a language is that they will not understand better if you talk louder, but if you talk slower. Later, I explained to my host family what had happened, and they had two t-shirts made for me with this saying for my birthday: “Don’t speak louder, speak slower, I’m ESL.” It was a friendly and funny way to catch the attention of people to this issue of talking louder to language learners instead of slower.

Peter sees himself as comfortable with both Bulgarian and English from a linguistic perspective. For Peter, the maintenance of his mother tongue for the next generation, his four children, is not a priority in his life. He does not feel it is important for his children to learn Bulgarian because their lives are here. English is the target language they need to learn to function in this society (Goldstein, 1994; Miller, 2003).

For him, the communication with the extended family back in Bulgaria happens with him acting as an intermediary, a translator, and that is enough. Peter has a functional view of language. Despite his fluency in both Bulgarian and English, Peter has developed a monolingual identity. For him, language is a tool to communicate in the society a person is immersed in, having no need for an additional language, unless this is part of his work.

Opposite of Peter's view is Sofia's outlook, who strongly claims her linguistic and ethnic identity. She wants her son to learn Portuguese. She wants him to be able to communicate with the extended family back in Brazil. She thinks that an additional language gives a person more opportunities. This allows him to learn about other cultures, making a person more marketable in today's society. Sofia's two-year-old son experiences both English and Portuguese at home and with his grandparents. He already says words in both languages. Sofia is amazed by her son; he seems to know when to use Portuguese with his Brazilian grandparents and when to use English with his American grandparents. She makes sure to speak Portuguese with her son while she is alone with him. She also wishes her fiancée would learn her mother tongue. She has even bought him a computer language program to help him start the process of learning the language. It is upsetting for her that her fiancé has not taken the time to start learning Portuguese. Sofia wishes that her fiancé would be able to communicate with her extended family when they come to their wedding in September. Still, in spite of Sofia's strong claim to her linguistic identity as a Portuguese speaker and ethnic identity as a Brazilian, she does not feel fully comfortable with her Portuguese skills. At any moment during our interactions, Sofia used Portuguese with me, and in one of her journal entries, Sofia shows less than a proficient ability in the language. Sofia expresses her frustration toward

her sister in that journal entry. On one occasion, Sofia wrote an e-mail to one of her cousins in Brazil. Before sending the e-mail to her cousin, Sofia sent it to Olivia to edit it for her. Olivia sent the e-mail without editing it, mentioning it was not all correct, but it was cute. Sofia was very upset at Olivia, imagining that the cousin in Brazil would perceive her as not very knowledgeable.

In a world where communication with other cultures and languages has become as simple as gaining access to the Internet, it is important to learn an additional language as an additive process (Fillmore, 1991), but this need not mean the loss of one's first language. Losing a first language in a subtractive process, as illustrated by Ana's story, causes her to struggle with her linguistic identity. She only hopes her mother tongue will come back to her if she has an opportunity to return to Bulgaria. Sofia and Olivia have found that maintenance of their mother tongue has given them both the opportunity to learn a third language without much effort (Cummins et. al., 2005; Freire, 1997). They can always resort to their mother tongue, and proudly claim their bi-cultural identity. Sula, as a spectator in the new culture, remains concerned about her son and his ability to maintain the mother tongue as he communicates through sign language, which he is learning in English schools. The two older children, however, will be able to re-integrate in their home country, having another language added to their skills.

Cultural Brokers

Generalized messages and the impact these messages have in society can cause discrimination against different groups, and this interplay between "old-timers" and newcomers can have significant consequences on newcomers' access to their new language and the maintenance or loss of their first. My interactions with Sula and the

other immigrants sharing their stories with me made me reflect on inferred messages I had also received from society. Their stories were, at a certain level, the cultural brokers³ for my social identity. As Pipher (2001) cites in her book, *The Middle of Everywhere*, what newcomers need are cultural brokers who can show them where to go and what to do in the new culture. As much as newcomers need cultural brokers, Western society needs to hear the newcomers' stories as a way to break negative messages and generalized ideas about other parts of the world. In Western society, some of the messages people receive about Muslim culture are in regard to the gender role. It is not uncommon to hear stories of women forced to marry men they have never seen before, their family members having made the decision for them. This can be true in some Muslim cultures but not all. Just as there are different types of Christians, there are different types of Muslims, as well as in other religions. While listening to Sula's stories, I thought about the messages I had heard about her culture. These undoubtedly influenced my preparatory time before meeting her. I remember asking friends about how I should introduce myself and how I should address her. I asked if I should call her by her first name or by the name of her first daughter—"On Janna"—which is the custom among women in the Muslim culture. I also wondered if I should hide my Christian identity because I did not want to offend her. After some sessions with Sula, I reflected on my earlier stereotypes. I had not realized that my way of thinking and my lack of ability to socialize with someone from a different culture had been such a stereotype.

For example, the use of the *hijab* is a hot topic, with a lot of stereotypes and negative messages surrounding it. I used to think that all Muslim women were required to

³ A person who facilitates the immersion and the border crossing between one culture to another. *The Middle of Everywhere*, Mary Pipher, 2002

wear the *hijab* solely because of the strict rules present in their patriarchal society. Sula's story of the *hijab* appealed to me both in the meaning of wearing it, as well as allowing me to reflect over the possibilities before making any assumption about a person wearing it. The *hijab* represents a symbol of Muslim religious identity. For Sula's family, the *hijab* represented the continuity of their multiple identities connected to their homeland, having inferred in it the desire of the maintenance of their mother tongue, Arabic (Zine, 2001; Sarroub, 2001).

Both Sula and her daughter, Janna, experienced situations of prejudice in America, as the result of generalized messages society gives to its members, and this pushed Sula to hold on more tightly to her religious identity as a Muslim and her linguistic identity as an Arabic speaker. Sula described her daughter's experiences in school as mostly favorable and enjoyable. She added that her daughter is a smiling girl who talks to every teacher she meets in the hallway. Sula stated the only attitude of prejudice her daughter faced at school was soon after Janna adopted the use of the *hijab*. Two boys at school grabbed it and tried to take it off of her head, telling her they wanted to see her hair. Sula and her husband advised her daughter that in situations like this, she should seek help from the teachers.

In another experience Sula described to me, she mentioned the feeling of embarrassment. Sula and Janna, were waiting to cross a street when a car passed by them. The passengers in the car, which she described as Black boys, put their heads out of the window and shouted at them, telling them to pull that thing off of their heads. They also had their hands out of the window, gesturing as if they were paying reverence to Sula and Janna. It is disturbing to hear stories such as these. One would think that people who are

not aware of their own misconceptions and stereotypes would at least respect other people's choices in a society with religious freedom.

Similar to Sula, Ana had experiences that made her reflect on the way others may perceive her. Because of her cleft palate and lack of fluency in English, Ana was constantly afraid of being perceived as someone with "mental problems." One of her friends told her that before they were friends, she thought Ana had some kind of disability. Ana wants people to get to know her and her story. They will then know that sometimes she is slower in understanding conversations, but that does not mean she is less knowledgeable.

