

Second-Language Acquisition, Culture Shock, and Language Stress of Adult Female Latina Students in New York

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Abstract: The purpose of this study was to identify and describe the educational, cultural, and linguistic adjustments and experiences encountered by Hispanic adult females in learning English as a second language (ESL) and the relation of these experiences to the variables of language, culture, and education of adult Hispanic females. Adult ESL learners face problems of controlling linguistic rules and of applications in various situations while attempting to deal with the shock of living in a new cultural environment.

Resumen: El propósito de este estudio fue el de identificar y describir los ajustes educacionales, culturales y lingüísticos que experimentan mujeres adultas Hispánicas en su aprendizaje del Inglés como segundo idioma. El estudio describe estas experiencias conforme se relacionan a las variables de lenguaje, cultura y educación de mujeres adultas hispanas. Los adultos que estudian Inglés como segundo idioma (ESL) encaran problemas como el controlar las reglas lingüísticas y aplicarlas en situaciones variadas, mientras tratan de manejar el choque de vivir en un ambiente cultural nuevo.

Keywords: second-language acquisition; English as a second language (ESL); Hispanic language

The need for continuing education activities for women has been expressed in a variety of ways. They may be justified as a means to address transitions and to provide information concerned with new research into biological and psychological development. Other programs may also be required to examine, from a woman's point of view, areas believed to have been treated historically from a male perspective (Holt, 1980; Long, 1975). The need to separate programs on topics such as legal status and financial matters may decline, according to Holt (1980) and Long (1975). However, they believed that social changes that would obliterate the need would be slow in arriving.

Background

The participants for this study were 8 adult Hispanic females who came to the United States from 10 to 15 years ago and developed some functioning English as a second language (ESL) skills. The participants were native Central American and Caribbean females who spoke Spanish as their first language and who were enrolled in an ESL program for adults. Their ages ranged from 29 to 39; this age group was chosen because it is the most representative age group of adult Hispanic females learning English. The procedures used in the current investigation were interviews, essays, questionnaires, and examinations of academic records. Interviews were conducted to solicit attitudes and experiential background related to cultural, linguistic, and educational factors affecting academic performance. Participants were asked to write an essay, in either English or Spanish, describing their lives as immigrant women in New York. The mode of the questionnaire (given in either English or Spanish) was 11 or 12 nonstructured questions. The first section gathered personal and demographic information; the second section collected information with regard to linguistic, cultural, and educational factors.

The three variables investigated were educational, linguistic, and cultural adjustments. *Educational adjustment* refers to the difficulties encountered by adults with limited English proficiency who are acquiring both a second language and initial literacy in a classroom setting (D'Anglejan, Renaud, Arsenault, & Lortie, 1984). *Linguistic adjustment* refers to the process of literacy consciousness as one where people must become aware of their day-to-day conditioning to build a strong foundation for their role in society (Delgado-Gaitan, 1987; Freire, 1973; Ramirez, 1994). *Cultural adjustment* refers to situations where people attempt to deal with the shock of living in a new cultural environment, one which is confusing and sometimes hostile (de Castell & Luke, 1987; Freire, 1973; Giroux, 1987; Ogbu, 1978).

This research confirms the findings of McKay and Weinstein-Shr (1993) and Fowler-Frey (1996) indicating that the barriers to participation in educational activities most frequently cited by adults are lack of time and cost. Busy schedules, home responsibilities, job responsibilities, and similar time-related obstacles were cited as important barriers to participation. Obstacles to participation are the situational barriers that relate to an individual's life context at a particular time, that is, the realities of one's social and physical environment. Cost and lack of time are examples. Other situational barriers are lack of attractive or appropriate courses and institutional policies and practices that impose inconvenience, confusion, or frustration on adult learners. Finally, psychological barriers are individually held beliefs, values, attitudes, or perceptions that inhibit participation in organized learning activities. Adults who cite as barriers a lack of interest or state that they are too old to learn, do not enjoy studying, are tired of school, and so on are ex-

pressing some of the wide variety of beliefs and attitudes that strongly influence participation behavior. Language minority populations (non-English speakers) are the “new majority” (as the following statistics demonstrate). Adult education presents an interesting demographic profile. Between 1990 and 1996, there were 6.8 million adults with limited English proficiency in the United States; by the end of the year 2000, that number had grown to 17.4 million (“Adult Illiteracy in the United States,” 1997). ESL is the “fastest growing” area of study, with eight community colleges reporting more than 70 ESL sections (Ignash, 1992).

The following figures are especially important because of the population demographics in this study. According to “Adult Illiteracy in the United States” (1997), one fourth of all foreign-born people in the United States in 1996 (about 6.7 million) were born in México. White individuals, including Hispanic individuals, constituted nearly two thirds of the 1990 to 1996 immigrants. About 43% of the immigrants were Hispanic individuals of all races (“Adult Illiteracy in the United States,” 1997). The largest number of Hispanic individuals resides in California, but Texas, New York, and Florida also have Hispanic populations of 1 million or more. Hispanic communities are diverse and include Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Central American, and South American individuals. Hispanic individuals are also the least educated language group in the United States. More than 7 million Hispanic individuals age 16 and older—50% of all Hispanic adults—are functionally illiterate (in their native tongue, in this case, Spanish) according to statistics published in *SER America* (1989).

Among those who are motivated enough to risk their lives to come to the United States, those who previously were shut out from educational services because of their undocumented status, but who enrolled and remained in English language and literacy programs when amnesty was granted, are those who have supported children and families in entry-level jobs but seek a better life. In the coming decades, the language minority population will represent an even greater portion of our labor force and potentially of our adult education and ESL programs. But will there be classes and programs for them, and will they be appropriate? Will they face a bewildering maze of program options or will there be appropriate educational sequences offering a clear path from entry to further education, training, or employment? Will the staff of these programs be able to provide effective education that leads to the fulfillment of real-world goals?

Participants’ Demographic Data

The participants in this study were 8 adult female Hispanic students attending ESL programs in The Bronx. They came to this country between 10 and 15 years ago. Participants’ ages ranged from 29 to 39 years old. The target population was chosen from four adult ESL programs of different levels

located in The Bronx to reflect maximum variation and diversity (Miles & Huberman, 1994). These adult ESL programs provide services mostly to students who need survival skills and are on public financial assistance. The goal of these programs is to teach these students enough English to enable them to join the workforce.

