Rejecting Third Spaces: How First Generation Immigrants Acquire Language to Perform, Not to Identify

Jone Laura Brunelle

University of Colorado Boulder, jlbrunelle@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholar.colorado.edu/comm_gradetds

Part of the Critical and Cultural Studies Commons, and the International and Intercultural Communication Commons

Recommended Citation

Brunelle, Jone Laura, "Rejecting Third Spaces: How First Generation Immigrants Acquire Language to Perform, Not to Identify" (2014). Communication Graduate Theses & Dissertations. 44.
https://scholar.colorado.edu/comm_gradetds/44

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by Communication at CU Scholar. It has been accepted for inclusion in Communication Graduate Theses & Dissertations by an authorized administrator of CU Scholar. For more information, please contact cuscholaradmin@colorado.edu.
Rejecting Third Spaces: How first generation immigrants acquire language to perform, not to identify

Jone L. Brunelle
B.A., James Madison University, 2010

A thesis submitted to the
Faculty of the Graduate School of the
University of Colorado in partial fulfillment
of the requirement for the degree of
Master of Arts
Department of Communication
2014
This thesis entitled:
Rejecting Third Spaces: How first generation immigrants acquire language to perform, not to identify
written by Jone L. Brunelle
has been approved for the Department of Communication

________________________________________
David Boromisza-Habashi

________________________________________
Karen Tracy

________________________________________
Lisa Flores

Date________________

The final copy of this thesis has been examined by the signatories, and we find that both the content and the form meet acceptable presentation standards of scholarly work in the above mentioned discipline.

IRB protocol # 12-0642
Rejecting Third Spaces: How first generation immigrants acquire language to perform, not to identify

Thesis directed by Assistant Professor David Boromisza-Habashi

The purpose of this M.A. thesis study is to examine the way in which first generation Spanish-speaking immigrants conceptualize the link between culture, language, and identity, and how they reject third space identity when describing their experiences with acquiring and speaking English and Spanish in the U.S. By conducting a thematic analysis of field notes from adult ESL classrooms and transcribed interviews with ESL students and coordinators, I reveal the tension between the desire to perform a U.S. American identity and the reluctance to embrace or internalize that identity. I propose that first generation immigrants who are actively assimilating talk about culture as mentality, and specifically, reference U.S. mentalities as contradictory to their own. I also posit that individuals make sense of this tension by referring to a split between enacting and claiming an identity, specifically by distinguishing between residing and belonging and public and private languages. Ultimately, immigrants who choose to reject third space identity still face a lived reality in which their foreign status is highlighted in all contexts.

Keywords: third space, hybridity, identity, language acquisition, first-generation immigrants, multilingualism, thematic analysis
CONTENTS

CHAPTER

I. INTRODUCTION .................................................................................................................. 1
   Significance and contribution
   Theoretical Background
   Conceptualizing Identity
   Third Space/Hybrid Identities
   Language “Loss,” Shift, and Acquisition
   Studying First Generation Immigrants

II. METHOD ........................................................................................................................... 24
   Challenges
   Participants and Scene
   Data Collection
   Data Analysis
   Role of the Researcher

III. ANALYSIS ....................................................................................................................... 41
   Conceptualizations of Culture, Language, and Identity
   Cultural “Doing” vs. Cultural “Being”
   Residing vs. Belonging
   English As Public vs. Spanish As Private

IV. DISCUSSION ..................................................................................................................... 78
   Rejecting Third Space
   Identity, Culture, and Language
   The Nature of Third Space and Agency
   Limitations
   Remarks on Further Research

V. REFERENCES .................................................................................................................... 95

VI. APPENDICES .................................................................................................................. 101
   Appendix I: Interview Protocol
   Appendix II: Participants by name, country of origin, and role
Chapter I
INTRODUCTION
Significance and Contribution

According to the 2010 Census Bureau the Hispanic or Latino population in the United States at that time was of 50.5 million. This is in sharp contrast with the data from the previous 2000 Census, where this community’s population was listed at a little over 35 million, which reflects the significant population increase in only a decade. Despite the fact that Spanish-speaking immigrants to the U.S. come from a variety of countries with differing histories, they are still categorized in ways that group them all together, either as Hispanic, Chicano/a, or Latino/a; perhaps this is related to the fact that many of them have a common language (Tammelleo, 2011). The term Hispanic is generally preferred by individuals who embrace U.S. assimilation while Latino/a is used by individuals who are attempting to preserve traditional culture (Orbe & Drummond, 2009). This is an example of how culture and language play an important role in our identity sense-making and group membership, and that language has implications for a particular culture, history, and tradition. When identities are juxtaposed within the diversifying culture of the United States, power differences between dominant and minority identities also become apparent, such as stigmatized Hispanic identities—which are closely associated with the Spanish language--versus idealized American ones and the English language (Norton, 1997).

It is safe to assume that a good number of Hispanic immigrants to the U.S. wish to achieve some degree of cultural assimilation. As part of the assimilation process, these individuals may take steps toward learning the English language, not only for survival but because fluency in a language is a key step in legitimacy and acceptance to a culture; it could be
considered a gateway to an “American” identity, or at least as a way to mark belonging. Even if fluency in English is not enough for full acceptance, lack of fluency is certainly a marker of foreignness. When young immigrants are enrolled in schools, they are automatically placed in English as a Second Language (ESL) classes; however, adults must take it upon themselves to learn English. Wenger (as cited in Gao, 2011) notes that learning is not just the acquisition of knowledge or skills, but a process in which an individual becomes a person; that is, it is a process of becoming who you are, an identity experience that transforms the individual. By looking at adult Spanish-speaking immigrants involved with ESL programs, we can uncover what it means for an individual to acquire a second language and the implications it has on identity. If the use of language links to specific identities, then immigrant Spanish-speakers must preserve the Spanish language in addition to English in order to maintain all desired identities and fit socially constructed categories. The act of selecting between languages and balancing their use is a response commonly associated with different and widely recognized identity categories. This process has interesting implications in the study of third space or hybrid identities, that is, in-between identities. Multilingualism is becoming increasingly common and valued in the United States, and its implications on the concept of belonging to specific identity categories present a useful area for exploration. There is a great deal of literature in Linguistics and Education that informs us about language learning and language use in an educational setting (Gutiérrez, Baquedano-López, & Tejada, 1999). However, studies of language and identity with a Communication perspective, one that connects language in use with identity negotiation in everyday life beyond the classroom, can provide important insights to a current and relevant social issue.
The role of language in identity formation cannot be taken for granted, as many scholars have pointed out that language and identity are inextricably linked (Lane, 2009, 2010; Rothman & Rell, 2005). Peirce (1995) claims that individuals negotiate their sense of self through language “across different sites at different points in time” (p. 13). It is worth exploring this concept from a Communication perspective to find out how multi-lingual individuals negotiate these multiple identities through their choice of language, not just to elucidate the strength of the connection between language and identity and the role of language in third space identities, but also to uncover the agency that individuals, such as the immigrant population, have in challenging, bolstering, or reshaping this space. If identity is enacted in accordance to group membership, a specific social language, and a specific context (Gee, 1996), then it is important to gain a sense of the state of identity when membership and language are in flux across contexts. It is likely that individuals maintain and shift between identities by shifting languages in various contexts. The aim of this study is to explicate how immigrants make sense of language acquisition, maintenance, and management and the implications of these processes for the identity forming process; it should also highlight the importance of considering contexts for specific language use when examining third space identity negotiation.

**Conceptualizing Identity**

Identity is a central topic of study in numerous fields, including but not limited to Communication, Education, Linguistics, and Anthropology, and not surprisingly, it is conceptualized differently within different schools of thought. Since this study looks at transition between multiple identities, it is crucial to begin with the common assumption of many academic discussions on identity: that they are multiple, fluid, and changing rather than fixed and stable
(Lane, 2009; 2010; Nair-Venugopal, 2009; Gao, 2011). Since this study is also placing great importance on identities across multiple contexts in daily life, I posit that identities shift from space to space (Nair-Venugopal, 2009; Tracy & Robles, 2013). The notion of multiple shifting identities challenges common ways of conceptualizing identity in the U.S. outside of a scholarly context, as is apparent through frequent statements such as “finding oneself” and “being who you really are.” These discourses begin to reveal the cultural notion that a person has one authentic self, made of a mix of biological factors like sex, race, and ethnicity, as well as psychological traits and sociocultural positioning (Carbaugh, 1996). Carbaugh (1996) points out that these characterizations presume that identity exists within the individual rather than in social interactions, positioning identity as something an individual “has” or owns. Americans place great emphasis on biological features such as race and ethnicity, which may be called master identities (Tracy & Robles, 2013) and are often thought of as relatively fixed and stable. This view of identities does not lend itself to instances in which individuals can easily claim multiple races and ethnicities. This challenge begs scholarly attention to the ways in which people negotiate and make sense of multiple racial and ethnic identities when they exist in societies that still conceptualize identities as fixed and stable.

Looking at identity from a Communication perspective, it is in fact instances of interaction and performance that provide evidence of sense-making about the “self” or selves. If we consider that identities are also things people “do,” we can look to ways that individuals perform or display the identities that they believe they have or want to have (Carbaugh, 1996, p. 23). We can also pay attention to how others affirm or deny the legitimacy of these performed identities. Nationality and ethnicity can act as boundaries for individual identities, and studying language as interactional discourse shows that boundaries such as these are communicatively
produced (Gumperz & Cook-Gumperz, 1982, p. 1). The language a person speaks can be seen as a marker of their identity, but also as a deliberate performance of belonging to a specific group or ethnic/national category. Some scholars argue that language is identity (Rothman & Rell, 2005). This suggests that developing a language is related to developing a self. Philipsen’s (1975) case study of Teamsterville demonstrated that there were particular ways of speaking that legitimized an individual as part of the in-group, and his alternative way of speaking not only marked him distinctly as an outsider, but elicited certain notions about his character. One could draw comparisons with the “foreign” ways immigrants speak in the United States, that is, the use of a language other than English, the presence of an accent when speaking English, and phraseology. These different ways of speaking often inspire stereotypes about the group and individual character, defining people as “other,” or “not native:”—essentially, considering individuals as non-members. Widely held language ideologies that favor the English language and associate Spanish with negative connotations, such as illegality or incompetence, will certainly influence immigrant language goals and their interactions in public spaces when in the United States. A lack of English – or “good” English – could prevent an immigrant from being legitimized by others as an American even though they may have lived in the U.S. for quite some time and do feel that they have a partial American identity or that are “from here.” This situation of being in between is characterized in literature as a liminal identity, also called third space or hybrid identity (Young, 2009; Yep, 1998; Meredith, 1998; Rutherford, 1990).

Several scholars have found it useful to distinguish between national identity and ethnic and cultural identity (Ting-Toomey, 2005; Joseph, 2004; Gao, 2011; Kim, 2007). Cultural identity involves the “emotional significance we attach to our sense of belonging or affiliation with the larger culture,” and ethnic identity is comprised of an individual’s ancestry and their
beliefs about the origins of those that came before them, based on components such as national origin, race, religion, or language (Ting-Toomey, 2005, p. 215). Cultural and ethnic identity are closely related, as both have to do with deep feelings of belonging and membership, though ethnic identity involves identification specifically with an ethnic group across time and can be inherited, and cultural identity on the other hand has to do with the culture an individual was socialized into. Ting-Toomey (2005) explains national identity in a more detached sense, as having to do with a legal status in relation to a nation. Gao (2011) emphasizes the role of place in national identity, noting that individuals gain a national identity and group membership based on the place where they were born. Immigrants who have spent most of their lives in a country outside of the United States have, through socialization, solidified a cultural identity that is different from most U.S. Americans. Although they may technically gain a U.S. American national identity after having lived in the U.S. long-term and gained citizenship, their sense of cultural belonging may outweigh the fact that they are an active, tax-paying member of society. Even as a U.S. citizen, nationality to another country may still be emphasized in daily interactions, highlighting that an individual is still an outsider. The notion of nationality is also complicated for individuals who are considered citizens of multiple nations. First generation immigrants do not necessarily distinguish between national, cultural, and ethnic identities; in fact, the three are entangled, overlapping, and conflated when it comes to individuals’ identity claims. To say that one is Mexican could indicate culture, ethnicity, or nationality. To understand how immigrants make sense of who they are and their social positioning, it is important to pay attention to how they themselves articulate distinct identity categories.