Even I think of that again – I think it's bad. When I say things, I think, "Oh. They think of me as a dummie." Or even that one girl – I'm saying things – she's like, "Wait a minute. Somebody said that already. Weren't you listening?" I'm like, "Yeah. But I wanted to say that on my own." And so I feel like – "She doesn't pay attention," or "She's just a dummie". Like do you understand what I mean? And I feel that too. (Interview, Fall 2011)

Sofia and Olivia share great concern for their parents. They recognize the challenges for their parents to get out of their comfort zone and immerse themselves in the new culture and language. The girls had responsibilities, and their time was limited. They were working, looking after the family, and learning a new language. When they did have time to socialize, they wanted to be in their comfort zone. They wanted to forget the language barrier for a while and the cultural differences they had with the host society. They wanted to be with a culture similar to their own, such as the Hispanic

community or with their own Brazilian culture. Olivia knows that some people can be harsh when they have stereotypes or misconceptions.

It's because they're ignorant and they're uncomfortable around you 'cause they don't know how to deal with that situation... I think for everybody, in their education, it's important for you to understand that you're not the only one in the world; that there's different cultures and you need to respect them, and that it's good for everybody to make an effort to learn a new language. I think it's important for everybody. (Interview, Fall 2011)

There is an entire set of challenges involved in the immersion of a new culture and language. It is necessary to step out of the comfort zone, in order to learn better ways in the new culture and how to communicate effectively with the target language. Some people will have the personality to face new challenges no matter what it takes; some will have no choice; others will have the process of immersion facilitated by “cultural brokers” (Pipher, 2001). For newcomers, their cultural brokers may be someone with whom they feel comfortable or share the same language and culture. This relationship, although essential for some, may have pros and cons that go along with it. It can prepare newcomers to immerse themselves in the new culture and language, but it also can cause a relationship of dependence.

Janna, as many other immigrant children, was a cultural broker for Sula, helping her mother by interpreting conversations in English and translating back and forth. Sometimes during appointments, Sula was nervous and could not understand what people were saying to her. Sula mentioned the comforting feeling of having Janna sitting beside her in these situations. Peter also had a cultural broker during his first months

experiencing the new culture. His friend from Bulgaria, the same one responsible for telling the coach about Peter's skills in running, was also Peter's roommate. Peter relied a great deal on his friend. He would be Peter's interpreter, helping him finding his way around town, but in the house they would speak only Bulgarian. For Peter, this relationship was very important during his first months in the United States. It was not until Peter had an opportunity to move elsewhere, that he really had to start to communicate in English on his own.

. . . we only talked Bulgarian because I was not comfortable with English, so I had a chance to leave there and go to a different place, which I did, and I thought that helped me with the language because I was almost forced to start speaking more and I didn't have him around to talk in Bulgarian so I got more into the English, which was good for me. (Interview, Fall 2011)

Similar to Peter and Sula, Sofia experienced the help of a cultural broker during her first months in the United States. Her cultural broker was a boy she met in school, also from Brazil, who could already speak English.

And he was from Brazil, but he'd been here longer than me. So he spoke English, too. So he kind of helped me, and it was useful. Like I didn't know how to order lunch when I started school. And he had to explain to me what the things were, and I had to tell him. And he would tell them what I wanted. So I think it was really helpful, you know, to have someone kind of translate for me, but in a way, maybe it like hindered me from learning... I think it was better for my learning (referring to the time they went to different classes), but I think it was helpful

when I first came here, to feel like I could communicate somehow. (Interview, Fall 2011)

During the first few months of immersion into a new culture and language, it was important for Sofia, an immigrant child, to have someone that made her feel secure and to help her to communicate. The presence of the Brazilian boy also created a relationship of dependence. Even though the relationship of dependence was developed, when Sofia had to be on her own, she was somehow familiar enough with the new system to take a chance on immersing herself in the new language and culture. Remaining a cultural broker for their parents is still part of Sofia and Olivia's lives. Despite employment in the host society and the improvement in their English skills, the parents still feel more comfortable having their daughters answering e-mails, text messages, and, if it happens that their daughters are around, they will answer the phone calls, as well.

Living in a multicultural society is a privilege. It is like living on a corner where every part of the global community meets. Unfortunately, misconceptions can happen in a society formed with groups representing different parts of the world, with different cultures and religious beliefs. Sometimes the messages people receive from the media and other vehicles of communication create stereotypes about specific ethnic groups, based on the history of events involving members of these groups. Life-based narratives can help society, as well as the academic community, gradually dissolve certain stereotypes which seem to remain very strong in society. These stereotypes include the prejudice surrounding the Black community and, after September 11, 2001, the Islamic community, and the misconception that immigrants do not want to learn English. It is essential to think about each other as individuals with different stories and interactions

with the world. Life-based narratives and other people's experiences give real faces to the stories. Additionally to this, life-based narratives are able to exert the role of cultural brokers. These are much more effective in impacting other people's lives.

The Power of Discourses - With Language, It is Possible to Say Nothing

How can a first language be included in a society with such a variety of mother tongues? If encouraged to speak their native language, will newcomers ever speak English? What about the host students? Will they feel uncomfortable with a variety of other languages around them? How can a monolingual teacher teach from students' first languages that are different than English? A variety of questions and doubts surround school holders⁴ already. There are not enough studies that prove and demonstrate how to use the first language of newcomers effectively and answer those questions. There are also few other studies that show strong results when the first language is set aside, both at school and home. What strongly exists is a large amount of beliefs against the use of the mother tongue in schools. The stories of the people I met made me reflect upon those questions, considering their immersion in society, but especially in the academic settings.

Humans naturally seek a comfort zone. It does not matter if it is in another language or in a different zone than the ones to which people are accustomed. The essential element is to be accepted, especially in an academic setting. When Olivia experienced middle school, all she wanted was to be included. Language was not a functional barrier anymore; despite her heavy accent which Olivia said she had at the time, she could communicate very well. Olivia found the major barrier was the specific cultural differences. She was fluent in the language, but fluency of the language did not give her total knowledge and understanding of the culture. Olivia found middle school to

⁴ Educators, educational law makers, researchers, etc.

be a challenging stage for teenagers, trying to be accepted into the group. She remembers being lucky enough to have a small group of friends who tried to include her. She struggled to understand the concept of “slumber parties,” especially when they had themes. People were amazed she did not know what seemed to be common knowledge.

Like once one of my friends – you know Grease, the movie – like from the ‘50s. It’s a musical. Anyways, very American thing. Okay? John Travolta, whatever her other name is, so she had like a Grease-themed slumber party/birthday party, and she invited everybody over and she’s like, “Okay. Let’s all dress up like this,” and I’m like, “Oh my gosh. I don’t know what this movie is. What the heck are you talking about? Like what is this?” She’s like, “You don’t know Grease? How can you not know that movie?” I’m like, “I don’t know. I didn’t grow up here, and at least from the ‘80s, I was like a baby. I wasn’t even born yet, and you guys grew up on this stuff ‘cause your parents taught you so I don’t know.” So again I’m like completely clueless about American culture, and just like, “Oh, I don’t know. You guys grew up on this stuff. I don’t know.” (Interview, Fall 2011)

Olivia had the power of discourse to enlighten people around her; that which seemed common knowledge for them was not for her (Fairclough, 1989). Do we usually think about how language learners, immigrant youth among American peers, survive in their new environment? Like Olivia, they transform their experiences into the practice of everyday life. They find a way for the specific circumstance. American peers and other “settled” immigrants serve as models in shaping the discourses of newcomers. This is especially true in the academic environment, where some students lead over others.