The 8 participants were Hispanic individuals. Among these 8 participants, 1 was from Guatemala, 1 was from Honduras, 1 was from México, 3 were from the Dominican Republic, and 2 were from Puerto Rico. None of them spoke English before they came to the United States. Analysis of the data presented demographic characteristics of the participants that are described in the following paragraphs.

All of the participants were native speakers of Spanish. They used Spanish in and outside of their homes to communicate orally and in writing with friends and family. All of the participants were attending adult ESL classes. The criterion to enter the adult ESL program was a low score on the *Test of Adult Basic Education* (1991). The participants could not read or write in English. They scored between Levels I and IV on the New York State (1983) Placement Test. This test is an oral assessment based on answering questions related to a content of pictures that are shown to the students. There are three possible scores: 0, 1, and 2. A score of 0 is given for incorrect answers or no answer at all; a score of 1 is given when the student indicates some comprehension but may have a grammatical error in his or her oral answer. A score of 2 is given for "native-like" answers. For example, if the question "How many people are waiting at the bus stop?" is asked and the student responds "Three" (i.e., not answering in complete sentences), that would be considered native-like. After three consecutive zeros, the proctor stops administering the test and the student is asked a fail-safe question (for self-esteem purposes). There are a total of four levels: (a) Level I: 0 to 15 points, (b) Level II: 16 to 25 points, (c) Level III: 26 to 34 points, and (d) Level IV: 35 to 45 points.

Participants were adult females in the age range of 29 to 39 years old. The average age for this group was 33. At the time of the study, the average New York State (1993) Placement English proficiency level was III (35 to 45 points). Participants had spent from 2 to 3 years enrolled in ESL programs. Most of the participants had lived in the United States for several years; the average number of years lived in the United States was 13.8.

The participants' occupations were as follows: 3 participants were housewives, 1 was a waitress, 1 was a student, 1 was a Parent Teacher Association president, and 1 was a housekeeper. Of all the participants, only 2 had some college education in their native countries, 2 had a high school diploma, 2 had a general equivalency diploma, and 2 had some elementary school education. Table 1 presents participants' demographic data. The variables include age, number of years lived in the United States, New York State (1983) Placement Test score, and occupation.

Table 1
Participants' Demographic Data ($N = 8$)

<i>Participant</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Birthplace</i>	<i>New York State Placement Test Score</i>	<i>Years in United States</i>	<i>Occupation</i>
Corina	35	Dominican Republic	3	14	Waitress
Sylvia	33	Guatemala	4	20	Housewife
Eva	39	Dominican Republic	3	12	Teacher's Aide
Elvira	39	México	4	11	Housewife
Ana	30	Dominican Republic	2	13	Housewife
Eneida	31	Puerto Rico	4	20	Student
Carmen	34	Puerto Rico	4	16	PTA President
Cruz Maria	29	Honduras	2	5	Housekeeper
Averages	33.75		3.37	13.8	

Materials

The study describes factors that might have contributed to the students' educational, cultural, and linguistic experiences. The case study approach was chosen as the best method to get the necessary data. Yin (1989) stated that the case study is preferred in examining contemporary events when the relevant behaviors cannot be manipulated. Yin also pointed out that the case study relies on direct observation and systematic interviewing. The case study's unique strength is its ability to deal with a variety of evidence—documents, artifacts, interviews, and observations. Yin observed that a case study might involve a deduction when an event cannot be observed directly. Thus, a researcher will infer that a particular event resulted from some earlier occurrence based on an interview and documentary evidence collected as part of the case study (Yin, 1989).

This study used a variety of ethnographic tools (see Appendix). These tools included observations of language, cultural, and educational behaviors, both in a formal fashion in the classroom and in an informal fashion in the participants' homes; interviews focusing on cultural, linguistic, and educational components; field notes; audiotapes; essays in English and/or Spanish; and other written English school work. Yin (1989) stated that the multiple derivations of evidence in case studies allow a researcher to address an immense range of historical, attitudinal, and observational issues. The most important advantage presented by using multiple sources of evidence is the development of converging lines of inquiry, a process of triangulation. Yin observed that the "findings and conclusions in a case study are likely to be more convincing and accurate if they are based on several different sources of information, following a corroboratory mode" (p. 91).

Observations

Participant observation is the most common form of data collection used in case studies. Dobbert (1982) defined a participant observer as a researcher who acts as a pseudo member of the group being studied. The participant observer tries to become partially socialized into the situation of the study's participants. Dobbert further defined the participant observer by contrasting his or her characteristics with those of a regular member of the community. The characteristics of an effective participant observer include: (a) a participant observer organizes the information he or she learns based on pertinent social science theory and methodology, whereas a pure participant organizes his or her information to achieve certain goals such as the group's tasks or his or her own personal satisfaction as a group member; (b) a participant observer has been trained to record certain information that might be ignored by a pure participant; and (c) a participant observer must be objective and look in the community because informants sometimes provide information that is biased. The investigator planned to gather written evidence from the participants who were required to write essays in either English or Spanish. The topics revolved around cultural, linguistic, and educational experiences that had an impact on second-language acquisition, culture shock, and language stress. Observations took place in and outside of the classroom. The interviews were audiotaped.

The researcher conducted two observations: one in the classroom and one in each participant's home. The purpose of this activity was to observe the participants' language use, cultural characteristics, and their learning styles. Essays, questionnaires, and interviews were cross-referenced. The researcher's field notes documented contextual and anecdotal information obtained during observations of the participants as they engaged in social and academic interactions. The entries provided supporting information that facilitated the transcription of the participant's dialogues. Informal conversations with the participants and their family members were instrumental in providing information about factors that influenced social behavior, second-language learning, and academic achievement. For example, data from one participant supplied information about her home environment and after school activities.