In learning English, immigrants may be learning more than the mechanics of a language—they are socializing themselves into a new culture, thus, a discussion of culture is
clearly necessary for discussing identity shift. Similar to the way people tend to think of identity, Agar (1994) points out that people often conceptualize culture as a thing that people have, but that it is more than that; it has to do with who you are and is “something that happens to you when you use a second language” (p. 20); an understanding of a different culture requires an understanding of a different mentality (Agar, 1994). It is the conceptualization of culture as “understanding a different mentality” that may link culture and identity, since we tend to associate our distinct ways of thinking with who we are. In that sense, immigrants who are participating in U.S. society may either be toggling constantly between different mentalities or develop a new mentality altogether, one that characterizes an in-between status. If either of these are the case, then how do they know when to engage in one way of thinking over another? Is that possible? And how do they gain membership to both groups if their cultures consist of conflicting mentalities? Ting-Toomey (2005) calls the boundary-crossing from exclusion to membership a “turbulent or exhilarating process” (p. 216), and claims that a gradual shifting of identity for immigrants during this process is unavoidable. It may be useful to alter the statement that language and identity are inextricably linked to say that language, culture, and identity are inextricably linked. Agar further connects language and culture by stating,

Language, in all its varieties, in all the ways it appears in everyday life, builds a world of meanings. When you run into different meanings, when you become aware of your own and work to build a bridge to the others, “culture” is what you’re up to” (p. 28).

Using English may build different meanings for immigrants to the United States than if they were to just use Spanish. The language may act as a mechanism that bridges their host culture and the new culture they are a part of.
The Communication Theory of Identity (CTI), which is sometimes used by scholars who study the immigrant experience and hybridity (Orbe & Drummond, 2009; Urban & Orbe, 2010), is worth mentioning because of its attention to a performative aspect of selves and the idea that an identity that is not legitimated by others can cause turmoil. This perspective has the framework necessary to highlight challenges that immigrants may face when there is a disjunction between who they feel they are and who others feel they are. CTI summarizes identity in four frames: personal, enacted, relational, and communal (Jung & Hecht, 2004). The personal frame focuses on the individual’s perception of self: enacted, refers to the way an individual performs the self; relational involves how an individual’s self is constructed in relationships with others; and communal is related to a community with a collective memory (Jung & Hecht, 2004). These four frames of identity cannot be separated from each other, for example, one cannot examine a person’s gender identity (personal identity) without considering how society defines gender roles (communal identity) or how others view a person as a man or woman (relational identity)” (Jung & Hecht, 2004, p. 267). The enactment of identity (enacted frame) involves some kind of performance from one individual to other individuals, and this performance must be accepted in the relational frame. I propose that the frames can be re-imagined as parts of a process of negotiating or constructing an identity through interaction, in which an individual has a desired identity (personal frame) that must be enacted through mediums like language (enacted frame) and accepted by interactional others (relational frame) to be legitimized as a member of a specific community. If an individual does not enact an identity in a satisfactory way, he or she may experience a gap between these frames called an identity gap (Jung & Hecht, 2004). For example, a personal-enacted identity gap occurs when an individual’s perceived self differs from the way he or she communicates the self to others, and the personal-
relational when the perception of self does not match others’ perceptions of them. To be fully accepted as an American, a person is expected to enact the American identity in specific ways, such as speaking English fluently and without an accent; enacting multiple master identities complicates this interactional process. Identity gaps can be associated with certain communication outcomes, and lessening the discrepancies between the four frames of identity will result in communication satisfaction, feeling understood, and conversational appropriateness and effectiveness (Jung & Hecht, 2004, p. 270). Scholars like Orbe (2009; 2010) use CTI to make sense of immigrants’ experiences in the United States and posit that identity gaps are something individuals must constantly work to diminish. Although I do not plan to use the categories of CTI for this study, its assumptions help us to think about identity as enacted or performed within interactions and note that legitimacy from interactional others is desirable, and problematic if it is not obtained. The framework suggests that individuals can have ideas about who they are independent of whether others accept that categorization. Although CTI studies do not necessarily illustrate it, the split between frames might also suggest, then, that individuals could enact identities that are inconsistent with the personal frame—who they really think they are. This is an important idea to keep in mind when looking at how first generation immigrants make sense of language use and other enactments of identity while in the U.S. Though these conceptualizations in CTI are useful in thinking about the connections between identity performance and acceptance and identity internalization, it is a more etic framework where the researcher alone rigidly categorizes participant frames of identity. This study aims to distinguish between participant’s own conceptions of identity and the lived reality, highlighting among other things the control they have in the process of claiming identities.
Third Space/Hybrid Identities

Very often, research will show that individuals who are living in the U.S. but are not native to the U.S. will at some point experience a feeling of living “in-between” multiple cultural identities, a phenomenon detailed by scholars such as Young (2009), Moreman (2011) (2009), Calafell (2004), and Yep (1998). This liminal status is referred to several ways in existing literature, including the term “hybrid identity” and saying that someone is in a third space or has a third space identity. It is often used to describe the in-between status of individuals whose racial or ethnic categories contain a hyphen, such as Mexican-American, African-American, and Asian-American. Urban and Orbe (2010) illustrate the distress individuals experience when they feel they exist in a third space by providing an example of one Romanian woman’s comment who claimed that “you are like a soulless person” when you belong to multiple communities, “trapped between two worlds…not Romanian any more…but I’m not American” (p. 314). Young (2009) illustrates what it might look like to have a liminal identity by using an excerpt from her mother’s narrative:

I feel like I’m still part of Korea. When we went to Korea, feel like this (America) was like home. I was used to American people. When I visit Korea, it was strange, my feelings. I feel like I’m a visitor to my own country. Just feel like I was a visitor. Didn’t feel like I was home. I want to go live there again, but after I went there, it was different. I think, I’ve changed, not Korea. (Young, 2009, p. 148).

Although her mother does not feel completely American, due in part to her accent, appearance, and family ties to Korea, she has assimilated to some degree since being in the U.S., causing her to feel somewhat disconnected from her “own country.” Fully claiming a Korean ethnic or
national identity, or fully claiming an American one is easy to process. Drawing clear identity boundaries becomes difficult when an identity is perceived as existing somewhere between the two.

With the exception of several studies like Young’s (2009), which features both she and her mother’s experiences of third space, many studies that examine this phenomenon are interested in bicultural or biracial individuals: those who are second or third generation immigrants, who have one parent that is native and one that is not, one parent who is black and one white, or who have a mix of cultural, ethnic, or national identities that forces them to negotiate a third space over the course of their lives (Asher, 2009; Yep, 1998; Moreman, 2011; Toomey, Dorjee, & Ting-Toomey, 2013). Fewer studies exist that describe the nature of hybridity and third space in first generation immigrants to the U.S. who have spent a considerable amount of their youth in their home countries. For individuals who have grown up in the U.S. and have strong cultural and linguistic ties to another country, or who are biracial, it is difficult not to claim some degree of belonging to multiple categories, despite the fact that the blurriness of categorical boundaries does pose challenges. For first generation individuals who immigrate to the United States later in life, there may always exist an awareness of their condition of foreigner, a clear feeling that they will never be considered from here, therefore why even try to belong. Even immigrants themselves may develop a level of acceptance in being part of a U.S. community of “resident foreigners.” A preliminary issue with this sentiment is that even within the group of “Spanish-speakers” in the U.S., individuals come from a number of different countries, cultures, and dialectal varieties of Spanish that make the group identity different from the cultural identities of the individual countries they left behind. Also, considering that learning and using a language involves both socializing into a culture and
transforming identity, it is unlikely that individuals will maintain the same cultural identities over time and be members of their home countries the same way they were before. Some environments reinforce a strong sense of a particular cultural identity, and individuals in that space do not have to think about these identities—such as a U.S. American living in the U.S; but in spaces that lack a particular cultural community, akin to one’s home country, individuals who have immigrated to the U.S. may feel lost (Calafell, 2004). One solution to this may be for Spanish-speaking immigrants to create a new community, another may be to try to become a member of the existing community. Whether it is the result of necessity or a conscious desire to transform the self, these individuals will be enacting identities that continue to morph over time.

It seems that it would be impossible for them to avoid the in-between experience that is typically associated with those who have lived their whole lives as multicultural/multiracial. If third space or hybrid identities are as challenging as studies pose, then it is possible that individuals would want to avoid that status altogether. First generation immigrants may be more reluctant to claim a third space identity when they are first assimilating than individuals who have been raised with the influence of multiple cultures and may be more accustomed to negotiating an in-between status, or have defined that third space to some degree. If first generation immigrants are striving toward behaviors (like speaking English) that enact a new identity, they must make sense of this potential shift in selves.

According to Bailey (2007), the term “hybrid” is essentializing and it highlights difference, making it a problematic term in research. It marks multiple cultural membership and multilingualism as abnormal or unnatural in some sense because it uses fixed and stable categories of nationality/ethnicity and monolingualism as the normative comparison; perhaps the categories should be viewed instead as social constructions. Even scholars such as Bhabha, who
has been influential in the use of concepts of hybridity and third space (Meredith, 1998; Rutherford, 1990), are aware of this concern. Because participants talk about themselves as feeling neither from here nor from there, I will proceed to use these terms in order to simultaneously (1) describe a phenomenon of “in-betweenness” felt by participants, and (2) be a part of the scholarly conversation that already utilizes these terms. Del Valle (as cited in Velázquez, 2013) points out the contrast between a linguistic culture of monoglossia and heteroglossia that exists in parts of the U.S., which pertains to similar notions about multilingualism and monolingualism. Despite living in a society where multilingualism is in fact common, individual speakers are influenced by monolingual ideologies, like the notion that identifying with one main language is the norm. This ideology is certainly influential on individuals’ perceptions of self when living in the U.S., and gives reason to characterize identities as situated within that framework. However, I want to acknowledge that language-use by individuals does boundary work and that the social pressures some face to maintain an identity that fits within the boundaries of a widely legitimated group, such as American or Hispanic, becomes clear when we look at the literature about identity gaps and look at pervasive practices in the U.S. that demand accounting for an identity that is neatly defined. One such practice is accounting for identity when marking boxes in a census, answering the question “where are you from.”

Discussions of hybridity are present in colonial discourses, where the term refers to mixed-breeds and is considered offensive, and in postcolonial discourse where it is conceptualized as a positive, privileged position—in-between status allows one to negotiate difference (Meredith, 1998). Bhabha has further developed the concept, discussing how hybridity creates a third space between the colonizer and colonized—a liminal position that is altogether
new and that blurs boundaries (Meredith, 1998; Rutherford, 1990). It is a productive space, an advantageous one. Although the creation and occupying of this space may be advantageous in challenging essentialist categories and boundaries on a systematic level, this conceptualization of hybridity does not fully attend to the potential challenges faced by the individuals existing in that space. This marks a difference between Bhabha’s preliminary conceptualization of third space and the way some other scholars have reshaped the term to point to struggles and dissatisfaction. Yep (1998), in an attempt to empower individuals, also argues that existing on the margins can be a positive thing, calling it a liberating experience due to the fact that it “can allow us to see things from both the center and the margins” (p. 83). I would support the move to take a position that might be cast negatively by a dominant culture and reestablish it as positive, but do not want to lose the reality of the situation in the process. As mentioned earlier, when individuals have reclaimed a liminal position and given it a name and even a language—such as the case of Spanglish—they are met with opposition from a number of people who find comfort in more traditional categories of identity and “pure” languages (Rothman & Rell, 2005). This demonstrates the pushback groups get when they claim a space that challenges traditional categories. One benefit of this study of Spanish-speaking immigrants is that, by learning of their experiences establishing themselves in this country and their goals in language learning, we can gain a perspective on the process of negotiating a third space as liberating and desirable and/or undesirable. For those who are learning English, the ideals they express do not necessarily match up to the reality they are living—perhaps individuals who move here later in life, who have more fully developed a single ethnic identity, are not granted this privilege—because they have not grown up “living and breathing” multiple cultures.
Negotiating the territory between seemingly stable categories of master identities can be done a number of ways, but because we are inclined to use the notion of language as a notable boundary between identity categories (Bailey, 2000; 2007) it is important to closely examine the use of languages by individuals who potentially exist in or are entering a third space. Since language is an observable enactment or performance of identity, we might wonder how individuals who are between multiple categories could use multiple languages to negotiate them.