During the different stages of gaining fluency in the target language and their immersion in the new society, people experience the shaping of their identities in a diversity of ways. Some of these moments become part of their most lively memories. Sofia found her comfort zone in the academic setting. Interestingly, her fondest memory was that of ordering school lunch. She felt she had a way of communicating, even though she did not know the target language. Her inclusion came, at first, through the help of someone who shared her mother tongue. At that time, her friend could represent her voice until she was ready to take the risk of communicating in the new language. Peter, also had a friend who could be his cultural broker in the new setting, as cited earlier. For Peter, though, his first academic experiences were slightly embarrassing. Not understanding what people were saying made him respond with silence and smiles. He did not struggle with the classes he was taking, though, because most of them were related to his strengths in mathematics. As a bilingual speaker and a teacher, Peter has experience on the other side of the learning process. Peter has taught foreign students, noting their similarities to the American students. Most functionally, the foreign students in his classes were all speaking at an advanced level. He did not have to accommodate his foreign students in any way, which, admittedly, he would not do. Peter believes that accommodating language learners makes them feel less competent than the other students.

Thinking over Peter's philosophy regarding newcomers, I also recalled that Sofia, Olivia and Ana often remember when they felt less competent than the other students. Bourdieu (1991) explains the influence of the social world affecting our "habitus," especially in education. He states that "we are constantly seeking for meaning in our

relationship established with a speaker, as well as in the products offered by the social space” (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 38). Ana remembers finding refuge among the teachers during break time, because she did not feel comfortable among the students. She was the only foreign student in the school and felt cultural differences everywhere. Mentioning the language barrier, people had to draw pictures to explain the lunch menu to her.

Additionally, she felt very self-conscious while eating at the table. Sofia and Olivia, however, felt more comfortable spending time with the other foreign students in the school. They could relate to each other because they were all going through a similar experience of acquiring the target language. They were completely immersed in a culture different than their own. Being around other immigrants, although not sharing the same language or culture, gives newcomers a sense of belonging. Despite having a close circle of friends in middle school, Olivia was keenly aware of her accent. At times, this was a barrier to her feeling comfortable. She would pronounce words that would sound completely different from the native pronunciation. Her pronunciation would make people laugh, and she would feel embarrassed, making her feel uncomfortable around native speakers. The place of a comfort zone came from the ones who were going through similar experiences.

Ana’s memories of the academic setting as a new language learner, in part, still shape her identity. She still fears tests and believes she can never achieve highly on them. When Ana finished high school, she was not accepted to college because of her low SAT scores, as cited earlier. Although completing the Intensive English Program at the college she is currently attending, Ana could not score the required grade to exit the English Program. However, throughout the program, she had scored well. The college took her

achievements throughout the school year into consideration. For Ana, being assessed made her see the tests as an isolated experience from those she had in school, creating a certain block for her. It was then difficult to apply the knowledge she had acquired during classes on the tests (Pearson, 2007).

Immersion into a new culture and new language is a challenging process that happens gradually. Fluency in a language does not give a person total understanding and knowledge. For some, the culture shock experienced early on in the host country is still fresh in their memories. Ana was amazed to frequent the stores and see there were no security guards, especially by the doors, watching the products on sale. In Bulgaria, everything she remembers was so different. People were very careful not to have their belongings stolen. Peter's first day in the United States is still remembered as comical to him, not knowing how to open a door. Sula immersed herself in the new society as a spectator of her family. Experiences, such as these lived by the protagonists of these stories, helped shape their identities in the new discourses to which they were now taking part.

Discourses are created through each new way we use a single word in a variety of contexts. Even when a person feels fluent in a language, challenges and confusion with words that sound familiar will still often happen. It was interesting to listen to Peter's story about his misunderstanding the informal use of the word "cool." He would question himself about the literal meaning of the word. During one of our interviews, Peter joked and inquired of me if my own use of the word cool was literal or colloquial, despite the fact that he also had used the word idiomatically during our interviews.

When people said cool, I thought cool meant chilled, cold, and they meant something good or interesting. I was kinda shocked that they would say cool. When you're talking to them and they said, "Cool, cool, cool" I thought that was really, "Wow, why are they saying cool? It's not cool. It's warm in here."(Interview, Fall 2011)

Puns, jokes, sayings and slang words can be challenging for language learners.

Additionally, the similar sound of some words and the sentence patterns in the two languages can make newcomers and native speakers find challenges within the context of conversations. One of my good friends used to teach swimming lessons. During her first semester in college, she asked one of the children in the pool the following question, "How many years do you have?" The child replied he had two, but my friend insisted that he had at least six "years." After the child started to cry, stating he was not a monster, another instructor explained to my friend that she the child thought she was asking how many ears he had, and the correct question should be how old was he? The pattern my friend was using to structure the sentence was the translation of the question word-for-word of our language, Portuguese.

Learning a new language is a unique experience, filled with funny, joyful and frustrating experiences. I guess those who are language learners will always experience these situations with language. As Bourdieu (1991) states, "... language is the exemplary formal mechanism whose generative capacities are without limits. There is nothing that cannot be said and it is possible to say nothing" (p. 41). In almost four years of experiencing the English language, I still say things that do not make much sense, such as trying words in "Portu-English." It sometimes works pretty well, but if I notice people

squinting at me and furrowing their brows while talking to me, I know that what I said did not make sense.

Discussion of Findings

The identity choices a newcomer is required to make during the immersion in a new culture has a decided impact on the maintenance or loss of that newcomer's first language (Goldstein, 2003). Immersed in the United States and interacting with the linguistic privilege of native speakers, the protagonists of my research made their choices of claiming their linguistic identities, both as multilingual speakers and as monolingual, in spite of maintenance of the first language, in Peter's case. They filled their stories with details and lively accounts with regards to language acquisition. Given the option to note their written stories in their first language, the three of them who chose to take part in this exercise chose English to expand it. The interviews with the Brazilian sisters, with whom I share the same first language, also happened in English.

During my pre-research, before data collection, I came upon a diverse set of factors that may impact the maintenance or the loss of a native language. Contrary to what my literature framework presented, none of my participants were directly challenged by any amendment, language policies referent to the use of their first language (Tse, 2001). They were advised to immerse themselves in English as much as possible. Language Policies were not a factor influencing the maintenance of their mother tongue. Peter, Sula and the sisters were fortunate to have someone introduce them to the new culture and language through the use of their mother tongue. Ana's story was a unique exception, introducing the role of a cultural broker in her life. Adopted by English speakers, learning the target language was necessary to build a relationship with her new

family. Despite of having a Bulgarian tutor once a week, their goal was to fill her conversations with English at a rapid pace.

The participants' stories, life-based narratives, had unique features but also contained common ground experiences shaping their identity as language learners. At some point, they were all newcomers, immersed in a new culture, each going through a process of which they were a part, at some point, of a silent group⁵ (Freire, 1997). They accepted the new situation they were in, through the help of cultural brokers. At some point, they started to develop an awareness of their situation, making them take notice of their multiple identities. The acquisition of a new language enabled them to share the power of their prior knowledge and gain competent roles in the new culture at different levels. For example, Sofia and Olivia mastered the English language similar to that of native speakers. They both sound similar to the majority when speaking English, which, according to Miller (2003), gives them a linguistic privilege in this English-speaking country. Furthermore, they are better able to negotiate their role in the target linguistic market (Goldstein, 2003). Peter has acquired fluency in English, having, as the only struggle, his accent with a few word challenges now and then. However, Sula and Ana are still trying to achieve self-representation and be "heard" by dominant speakers. Ana has discovered this process through access to a college education. Sula remains dependent on her daughter's support for communication outside of her apartment.