The Interview

An interview is a method of data collection that is described as an interaction involving the interviewer and the interviewee, the purpose of which is to obtain the desired data with maximum efficiency and minimum bias (Marshall, Mitchell, & Wirt, 1989; Tuckman, 1988). Interviews are used by researchers to convert data (the information given directly by a participant) into themes. By providing access to what is "inside a person's head," these

approaches make it possible to measure what a person knows (knowledge or information), what a person likes and dislikes (values and preferences), and what a person thinks (attitudes and beliefs). Tuckman (1988) stated that interviews also could be used to uncover what experiences have taken place and what is occurring in the present. Tuckman also indicated that interviews are a way of getting data directly from people by asking them rather than by observing and sampling their behavior. The materials mainly consisted of (a) interviews conducted with each of the 8 participants, (b) students' essays, and (c) a questionnaire on three factors. The interview was conducted to solicit attitudes and experiential background information related to cultural, linguistic, and educational experiences affecting the participants' academic performance. Interviews with participants were conducted in either Spanish or English. Participants chose Spanish because it was the language they felt more comfortable with. Due to incongruence across language barriers, a 3-point Likert-type scale was used instead of a 5-point scale. This simplified participants' responses for the investigator.

Participants were observed in several learning settings including the classroom, language labs, and computer labs. Analysis of the data was conducted by identifying emergent themes through constant comparison (Gall, Borg, & Gall, 1996). In this process, the themes were identified from and traced through the multiple sources of the data. The occurrences of the themes were then recorded in a master table to evaluate their frequencies and any patterns.

Essays

Participants' essays were used to identify the written language skills and attitudes of the participants. Information was gathered through asking each student to write a brief essay in English or in Spanish describing her life as an immigrant woman in New York. This instrument provided an opportunity for expression to those students who were shy and felt uncomfortable when being interviewed by the investigator and gave additional information to the investigator.

The Questionnaire

Questionnaires are a way of getting data about people by asking them rather than by observing and sampling their behavior (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Tuckman, 1988). Previous information about the participants' language, culture, and family background identified factors that have contributed to the participants' academic performance as Hispanic students in the United States. The questionnaire, given in either English or Spanish, was divided into three parts: (a) linguistic experiences, (b) cultural experiences,

and (c) educational experiences. The English and Spanish versions are found in the Appendix.

The mode of this questionnaire is 11 or 12 unstructured questions. The first section of the questionnaire gathered personal and demographic information about the students such as name, age, place of birth, language used in and outside of the home, and school attended. This part is in both English and Spanish. The second section of the questionnaire collected information with regard to linguistic, cultural, and educational experiences. Participants answered the questionnaire in either Spanish or English. All the instruments in the study were used in the pilot study to determine their feasibility for the main study. Each of the measurement instruments used in the pilot study was centered on the main issues considered in the study: the influence of cultural, linguistic, and educational experiences.

Data Collection Procedures

Data were collected during a period of more than a year and a half and the participants were followed in several learning settings. The researcher collected the second-language learners' speech protocols during designated times, in school and at their homes. The 8 participants' interviews were audiotaped by the teacher-researcher who was present in each session. She used two Radio Shack micro recorders. The recordings yielded three interviews totaling 265 minutes. On average, each session was approximately 30 minutes in length.

The researcher transcribed each dialogue herself, carefully taking time to check and recheck statements made by the participants. Posttranscription conferences were held. In the conferences, the researcher and the participants listened to repeated playbacks of the recordings. The participants recalled and explained what was said and intended, thus helping the investigator to interpret the transcriptions accurately. The transcription involved 3 times as many hours as the time taken to record the interviews. The range of collected data included the following: audiotapes, teacher-researchers' field notes, Likert-type scales, and compositions. The interviews were recorded in the participants' homes and in the classroom (see Appendix for English and Spanish versions).

Analysis of the Data

The researcher monitored data to identify patterns and describe factors that affected participants' English-language acquisition, cultural, linguistic, and educational experiences. In this study, the researcher identified, summarized, and contrasted essays, interviews, and questionnaires. Following careful readings of the transcriptions, the investigator summarized conversation samples. Significance of information was determined contextually by

Table 2
Linguistic Factors Contributing to English Language Acquisition ($N = 8$)

<i>Interview Factor</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Essay Factor</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Questionnaire Factor</i>	<i>F</i>
Going to an English school	14	Going to the doctor	11	Speaking Spanish	8
Looking up the words in the dictionary	13	Speaking to children's teacher	10	Understanding English music well	8
English being the language of the United States	11	Purchasing English cassettes	9	Understanding television programs in English	8
Getting a job in the United States	9	Using English to interpret cookbooks	8		

NOTE: F = frequency of agreement.

Table 3
Cultural Factors Contributing to English Language Acquisition ($N = 8$)

<i>Interview Factor</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Essay Factor</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Questionnaire Factor</i>	<i>F</i>
Adjusting to Anglo-Saxon culture	11	Feeling embarrassed due to not knowing English	21	Watching television programs in English	8
Having American friends	9	Indispensable for survival	16	Watching television programs in Spanish	8
Feeling helpless in Anglo-Saxon culture	8	Being able to find a job I like	8	Shopping in Latin stores	8
Being discriminated against because of accent (Spanish)	8				

NOTE: F = frequency of agreement.

the frequency of occurrence and the relative importance of particular events to the participants. In the process, the researcher read each transcription and identified similar experiences. For example, in the cultural component, when participants were asked to compare education in their home countries to that in the United States, all 8 said that education was *mas fuerte* (harder) in their native countries than in the United States.

A frequency of 8 indicates that all participants mentioned this item as one of the factors that contributed to the acquisition of English. Participants used several learning strategies in their interest to improve proficiency in English. They went to the library with their children to get books related to their school learning; they watched television in English, listened to tapes, imitated the teacher's pronunciation, spoke to Americans, and read newspapers. They also expressed the use of all kinds of gained knowledge when

Table 4Educational Factors Contributing to English Language Acquisition ($N = 8$)

<i>Interview Factor</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Essay Factor</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Questionnaire Factor</i>	<i>F</i>
Being able to help children with homework	11	Reading books	13	Studying English intensively	8
Having a good teacher	10	Translating	10	Studying English to take general equivalency diploma test, computer classes, and so on	8
Adjusting to American culture	9	Getting a job	10	Reading in Spanish	8
Reading children's books	8	Practicing in English	10	Thinking in Spanish	8
Being bilingual	8	Taking U.S. citizenship test	9	Writing in Spanish	8

NOTE: F = frequency of agreement.

they had to go to the hospital or post office, answer the phone, read letters, and fill out job applications. The majority of participants indicated that they did their homework with their children and watched television programs together. They went outside their home environment to listen to other Americans speak, they went shopping in English-speaking stores, and they read books recommended by their instructors.