**Language “Loss,” Shift, and Acquisition**

According to Dastgoshadeh & Jalilzadeh (2011), an individual who learns a new language will experience a change in their perception of their competence, communicative style, and value systems, supporting the notion that language and identity are inextricably linked—but knowing and using a new language does not necessarily result in the exclusion of an original language, leaving the question of how individuals will view their communicative styles and values when they are shifting between multiple systems. Agar says that multiculturalism is a cliché, and “no one quite knows what to do with it or what to do about it” (p. 26). I would argue that multilingualism is in the same state of crisis. It is something that, like multiculturalism, is touted in public institutions as highly valued, but that not all individuals who speak multiple languages are valued. Perhaps what we mean by multilingual is the ability to speak multiple languages like a native, or to speak English like a native and have some knowledge of other languages. We hold immigrants to a higher standard when it comes to the valued “skill.” Many people even move to the U.S. to perfect their English so that they can gain opportunities in their professional lives, only to face discrimination and challenges when they still speak English with an accent.
An understanding of the processes of language loss and language shift may provide insight into language acquisition and individual agency in self-presentation. When individuals lose language unwillingly, they must find other ways to legitimize the authenticity of a particular identity. Losing grasp of a language is very devastating to some, while others may make a concerted effort not to preserve it. In these cases, the intergenerational loss of a language still has major effects on identities. During the English learning process, immigrants do not necessarily leave behind the identity associated with the Spanish language, but rather they make a greater effort to preserve it.

People may try to preserve language in various ways, one of which is passing language down from parents to children (Dastgoshadeh & Jalilzadeh, 2011). For example, in the case of Norway’s Kven speakers, they made the choice not to pass their minority language down to their children (Lane, 2010). Here, language “loss” was a strategic move on the part of parents for sociopolitical reasons: to prevent burdening their children in a world where Norwegian was the dominant language and Kven, the minority one, was stigmatized (Lane, 2010). Even so, many parents and children now regret this intergenerational loss of language and are attempting to revitalize it. It is clear from studies like this that the use or disuse of a language does not happen solely on a personal level, but rather it is a purposeful course of action dictated by how individuals desire to enact identities and the events taking place on a communal level. The same way that the actions among Kven-speaking parents came from an ideology of “Norwegianization” (Lane, 2010, p. 71), immigrants in the United States may also prefer English for their children under ideologies of Americanization, where English is “linked not only to success, but also to privileges and modernity” (p. 72). Yet, they still expect their children to maintain their native language; for example, one individual notes that his mother was
disappointed in his lack of fluidity between Spanish and English, saying that this deficiency meant he was no longer Spanish (Moreman, 2011). We see similar patterns of these language ideologies in other countries as well, typically linked to the political landscape of the time. For example, during the dictator Franco’s rule in Spain, the Basque language was publicly shamed, and even declared illegal (Urla, 2012). As a minority language specific to an autonomous region that is prideful of its very distinct culture, the Basque Country is now also going through a time of language revitalization (Lasagabaster, 2008). Whereas the language was once considered anti-Spanish if used in anything but a folkloric context (Urla, 2012), it is now a major component of Basque cultural identity (Totoricagueña, 2004). Ideologies like this one have been documented recently in the U.S., for example, in reactions to news stories about immigrants and even in protest against Coke after a Super Bowl commercial. Twitter and Facebook users announced their outrage at Coke when they launched an ad featuring “America the Beautiful” being sung in languages other than English. They made comments such as, “Americans speak English,” “F you coke the national anthem wasn’t made for your gook and Mexican talking. STFU!!! Speak English,” and “You commies spend millions to piss off true Americans? Last coke I ever drink was today.” These comments reflect the notion that “true Americans” speak English, and make a clear distinction between individuals of other nationalities or ethnicities (“Mexican talking”) and Americans. The comments also expressed the belief that one must speak English to be considered an American. Another related issue in the news was the murder of a New York woman and her two children by her husband after NYPD ignored her complaints that her husband had threatened to kill her. She had filled out a form in Spanish, and it had been set aside and never translated; this was one of several cases where complaints or concerns written in Spanish were ignored. Comments on this article again turned to complaints that immigrants need
to speak “our language.” Language ideologies that favor the majority language and make negative, even hateful associations between other languages and those who speak them certainly have implications for an individual’s desire to conform to the dominant language and possibly hide or “lose” another language.

Hopi youth are another group who experienced intergenerational language loss, yet they are able to perform their Hopi identities in other ways (Nicholas, 2009). When Hopi youth did not know the language, even though that had an impact on their complete cultural integration, their performance and understanding of rituals and the Hopi way of life had to be strong in order to compensate for their shortfalls and maintain that cultural identity. However, these youths were born into Hopi culture, whereas immigrants to the U.S. must work to assimilate both in lifestyle and language, and Hopi youth who did not speak the language still felt they were missing a piece of the puzzle. Even when Spanish immigrants master both languages, they may still be characterized as foreigners; with the use of just Spanish, they have little chance of acceptance into mainstream U.S. culture. In both the cases of Hopi and Kven speech communities, language has shifted for sociopolitical and practical reasons. The shifting language marks a shifting identity as well, where the group membership experience is not quite the same as it would be had individuals maintained the language central to the Kven or Hopi identity.

While language is just one of the indicators of otherness when talking about third space, it is clear in the literature that it is one of the most crucial links to identity. The use of a language other than English can mark an individual as “other” or can be used as a tool to maintain multiple facets of identity.

One phenomenon that is being studied by linguists is Spanglish, a mix of English and Spanish that is spoken in the United States by a culturally and linguistically diverse Hispanic
population of more than 50 million, and which continues to grow. However, Spanglish is seen by some critics as a danger to standard Spanish and to the “collective Hispanic identity” (Rothman & Rell, 2005, p. 516). The term Hispanic, as proposed by Tammelleo (2011), is a historical reflection of a mix of cultures, just as Spanish and English are now fused together to identify the Hispanic speech community in the United States. In colonial Latin America, “there was a great deal of mixing of languages, food, religion, music and dance; however, the diverse elements did not entirely dissolve into a new common culture. Particular people were still recognized in terms of their African, Indian, or Iberian backgrounds; “music, artworks, food and styles of dress continued to reflect their unique Mayan, African, or Iberian roots” (Tammelleo, 2011, p. 543).

Spanglish has also been regarded as more of a mix between two languages and less of an accepted fusion into a common language. Linguists argue that language is a tool for expression of identity, but also, “identity is language” (Rothman & Rell, 2005, p. 525). If that is the case, Spanglish may be a reflection of the in-between status of Hispanics with hybrid identities (Mexican-American, Latin-American) but also a strategically used tool for performance by these groups of individuals. New immigrants have more opportunities now than in the past to hang on to their heritage culture and language (Shankar, 2011), perhaps through strategies like using Spanglish or code-switching. The use of Spanglish may give Hispanics agency in shaping their in-between identities; it is a way to claim a liminal space and reject set categories. Ilan Stavans (2003), a Mexican-American scholar and long-time advocate of Spanglish characterizes it as “an internal tongue” (p.45), defending its existence and use, especially among heritage speakers who find themselves displaced in the United States, as a way “to define their own turf” (p. 45).

Communication Accommodation Theory
Moreman (2011) talks about Latino/a White hybrid individuals as *performers* of hybrid identities, considering that they have agency in the enactment of their identities. One of the ways in which he proposes they do this is through language use, specifically through the ability or inability to code switch between English and Spanish. Code switching, or changing between languages, has been of interest to several scholars who want to learn about the link between language and identity (Rothman & Rell, 2005; Moreman, 2011; Toomey, Dorjee, & Ting-Toomey, 2013; Tracy & Robles, 2013). It can be a tactic to enact inclusion or exclusion to a particular group; Toomey, Dorjee, and Ting-Toomey (2013) identify it as a strategy used by bicultural individuals in particular to perform in-group membership. Tracy and Robles (2013) also point out that code switching can “create particular relational meaning” (p. 154). Although Bailey (2007) challenges traditional research on code switching between languages by pointing out that it is only meaningful when compared to monolingual speech, I argue that it is still useful to study it considering participants live in a society where monolingual speech is indeed considered the norm, whether or not it is actually the case.

Moreman’s claims about code switching as an enactment of identity resonates with Communication Accommodation Theory, and emphasizes the notion that individuals may actively use language as a resource for belonging to or maintaining a particular cultural identity—or in other cases, that the lack of language resources can limit the ability to enact inclusion to a group and the use of a language out of necessity can automatically signal exclusion.

Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) seeks to explain a shift in individual speaking styles, or in this case, a shift in languages. It proposes that individuals will speak a language to accomplish a positive social identity through divergence, maintenance, or
convergence—that is, by accentuating difference from a particular group or interlocutor, maintaining an original speaking style regardless of the social situation, or by marking the self as more similar to an interlocutor and as part of a group (Gallois, Ogay, & Giles, 2005). It may be valuable to question how these goals function in the case of immigrants who may be experiencing shifting identities. CAT offers these seemingly simple explanations for language choice across situations. Although these explanations provide a useful foundation for thinking about how immigrants choose to use language and why they actively cultivate English as a resource to give them more agency, it is worth exploring the implications of CAT. For instance, we could assume that these goals of inclusion and exclusion can be in tension with each other in the same way we talk about the challenges of third space. How does one accomplish both divergence and convergence, when an individual wants to maintain a strong sense of Spanish cultural identity while still being a member of U.S. American culture? What happens when someone is trying to speak good English, not just to be accepted into a group, but to pass as someone who is “competent” when they are clearly marked as foreign? After all, it is no secret that some U.S. Americans foster an anti-immigrant mentality, which developed at the turn of the century (Agar, 1994). Diminishing one’s foreignness, by perfecting English or assimilating in other ways, is potentially a way to avoid the mark of incompetence that some Americans would associate with a foreign status. The belief that speaking English well could achieve convergence supports the notion that immigrants to the U.S. may be trying to eliminate the feeling of being “lost” by aiming for membership in a group that already exists. One could argue in this case that knowing English for the sake of membership is knowing English for the purpose of survival beyond minimal everyday interactions.
Another reason for invoking CAT in this discussion is because of its tendency to frame code switching as a rhetorical move—that is, an act that an individual explicitly with an identity purpose in mind. This conflicts with Bailey’s (2000) claim that code switching does not happen in any particular pattern—that there’s no rhyme or reason for it. In studying immigrants living in the U.S., one could ask how much choice these individuals actually have in terms of choosing what language to use. Although social pressures to use English and the desire to maintain the Hispanic heritage and pass it down through the use of the Spanish language are certainly conscious motivations, it seems important to remember that aiming for inclusion could be framed as less of a choice and more of a necessity.

**Studying First Generation Immigrants**

As mentioned earlier, studies on the negotiation of hybrid identities often focus on second-generation immigrants, on youths that have grown up bicultural (Toomey, Dorjee, & Ting-Toomey, 2013) or in multicultural contexts (who have moved to the U.S. young, who have one parent from another country, or are multiracial). These individuals are characterized as having no choice but to exist in a third space, as either conflicted or enriched by living a life where they cannot be neatly included into just one national, ethnic, or racial identity category. Research is less prevalent on the potential hybrid identities of immigrants who have come to the United States later in life, those who might have may make different choices regarding whether or not to embrace a new culture as their own and enter third space at all. Works that focus on first generation immigrants do not discuss the possibility of rejecting the complexity of a third space identity altogether, instead they try to illuminate strategies for embracing multiple cultural influences and describe the challenges of liminality. Would immigrants be able to renounce a
shifting identity when living in a new country, or is assimilation and an eventual hybrid self inevitable? What are their goals in assimilating and/or maintaining their innate culture, and what are their experiences with this aim? If English is linked to a specific identity that is different from a Spanish-speaking identity, then one would assume that individuals who are actively learning English are taking steps toward a third space identity; whether it is their intention or not, and how they view that space, is uncertain and perhaps dependent on the individual.

This study contributes to research on hybridity and third spaces with special attention to language and its connection to identity and culture from the perspective of first generation immigrants. It highlights the agency in shifting identity—the fact that individuals are actively contributing to the formation of identity in some way, whether it is an attempt to create a unique space for themselves in the U.S. or a reaction to dominant ideologies about languages and identity categories in the place they are living. Learning about the nature of first generation immigrant identity in the U.S. will also illuminate whether participants feel privileged in their identities, challenged, or both, and highlight some differences between ideal identity experiences and actual lived experiences. Focusing on language use as a negotiation and marker of third space identities, I pose the following research questions:

**RQ1:** How do English language learners make sense of the relationship between language choice, culture, and identity?

**RQ2:** How does language use in daily contexts shape English language learner third space identities?
Chapter II

METHOD

Examining the nature of identity through studying language learners is not new to research (Early & Norton, 2012; Higgins & Stoker, 2011; Tananuraksakul, 2012; Jo, 2010). Gao (2011) says that learning is a process of becoming or avoiding becoming a person, which highlights the idea that places of learning are sites where identities are bolstered, challenged, and shifted. From this statement we can extrapolate that a person may have agency in shaping their identities through learning, and that education can have specific identity-building significance.