Being in a country with such diverse ethnicity, languages and religions made them take a stand in their own religious views and beliefs. Their religious identities were

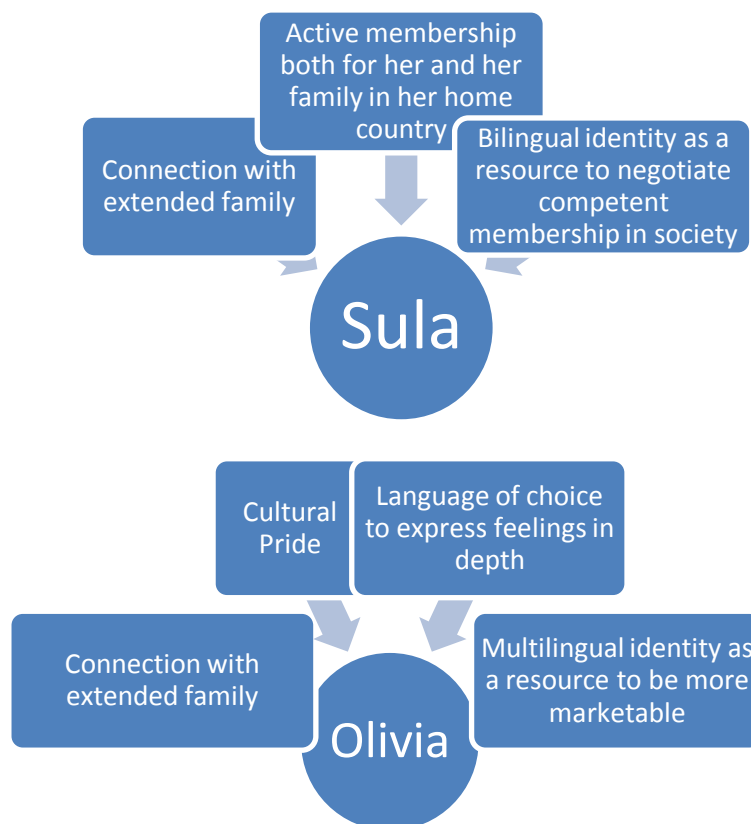
⁵ The concept of a culture of silence by Freire, describes a group of people who feel overwhelmed, and/or dependent on the culture around them, which effectively silences them to competent participation in society. Freire, 1997

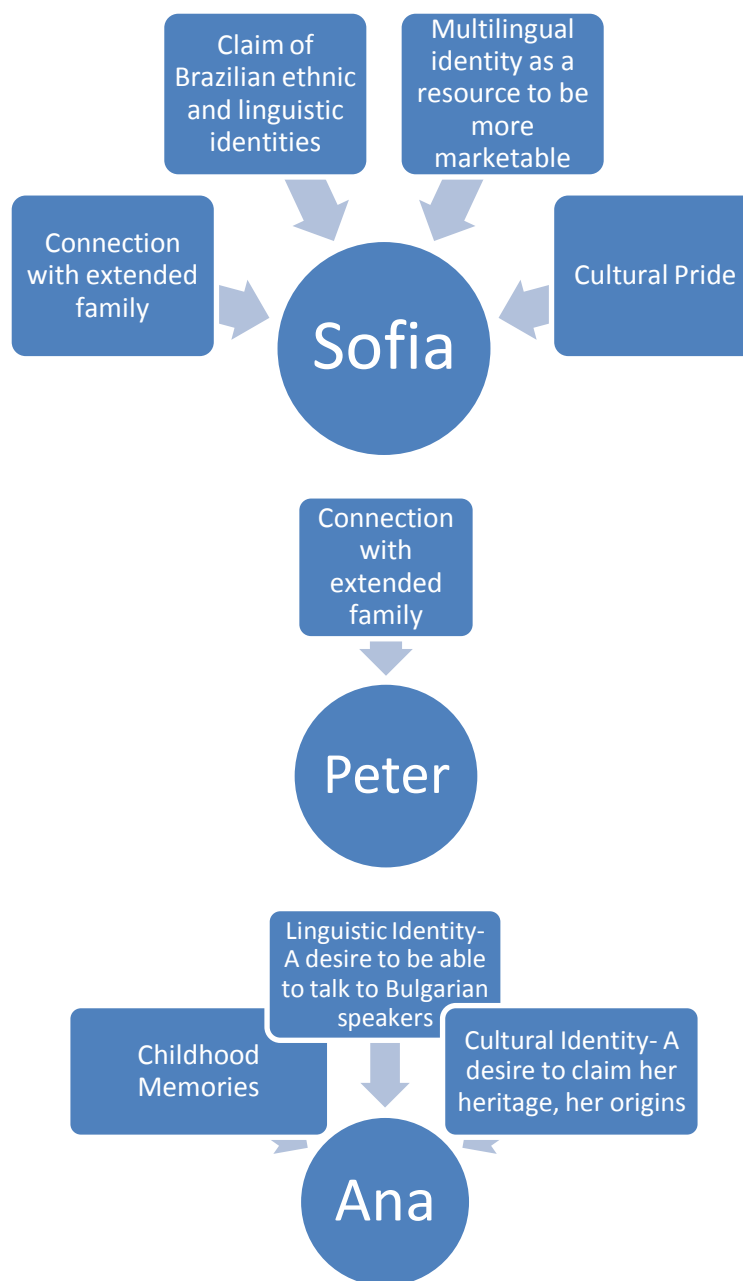
influenced by the role of their linguistic identities in the host community, as well. Olivia and Sofia found their religious identity provided them a comfort zone on the weekends. This environment provided similar warmth in their native culture, facilitating the use of their prior knowledge related to their first language and experiences in their home country to acquire a third language (Freire, 1997; Baynhan, 2006; Hatoss & Sheely, 2009). For Ana, it provided a safe environment where she could take more risks in immersing herself in English. Sula and Peter found their religious identities were a path to reaffirm their culture amongst such diversity.

The construction of the participants' identities was based on "several senses of their selves" within the diverse interactions of the host society (Zacher & Leander, 2007). At certain moments, negative messages received made some of them withdraw while looking for refuge among others facing similar challenges. As for their linguistic identities, especially as English speakers, this was a slower process for some. Within a range of six months, Sofia, Olivia and Peter were communicating in English. Their main responsibility at that time was the acquisition of the language in an academic environment. Sula came from her home country with some knowledge of English. When we first met, her verbal skills were better developed than her listening skills. Sula's role as a spectator in her family's immersion allowed her skills in English to only slowly progress while for Ana, the feeling of gratitude for having been adopted and finally having a family pressured her to learn the target language. This would be the only manner in which she could reciprocate the opportunity her parents had given her. English was the only way to communicate with her new family. Not having any connection with her mother tongue, Ana gradually substituted Bulgarian with words in English. As a result,

she does not recall when the loss of her mother tongue happened. Because of other challenges, Ana required more than ten years of immersion to achieve fluency in verbal English while still struggling to understand complex vocabulary, sayings, writing and the speed at which people talk.

The intersection of influences created by the new environment, language and the presence of cultural brokers, all persuade the shaping of the multiple identities demonstrated by the participants. Their multiple identities influenced their relationship with the maintenance of their first language. The diagrams below illustrate the main factors impacting the maintenance of the first language for each participant and the main factors involved in Ana's desire to reacquire her first language.