Participants indicated their belief that learning English would open doors due to the demand for bilingual workers in New York City. They thought that ESL classes would enable them to pursue an associate's degree and that a knowing English would enable them to leave public assistance. Participants felt that the benefits of participation in ESL classes included improving oneself and one's personal effectiveness in U.S. society and being better able to help one's children with their homework and to speak to their teachers. Participants observed that learning English also improves one's employability by being able to get a better job or to enter job training and to function better during everyday uses of the language, such as while shopping and using the telephone. Experiencing the success of knowing that one can learn the language, improving reading and writing skills in English, and being able to help people in one's native country were mentioned as well. All participants showed care about their individual English performance as well as mastery of English language skills. However, according to participants' responses, a key component between the expectation and reality of participants' success centered on the impact of instructor involvement. When instructors were supportive and understanding in times of academic

difficulty, the participants' English performance improved. The sensitivity of the instructor is therefore very relevant.

Respondents indicated that the culture and traditions of their native countries had a profound impact on their study habits. Essays, interviews, and questionnaires revealed that participants spent time with other Hispanic individuals, children, and family members doing their homework, reading English-language literature, and attending arranged personal, financial, and health meetings. Respondents indicated that being with "Americans" helped them understand the American culture and the English language. Reading about things in which they were interested helped them to learn better. Field trips to museums, taking the train, and reading maps gave them the courage to go to the same places again with their spouses and/or children. Examples of visited places included: the Museum of Natural History, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Bronx Zoo, the Museum of the American Indian, the Jewish Museum, the United Nations, the Intrepid, the Brooklyn and Bronx Botanical Gardens, and various ethnic restaurants in Manhattan. Exchanging recipes increased their vocabulary acquisition and gave them the courage to try new recipes taken from magazines. Writing mock application letters and filling out job applications and bank slips helped participants become acquainted with the "world of work."

Participants' experiences with life and decision making were a strong foundation for their learning. At the same time that participants led complex lives, they balanced job and family responsibilities with their educational pursuits. Participants used reading and writing to help them with computer classes, to take driving tests, to pass citizenship tests, and to obtain job-necessary certificates.

Participants expressed feelings of isolation during the first few years of living in New York City. They all lived in south Bronx and were worried about crime, drug addiction, and violence. Participants stated how difficult it was to be a single mother living on public assistance. They also realized that besides English, they needed to acquire computer skills if they wanted to get a job. Most participants mentioned how difficult it was to go to school, work, and care for their children. Participants expressed the idea that lack of program flexibility caused them to drop out.

Some of the "forces" that helped participants improve their literacy were: helping their children with homework, being able to answer the phone, being able to read the mail, understanding the doctor when they went to the hospital, getting a job, understanding other Americans, increasing self-esteem, and being able to speak in two languages. They also drew pictures, memorized words, listened to tapes, sang songs, took pictures to create biographies, and read children's literature.

Some of the deterring factors that impeded participants' learning of English were: being in mixed-level classes, fear of speaking, fear of ridicule,

lack of child care, difficult classes, and programs that did not offer flexible scheduling and thus were too demanding.

Findings

The findings of the study are summarized in conjunction with the following research questions posed in this study.

Research Question 1: Why do some Latina females within the same socioeconomic levels, years spent in the United States, and similar levels of English proficiency perform better than other Latina students?

Some Latina females perform better than others because of their positive attitudes toward learning. Research supports the fact that attitude plays a major role in second-language acquisition (Carrasquillo & Rodriguez, 1996; Marin & Gamba, 1996). Participants reported more effort toward the goal of acquiring English-language proficiency. The majority of the participants affirmed the importance of education with emotional support and positive encouragement from the ESL program. Participants' responses provided additional information. One participant said, "I had to adjust to American culture because no matter where you go, English is indispensable."

Research Question 2: How does the linguistic environment influence Latina participants' English performance?

Each participant in this case was born into a Spanish-language society (Honduras, México, Guatemala, Puerto Rico, and the Dominican Republic) and was reared in this environment for the first two decades of her life. Each of the participants had never had any formal English-language instruction before coming to the United States. Each participant had grown up in a Spanish-language society. The purpose of attending an ESL program was to acquire the English language. The English-language environment became a crucial element toward the academic success of these Hispanic students, and being in an ESL classroom influenced their linguistic, cultural, and educational experiences toward the United States and toward learning. One participant said, "For example, I don't speak my language when I go to Manhattan. I speak Spanish with my sister in The Bronx only."

Research Question 3: How does Hispanic culture affect participants' English performance?

Respondents indicated that the culture and traditions of their native countries had a profound impact on their study habits. Essays, interviews, and

questionnaires revealed that participants spent time with other Latinos, children, and family members doing their homework and reading English-language literature with other personal challenges. One participant said, "I went to school because I did not want my children to say 'Mommy doesn't understand what I tell her.' That's why I became interested in learning English."

Research Question 4: How do educational factors influence Hispanic participants' English performance?

Every participant cared about English performance as well as mastery of English-language skills. However, according to participants' responses, a key component between the expectation and reality of participants' success centered on the impact of program involvement; having their teachers' understanding in times of academic difficulty was especially important to the participants' English performance improvement. One participant said, "It's through education that we can develop and offer our children a better future. If parents study and are educated, we'll have children like that [educated]."

Research Question 5: Does the concept of language learning strategy reflect real actions that women believe they take to learn English as a second language?

Participants' real actions to learn English included going to the library with their children to get books related to their school learning; they watched television in English, listened to tapes, and imitated the teachers' pronunciation. They spoke to Americans, read newspapers, and used all kinds of gained experience and knowledge when they had to go to the hospital or post office, answer the phone, read letters, and fill out job applications. One participant said, "My teacher says 'Yeah, right' all the time; now I use that expression a lot." Another participant said, "I use English in the hospital to make appointments and with the doctors. I also use it with my daughter's teachers."

Research Question 6: What special contributions can participants make to the understanding of social and effective learning strategies?

Respondents indicated that being with "Americans" helped them to understand the culture and the language, and reading about things in which they were interested helped them to learn better. Field trips to museums, taking the trains, and reading maps gave them the courage to go to the same places again with their spouses and/or children. One participant said, "If I go to a place and they don't understand my English, that will motivate me to learn more."