English as a Second Language (ESL) classes are places where first generation immigrants actively try to learn and improve English, and in the case of ESL classes for adults, enrolling is typically a choice individuals make free will for one reason or another. This makes ESL participants ideal informants when it comes to investigating the link between language and identity. Moreover, first generation immigrants often have to think about the issues of language and its implications for belonging to identity categories in a way that many U.S. Americans living in the U.S. do not. This frame of mind is invariably present when individuals are actively assimilating into the host culture, as their belonging is constantly called into question.

Immigrants are well aware of the impediments that challenge their full assimilation, such as accent, low English proficiency, ethnic features, and cultural difference. English language classes are regarded as an element that will help “overcome” these challenges, again suggesting that individuals have some degree of control in their identity membership through language acquisition or manipulation. The purpose of focusing on these individuals was to learn how first generation immigrants who are actively pursuing some degree of assimilation make sense of
their shifting identities and their control over the claiming of new and old identities. This would also illuminate their notions of language, identity, and culture.

The conceptualizations of language, identity, and culture of first generation immigrants are therefore very valuable experiences that will help us learn and better understand shifting identities. With this in mind I began to search for a locality that sponsored ESL classes and that allowed the presence of a researcher as an observer. This collaborative and friendly learning environment is conducive to camaraderie, so whether planned or by chance I began to be regarded as a volunteer as well by the participants. This allowed me to better integrate in the group and lessen to some degree the discomfort of being watched, gaining a level of acceptance by students. However, despite this advantage in the data collection process, the challenges that any observation entails were many and varied. I believe that it is important to describe the nature of working in this environment to give a sense of the lack of power immigrant participants may perceive in intercultural encounters, the constraints they face, and the level of caution they exercise that may be distinct from participants of other kinds of scholarly research.

First, programs that offer classes to immigrants tend to be very protective of their students. Participants may often feel that they are disadvantaged because they are foreigners and because they are not proficient in English. As a result they are weary and concerned about being exploited. Because of my student status, and perhaps because of my long-vested interest in language learning and Spanish culture and language through family connections, the program coordinator of Centro de Idiomas y Culturas (CIC) agreed to let me observe the group on the condition that the volunteer teacher would allow it. Having overcome the first challenge, new obstacles began to emerge. Some teachers felt uncomfortable about having a stranger routinely observe their students, and despite the fact that they were put at ease after my first visit, it was
hard to gain access to the initial observation. Even after three weeks of attending one conversation class, a bilingual coordinator still seemed uncertain about my presence and would systematically consult with the teacher to make sure that I was not disturbing the classroom. Fortunately, once I established myself as a part of the class and formed relationships with students, teachers, and coordinators my presence was accepted, even welcomed.

A second setback to the participant observation process was the lack of consistency in class attendance. Sometimes students missed class and other times they simply moved to a different location and they left the program. As a result, my initial site decreased to just two students halfway through the data collection period. Unlike many conventional students who are working towards a degree and are required to attend class, these participants were not receiving credit or certification for their participation in an English class (with the exception of one person whose workplace required it), and they often struggled to balance work and family life as well as multiple English classes. One participant stopped attending after my first visit because her nanny was moving and she had to stay home with her children during the day; another had to find a class at a different time because of his work schedule. Although the organization is generous and accommodating with their students, some participants felt that they simply could not afford to take classes anymore. The lack of consistent attendance prompted discussions between one monolingual volunteer teacher and a bilingual coordinator about priorities and punctuality, and the fact that the individuals would not learn English unless they came to class consistently and on time. This discussion caused the teacher tell the coordinator about cultural differences when it comes to concepts of time. The issue, which is at the center of the cultural aspect of integration and assimilation, led to the teacher talking about punctuality during class time. Some students revealed in interviews their surprise about the “lack of
commitment” of some of the participants because they would not attend regularly, or would arrive late.

A third challenge was the participants’ differences in English proficiency levels. For example, in a conversation session, the make-up of the class would consist of students with very different levels of proficiency, which made it difficult to properly serve everyone’s needs. This was evidenced by the sentiment of one student who made the observation that she felt her role in the classroom was to help other students, since she was able to understand and speak English better. This difficulty was compounded by the fact that even though in some cases all participants were Spanish speakers, they came from different countries, and though they all share a seemingly common language, dialectal differences are commonplace and often very distinct. In these cases, both the teacher and the participants looked at me, as a speaker of English with knowledge in Spanish, to help translate or disambiguate the concept in question, which was not an easy task. The dialectal differences also challenged participants making it difficult to help each other.

The language aspect of the study also presented some challenges when it came to conducting interviews. Despite my knowledge of Spanish, deep and involved concepts are often difficult to express in any language, much more in one that is not the dominant language. As a result, my inclination was to interview participants who could speak at least some English and who were able to clarify ideas if needed. I encouraged them to explain things in Spanish because I realized that many would not have been able to say everything in English, even if they wanted, but they tried it anyway perhaps because they were aware of my own Spanish shortcomings. I conducted one interview completely in Spanish at a participant’s request, and I felt that she may have restrained herself in the depth of some of her responses because she thought I might not
understand. Some participants who agreed to be interviewed did so cautiously, as they were skeptical about having to sign a consent form and be audio-recorded. Due to the fact that consent forms intimidated students and that students were not consistent with attendance, creating a fluid environment, I was given IRB approval to request verbal consent alone for observation, and use formal documentation for interviews only. The consent-request process was as follows: On my first visit, I introduced myself to each student as they came in the classroom, explained the purpose of my presence, and asked permission to observe and take notes for a research study. When new students joined the class, I followed the same procedure. All the participants granted permission.

This segment provided an overview of the environment where the observations took place as well as the constraints involved in the process. In the following section, I will explicate the specific compositions of the classrooms and the profiles of the individuals who participated in the interviews.

Participants and Scene

The fieldwork for this study was conducted during Fall 2012, and Fall and Spring of 2013/14.

Fall 2012

I was able to find several ESL programs in my area. One of them is an adult ESL class at Hilldale elementary school. The school’s family outreach coordinator works with several community members and certified ESL teachers to offer a class on Monday and Wednesday mornings to immigrants who want to learn English. I was a participant observer of this class in the fall of 2012, gaining insights and building relationships with students and affiliates of the program. The class where I participated consisted of a certified ESL teacher named Kelly, who
was a monolingual English speaker, and between six and ten Spanish-speaking adult immigrants living in the area. The learning activities followed a structured pattern: on Mondays, students worked on the material from textbooks, and on Wednesdays they engaged in role-play and interactive sessions to practice English in conversation. For example, Kelly sometimes brought a board game to encourage conversation by prompting players to say something about themselves, ask a question of another player, or answer a question from a card. Unlike some ESL classes where there is “no Spanish at all” (according to participant Mariana) this particular teacher allowed the use of the native language (mostly Spanish) to aid in the understanding of concepts and terms. A few students were able to assist in translation between teacher and students for certain situations, and I found myself using Spanish on occasion to clarify information for Spanish-speaking students. The material presented scenarios that provided opportunities for learning language involved in everyday situations such as competence in communicating effectively in routine activities (grocery shopping, parent-teacher conferences, work) and the acquisition of a highly valued skill for the workplace. I saw the scene as a space for individuals to attempt to shift non-English speaker identities from “foreigners”, or “not from here”, to being closer to “natives”, or “from here,” or at least to gain legitimacy to their “American” identities (to pass as belonging to that category). This conception was explored in the personal interviews. It was apparent that individuals were not ready to relinquish their innate Spanish, Hispanic, or Latino/a identity, in the process of gaining legitimacy to a new one. Students spoke Spanish often, for clarifying concepts and to engage in interpersonal conversation during breaks, or when the situation was not framed as class time.

I used criterion sampling for interviews (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011), selecting participants who were students in the ESL class or had the experience of language learning in the United
States. As I mentioned earlier, there were challenges in recruiting enough participants who were able to take part in interviews using English and who attended consistently enough to be able to provide meaningful data. For this reason, I expanded my interview criteria to include coordinators employed by the ESL organizations, as long as they identified Spanish as their first or dominant language and were actively attempting to improve English. One coordinator would join the class as a student on days where her work obligations were not too demanding, which is an indication that language learning and thus integration and assimilation is a continuous process that extends beyond classroom participation as an official student. By the time I concluded my participation in this site, I had secured three interviews: one with the coordinator Mariana, who is a native of Venezuela, and two with students Paula from Ecuador and Ema from Mexico, whose interview was conducted completely in Spanish.

**Fall/Spring 2013-2014**

Low enrollment during the fall of 2013 prompted me to reach out again to the community for alternative ESL sites. There were now only two students in the class, and neither were Spanish-speakers. Eventually, I was able to locate a program called Centro de Idiomas y Culturas (CIC), based in the area where I reside and in the surrounding localities. This organization is well established in the community, and its good reputation had been discussed by classmates at the university and the ESL students from the previous site. This program consists of volunteers providing one-on-one tutoring as well as more traditional English instruction to immigrants in the area. English classes are divided into levels 1 through 7, depending on proficiency, and conversation classes. Individuals complete a placement test to determine the most appropriate class for their proficiency level. The classes are taught by volunteers who are trained by
professionals from CIC and given lesson plans and class materials. Furthermore, the conversation classes are flexible and vary in content and structure according to the teacher. After making contact with the program director and coordinators for two different locations, I attended three separate classes: a conversation class which included between two and eight students in attendance per class period (all Spanish speakers), a Level 5 class at a nearby high school with a roster of approximately seven students (two Spanish-speakers), and a Level 7 class at a local gym with four to six students (one to two Spanish speakers). Two of the classes were taught by monolingual English speakers, and the third one was taught by a long-time U.S. resident woman who had immigrated from Asia. The majority of my observation data comes from the conversation class that was taught by Ellie, who identified as a monolingual U.S. American, as it was the richest in conversation and had the most Spanish-speaking students. Between these classes, I conducted five interviews: two with coordinators Marcela (Spain) and Naomi (Mexico), and three with students Uriel (Mexico), Anita (Mexico), and Gabie (Peru). Of the eight total interview participants, most had lived in the United States from eight to twenty-one years, but two participants (Paula and Uriel) had been in this country for under a year. Participants had also moved to the United States for various reasons – mostly for job and language-learning opportunities – and stayed in the country because they had married a U.S. American, a long time U.S. resident, or had children here and wanted them to grow up in the U.S. Uriel was the only male participant.

**Data Collection**

I rely on two main points of contact for data analysis. The primary material includes data from interviews with Spanish-speakers who are learning English and are in some way affiliated...
with ESL classes. The secondary material consists of field notes of my observations at the ESL classes. I was unable to gain permission to audio record the classes themselves. The reason observation is included is twofold: First, it is an important tool for recruiting participants for interviews; Second, it is important to observe situated interactions, that is, to immerse the researcher in a routine activity in order to correlate the content of the interviews with the contexts in which they occur to come up with a robust analysis. Observing the different levels of interaction between students, students and teacher, and researcher and students/teacher, provides interesting insight into how members of the classroom enact foreignness or belonging, as well as ideologies about language and identity categories. Moreover, my own data from the observation of classroom dynamics where language acquisition takes place reveals how students learning English, as well as coordinators and the teacher, presented student identities as distinctly foreign or other. In explicating how participants enact belonging to multiple established and recognizable identity categories, I was able to interpret how these interactions shaped third space identities, as well as how participants actually defined their identities and identity goals.

The ESL classroom is also a particularly rich context for this research because it is an in-between space itself where language acquisition takes place and identity shifting and negotiation occurs. Individuals in the classroom frequently commented on language use, the importance of language, and how they were using or misusing language. As a participant observer, I looked for how language was used in the classroom in general, paying particular attention to any code switching between English and Spanish, as well as explicit comments about language-use or identity. For example, if a participant used Spanish to consult with a classmate and then switched to English to answer a question from the teacher, I recorded those incidences and focused on them, as these interactions may shape or indicate particular identities. Because I conceptualize
identity as existing fluidly in interactions, changing from one language to another could be seen as a performance of particular selves that drew in-group and out-group boundaries, for example, to shape Hispanic, American, and third space identities. In addition to looking at code-switching, if a student made a comment about comfort level with a certain language or about contexts in which they would use language, or the teacher or students commented on language use in general, I would also make note of this talk. This provided insight as to how members of the classroom characterized the relationship between language and identities.