Ana was the only who happened to lose her first language, but with a desire to reacquire it. My theoretical framework differed slightly from my findings related to language loss (Fillmore, 1991; Fishman, 1996). Ana's experiences were unique. She had no extended family back in Bulgaria or any connection that would provide her the maintenance of her native language. The maintenance of Ana's first language is now a part of her plans for the future. She desires to reacquire her Bulgarian language and be

able to claim her ethnic and linguistic identities. While this does not happen, she compromises by searching for Bulgarian videos and listening to the familiar sounds of her mother tongue. Peter, despite his continued connection with extended family, has an assimilationist⁶ view of language (Schmidt, 2000). It seems that for him the communication with extended family is the strongest force of maintenance of his mother tongue. Peter has developed a monolingual identity in spite of his maintenance of his first language. The power of imposition of the linguistic market introduced to him has influenced him in his language choice (Goldstein, 2003; Hawkins, 2005; Miller, 2003). For him, there is no need to pass on his first language to his direct family, as English is the language they need to be competent citizens in this society. The maintenance of the mother tongue for Sula, Olivia and Sofia is presented through a pluralistic view (Schmidt, 2000). For both Sofia and Sula, the maintenance of their mother tongue is impacted by the extension of their linguistic and cultural identities through their children. Sofia, despite her linguistic ability in Portuguese not fully supporting her cultural identity, wants her son to be able to experience both her heritage culture and language, as well as be more marketable with a bilingual identity. Sula as a temporary immigrant in the United States, wants her children to dominate English, considering that a bilingual identity is much more marketable, as well. However, extremely important for Sula's maintenance of her mother tongue is the near future when she will be moving back to Iraq with her family. Her extended family is back in Iraq. Additionally to that, the linguistic market there will require from its members the fluency of dominant Arabic speakers. Sula wants her children to be able to communicate with her

⁶ For definition of terms, see p.11-13

extended family and be successful members of their home country. Olivia's maintenance of her mother tongue is strongly impacted by cultural pride and her emotional connection with her first language. Her language choice is related to her multilingual identity (Pavlenko, 2004). It gives her one more resource to establish relationships with other speakers, such as expressing her emotions in depth or simply signaling intimacy in being part of a group, the Brazilian community. For Sula, Olivia, and Sofia, learning English is essential to live in the United States; however, keeping their roots through their mother tongue and culture is essential to connect with extended family. Above all, this allows maintenance of their cultural and linguistic identities.

Conclusion

It was amazingly surprising to find that I was starting to make sense of my own experiences while researching other people's stories (Barkhuizen, 2011). It has been at this time, while residing in the United States as a Brazilian immigrant, that I have realized that I belong to more than one culture at the same time. At times, we think about culture, and often what comes to our minds is a different country. We do not need to travel to experience a culture different than our own. In our own community, we will find people who have a different way of living than ourselves, even though they are from the same country; this goes without mentioning the conflicts of generations inside our own families. The different discourses and the possibilities of misinterpretation are present everywhere. If, in our homes, we face different discourses, imagine living in a country that receives people from around the globe.

Residing in the "middle of everywhere" as Pipher (2002) describes Lincoln, Nebraska, brought forth many questions. For example, I wondered what a Brazilian

immigrant is like and how I could describe myself accurately; these were now part of my personal inquiry. While growing up in Brazil, I sometimes wondered about my identity. I am the daughter of a migrant family from the Northeast of Brazil that relocated to the economical and busy Southeast. Being born in the Southeast, I have always been a blend of both cultures, taking from each what I thought was worthy of keeping. I would describe Brazil the way Olivia, one of the immigrants who shared her story did, as a “bunch of little countries with diverse cultures,” Therefore, I can definitely say I am a blend. As a woman living in a patriarchal country, most notable in the Northeast of Brazil, certain life choices were difficult. For example, I wanted to finish school, including college, and start a career before considering marriage. I certainly received rolling eyes by some or many of my relatives in the Northeast of Brazil. My decision to postpone marriage until age twenty raised a lot of eyebrows in Northeastern Brazil, as did my decision to divorce my husband after finding out about his repeated infidelity.

Women in the Northeast simply do not divorce; most of them accept what their husbands dictate. Identities are discursively constructed and negotiated through discourses (Miller, 2003; Goldstein, 2003). The stories of the people I met, as well as my story, impact the maintenance of first language. Such stories represent the connection to and the possibility of developing positive identities, therefore, creating a connection to a person’s homeland.

My identity was shaped by my parents’ experiences. My mother did not go to school because, according to her father, school was not for girls. My father had a third-grade education and was living on the streets by the age of eight, after his mother’s death. They both wanted their kids to have educational opportunities and have choices in life. In

fact, my oldest brother and I were the first in our extended family to achieve a higher education.

As an immigrant, my reasons for relocating are diverse, including the acquisition of English. As a consequence, I discovered myself as Brazilian. We commonly identify ourselves with the areas in which we are born. Engrained in other people's stories and through other immigrants I had met, I found we all had a certain commonality. We all discovered our ethnic identity after leaving our home country and becoming immersed in a new culture and language. We were becoming aware of the world surrounding us through our own experiences and through the new culture in which we were immersed. Paulo Freire (1997) would probably say this is the way to liberate the oppressed from his condition of belonging to a silent group, using his own world to make him aware of the existence of a much bigger and more complex world.

Throughout this study, I learned the stories of people who, just like me, acquired English as an additional language. Their stories were filled both with memorable and thought-provoking experiences. An intersection of influences is involved in the acquisition of an additional language, altering or reinforcing the relationship and the feelings towards the first language, resulting in the maintenance or loss of a mother tongue. A new culture's social and academic environments play an important role in shaping the multiple identities of anyone, and these may more strongly shape those of a language learner.

It is essential to be aware of the intersection of influences shaping a language learners' identity, considering that the identity choices a newcomer is required to make during immersion has a decided impact on the maintenance or loss of that newcomer's

first language. The immersion in a new society may guide a newcomer to a subtractive process of language acquisition (Fillmore, 1991; Fishman, 1996). Creating a safe environment for immigrants or the children of immigrants is our role in society. This includes a school holder or a lay person. After all, we all are citizens of the world. No one is a “blank recipient;” each brings with him prior knowledge, whether or not he is literate. Acknowledgment of this knowledge and prior experience gives a person, especially a language learner, confidence to engage in the process of learning. Peter, for instance, did not know much English, but his skill as a runner was very much appreciated. Sofia and Olivia, in addition to meeting other children sharing their first language, had the tremendous support of their parents as their language acquisition began. They confirmed and emphasized the great opportunity they had of experiencing another culture and what is involved within it. Sula’s children had their parents as role models. Their mother, Sula, appreciated her children’s new skills and was eager to learn, and their father was achieving higher education in this country. Ana had support from her adopted parents, a need any teenager requires for that stage; however, being immersed in another language and culture, without any connection to her native country and language drove her to language loss.

Within the intersection of influences shaping a language learner’s identity is also the linguistic market (Bourdieu, 1997; Goldstein, 2003; Hawkins, 2005). Language is power, and the way people think they are perceived when speaking interferes in the process of engaging in learning and immersing in a new culture. Language learners, for example, are often very self-conscious of their accent. At times, the symbolic power

present in the dialogue or messages that power speakers give to language learners may be intimidating.

Our role in society, as school holders or lay people, is that of a cultural broker, someone who prepares newcomers for immersion in the new society, often by simply acknowledging their presence, individuals giving directions in ordinary situations that we often take for granted, such as turning the handle of a door, ordering lunch, and an uncountable number of situations we may assume as common knowledge (Pipher, 2002; Freire, 1997). Assuming that everyone understands these concepts can cause frustration and stress for newcomers. Engaging in life-based narratives allows us to develop the feelings of becoming agents of social change, cultural brokers.