Research Question 7: In participants' expressions of personal experiences, what beliefs are indicated about what it means to be an adult immigrant in New York?

Participants expressed feelings of isolation during the first few years of living in New York. They all lived in the South Bronx and they were worried about crime, drug addiction, and violence. They stated how difficult it was to be a single mother living on public assistance. They also realized that besides English, they needed to acquire other educational skills to survive and succeed in New York City. One participant said, "In the field of cosmetology, there aren't many people that know how to speak Spanish. I was forced to learn it since African Americans don't speak any Spanish at all."

Research Question 8: Do low-literate adults use reading or writing skills to complement other learning, either about human relations or about technical skills?

Although not all participants were completely literate in their own language, all participants expressed that life experiences and decision making are strong foundations for their learning. Participants used reading and writing to help them with their daily life activities and learning challenges. One participant said, "Another way I use English is to watch TV in English using caption, and I would copy the strange words and look them up in the dictionary." Another participant said, "I try to do crossword puzzles that I find in English newspapers; that way I learn new words."

Research Question 9: How do participants set about improving literacy skills and what strategies do they use?

The majority of participants indicated that to improve their literacy skills, they do their homework with their children and they watch television programs with their children. They go to Manhattan and listen to English-proficient speakers, they go shopping in American stores, and they read books recommended by their instructors. One participant said, "If I pay attention and study, I can read and write better. I get excited when I see that I am learning something. For example, I took the government test that had 60 questions and I was very satisfied with my score of 95."

Research Question 10: How were the participants motivated to improve and what factors would deter them?

Some of the forces that helped participants improve literacy were: helping their children with their homework and being able to answer the phone, read the mail, and speak with English-speaking professionals. Participants listed

the following strategies adopted to assist them in improving their literacy: drawing pictures, memorizing words, listening to tapes, singing songs, taking pictures to create biographies, and reading children's literature. Some of the forces that deterred literacy improvement were: being in mixed-level classes, fear of speaking, fear of ridicule, lack of child care, difficult classes, and programs that were too demanding because they did not offer flexibility in scheduling. One participant said, "I look up the definitions of the words that I hear daily and that I do not understand and little by little I familiarize myself with some of those words."

Research Question 11: How would literacy fit in with other learning motivations?

Learning English would open doors due to the demand for bilingual workers in New York City, and ESL classes would enable them to aspire to a higher educational degree and would also enable them to leave public assistance. Participants felt that the benefits of participation in ESL classes included improving oneself and one's personal effectiveness in U.S. society, being better able to help one's children with their homework and to speak to their teachers, and improving one's employability by being able to get a better job or to enter job training. One participant said, "My children are American and English is the language that I use to help them with their homework, especially my son who is having problems with math. English is backwards, like in the case of House White [White House], I have to say it backwards."

The above findings confirm the findings of previous studies, which consistently find a significant relationship between cultural, linguistic, and educational factors (Carrasquillo & Rodriguez, 1996; Fowler-Frey, 1996; Ogbu, 1994; Weinstein-Shr, 1993). In this study, language, environment, and cultural and educational factors appeared to be predictors of adjustments. Factors of language, culture, and education have affected the development of attitudes toward adjustments.

Implications

There are implications that arise from this study. Adult Hispanic women who lack English-language proficiency expressed difficulties in their linguistic, cultural, and educational experiences living in the United States. They experience challenges in their role of raising children, a lack of understanding of English, and a desire to be successful individuals. Moving to the United States changed the lives of these participants. Relationships with kin and community were disrupted, as were culturally valued ways of connecting themselves to family life in a new country.

Immigrant families with a non-English language background living under low socioeconomic levels have cultural-linguistic literacy needs as well as daily living needs. We need to explore ways in which programs providing

adult ESL literacy training can be made more sensitive and accessible to immigrant families. Programs must acknowledge the existing cultural-linguistic capital possessed by adult Hispanic women while at the same time assisting families in acquiring new cultural, linguistic, and educational knowledge; more emphasis should be placed on pursuing community-based literacy programs serving immigrant families that are dedicated to their children and their personal educational growth (Da Vanzo, Hawes-Dawson, Valdez, & Vernez, 1994; Fingeret & Danin, 1991).

The essential variable in the participants' success was the impact of the immediate family. Essays, questionnaires, and observations all reiterated that the family environment, particularly that of the child/mother relationship, was the pivotal element determining academic success or failure. Research studies (Duran & Szymanski, 1995; Floriani, 1994; Wrigley & Guth, 1992) assert that children's motivation to succeed in school is influenced by the educational achievement of their mothers. Parental involvement in their children's schools influences student achievement, attendance, motivation, self-esteem, and behavior. Parents who read to their children have books in their homes; and parents who exhibit high achievement goals for their children tend to have higher achieving children when compared to parents who do not.

The community of Hispanic cultural norms, sustained and infused with American values, and coupled with academic involvement proved to be the critical features for academic success among the group. What the findings make clear is that understanding the broader literacy needs of families requires not only isolated assessments of basic reading and writing skills in English or in Spanish, but also attention to the cultural and social knowledge needs of families. Furthermore, poverty, cultural discontinuity, and cultural conflict were found to play important roles in the adaptive strategies shown by families.

The participants expressed that the role of the instructor was crucial in helping students to succeed academically. Teachers must create an environment that fosters self-esteem and an interest in learning. Teaching methods should be stimulating, supportive, and meaningful for adult students, but individual effort should be equally stressed as a crucial element toward academic success. It is essential that teachers get involved in their students' learning by providing appropriate books and learning materials, checking homework, answering questions, and providing a supportive emotional environment. Teachers should build on the experiences and languages of the learners, inviting them to discuss their experiences and providing activities that will allow them to generate language that they have already developed. Learners should be seen as resources. Teachers should ask them to share their knowledge and expertise with others in the class.

Students should be encouraged in times of academic difficulty. When teachers are supportive and nurturing, the threshold of student motivation

may be sufficiently raised to endure the task at hand. During the course of several of these episodes of academic difficulty, a pattern of motivation may carry the student throughout his or her lifetime of learning.