In addition to observations, I used transcribed interview data to identify themes in participant talk about social positioning, identity negotiation, and language use in daily life. I conducted eight semi-structured interviews, in which a set of questions and objectives guided the session. However, the interview process was open to allowing the participants to partially control the direction of the conversation depending upon their experiences and interests, and in most cases conversations turned out to be fairly flexible. The interview protocol is designed to elicit participant descriptions of their own experiences with language use and interactions in and outside of the classroom to inform how they are enacting and negotiating certain identities. The original interview protocol, which was used for the first three interviews, was readjusted to address the suggestions and concerns of committee members. A section of questions focusing on the specifics of the student’s role in the classroom and satisfaction with the class was eliminated, as it did not directly address the research questions (e.g. *Can you describe what you find most interesting about class; How would you describe your role in the classroom?*). Several questions were also edited or added that elicited potential discussions beyond a surface level expression of experience with language use in the U.S. Although a general discussion of language use and feelings of belonging tended to gloss over conflict and challenges, questions that asked for
specific examples of language use in interactions brought tensions to the surface of talk, sometimes revealing contradictions between the way participants described their identities and language use and the reality of these concepts that came up in their narrations of interactions (e.g. *Can you think of a situation when you or someone you know had difficulty with Spanish in a social situation? What happened and what problems did it cause?*).

I used criterion sampling to select participants for interviews, where the criteria were that individuals had to identify Spanish as their primary language, were actively learning English, and were involved with the language learning programs I observed, as a student, teacher, coordinator, or other. As mentioned earlier, recruiting participants was challenging for various reasons. I began by approaching students who seemed to have a high English proficiency, as they were likely to have more experience with multiple language use and were perhaps more likely to have experienced in-between status. This approach was also a matter of convenience, as it would be easier for me to communicate with them in an interview and get more in-depth responses. Though most of my participants fit this description, I did also experience a couple of more challenging interviews. In retrospect, the most challenging interviews were valuable to my data as they provided additional perspectives of individuals who were perhaps in the preliminary stages of their experiences with liminality.

Interviews lasted between thirty and sixty minutes and took place mostly on site after class or at an alternate prearranged time. Since the focus of this study is not a specific type of event, but rather an understanding of how participant identities are situated within socially constructed boundaries, it was important to gain a good insight of each individual’s background and experiences about immigrating to the United States and learning and using English and Spanish. Interviews began with broad questions about where participants were from, how they
came to be in the United States, and what it is like to live in the United States. The question “where are you from” usually follows “what’s your name,” which are both forms of inquiry that may occur in any friendly environment where people meet each other for the first time. However, these questions ask a person to account for himself (Young, 2009), essentially categorizing the self as one of “them” or one of “us.” It is not always so neat that it fits into a single title, but rather can be a potential negotiation of a third space (Young, 2009). In a country where people prefer precise labels to categorize others, even an opening question like this can be a loaded one and may reveal a great deal about how individuals position their identities.

The second group of interview questions inquired about language learning, specifically the importance of learning English and of speaking Spanish, potential challenges individuals faced using language in social situations, and the overall experience of transitioning from Spanish to English use. I also asked about when, generally, participants used English and when they used Spanish, in order to get a sense of language use and identity across contexts. Next, participants were asked questions that were more directly related to identity and membership and the potential connection between language and identity — how they might describe the community they are part of in order to learn about how they situated themselves in relation to others, whether they thought immigrants like themselves ever felt like they were “from here” or if others considered them from here, and if they were accepted as “an American,” and if that even mattered. I also asked about specific situations where they felt that they did or did not belong, and how important language is to who they are. The final sets of questions were aimed at learning more about participant agency in language learning and the shaping and shifting of identity, that is to say, how active (and conscious) of a role they are taking in shaping their identity; and to inquire about their attitudes about the value of knowing multiple languages, the
meaning of fluency in a language, and a time they were uncomfortable speaking a particular
language. This broad but thought out set of questions evoked enough conversational data to find
descriptions about the participant’s understanding of the link between language, culture, and
identity, and how these components shape their notions of who they are, who they are becoming,
and how they are situated in relation to others in a variety of daily activities.

Data Analysis

After each interview, I used transcription software (ExpressScribe) to transcribe recorded
interviews for analysis, and in one case, an interview was translated into English. The interview
process in itself is an interesting point of analysis, since participants and I had to cooperate and
navigate between two languages to reach a common goal; even to express their experiences,
participants had to negotiate language. Despite the fact that they were given the option to answer
questions in Spanish, only one participant decided to do so; it seemed to be an example of
something that came up in their interviews—that they choose to speak English or Spanish based
upon the preferred language of their conversational partner. It became obvious that they adopt a
subordinate role when it comes to understanding their position in the host culture. They are the
ones to accommodate for others when it comes to language interaction, meaning they almost
always speak English with individuals whose first language is English, rather than the English
speaker accommodating for them and engaging in conversation in Spanish.

Once interviews were transcribed, I coded them by themes. Identifying themes can be a
partially inductive approach to making sense of participant expression in data (Ryan & Bernard,
2003). The search for themes is similar to open coding in grounded theory (Lindlof & Taylor,
2011), or more generally among content analysts, qualitative analysis (Ryan & Bernard, 2003).
Guest, MacQueen, and Namey (2012) claim that thematic analysis is the most common method of analysis in qualitative research, and that it is the most useful method for “capturing the complexities of meaning within a textual data set” (p. 11). Ryan and Bernard (2003) outline multiple techniques for finding themes, depending on the data at hand. Following this approach, the techniques I used involved looking for topics or statements that were repeated within and across interviews (repetition), and grouping together quotes that were alike and seemed important before naming the theme (cutting and sorting). As an example, if several participants expressed that they try to use Spanish at home with their children to maintain a connection to Spanish within the family, these comments were grouped together and labeled to reflect the fact that they involve a familial context, and regard Spanish language use for the purpose of identity negotiation within this context (an attempt to maintain Spanish, and thus maintain a Hispanic identity). I also took note if several participants talked about feeling most like “themselves” and most comfortable when speaking Spanish but are considered American when visiting home. There were common statements like this one that revealed something about liminality and language. I also looked for ways that membership and non-membership (foreignness) were enacted, that is, how individuals described themselves as being part of or not part of U.S. American culture, and part of or not part of their home culture. By analyzing both field notes and interview transcripts, I was able to account for the participants’ perspectives, but also their perspective in a broader context which was immersed in a specific context where language acquisition was occurring and where first generation immigrants were interacting with individuals from the same country, with individuals from different countries, and with U.S. Americans like myself and the teachers. Observation alone would not have completely revealed how participants see themselves assuming agency to manage and create identities.
Role of the Researcher

Even though I joined classes officially as an observer, my level of participation varied and evolved across the four classes I attended and within interviews. My role as a researcher was influenced by my own identity, which is also more complex than the well-defined identity categories that hybridity and third space research reject. Although I do not claim a fully Spanish identity, I did complicate my assumed American identity when I introduced the motivations for my research: my mother is from the Basque region of Spain, and my father from the United States, so I have been raised in a multicultural home. Whereas English is my primary or dominant language, I have proficiency in Spanish, and despite the fact that I am not living in a place where I am marked as other, I do have the desire to solidify my Spanish in order to gain legitimacy to that identity. This is worth noting in most part because I am in a similar position as many of the participants’ children, and participants were aware of this. It is likely that discussion of children and language maintenance throughout generations came up frequently in interviews because of my own interest and participants’ connection to my experience through their children. In some cases, I felt that participants were trying to communicate the same message to me as they did to their own children: *maintain your Spanish heritage*. Mariana remarked as I was leaving our interview, “*make sure you practice your Spanish, that is important.*” This emphasized the idea that language was a link to identity maintenance. The resemblance of my situation to that of their children may have also allowed me to gain access to the sites and interviews and to build a relationship with participants that I may not have otherwise. My proximity to participant experiences, however, also necessitated that I engage in deep reflexivity in order to ensure I was listening first and foremost to participant experiences and understandings of their own social positioning and not relying solely on my interpretation of my own and my
mother’s experiences. Over the span of time that I was collecting data, I went through several versions of analysis for various classes and received input from professors and classmates. I also had informal conversations with participants about my findings, to be sure these resonated with them as accurate.

Since the teacher, students, and coordinators knew I had some level of proficiency in Spanish, I often played the role of ad hoc translator. Students primarily depended on each other to clarify new words and concepts, but would turn to me if they were still unsure. Sometimes the teacher asked me to translate a word into Spanish, and when there was a miscommunication between the students and teacher, they would both look to me for clarification. The expectation for me to clarify and disambiguate situations sometimes led to feelings of failure on my part, as they pointed out my less than perfect Spanish. As a result, I found myself actively participating in language learning, writing down new words in Spanish to look up later. I noticed on occasion that a word I had failed to translate into English was the result of a dialectal variation specific to a country other than Spain, whose dialect I am most familiar with. Although I do not want to overstate any similarity between these experiences I had and those of immigrants, whose identities are often undervalued in the U.S., they did give me some appreciation for the challenges individuals can face in language use and language learning that were expressed later in interviews. Despite those small moments of recognition I had, I was very aware of my markedly privileged identity in the space of the ESL classroom. Whereas my role was more of a volunteer at my first site, all of the classes at CIC regarded me as one of the students. I was systematically included when participants took turns formulating sentences off of a worksheet or when we would write them on the board. One teacher commented that she was glad to have me participating as a student, so that the other students could have more exposure to “proper
English.” It appeared that while I was observing classroom interactions, the teacher also saw me modeling the ideal U.S. American identity that students should strive for. My participation in the classroom may have been emphasizing student foreignness, the very thing I was trying to learn about.

The original interest for this research subject began on my own dual identity and the reflections of negotiation between the two. However, I never intended to become part of the methodological framework of the study, my aim was to be simply an observer. My active participation, and the insight of my own duality helped to better absorb the experiences and to put them into the proper context.
Chapter III

ANALYSIS

To begin this section, I would like to clarify the ways in which I will refer to participant identities. Although individuals did not talk about themselves in terms of cultural, ethnic, and national identities, they did draw distinctions between what I will call a “home” identity, one that is associated with the country they lived in before moving to the United States and likely converges elements of those three identity types, and a U.S. American identity, one that is associated with individuals from the U.S. The “home” identity, which I also refer to at times as an original identity, an unchanged/unaffected identity, or a Spanish/Hispanic/Latina/o identity, is characterized by the notion that it is a clearly marked and recognizable identity category that individuals have rather than a third space identity that is marked by influences from multiple distinct cultures.

This analysis begins by describing the way in which participants made sense of culture and how it fit together with notions of language and identity. Explicating the relationship of these three components from the perspective of participants provides a foundation for understanding the way they make sense of their shifting identities. It is also useful when comparing how participants viewed their own identities in relation to how they viewed the identities of their children. Participants understood language and culture as closely tied, to the extent that a person could not be considered fluent in a language without learning that language in the context of its associated culture. However, culture itself was something that reached beyond language. The term “culture” maintained its ineffability to some extent, as participants referred to it in various ways without explicitly naming or defining it, but their descriptions of culture matched Agar’s (1994) conceptualization of culture as mentality and also something that a person has. This
notion of culture as mentality encompasses norms, values, ideologies, and the actions guided by them. Participants brought identities into the conversation about culture by drawing distinctions between ideologies and practices in the U.S. and their own ideologies and practices, which they saw as representative of their home countries. This understanding of language as located in culture laid the foundation for their explanations as to how one should go about learning a language, and the difference between language and identity for their children and themselves—highlighting differences in the experience of adult immigrants in a third space and individuals who have grown up in a third space. By understanding culture in terms of mentality and highlighting certain U.S. and home mentalities as incompatible, individuals disavowed a U.S. American identity to some degree and associated themselves with their home countries. However, they had to make sense of the fact that they were striving to embody certain ways of living and speaking that are associated with a U.S. American identity while minimizing markers of their original cultural and ethnic identities. They had a unique way of coming to terms with the fact that they were assimilating, yet still rejecting any form of third space identity. Using Spanish speaking styles in conversations with U.S. Americans and carrying over American English concepts into Spanish were instances of overt foreign status amongst conversational partners, and were clear indications of liminality. However, participants were most satisfied claiming clear-cut Hispanic identities.