It is meaningful to learn about other people's stories. As citizens of the world, especially living in a society that receives people from all corners of the globe, it is important to acknowledge the diversity of cultures and the right of being respected as a human being. Throughout life-based narratives, we, researchers and readers, give real faces to stories, such as those of the people I met in this study. With Ana, Sofia, Olivia, Sula and Peter, we, as citizens of a multicultural society, had the opportunity to learn about other cultures and beliefs different than ours. Most of all, we learned about the complexities and challenges these people faced while being immersed in another culture and acquiring a new language.

Gaining awareness of both the challenges newcomers face while immersing themselves in a new culture, as well as acquiring a target language, frees language learners from silent groups. They can now develop a voice to express their feelings

towards factors that may have shaped their multiple identities, either positively or negatively.

Throughout the stories of the people we met in this study, factors, such as the presence of a cultural broker, connection with native language and culture, coupled with personal pride, demonstrated a significant role in the maintenance of their mother tongue. The participants' multiple identities were strongly related to their immersion in a new culture, filled with unfamiliar discourses. Emigrating from countries where the majority shared ethnicity, the newcomers discovered their own ethnic identity while standing isolated in a corner of the world. They reinforced their own ethnic and linguistic identities, as Arabic and Portuguese speakers, or others did so by taking a stand on religious views.

Their experiences in the new community, their role in the social and academic environments, as well as the linguistic market, represented the development of their language skills. Their interpretation of various discourses in the target language strongly influenced their views of the mother tongue. The maintenance of their first language either represented the expansion of their roots through the next generation or their view of language as simply functional, acquiring only the language a person needs to be competent a member of the community in which he is immersed.

Here, at the end of my research, the questions that remain are mostly related to religious identity and its role both in the maintenance of the mother tongue and in the acquisition of the target language. Little previous scholarship addresses this, yet my findings indicate that religious identity may be quite influential for newcomers. Is it a way for newcomers to affirm themselves as humans beings? Is it a way to develop

competency or entitlement? Or is it simply a way to feel equal? Furthermore, is the maintenance of the mother tongue related to the privileged position of the United States and the English language in the world? Which stereotypes influence the maintenance of a mother tongue?

With these questions in mind and the intersection of influences affecting newcomers' identities, it is essential to be aware of groups that are silent due to involuntary oppressive situations. Not being aware of our own role in society as language learners, lay people, and school holders may also put us in the position of being part of silent groups, either as the oppressed or the oppressor. In Freire's (1997) words, "Washing one's hands of the conflict between the powerful and the powerless means to side with the powerful, not to be neutral" (p. 158).

It is, therefore, crucial to develop an awareness of the complexities and challenges involved in the immersion of a new culture and language and to recognize immersion as a moment in time when the newcomer's first language may be in danger of loss. Newcomers rarely refuse to learn the target language. The maintenance of a positive relationship with their native language is significantly important to their linguistic identity, directing them to a competent membership in the new society without leaving their roots behind.

Immersion in the target language and culture is a process of exploration, not solely deciphering codes or reading a message. A newcomer is required to make identity choices, which has a decided impact on the maintenance or loss of that newcomer's first language. Identities are discursively constructed within the discourses a newcomer takes part (Gee, 1990; Miller, 2003). Immersion is gaining an awareness of the parts of the elephant, as well as the elephant as a whole, a concept cited in the fable, "Six Wise Men

of Hindustan” (as cited in Andrews, 2006). In the fable, the wise men want to know what the elephant is like; however, each of them is blind. According to the story, each wise man touched a different part of the elephant and described the part as a whole. Each one of them held a portion of the truth but not the whole truth. Immersion in a new society, acquiring English, and maintaining the newcomer’s native language and culture, can be compared to this fable. Immersed in a new society, choosing to learn only its primary language, but not immersing in the culture, or leaving behind prior knowledge about a whole language and culture is the same as holding only part of the truth, limiting the view of the whole elephant. In the end, the intersection of influences impacting a language learner’s multiple identities should help lead to an additive process of acquiring a language (Fillmore, 1991).

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Appendices

Appendix A- ENGLISH CONSENT LETTER



COLLEGE OF EDUCATION AND HUMAN SCIENCES
Department of Teaching, Learning and Teacher Education

Adult Informed Consent Form

Dear Potential Participant,

You are invited to participate in a research project entitled Language Loss and Language Maintenance. The project director is a graduate student, Lucilei Brigido Oliveira, from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, in the Department of Teaching, Learning, and Teacher Education. The purpose of the project is to explore the challenges speakers of English as an additional language face in regard to their cultural identities and the use of their first language. This research project is particularly focused on how speakers of other languages relate to their first language while living in an English-speaking country. You were selected to be invited to participate in this study because your first language is other than English, and you also learned English as a second language.

Your participation in the research study would last from three to six months, starting in the summer of 2011. During your participation in the study, you will be interviewed twice; once at the beginning and once at the end of the study. Interviews will last 30 minutes to one hour and take place in a study room at a library that grants us some privacy. These interviews will be audio taped and later transcribed by the researcher as a way for the researcher to gather accurate information. Audiotapes will be destroyed once the transcriptions are complete. In addition to the interviews, the researcher will observe you in interaction with your family once a month, depending on your availability. During these observations, the researcher will also interact and audiotape, with your permission. There will be a maximum of four observations during the study, lasting from thirty minutes to one hour. You will also be asked to keep a journal, reflecting on the language you use with your family members. Questions will be provided once a week to facilitate your journal writings. The researcher will collect your journals once a month. Your journal may be written in the language with which you feel most comfortable.

The findings from the study may be presented as a thesis to conclude a Master's program, and it may also be presented in education conferences. Your identity will be kept confidential; you will be identified only with a pseudonym. In other words, any information that could identify you will be

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excluded from the study or altered (as with the use of a pseudonym). All of these precautions are taken to limit, as much as possible, the risk that your identity be revealed. Throughout your participation in this project, there are no known risks that would concern you.

For your participation, you will receive no compensation; however, your participation is greatly valued as it may provide the benefit of aiding educators to develop and think about approaches, which may help smooth the challenges learners of a second language may face, while learning a target language.

Your participation in this study is voluntary, and I thank you for considering taking part in it. The only requirement necessary for being a part of this study is that you must be 19 years of age or older to participate. You have the right to ask questions and receive answers at any time during the course of the study. You can contact the researcher, Lucilei Brigido Oliveira, at lucileiabo@yahoo.com.br or by phone at (402) 570-6279 or by post at 4512 Lowell Avenue, Lincoln, NE 68506. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant that have not been answered by the investigator or to report any concerns about the study, you may contact the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Institutional Review Board, at (402) 472-6965. Again, you are free to decide not to participate in this study or to withdraw at anytime without it adversely affecting your relationship with the investigators or the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Your decision will not result in any loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.


Sincerely,

Lucilei Brigido Oliveira


Participant Signature and Date

Researcher Signature and Date

Appendix B- ARABIC CONSENT LETTER



UNIVERSITY OF
Nebraska
Lincoln



IRB# 20110411547EP
Date Approved: 04/20/2011
Valid Until: 04/19/2012

CO
Department of Teaching, Learning and Teacher Education

ورقة ابلاغ عن موافقة الناضجين

اعذائي المشتركين:

انتم مدعون للمشاركة في بحث بعنوان فقدان اللغة وتصليحها والمشراف علي هذا المشروع طالبة متخرجة : لوسيلي برجادوا اوليفيرا من University of Nebraska بمدينة Lincoln من قسم التعليمي والتدريس. الهدف من هذا المشروع للاستكشاف التحديات بالتحديث باللغة الانجليزية كلغة اضافية و بتحديات من خلال العادات والتقليد من خلال التحدث باللغة الاساسية. هذا المشروع للبحث المكثف علي كيفية التحدث لاللغات الاخرى وعلاقتها باللغة الاساسية بالرغم من العيش في دول ذو تحدث اللغة الاجنبية (الانجليزية).