Conclusions

Class discussions of cultural and personal differences in learning style and interaction patterns may help overcome initial resistance. The fundamental duty of an educator of adult ESL is to facilitate the development of communication skills in English, either in a classroom setting or in a one-on-one tutoring structure. Educators must also include substantive content beyond language instruction, such as employment skills, survival skills, cultural information, American history, and citizenship facts. Educators must also take into consideration the implications of the learners' cultural differences and cultural adjustment processes. Viewed in a narrow sense, literacy is the ability to comprehend and produce natural language in its written form. A broader definition of literacy encompasses notions of literacy tied to the ability to use both written and spoken language, to accomplish specific problem-solving and communicative goals arising in the workplace, or in conducting transactions within everyday institutions of the community (Venezky, Wagner, & Ciliberti, 1990). A broader definition of literacy refers to the general ability of individuals to interpret and act on the world within cultural and social communities of practice (Wertsch, 1991). This broader definition proposes that there is a fundamental connection between language, communication, and everyday cultural activity. To participate in such everyday activities, individuals must interpret the cultural and social demands and contexts of activities and the means of using language to participate effectively in cultural and social activities. Ethnographic studies of the survival needs of immigrant families suggest that public and private institutions can be ill equipped to assist immigrants with vital literacy needs pertaining to health care, social services, banking and commercial exchanges, schooling of children, and other issues. To help immigrant non-English background families develop literacy, we must explore how language, culture, and society are intertwined.

This study identified linguistic, cultural, and educational experiences of adult Hispanic ESL students in New York City. Tangential to this research is the development of strategies for English language instruction designed to meet specific needs of Hispanic-language ESL learners. One of those variables should be the role of ESL programs in maintaining the level of interest and motivation in this population.

Every adult ESL class is multilevel; learners begin with varying degrees of competencies and educational backgrounds. They also show different rates in each of the language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing (Wrigley & Guth, 1992). However, in many adult ESL classes, there are

even more variables that affect the levels within the class. Some programs (generally because of funding constraints, learner scheduling difficulties, number of learners, and program logistics) place learners of all levels, from beginning to advanced, in a single class. Additionally, learners have varying degrees of literacy in their first languages as well as in English (Carrasquillo & Rodriguez, 1996; Kramsch, 2000; Leki, 2000; Wrigley & Guth, 1992). It is recommended that future descriptive studies should give more attention to other factors that add diversity in the classroom and rate progress in learning English, such as type and amount of learners' previous education, learning-style preferences, learner expectations of appropriate classroom activities, and culture of each learner. Descriptive studies should also be carried out with other successful students in other geographic locations to determine if similar findings will result.

Attrition often begins at enrollment. Intake that is slow, cumbersome, and impersonal, and that may include an intimidating test, can discourage learners before they begin. All staff at the learning site (testers, office personnel, and teachers) need to facilitate smooth and speedy enrollment, underscore learners' abilities, and show them what the program can do for them. Bilingual intake can assess learners' wants and needs accurately, uncover impediments to attendance (e.g., transportation or child care), and make registrants comfortable and ready to return to the learning site for classes.

Finally, research should examine ways in which electronic technologies can improve the literacy of immigrant families and family members. The emergence of simple-to-use "point and click" computer capabilities has created new forms of cultural-linguistic and educational capital that are potential tools for promoting literacy acquisition among non-English background immigrants. Children of immigrant families are being given access to computers at school, and some of the computer software is available both in English and Spanish versions. Adult ESL learners should be able to take advantage of technology in learning and teaching.

Appendix

I. Essays (English and Spanish)

Essay Number 1: Cultural Factors Affecting Your Life.

Describe your life as an immigrant woman in New York City. You may want to include the types of experiences you had (either positive or negative).

What would you want to say about Latina women learning ESL?

Ensayo Número 1: Factores Culturales Que Afectan Su Vida.

Describe su vida como una Latina inmigrante en Nueva York. Si desea, puede incluir diferentes tipos de experiencias que ha tenido (ya sean positivas o negativas.) En general: ¿Qué le gustaría decir acerca de las mujeres Latinas que están viviendo en Nueva York?

Essay Number 2: Linguistic Factors That Affect Your Life.

Describe what learning English has been like. What interest did you have in learning the language?

Ensayo Número 2: Factores Lingüísticos Que Afectan Su Vida.

Describa como ha sido para usted el aprendizaje del idioma Inglés. ¿Qué interés tuvo en aprender este idioma?

Essay Number 3: Educational Factors Affecting Your Life.

Describe how knowledge of English has helped you from an educational perspective. What intellectual changes did you notice during the learning of English?

Ensayo Número 3: Factores Educativas Que Afectan Su Vida.

Describa como el conocimiento del Inglés la ha ayudado desde la perspectiva educativa. ¿Qué cambios intelectuales ha notado usted durante el aprendizaje del Inglés?

II. Interview (English Version)

Strategies used by women who are studying English as a second language

Date

Location

Length of interview

Personal information:

Name

Age

Place of birth

Current place of residence

Language used in the home

Language used outside the home

Educational background:

Elementary school

High school

College

Other

School attended

Ethnic background

Level of English proficiency (as assessed by the New York State Placement Test)

Number of years in the United States

Occupational background

Educational Factors

1. Do you think education is important?
2. Why do you need to learn English?
3. What is your main goal in learning English?
4. Describe the needs you have to learn English.
5. What specific things did you do to help yourself learn English?

6. In what activities did you participate that helped you understand and use spoken English better?
7. What specific things did you do to help you read or write English better?
8. What specific things did you do under the direction of teachers or tutors to help you learn English?
9. Over the years, what were your own most effective methods or ways for learning English?
10. Over the years, have your methods of learning English changed?
11. What influence did your individual personality have on what you have done to learn English?

Linguistic Factors

1. Which language do you speak at home?
2. When do you speak Spanish?
3. When do you speak English?
4. Do you think in English, or do you translate your ideas from Spanish into English?
5. What are the advantages of speaking English?
6. What are the advantages of speaking Spanish?
7. What has the process of learning English been like overall?
8. What specific things did you do alone or in groups to help you learn reading in English?
9. What specific things did you do alone or in groups to help you learn writing in English?
10. What specific things did you do alone or in groups to help you learn listening in English?
11. What specific things did you do with native speakers to help you learn English?
12. Who were the people you felt at ease with when trying to learn English?