The second part of this analysis offers an overarching theme for how participants made sense of their active assimilation while maintaining a distinct, unaffected identity. It became evident in their talk that they envisioned a distinct split between the enactment of an identity—speaking English “like a native,” adjusting their styles of talk, and so forth—and their true identity. This ideal conception of the true, unchanged identity did not necessarily match reality,
and in some cases, participants’ language goals suggested that what they really wanted was dependent on shifting their identities to some degree: For example, the desire for English to feel as natural and comfortable as Spanish, and the desire to think in English. However, they felt the strong necessity to embrace their home identities and reject the notion that the enactments of a new identity resonated with who they really were. Thus, participants made the distinction between *enacting* an identity and *claiming* that identity, a theme I have labeled cultural being versus cultural doing. This notion of their own positioning within the U.S. entailed a difference between participating as a member of a culture through language use and claiming that cultural identity. Several subthemes further exemplified this conceptualization of self: residing versus belonging, the common distinction participants would make between living in a place and being a real member of that place, and English as a public language versus Spanish as a private one, which emphasized English as a public performance and posited that Spanish was something that was only to be used when connecting to family, home, and heritage. I will expand on these themes in the following pages with the goal of illuminating how first generation immigrants in this study make sense of enacting new identities while claiming unchanged identities; that is, how participants reject third space identities. The fact that immigrants may not acknowledge a third space identity is not indicative itself of whether they are actually still fitting within clear boundary lines of identity categories. This will bring up questions of whether individuals actually have control over the identities they wish to claim or not claim.

**Understanding Culture in Terms of Difference**

Participants often brought up culture in terms of differences in societal values and practices, echoing the conceptualization of culture as a mentality (Agar, 1994). In discussing her
ESL classmates from various countries, Paula even rephrased the concept of cultures as “realities,” saying, “others, too, are from different countries, so you can understand not the idiom but the, eh, the culture, so-or another realities…” This statement also reveals the perceived value in understanding culture or realities beyond language. Further mentions of culture had the tendency to frame U.S. American mentality as markedly different from individuals’ own mentalities, as participants would reference certain practices that they disagreed with. Anita described her disapproval of the different “culture” surrounding child rearing and materiality in the U.S.:

*Excerpt 1, Anita, lines 390-401*

That’s the hard thing here because here is different culture, different living, and here I can see a lot of people, they are not raising their children like we are you know? We raise them and we let them stay home until they want to leave, and here you turn 18 and you get out of the house, and that’s not fair because it’s just not prepared to be in his own world. But they don’t care about that they just want to get out. In Mexico we-if you come to Mexico you’re raised different, you know, more love and attention. You talk more with them, the material things, and here the people just give a lot of material things to their kids but they don’t spend that much time with them, maybe a few but not a whole lot. Pretty much they just leave them with the babysitter, you know, like I said, some drugs and bills. I see that a lot.

Anita attributed these child-rearing differences to cultural difference, drawing distinct comparisons between “here” (the U.S.) and Mexico, where she is from. Having raised her child in the U.S., she spoke about how she would still help her son with anything he needed, even though he was in his twenties--something she felt she was considered unusual to others. Her statement not only echoes the sentiment of culture as mentality, but articulates her own reluctance to adopt the U.S. mentality. She later described how she was distinct from U.S. Americans because of her differing mentality, saying, “for me I'm still Spanish because I feel that way because I'm not like the people from here, I'm not that material person everybody else
here is” (lines 605-607). Although these ways of thinking are not shared by all U.S. Americans or all Mexicans, Anita points out that she has seen these played out a lot, that her experiences guide her assessment. Since materiality is typically framed as a negative attribute, Anita’s comment goes beyond just differentiating herself from U.S. Americans, and suggests a reluctance to be considered one herself.

Marcela brought up differences in Spanish culture and U.S. American culture in talking about conflict style, which plays out in multiple contexts including the public space of work and the private space of home.

*Excerpt 2, Marcela, lines 281-289*

Now even here at work [I feel like a foreigner]; like in Spain we have a different conflict style with like really express our emotions. It’s like, way it is, and I think that’s very, uh, challenging for people here, you know, because their reactions like, ‘Oh, oh my God.’ With my husband, too, it’s like he doesn’t want conflict-is viewed in a totally different way, and we kind of like conflict a little bit, just like ((laughter)). And so when we are , uh, discussing things and everyone wants to agree really fast you know because it’s part of the culture, I feel like “ahhh, if we were in Spain we’d be saying ‘no but this,’” and sometimes I do that and I drive them crazy. “Ah Marcela, stop” ((laughter)).

Although Marcela’s characterization of cultural difference was presented more lightheartedly than Anita’s, it is similar in the sense that she recounts her own experiences in recognizing her mentality in contrast to the mentality of some U.S. Americans—in this case, co-workers and her husband and daughter. She uses her realm of experience to characterize whole cultures. It seems that “foreign” to participants means that one has a different mentality than the majority of the people in the place where one resides; in pointing out the differences between her own style and others’, she marks herself as foreign. Not only does Marcela talk about differences in mentality, but she emphasizes the disharmonious nature between the two ways of thinking, noting that her use of conflict makes others feel uncomfortable and perhaps that she herself would prefer to take
more time discussing something before reaching an agreement. These are realities that cannot be unified or mixed.

Naomi referred to culture by discussing culture shock when first moving to the U.S. from Mexico. She notes that her style of communicating was fine where she was from, but violates boundaries in the U.S.

*Excerpt 3, Naomi, lines 18-26*

I’m not a shy person. I never worry about that I didn’t speak English, but it was a huge shock to me, like my brother when I came here—my brother lived there, I came with my brother and he told me like, “Naomi, you are not in Mexico anymore, you cannot be talking with the neighbors over here because in the U.S., people use their own time by their own and just not be very social and talking with neighbors” like used to be on my country. And it was my first cultural shock, and it still since 21 years I still, uh, having problem to um, communicate with my neighbors or have relationship with my neighbors.

Again, the participant draws from her own perceptions of U.S. American mentality to make distinctions between cultures and categorize her own ways of interacting as different from the people where she resides. Naomi does not cite the language as the major barrier, but rather the mentality of her U.S. neighbors. This difference led her to a culture shock that lingers in the form of a difficulty in communication. Agar (1994) points out that, “problems in communication are rooted in who you are, in encounters with a different mentality, different meanings, a different tie between language and consciousness” (p. 23). This seems to describe Naomi’s experience. The question becomes, what is the role of language?

In references to culture, such as Paula’s mention of realities, participants seemed to draw a distinction between language and culture, even though they talked about the two as very closely related and necessary to each other for successful acquisition of English. Mariana explicitly stated that there was a difference between being bilingual and bicultural:
Excerpt 4, Mariana, lines 220-226

You know like my daughter yesterday was teaching me a song that she learn that maybe for you was something you learn also when you were five, but for me it was new and she was teaching me and I think that is for me the real experience, because that is the thing that makes you not only bilingual but bicultural. You know, I think you can speak the language but that doesn’t mean that you are bicultural, I mean, you have to be immersed in the culture and trying to learn.

This distinction between being bilingual and bicultural, according to Mariana, comes from experience. Being able to experience a song that is deeply rooted in U.S. culture (she points out that the researcher may have also learned the song once) makes the knowledge of the language used something more: a full understanding of the meaning of the song, beyond the words.

Mariana, at a different point in her interview, also commented that she wanted her kids to “understand not only the language, but the meaning beyond the lang-the walls” when it came to Spanish. This is revealing of her conceptualization of culture and language—that the two are not the same thing, but are dependent on each other. Culture gives mechanical language its meaning; however, one needs both. Without some basic knowledge of the language, Mariana would not understand the song enough to move beyond the words and get at the meaning, but without a sense of the song’s cultural meaning, just a knowledge of the words would not be sufficient for understanding the song. Participants realize that a nuanced understanding of language can only come tethered to cultural meaning.

The Acquisition of Language

In discussing their own experiences with language acquisition, participants further elucidated their beliefs that knowledge of language itself was not enough for speaking English in the U.S. Learning English well enough to participate as a cultural member could only be achieved through language in use, and specifically, language in use within the U.S. Some
participants had some knowledge of English before moving to the U.S.—Anita had worked in a touristy part of her country, Marcela had taken English classes in Spain, and Uriel had to pass an English test for his degree in Mexico and subsequently used the language in classes through the use of manuals, for example. However, all of them pointed out that knowing English once residing in the U.S. was a completely different experience. Anita said that, “all the rules is [sic] different [here], so you have to accommodate to the rules here.”

*Excerpt 5, Marcela, lines 34-39*

I was going since I was 8 years old until I was fifteen I was going to this American institute that- it was where we had classes three times a week for two hours so it was really intensive. So when I came here of course I knew a lot of grammar uhhh and I knew a fair amount of vocabulary, uh, my conversation skills were really bad, the pronunciation it was terrible and then for some reason I could not understand neither.

Along with the typical proclamations about the difficulty of understanding certain dialects, slang, and speed of speaking that one might expect, both Marcela and Anita suggest a necessary component of language beyond grammar and vocabulary for understanding; knowledge of the culture, the “rules” and norms of interactions, in order to speak English more like a native and less like a foreigner appear to be this crucial missing piece. A lack of this cultural knowledge would accentuate an individual’s status as foreigner, which can have negative social and professional implications. The idea of having to understand a culture in order to fully understand the language tied to it elucidates how an individual living in a Spanish-speaking country with no ties to the U.S. may speak “perfect” English, but not be considered a U.S. American, just as an individual in the U.S. could speak “perfect” textbook Spanish and not be considered Spanish. According to participants’ definitions, however, it would be unlikely, maybe even impossible, for an individual to be a “native speaker” of a language without any identity ties to the culture. Language alone is not sufficient to be a cultural member, but the understanding of cultural rules
and practices that are tied to language are necessary for fitting in. Mariana described this difference between what she calls “the thing you learn in books” and this next level of communication:

Excerpt 6, Mariana, lines 200-205

It’s something about language that’s not only the thing you learn in the books. It’s uh you know the meaning, the nonverbal things, and the you know the personal interaction the (enrich) the whole process. And that’s something that is a whole level of communication sometimes it doesn’t matter you have been here forever or you go to the school to learn English it’s more about interaction.

She points out that simply living in a place where the language is used does not automatically result in learning the language, but that a person must use that language in that particular context. She also talks about the necessity of personal interaction, which is elaborated later by others to make the point that one must branch out beyond interactions with other Spanish speakers and use the language with English-speakers. Mariana’s articulation of language in practice brings up the issue of how one might get language/culture experience beyond books. Participants stated that in order to really learn a language, one must engage in forced cultural interactions, potentially uncomfortable ones. The length of time participants had lived in the U.S. did not necessarily correlate with their proficiency in English; some had lived in the U.S. for nine years and were still very uncomfortable using the language, whereas Uriel had moved to the U.S. just ten months prior and was considered to be a highly proficient English speaker. He stated that individuals must make a conscious effort to put themselves in situations where they would have intercultural interactions. Marcela commented on the noticeable difference in her language proficiency when she left her comfort zone of Spanish-speaking friends in the U.S. and worked somewhere where she had no choice but to use English:
Excerpt 7, Marcela lines 53-59

I lived with a group of friends that were from Spain, so- and from Mexico, so I didn't have to- I was not out there. Then when I really started improving my English, uh, was when I was hired to work for an attorney, immigration attorney, and you know even my friends noticed that after five months there they said ‘wow your English has gotten a lot better.’ Of course it was because I was using it more and more. And since I didn’t have to use it for my professional life and my friends spoke Spanish…

This excerpt brings up several interesting points about language, cultural context, and identity. Although place is important in the acquisition of a language (people move to the U.S. to learn and perfect English), place alone does not make for a cultural context. This contributes to the notion of culture as a mentality; while the space participants live in are surely influenced by a particular culture and artifacts of that culture are present, full immersion requires interactions with individuals who have the cultural identity associated with that place. Marcela’s situation in which she lived with other Spanish-speakers and thus spoke mostly Spanish is common amongst immigrants, and is one of the reasons participants could live in the U.S. for years and still feel uncomfortable using English. Individuals who shared a cultural identity associated with Spanish were unlikely to speak English with each other unless it was in some kind of public context such as the classroom. Paula referred to this when asked if she speaks English with her husband, who was also from Chile. She stated, “no, speak with my husband in English don’t make sense in my house, no no” (lines 174-175). Language in use is not only contingent on where it is used, but also with whom. One could use a language everyday in Mexico, like in the case of Uriel in his architecture program, but not be fluent until they had to use English regularly in the context of U.S. culture, with other U.S. English-speakers. In some cases, participants had even moved to the U.S. in order to put themselves in the necessary context to learn English—and eventually started families here. Even Ellie, the conversation teacher, commented one day to a coordinator that her students needed to show up consistently or they would never learn:
Field Notes Excerpt 1

We are waiting for students to show up for class. Lately, only one or two students have been showing up, but inconsistently. Ellie has been getting frustrated with the inconsistency and lack of punctuality and has a conversation with one of the coordinators. She demands to know what is happening to these students, where they are and whether the coordinators have made it a point to let them know that these classes are important. “They’re never going to learn if they don’t use the language. They need to come to every class or they’re not gonna learn.”