لقد تم اختيارك للدعوة في المشاركة في هذه الدراسة لان لغتك الاولى مختلفة عن اللغة المرغوب في تعليمها وعلي انك تتحدث لغة مختلفة والانجليزية كلغة ثانية.

مشاركتك في هذا البحث سوف تستمر من ثلاث الي ستة اشهر اثناء صيف عام 2011. اثناء انضمامك في هذه الدراسة سوف يتم مقابلتك مرتين لهدف استجوابك علي الدراسة : المقابلة الاولى ستكون في بدارية الدراسة والثانية في نهايتها و ستكون مدة المقابلات من ثلاثين دقيقة الي ستون دقيقة. وستكون في مكان الدراسة بالمكتبة وهذا سوف يكون حق الخصوصية في التحدث بحرية. هذه المحادثات سوف تسجل وسوف يستطلع عليها الباحثين بطريقة بغرض جمع معلومات معينة عن الدراسة. سوف يتم اطلاق والقاء التسجيل عقب اكمال المدونات. وبالإضافة الي ذلك الباحثون سوف يرصد معلوماتك ومع معاملتك مع عائلتك مرة اة اثنان شهريا اعتمادا علي قدر استطاعتك. اثناء هذا الترسيد الباحث سوف يتفاعل ويسجل ما يحدث ب المقابلات وهذا بعد اتخاذ تصريحك منك. الملاحظات سوف تستمر لمدة من نصف ساعة الي ساعة واحدة. وسيطلب منك ان تكتب وتحافظ علي مجلاتك الي تكتبها عن اختبارك في هذه الدراسة الي تشعر بالحرية الكتابة بها.

النتائج من الدراسة ربما تقدم كمقترح لنهاية برنامج الماجستير وربما تقترح في مؤتمر تعليمي بالجامعة. هاونيك سوف تحفظ في غاية السرية وسوف نقوم باستعمال اسم مستعار. بعبارة اخري. اي معلومات التي يتم التعرف عليك سوف يتم استبعادها تماما من الدراسة او تغييرها بمستعار. كل هذه التحفظات تم اتخاذها لعدم التعرف علي هاونيك علي قدر المستطاع ولا يوجد ايها مخاطر لك في الاشتراك في هذا المشروع. عندما تشترك في الدراسة لا يوجد تعويضات لذلك اشترائك لة قيمة عظيمة لدينا كما سوف نقيم بتوفير قائدة تصليح اللغة لتطوير التفكير عن المنهج و سوف يساعد علي تسهيل الصعوبات لتعليم الانجليزية كلغة ثانية كلغة المراد تعليمها.

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اشترائك في هذه الدراسة تطوعي ولكم جزيل الشكر في التطلع علي الدراسة. المتطلبات الوحيدة اللازمة للاشتراك في هذه الدراسة ان يكون العمر لا ينقص عن تسع عشر سنة. لك الاحقية لطرح الاسئلة وان تجد اجابة لها اي وقت اثناء دراسة الكورس. يمكنك ان تراسل الباحثة : لوسيلي برجادوا اوليفيرا عبر البريد الالكتروني: lucileiabo@yahoo.com او هاتفيا 472-6279 (402) او عبر البريد الجوي 4512 Lowell Avenue, Lincoln NE (68506). اذا لديك اي اسئلة عن حقوقك كمشارك بالدراسة التي لم يتم الرد عليها بواسطة محقق، قم بتقريرها عن وسيتم الاستجواب عليها. يمكنك مراسلة المجلس الاستعراضي لموسسة University of Nebraska هاتفيا 472-6965 (402). مرة اخري لك الاختيار بعدم الانضمام الي هذه الدراسة او قيامك بسحب في وقت اخر بجمع سلب اي اضرار لعلاقتك مع المحققين بـ University of Nebraska. اختيارك لن يسبب اي خسائر من الفوائد المقصودة.

باخلاص التحية:

لوسيلي برجادوا اوليفيرا

Appendix C- PORTUGUESE CONSENT LETTER



COLLEGE OF EDUCATION AND HUMAN SCIENCES
Department of Teaching, Learning and Teacher Education

Adulto Consentimento Livre e Esclarecido

Caro participante em potencial,

Você está convidado a participar num projecto de investigação intitulado "Language Maintenance and Loss" – "Preservação e Perda da Língua Materna. A diretora do projeto é uma estudante de pós-graduação, Lucilei Brigido Oliveira, da Universidade de Nebraska-Lincoln, no Departamento de Ensino, Aprendizagem e Formação de Professores. O objetivo do projeto é explorar os desafios falantes de Inglês como idioma adicional se deparam em relação às suas identidades culturais e ao uso de sua primeira língua. Este projecto de investigação se centra sobretudo na forma como os falantes de outras línguas se relacionam com a sua primeira língua, enquanto vivem em um país de língua Inglesa. Você foi selecionado para ser convidada a participar neste estudo, pois a sua primeira língua é diferente de Inglês, e você também aprendeu Inglês como segunda língua.

Sua participação na pesquisa duraria de três a seis meses, com início no verão de 2011. Durante sua participação no estudo, você será entrevistado duas vezes, uma no início e uma vez no final do estudo. As entrevistas durarão de 30 minutos a uma hora e acontecerão em uma sala de estudo em uma biblioteca que nos dará alguma privacidade. Essas entrevistas serão gravadas e posteriormente transcritas pela pesquisadora como um caminho para o pesquisador para coletar informações precisas. Fitas serão destruídas quando as transcrições forem completas. Além das entrevistas, o pesquisador irá observá-lo em interação com sua família, uma ou duas vezes por mês, dependendo de sua disponibilidade. O número total de observações variará de três a quatro. Durante essas observações, a pesquisadora também interagirá e poderá fazer gravações de voz com sua permissão. Observações durarão de meia hora a uma hora. Você também será convidado a manter um diário, refletindo sobre a linguagem que você usa com seus familiares. As perguntas serão enviadas uma vez por semana para facilitar sua reflexão sobre o uso da língua. O pesquisador irá recolher os seus periódicos, uma vez por mês. Suas reflexões podem ser escritas na linguagem com a qual você se sente mais confortável.

Os resultados do estudo poderão ser apresentados como tese para concluir um programa de mestrado, e também poderão ser apresentados em conferências de educação. Sua identidade será

mantida em sigilo, você será identificado apenas com um pseudônimo. Em outras palavras, qualquer informação que possa identificá-lo serão excluídos do estudo ou alterados (como acontece com o uso de um pseudônimo). Todas essas precauções são tomadas para limitar, tanto quanto possível, o risco de que sua identidade seja revelada. Ao longo da sua participação neste projeto, não há riscos conhecidos que lhe dizem respeito.

Para sua participação, você não receberá compensação, no entanto, sua participação é muito valorizada, pois pode proporcionar o benefício de ajudar os educadores a desenvolver e pensar em abordagens, que podem ajudar a suavizar os desafios que os alunos de uma segunda língua podem ter de enfrentar, ao aprender uma língua adicional.