Cultural Factors

1. Do you consider yourself more American, more Hispanic, or equally American and Hispanic?
2. How do you relate to the American culture?
3. Tell me about your American friends.
4. Tell me about your Hispanic friends.
5. Do you find differences between the schools in the United States and those in the country you came from?
6. What personal changes did you note during the learning of English (physical, emotional, psychological, intellectual, or social)?
7. What are your feelings about these changes?
8. What specific things did you do to help you function socially in an English-speaking country?
9. Do you practice English with friends, family or other students?
10. Is there any influence of culture or your native culture on what you have done to learn English?

11. Is there any influence of your national background on what you have done to learn English?
12. What influence did your individual personality have on what you have done to learn English?

II. Interview (Spanish Version)

Estrategias que utilizan las mujeres que están estudiando Inglés como segundo idioma.

Fecha
 Ubicación
 Duración de la entrevista
 Datos Personales:
 Nombre
 Edad
 Lugar de Nacimiento
 Lugar de Residencia Actual
 Idioma Utilizado en la Casa
 Idioma Utilizado fuera de la Casa
 Educación:
 Educación Primaria
 Educación Secundaria
 Facultad o Universidad
 Otro
 Escuela Asistida
 Grupo Étnico al Cual Pertenece
 Nivel de Fluidez en Inglés (de acuerdo al examen de ingreso NYS)
 Cantidad de Años de Vivir En Los EEUU
 Ocupación

Factores Educativos

1. ¿Considera usted que la educación es importante?
2. ¿Porqué necesita aprender Inglés?
3. ¿Cuál es su meta en aprender el Inglés?
4. Describa su necesidad de aprender Inglés.
5. ¿Qué cosas específicas ha hecho que la hayan ayudado a aprender el Inglés?
6. ¿En que actividades ha participado que la hayan ayudado a comprender mejor y usar el Inglés oral (hablado)?
7. ¿Qué cosas específicas ha hecho que la ayudaron a leer o escribir mejor el Inglés?
8. ¿Qué cosas específicas ha hecho bajo la dirección de maestros o tutores que la han ayudado a aprender el Inglés?
9. Con el pasar de los años: ¿cuáles fueron sus métodos más efectivos para aprender el Inglés?
10. Con el pasar de los años: ¿han cambiado sus métodos de aprender Inglés?

11. ¿Qué influencia ha tenido su personalidad individual en lo que ha hecho para aprender el Inglés?

Factores Lingüísticos

1. ¿Qué idioma habla en su casa?
2. ¿Cuándo habla Español?
3. ¿Cuándo habla Inglés?
4. ¿Piensa usted en Inglés o traduce sus ideas del Español al Inglés?
5. ¿Cuáles son las ventajas de poder hablar en Inglés?
6. ¿Cuáles son las ventajas de poder hablar en Español?
7. ¿En general, cómo ha sido su proceso de aprendizaje del Inglés?
8. ¿Qué cosas específicas ha hecho sola o en grupos que la han ayudado a aprender a leer en Inglés?
9. ¿Qué cosas específicas ha hecho sola o en grupos que la han ayudado a aprender a escribir en Inglés?
10. ¿Qué cosas ha hecho sola o en grupos que la han ayudado a aprender a escuchar en Inglés?
11. ¿Qué cosas específicas ha hecho con los nativos de habla inglesa que la han ayudado a aprender el Inglés?
12. ¿Quiénes fueron las personas con las cuales usted se sentía cómoda mientras estaba tratando de aprender el Inglés?

Factores Culturales

1. ¿Cómo se identifica: más Estadounidense / Americana, más Hispana, o igualmente Estadounidense / Americana e Hispana?
2. ¿Cómo se ve usted en la cultura Estadounidense?
3. Cuénteme acerca de sus amistades Estadounidenses.
4. Cuénteme acerca de sus amistades Hispanas.
5. ¿Encuentra usted diferencias entre las escuelas de Estados Unidos y las del país de donde usted proviene?
6. ¿Qué cambios personales ha notado durante el aprendizaje del idioma Inglés (físicos, emocionales, psicológicos, intelectuales o sociales)?
7. ¿Cómo se siente con respecto a estos cambios?
8. ¿Qué cosas específicas ha hecho que la han ayudado a funcionar socialmente en un país de habla Inglésa?
9. ¿Practica usted el Inglés con amistades, familiares u otros estudiantes?
10. ¿Hay alguna influencia de cultura o de su cultura nativa que la ha hecho aprender el Inglés?
11. ¿Hay alguna influencia de su nacionalidad en lo que ha hecho para aprender el Inglés?
12. ¿Qué influencia ha tenido su personalidad individual que la ha hecho aprender el Inglés?

III. Questionnaire: Adult Females Studying English as a Second Language (English Version)

Please mark the following items by circling the numbers that most accurately reflect your feelings about the following statements. The numbers correspond to the following scale:

<i>Agree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>I don't know</i>
<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>

Part I: Perceptions on Cultural Factors

1. I often speak English with my friends.	1	2	3
2. I often speak Spanish with my friends.	1	2	3
3. I study English because I am interested in learning about American culture.	1	2	3
4. I often watch television programs in English.	1	2	3
5. I often watch television programs in Spanish.	1	2	3
6. I often listen to music in English.	1	2	3
7. I often listen to music in Spanish.	1	2	3
8. I often listen to radio programs in Spanish.	1	2	3
9. I often listen to radio programs in English.	1	2	3
10. I shop in Spanish stores.	1	2	3

Part II: Perceptions on Linguistic Factors

1. I often speak English.	1	2	3
2. I often speak Spanish.	1	2	3
3. I understand music in Spanish very well.	1	2	3
4. I understand music in English very well.	1	2	3
5. I read English very well.	1	2	3
6. I speak English very well.	1	2	3
7. I speak Spanish very well.	1	2	3
8. I can understand television programs in English very well.	1	2	3
9. I can understand television programs in Spanish very well.	1	2	3

Part III: Perceptions on Educational Factors

1. I think in English.	1	2	3
2. I think in Spanish.	1	2	3
3. I write in English very well.	1	2	3
4. I write in Spanish very well.	1	2	3
5. I understand radio programs in English very well.	1	2	3

(continued)

Appendix (continued)

	<i>Agree</i> 1	<i>Disagree</i> 2	<i>I don't know</i> 3
6. I understand radio programs in Spanish very well.	1	2	3
7. I study English because I am interested in my own personal achievement.	1	2	3
8. I study English because I want to get a better job.	1	2	3
9. I read and understand Spanish well.	1	2	3
10. I read and understand English well.	1	2	3
Please share any other comment/anecdotes about your experience learning English as an adult.			
Thank you!			