From Ellie’s comments, it becomes clear that this belief is not just held by participants, but is perhaps a widely held expectation of immigrants to the U.S.—that they must integrate in order to learn the language, and must learn the language in order to integrate.

Participants did not just articulate the necessity of immersion in U.S. culture for acquiring English, but also described their attempts to teach their children Spanish by the same standard. Participants’ children were growing up in the U.S. and were inclined to participate in U.S. culture and the English language in much of their day to day lives, and they were lacking in cultural contexts that corresponded to their parents’ hometowns. However, parents made an effort to help maintain children’s bicultural identities through making them use Spanish at home, and to do so with more than just words—to teach them the culture. Participants stated that their children who were growing up in the U.S. had an advantage in knowing English because they were living and breathing U.S. American culture as they learned English at school, with their friends, and sometimes with their parents depending on whether the participant had an American spouse or was married to another Spanish-speaker. As shown earlier, Mariana pointed out that her children were learning English at school in conjunction with other facts, nursery rhymes, etc., and that she found these helpful herself for learning.
On the other hand, children were at a disadvantage when it came to learning Spanish, because they were almost completely immersed in contexts where English and U.S. culture were dominant. When asked about how her son would categorize himself, Anita said:

*Excerpt 8, Anita lines 622-635*

A: He say he’s an American. He’s an American but he doesn't know nothing about Spanish, uh, culture so that’s why he say ‘I'm an American, I don't know nothing about Spanish.’

J: so even if you know the language but you don’t know about the culture?

AU: yeah you don't feel like he belongs to Mexico

J: How does that feel?

AU: I feel weird because, um, I dunno because all his life is here too you know? So that’s very- he feels that way I guess cuz he only go once a year over there [to Mexico] so he’s not really familiar with Spanish culture (.) he doesn’t know.

Anita emphasized the disconnect between language and culture, admitting that her son’s infrequent exposure to Spanish within its cultural contexts contributes to the absence of a Mexican identity. Other participants had a slightly different interpretation of the cultural identities of their children, which were inconsistent with their characterizations of needing to speak English themselves to be considered U.S. Americans. They typically overstated their children’s bilingual capabilities initially, later conceding that their children occasionally had problems understanding certain words in Spanish or expressing themselves in Spanish due to their constant exposure to English, or that their children would understand what was said in Spanish but would respond in English.

*Excerpt 9, Ema lines 121-132*
Sometimes [my daughter] tells me, what is that word? What does that mean? And I have to explain it to her, or vice versa. She speaks in Spanish to me and in English, and sometimes when I don’t understand her in English I ask her, what’s that? And sometimes she tells me “it is like” and something like that, she begins to explain.

Yet, even when some participants stated that their children were not fluent in Spanish, they still considered them to maintain a Spanish identity, even though their own lack of English fluency contributed to their own disassociation with a U.S. American identity.

*Excerpt 10, Naomi lines 309-317*

J: your children that have been born in the United States--are they still considered from Mexico as well?

N: yes they are Mexican ((laughter))

J: and if they didn’t speak Spanish would they still be Mexican?

N: yes absolutely.

This marks an interesting interpretation of the link between language and identity. Like Nicholas’ (2009) Hopi youth, Hopi heritage and identity were not contingent on knowledge of the language, but could be enacted instead through tradition and ritual—involvement in Hopi culture. An explanation for this situation is that participants are highlighting the power of inherited identity, an ethnic identity. Having one parent from Mexico and the other from the U.S. automatically makes a child bicultural, just as an individual with a parent who is white and a parent who is African American would automatically make a child biracial. Having two parents from Mexico and growing up in the U.S. also qualifies a child as having more than one ethnic or cultural identity, particularly if the influence of Mexican culture in the home is strong.

Participants do not see themselves qualifying as U.S. Americans, with or without the language, because they did not grow up with each foot in a different culture, like their kids. Both of their
parents are Mexican, or Spanish, and so on. Furthermore, certifying that their children are Mexican may be an indication that they are trying to maintain this heritage or identity throughout generations. In the same way that cultural practices were a way for Hopi youth to perform Hopi identity, and possibly make up for lack of the language, participants are revealing that language may be used as a way to connect to a heritage even when there is a lack of cultural steeping. Mariana said that speaking only Spanish at home was a way to “connect them [my kids] with my heritage, my culture, my family.” Having a certain ethnic identity as well as enacting that identity through language use usually seemed to be sufficient for children to claim an identity. Participants, however, had a harder time claiming a U.S. American identity because it was not their ethnic identity or cultural identity, and despite their citizenship, was often not considered their primary national identity.

Participants talked about language and culture as necessary to each other, where the understanding of culture and proper use of language to be the condition that must be met in order to enact a cultural identity, or at least to pass as feeling comfortable interacting as a member of U.S. society. As we will see, participants were comfortable claiming just a Spanish identity, though it is clear that they were usually adamant in claiming that their children were both. Their children are individuals who grow up with unclear identity boundaries, thus third space identities characterize their lifelong experiences. Parents of these individuals, like the first generation immigrants in this study, seem to think of themselves as occupying a different kind of experience. Whether it is partly because they feel solely responsible for maintaining their strong heritage for themselves and their children, or as a way to proudly reclaim a status of other, participants see themselves in a unique situation.
Language was also a way to connect to culture, reflected in the fact that individuals were partaking in language classes to become integrated and in stressing the importance of language for future generations to maintain a link to one’s heritage. This means, according to the participants’ views, that language is inextricably linked to identity as long as cultural understanding is not separated from language. That is to say that the mechanics of language are sufficient perhaps for passing tests and conducting business in other countries, but are fruitless in achieving the goal of cultural participation. Many individuals who knew some English before moving to the United States still take ESL classes and put themselves in English-only situations once they move to the U.S.; those ESL classes incorporate learning about U.S. American values and lifestyles in conjunction with learning language, much like Mariana’s daughter learned English through nursery rhymes. For some, learning how to use English in a U.S. cultural context may just be out of necessity; others moved to the U.S. for the specific purpose of becoming fluent in English. Either way, participants’ own conceptualizations of this method of language learning—learning language and culture together—makes it difficult to deny that learning and using English in the U.S. will not shift and reshape an individual’s cultural identity. Mariana neatly tied together the notions of necessary cultural immersion and individual effort in saying, “I think you can speak the language, but that doesn’t mean that you are bicultural, I mean, you have to be immersed in the culture and trying to learn.” This statement implies that an individual who immerses themselves in culture and language could reach a bicultural status; however, participants only implicitly suggest the outcome of being bicultural, while explicitly denying that assimilation is changing their identities and moving them into a third space, one that is altogether different from a purely U.S. American or home identity. Participants made sense of this distinction by articulating a difference between performing or “doing” some kind of new
identity through the use and understanding of English and actually “being” anything other than Hispanic or Latino/a.

**Cultural “Being” Versus Cultural “Doing”**

The overarching theme of cultural being versus cultural doing is closely tied to language because participants articulated their motivations for perfecting English in terms of what they could achieve outwardly with it, not how it would change them internally. “Being” a cultural member would mean that the participant, through enactment of a U.S. American identity by way of English-use, for example, would consider themselves to have a U.S. American identity to some degree, or at least a new identity that was not the same as the distinct and clear cultural identity they had before moving to the U.S.; this was not how participants talked about themselves. Since participants seemed to think of identity as something they had and who they were, regardless of what identity they enacted, considering themselves to have a new identity would mean they would carry it with them to any location. They could go to the countries that were once home and still feel they had a slightly different identity than when they left. Instead, participants described themselves as “doing” cultural membership--that is to say, they were acting like a member of society, even trying to pass as one of the in-group with strategies like the use of “perfect” English, but would not claim the cultural identity of that group. Participants made sense of this distinction in a couple of ways: articulating the difference between residing in the U.S. and belonging to the culture, and marking English as a public language that is used for identity enactment and performance and Spanish a private one, which represented their true, comfortable selves and was a way to maintain connection to family and their heritage.
Residing vs. Belonging

Although participants stated that interaction with and exposure to a particular culture was necessary for full language proficiency and passing as a cultural member, they also made the distinction that residing in a particular nation did not mean that they were “from” there, or ever would be for that matter; that is, they made a distinction between residing in a place and feeling a sense of belonging to the place. Even if participants were formally recognized as U.S. citizens, they typically maintained that the U.S. was not home.

Excerpt 11, Naomi lines 418-423

In my own opinion I am not considered from here. I am from Mexico and- I am from Mexico. I know who I am, where I come from and- but I am living in another country. I am part of this country now because I am part of- I am living here, I contribute with taxes, with jobs you know, I am part of that country but I am not really from here. You know? I know where I am from.

Excerpt 12, Marcela lines 239-242

Well the reason I want to keep my language is because I think it's very important (.). my identity is very linked to, you know, Spanish (.). Spain where I'm from. So for me I don't want to lose that at all but at the same time, I mean, I live in a country that speaks a different language.

Excerpt 13, Mariana lines 150-155

I was born in Venezuela and I feel like I am Venezuelan, and I am Latina. Um, that is- I mean I am from Latin America I would say, I am Venezuela even if I have a US passport. Maybe I have now a hyphenated American last name. But I think you know I will say always I am from Venezuela. And maybe you know if I can go beyond that I mean if I need to go beyond that, then part of me is from [this town].

For these participants, being a part of the community or part of the country meant living there, being recognized legally as a citizen, and contributing to society. Marcela noted that it was important to maintain Spanish, but inferred that the use of English was important because she was living in a country that speaks English; however, being a part of the community was not to
be conflated with being from the community. Even though Mariana conceded to being able to say she was partially from the town where she was residing, she would only do it if she needed to, and like the other participants, immediately tied herself to other identities—in her case, Venezuelan and Latina. In these cases, participants are not speaking explicitly about a cultural identity, but rather placing great emphasis on national and ethnic identities. That is not to say that cultural identities didn’t make a difference to participants in terms of belonging; children who were born in Mexico to two Mexican parents but grew up in the U.S. were considered bicultural—they had Latino/a ethnic identities, perhaps a third space cultural identity (some combination of U.S. American and Latino/a), and probably a U.S. national identity.

The distinction between residing in the U.S. and being a U.S. American highlights the distinction in scholarly literature between national identity and cultural identity, and marks a difference between bicultural individuals discussed in a lot of literature (youth who grew up with heavy influence from multiple distinct cultures) and individuals who have immigrated to the U.S. as adults. Adult immigrants have had time to form strong cultural identities in their home countries, whereas second generation youth have developed multiple cultural identities simultaneously. Bicultural individuals’ identity categories may also be unclear, and they certainly exist in some new third space, but there is often a feeling of being American and also being Asian (or Mexican, or Indian). Adult immigrants who spend years in the U.S. after developing a distinct, singular cultural identity exist in a different kind of third space, an identity that I call resident foreigner. Participants are not resident aliens when they have citizenship, but that does not mean that they have gained full cultural acceptance or consider themselves full members of the culture. Despite their shifting away from a purely Spanish cultural identities after years in the U.S. and constant use of English, they do not necessarily feel like every other
citizen. Their goals are to be accepted, and to be a functioning, residing member of society, but with the expectation that they will always be marked as different.

Individuals who take on the identity of resident foreigner are often grouped together with other individuals who live in the U.S. and are not considered from here—they are ascribed this identity despite the fact that they do not necessarily share cultural identities. An example of this is how Spanish-speaking individuals are grouped together as just that: Spanish speakers. Yet, they come from different countries with their own varieties of the Spanish language and cultures (mentalities). These different varieties of Spanish came to the surface of class conversation one day during a card game.