Sua participação neste estudo é voluntária, e agradeço-vos por considerar que nele participam. O único requisito necessário para fazer parte deste estudo é que você deve ter 19 anos ou mais de idade. Você tem o direito de fazer perguntas e receber respostas a qualquer momento durante o curso do estudo. Você pode contatar o pesquisador, Lucilei Brigido Oliveira, na lucileiabo@yahoo.com.br ou pelo telefone (402) 570-6279 ou pelo correio em 4512 Lowell Avenue, Lincoln, NE 68506. Se você tiver alguma dúvida sobre seus direitos como participante da pesquisa que não foram respondidas pelo investigador ou relatar qualquer preocupação com o estudo, pode contactar a Universidade de Nebraska-Lincoln Institutional Review Board, em (402) 472-6965. Novamente, você é livre para decidir não participar deste estudo ou de se retirar do mesmo a qualquer momento, sem que o seu relacionamento com os investigadores e/ou com a Universidade de Nebraska-Lincoln sejam prejudicados. Sua decisão não resultará em perda de quaisquer benefícios a que tem direito.

Atenciosamente,

Lucilei Brigido Oliveira

Assinatura do participante e data

Assinatura do Pesquisador e data

Appendix D- PARTICIPANTS' CONTACT INFORMATION



COLLEGE OF EDUCATION AND HUMAN SCIENCES
Department of Teaching, Learning and Teacher Education

Lucilei Brigido Oliveira (lucileiabo@yahoo.com.br)
4512 Lowell Avenue
Lincoln, NE 68506
(402) 570 – 6279

Dear Participant,

This form will facilitate our communication. Please fill it in and choose one of the options that you would prefer to be contacted.

Participant's Name: _____

Contact Information:

() E-mail Address- _____

() Mailing Address- _____

() Text Message- (phone number) - _____

() Phone Call- (phone number) - _____

I truly appreciate your participation,

Sincerely,

Lucilei Brigido Oliveira

Graduate Student University of Nebraska-Lincoln

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Appendix E- GENERAL GUIDELINES FOR INTERVIEWS AND JOURNALS



COLLEGE OF EDUCATION AND HUMAN SCIENCES
Department of Teaching, Learning and Teacher Education

Research Project: Language Loss and Language Maintenance

Researcher: Lucilei Brigido Oliveira – lucileabo@yahoo.com.br phone (402) 570-6279

General Guidelines for Interviews and Questions to be used during the study: Language Loss and Language Maintenance

- How long have you been in the U.S.?
- Where were you born? Tell me about your country of origin?
- How old were you when you moved to the U.S.?
- Did you know English before you arrived in the U.S.?
- What was the reason for your move?
- Were you literate or semi-literate in your first language when you left your country?
- How long did it take for you to start to communicate in English language?
- Tell me about your experience in learning English.
- In the case of if you moved with your parents, how did they assimilate the language, in your point of view?
- If applicable, tell me about some member of your family and his/her experience with the English language?
- If applicable, when do you use your first language?
- Which language do you feel more comfortable using? Why?
- How would you describe yourself, in terms of language and culture? Which of your cultures can you relate to more? Why? Give me an example.
- What were the reasons that made you come to the United States?
- Did you come to the U.S. by yourself?
- Consider the following situation: You are not fluent in your first language, or you lost your L1. How do you feel about losing your first language? Do you think you lost your culture, as well? How do you feel about getting your first language back? Do you intend to relearn your native language? Why or why not?
- What do you keep out of your culture?

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- Tell me about the food in your country of origin.
- Think about how you interact at home, at school (if applicable), at your job, and with friends.
- Which language do you use during each of these interactions?
- Do you feel someone accommodating in the language while speaking to you, or do you accommodate for someone while interacting?
- Does the thought of how to say something or which language to use cross your mind during your daily activities? Tell me more about this.
- Are there times when you are ashamed of your first language? Could you think of examples?
- How do you feel about your parents' use of English? Or other members of your family? (if applicable)
- Considering the use of English, do you feel the need to help your parents or other members of your family while they are interacting with others?

Appendix F- TRANSCRIPTIONIST AGREEMENT LETTER



COLLEGE OF EDUCATION AND HUMAN SCIENCES
Department of Teaching, Learning and Teacher Education

CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT FORM

Dear Transcriptionist,

You are invited to participate as a transcriptionist in a research project entitled Language Loss and Language Maintenance. The project director is a graduate student, Lucilei Brigido Oliveira, from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, in the Department of Teaching, Learning, and Teacher Education. The purpose of the project is to explore the challenges speakers of English as an additional language face in regard to their cultural identities and the use of their first language. This research project is particularly focused on how speakers of other languages relate to their first language while living in an English-speaking country. The participants will be writing their journals in the language with which they feel most comfortable. In case one of the participants chose Arabic as a preferred language in which to write, if you agree to participate in this project, you will then be called in regard to your work.

As a transcriptionist, you will receive confidential information, which will be identified only with the participants' pseudonyms; you will not have access to the participants' true identities. Furthermore, you may use the Confidential Information only for the purpose of translating it into English.

All data you receive must be kept confidential. The Confidential Information is not to be used, reproduced, transformed, or stored on a computer or device that is accessible to persons to whom disclosure may not be made, as set out in this Agreement. All written and oral information and materials disclosed or provided by the researcher to you under this Agreement is Confidential Information regardless of whether it was provided before or after the date of this Agreement.

The researcher will request the return of all Confidential Information from you once the translations have been provided and you will not retain any copies of this information.

By signing this agreement, you are agreeing to participate as a transcriptionist in this project and abide by all of the rules of this Agreement.

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This **CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT** is dated this ____ day of February, 2011

BETWEEN:

(Lucilei Oliveira - Researcher)

(_____-Transcriptionist)

Appendix G- CONTACTING THE PARTICIPANTS



COLLEGE OF EDUCATION AND HUMAN SCIENCES
Department of Teaching, Learning and Teacher Education

Lucilei Brigido Oliveira (lucileiabo@yahoo.com.br)

4512 Lowell Avenue

Lincoln, NE 68506

(402) 570 – 6279

____/____/11

Dear Potential Participant,

I would like to thank you for considering to take part in my study “Language Maintenance and Loss”. If you choose to participate, this letter will serve as a reminder of the sign up date which is ____/____/11.

Please feel free to contact me at anytime if you have questions or concerns. Thank you again.

Sincerely,

Lucilei Brigido Oliveira

Graduate Student University of Nebraska-Lincoln



COLLEGE OF EDUCATION AND HUMAN SCIENCES
Department of Teaching, Learning and Teacher Education

Lucilei Brigido Oliveira (lucileiabo@yahoo.com.br)

4512 Lowell Avenue

Lincoln, NE 68506

(402) 570 – 6279

___/___/11

Participant's Name: _____

Contact Information (chosen by the participant—e.g. e-mail, mailing address, text message, phone number)

Dear Participant,

As you were previously informed in the Information Letter provided for you, you will be receiving a set of questions to help you reflect on your use of language and write about it in your journal. We have an interview scheduled for ___/___/11. In addition, your journal is due ___/___/11. Also, I will be observing you in your home environment on ___/___/11. Reminding you again, there will be a maximum of four observations during the study, lasting from thirty minutes to one hour.

Please feel free to contact me at anytime if you have questions or concerns. Thank you, once again, for your participation in this project.

Sincerely,

Lucilei Brigido Oliveira

Graduate Student University of Nebraska-Lincoln