NOTE: G. Marin and R. J. Gamba (1996) contributed to the design of this instrument.

III. Cuestionario: Mujeres Adultas Estudiando Inglés Como Segundo Idioma (Spanish Version)

Por favor marque las siguientes oraciones con un círculo alrededor del número que refleja sus sentimientos acerca de cada una de ellas. Los números corresponden a la siguiente escala:

<i>Estoy de Acuerdo</i> 1	<i>No Estoy de Acuerdo</i> 2	<i>No sé</i> 3
----------------------------------	-------------------------------------	-------------------

Primera Parte: Percepciones de Factores Culturales

1. A menudo, hablo Inglés con mis amigos.	1	2	3
2. A menudo, hablo Español con mis amigos.	1	2	3
3. Estudio Inglés porque estoy interesada en aprender la cultura estadounidense.	1	2	3
4. A menudo, veo programas de televisión en Inglés.	1	2	3
5. A menudo, veo programas de televisión en Español.	1	2	3
6. A menudo, escucho música en Inglés.	1	2	3
7. A menudo, escucho música en Español.	1	2	3
8. A menudo, escucho programas de radio en Español.	1	2	3
9. A menudo, escucho programas de radio en Inglés.	1	2	3
10. Hago mis compras en tiendas Latinas.	1	2	3

Segunda Parte: Percepciones de Factores Lingüísticos

1. A menudo, hablo Inglés.	1	2	3
2. A menudo, hablo Español.	1	2	3

(continued)

Appendix (continued)

	<i>Estoy de Acuerdo</i> 1	<i>No Estoy de Acuerdo</i> 2	<i>No sé</i> 3
3. Entiendo muy bien la música en Español.	1	2	3
4. Entiendo muy bien la música en Inglés.	1	2	3
5. Leo muy bien en Inglés.	1	2	3
6. Hablo muy bien el Inglés.	1	2	3
7. Hablo muy bien el Español.	1	2	3
8. Entiendo muy bien los programas de televisión en Inglés.	1	2	3
9. Entiendo muy bien los programas de televisión en Español.	1	2	3

Tercera Parte: Percepciones de Factores Educativos

1. Pienso en Inglés.	1	2	3
2. Pienso en Español.	1	2	3
3. Escribo muy bien en Inglés.	1	2	3
4. Escribo muy bien el Español.	1	2	3
5. Entiendo muy bien los programas de radio en Inglés.	1	2	3
6. Entiendo muy bien los programas de radio en Español.	1	2	3
7. Estudio Inglés porque estoy interesada en mis logros personales.	1	2	3
8. Estudio Inglés porque quiero obtener un trabajo mejor.	1	2	3
9. Leo y entiendo muy bien el Español.	1	2	3
10. Leo y entiendo muy bien el Inglés.	1	2	3

Por favor, comparta algún otro comentario / anécdota acerca de su experiencia en el aprendizaje de Inglés como segundo idioma.

¡Muchas Gracias!

Consent Form (English)***Research Project on Women Learning English***

My signature on this form indicates that I understand the focus and method of this research project on women learning English as a second language. I also understand my rights as a participant and agree to take part under these conditions:

I will allow the interview to be tape recorded so that my words are not misunderstood or changed. However, I can ask that the tape recorder be turned off at any time.

I understand that all tapes will be erased or destroyed after the data have been acquired.

I can choose not to answer any question that makes me uncomfortable.

I can ask the researcher questions and receive answers at any time during the interview.

I can withdraw from this research project at any time during the interview or afterward, without prejudice or obligation.

I understand that my confidentiality will be maintained by disguising my name and other identifying data. If I wish, I may even suggest a pseudonym.

I can ask for and review a written summary and/or transcript of the interview.

I understand that information derived from the interview will be used in the researcher's PSC CUNY Grant and perhaps in subsequent reports, some of which may be published. However, my name and other identifying data will not be revealed without my written consent.

I may contact the researcher after the interview has been completed to discuss any matter that pertains to this project when it has been completed.

I can ask for a copy of the findings of this research project when it has been completed.

Participant Signature
Researcher (L.B.)

Date
Date

Consent Form (Spanish Version)

Proyecto de investigación sobre mujeres que están aprendiendo Inglés

Mi firma en este formulario indica que yo comprendo el enfoque y los métodos de este proyecto de investigación sobre las mujeres que están aprendiendo Inglés como segundo idioma. También comprendo mis derechos como participante y acepto formar parte del estudio bajo las siguientes condiciones:

Voy a permitir que la entrevista sea grabada para que mis palabras no sean mal interpretadas o cambiadas. A su vez, puedo pedir que el grabador se apague en cualquier momento.

Comprendo que todas las cintas serán borradas o destruidas después que se hayan adquirido los datos.

Tengo el derecho de no contestar ninguna pregunta que me haga sentir incómoda. Le puedo hacer preguntas al investigador y recibir respuestas en cualquier momento durante la entrevista.

Puedo retirarme del estudio en cualquier momento durante la entrevista o después, sin prejuicios u obligaciones.

Comprendo que la confidencialidad se mantendrá al cambiar mi nombre y otros datos que me puedan identificar. Si deseo, puedo sugerir el uso de otro nombre.

Puedo pedir y revisar un resumen escrito y / o una transcripción de la entrevista.

Comprendo que la información derivada de la entrevista será utilizada para el proyecto de PSC CUNY de la investigadora y quizás en informes subsecuentes,

algunos de los cuales podrán ser publicados. Sin embargo, mi nombre y otros datos que me identifiquen no serán revelados sin mi consentimiento por escrito.

Puedo contactar a la investigadora después de que la entrevista haya culminado para discutir cualquier asunto relevante a este proyecto de investigación al tema general de mujeres que están aprendiendo Inglés.

Puedo pedir una copia de los resultados de este estudio una vez que se haya completado.

Firma del participante

Fecha

Firma de la investigadora (L.B.)

Fecha

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