*Field Notes Excerpt 2*

*Six of us were gathered playing a card game. Ines, an older woman from Spain, tried to tell another player to take a card on her turn. “Coge,” she said, which means “take one.” The other students got wide-eyed and some laughed. “What did you say?” Ines seemed confused, until one of the students informed us that coger is a bad word where they’re from.*

*Excerpt 14, Anita lines 436-439*

In Venezuela and Columbia they speak Spanish too but it’s different than meanings of the words in Spanish (. ) for example they say bad word in Colombia, in Venezuela it’s a good word for them but for us it’s bad, but they spoke the same word, you know it's interesting.

Participants like Anita realized and commented on the differences between themselves and others that they were grouped with while living in the U.S. Even though they would categorize these individuals as more like themselves, other resident foreigners who were sharing the experience of learning English, they still did not necessarily share the cultural identities they held tightly to, those associated with the countries they had moved from. At times, they were able to back each other up in explaining cultural differences between the U.S. and certain Spanish-
speaking countries, but at other times noticed marked differences between themselves. Their sense of group sameness was dependent on who they were interacting with. In the conversation class one day, participants’ cultural differences from the U.S. became the focus of the class during a discussion on families and naming:

*Field Notes Excerpt 3*

Ellie has told us to draw a family tree on our worksheets. She is focusing on last names and lineage, and asks me to tell her my last name. She writes it on the board, and then asks what my mother’s maiden name was. Even though my mother is from Spain and has two last names, I give her the one my mother uses since living in the U.S. She then asks for my grandmother’s maiden name, and again I give her one last name. She then asks Uriel what his last name is. After writing it on the board, she asks for his mother’s maiden name, and so on. “It’s the same,” he says. Ellie stares at him for a moment and then tries to clarify. Over time, Uriel gets frustrated and tries to explain, “in my culture, we keep last names and add to them to each other.” Ellie tries to clarify again, as though he doesn’t understand her. Other students in the class begin to back him up by countering what Ellie says. “In my culture, too, we keep the last name,” one student says. One student gives Uriel a nod and a knowing look, as if to say “we understand.” “So you have a bunch of people with the same last name running around in Mexico?” Ellie asks. “That must be a mess for the government!” She continues to stare blankly. “Okay,” she says, and turns instead to her own lineage, writing her last name on the board, and so on, realizing that this exercise does not pertain to the students in the way she had hoped.

In this observation, students were in the same boat so to speak in terms of their difference from the U.S., even if they were from different countries—that is to say, they were the same in the fact that they were different from U.S. Americans. The significance of place or location to identity comes to the forefront of this discussion about residing versus belonging. Although participants denounced any feeling of belonging to U.S. culture, they did develop a sense of community based on the premise of being foreign. Their identities did resonate with others in their community in terms of their “othered” status. Participants even spoke about this group when referring to their community: Naomi said that her goal as a CIC coordinator was to, “be more fluent and represent my community in a better way… I’m not thinking on myself, I’m thinking on
someone else who I am representing” (lines 437-440). Mariana described English language
learners as “a community that’s learning together” (lines 295). As representatives of this
community, participants were not speaking about friends and family back home, but rather were
identifying with other resident foreigners learning English in the U.S. This suggests that there is
in fact some shift in participant identities since moving to the United States. However, they made
the distinction between having a new identity and enacting that identity in terms of language use
as well.

**Public and Private Languages**

The description of English and Spanish use in particular was another way participants
demonstrated their distinction between doing cultural membership and being a cultural member
(claiming that cultural identity). Participants described a practical attachment to English and an
emotional one to Spanish. In their talk, they systematically characterized Spanish as inseparable
from their identity, even saying that Spanish is who they are, and English simply as a resource at
their disposal to achieve certain successes and overcome challenges. The distinction can be
broadly seen in Mariana’s back-to-back statements:

*Excerpt 15, Mariana lines 81-105*

**J:** Can you describe more the importance of learning English to you?

**M:** Well I think you know right now, not only learning English, any other language,
it’s important you go you are looking for a job people—the companies they are
they assume that you, you have computer skills. I mean, they don’t ask that
anymore. Maybe they ask what kind of program you can use or whatever. But I
think with the language it’s the same thing. Open, you know, different
opportunities. It’s a, um, it’s a different also perspective to their world because
you don’t have to…it’s um..no se como decirle..um well yeah like open
opportunities and doors for you and also the possibility to meet other people. And
I think English is you know, like an international language where you can
communicate with pretty much anybody around the world then if--especially now
if the now the community you live is beyond (--). I think it’s pretty much for me it’s a way to connect and reach farther than if you only have one language.

J: Okay, so what is the importance of speaking or maintaining Spanish?

M: Well I think it’s part of my, of course it’s part of myself, it’s part of my culture. It’s the way I communicate with my family, and I think of course it has an emotional component, when I want to talk about my feelings or my, the things I did in my childhood, um, I feel more comfortable speaking Spanish. I mean, it’s a connection with your, with your mother and with your, you know, your family and with your life back at home.

These characterizations of English and Spanish resonate with other participants’ descriptions of language as well. English is an international language that can be a resource or skill for success in public spheres; Mariana even compares it to computer skills. Spanish, on the other hand, is comfortable, is part of the self and one’s culture and a connection to heritage and one’s family. In this sense, English is considered a language for public use, a tool for performance, and Spanish is for private use.

**English as a public language.** As participants spoke about their reasons for learning English, the importance of knowing English, and the situations in which they’d use English, it became apparent that they were conceptualizing English as a public language in several ways. First, English was constantly described as an international language, meaning that it reached far beyond U.S. culture. This is not surprising news, as talk about globalization and English as an international language is common; however, it is important to note that participants were hyper-aware of this characteristic of the language, and often cited it when discussing the importance of knowing the language and even of their reasons for moving to the U.S. and choosing to learn this particular language.
Establishing that English is an international language begins to pave the way for conceptualizing the language as something separate from one’s cultural identity; it suggests that one can use English across interactions without having a strong sense of U.S. American identity (or British identity, for example). Some participants recognized the wide expanse of the English language before immigrating, particularly in a professional context, which is what the following participants describe in the excerpts below:

*Excerpt 16, Uriel lines 124-137*

U: to get to my master they asked me to have 575 points on TOEFL exam and

J: to get your Masters in Mexico?

U: to get my Masters just for admission purposes. And I did it, I was actually surprised because I didn’t have any um background any big English background and that exam everything that I have read or any book I read in that Master was in English because if you read your published you know if you want to learn the state of the art of something everything is in English. And so I was reading papers in English and I was writing English and then there was a point in time I had to translate things from English to Spanish for a magazine.

*Excerpt 17, Mariana lines 27-31*

I am a psychologist and I have a masters in organizational development and I used to work for a international company and I didn’t speak English in that time and it was difficult to go in the company you don’t, especially in an international company you don’t speak other languages. I decided to come here and spend a year here trying to learn, and I’m still learning.

Sometimes English wasn’t necessary for work in other countries, but participants would move to the U.S. for work opportunities that required knowledge of English. Participants described English as a resource in the U.S. for immigrants to either survive in the workplace, or have success in the workplace. Some considered it a way to get promotions and move up in a company, or to have the qualifications for a new job since they said that “not everyone speaks it” (Paula) while others described it as a prerequisite for starting a new career altogether. A common
situation amongst participants was that they had high-level degrees from their home countries and had even worked certain professions there that they could not do here. Sometimes degrees were not recognized in the U.S., so individuals would have to essentially start over, and needed to prove a certain level of proficiency in English in order to be admitted to a program. It is ironic that individuals may move to the U.S. to learn an international language that will offer more professional opportunities, but the process requires that they start back at the beginning and take on jobs that may be below their skill level.

Excerpt 18, Ema lines 616-620

Well, I think so, it is different, because in Mexico, when you go to work, you are confident because you know that everybody speaks the same language, but when you are here, you are a little nervous when you go to clean houses because people don’t speak Spanish and one has to listen carefully, and pay close attention to what they say, well, so that is a big difference.

Excerpt 19, Anita lines 576-584

I went to see if I could take the uh that GED class; I didn’t pass so they said you need to practice a little more in case you forgot something and then when you finish there you can come back because I wanna go to college for different program, different things, but it was them they asked me for my GED. I said ‘well I have a diploma but it's not valued here.’ Like I said I got it in Mexico so they want me to have it from here because I want to apply for the grant, you know the- so you don't have to pay back so I need to have my GED from here they don't accept my diploma they don’t accept my college so I have to start all over.

Ema and Anita talked about learning English as a necessary step to achieve all the other goals they aim for. Whether it is to advance in the workplace or merely survive in the workplace, English was commonly described as a tool or skill to improve one’s position in the community or on the job.

Another way that participants talked about English that was similar to language as a resource was language as a performance. Participants rarely talked about English as being part of
who they were, but instead described it as something that they had to consciously perform in public situations, either to show competence, gain acceptance, or to counteract pre-existing prejudices against foreigners and different races by standing up for oneself or disproving misconceptions about an individual’s capability to understand or participate. Anita and Naomi both described situations in which they felt they were discriminated against because of their foreignness, whether it was marked by skin color or language, and where the use of English is an asset in defending oneself and proving that difference doesn’t mean an inability to speak the language:

Excerpt 20, Anita lines 524-527

well I think [English is] important for everyone because they can get a better job too and better responding to other people like I said before if they want to say something to you because you're different you speak up for yourself; that is what I think is important for a lot of different people.

Excerpt 21, Naomi 96-106

Can you believe says I took the bracelet I was cleaning and you know, and she was asking me and you know but I didn’t understand that one this was very very bad experience for me cuz I didn't understand and I didn't know that system. I feel discriminated, I feel that she was accusing me for something that I didn't know and didn't understand and you know and she- and you know I was very upset because she spoke with my daughter for my something and she has to translate those very bad situation

... very bad experience for me because the languages.

When Naomi was cleaning houses and a customer asked about a lost bracelet, Naomi felt her inability to understand not the customer’s questions led to discrimination and to her inability to stand up for herself. Anita also explicitly stated the usefulness of English as a tool for defense. In these cases, Spanish and the lack of English represented a route to discrimination while English was the key to handling bad situations.
Participants’ talk about English as a resource that was separate from their identities is somewhat inconsistent with their conceptualization of language, culture, and identity. If one must integrate into a culture in order to fully learn a language, and learning a language necessarily leads to understanding and integrating into a culture, then participants making the effort to learn English by putting themselves in English-only situations would cause them to assimilate to some degree. Whereas bicultural youth are often described as struggling to forefront multiple identities, adult immigrants seem to be finding themselves in a tricky situation: they want to participate in U.S. culture seamlessly by using English like a native, but still resist the possibility of being considered from the U.S., even if they are legally recognized—the idea of cultural membership versus considering oneself from the U.S. Some hold strongly to the idea that they are residing here but are not *being* U.S. Americans. The perception of English as an international language likely colors the notion that English is a resource or tool; English isn’t used around the world because people from other nations are fans and desire a U.S. cultural identity, but has to do with dominance—business and globalization. Thus, speaking English probably has less to do with an individual’s ties to or love of the U.S. than if an individual were learning and speaking a language that is more obscure around the world, like Basque. However, immigrants to the U.S. are learning and using English in U.S. cultural contexts (likely making their English different from fluent English speakers who have not learned in the U.S.) and are residing in a country that is proud of English and American identity, whose members articulate strong identity implications for the language. The inability to use English in public contexts, or the use of English with an accent, was a marker of foreignness; participants recognized that some members of U.S. society associate a foreign identity with other negative identities, such as incompetence, thus pushing them to try to minimize the difference in the way they spoke.
Spanish as a private language. In contrast to English, participants described Spanish as a private language. It not only represented individuals’ “real” cultural identity, but it felt comfortable or natural. Participants even stated that Spanish was who they were, clearly fusing it to identity. By way of contrast, participants also articulated that they had trouble being themselves in English, and that their “true personality” could not be expressed in the same way through English. Paula, for example, said that she was funnier in Spanish, as she felt more comfortable joking. Uriel also described this feeling that English did not fully represent himself:

Excerpt 22, Uriel lines 145-150

The hardest part for me is to really sound like myself and not sound like- I mean I can try to be like a regular guy and to say just a couple of phrases and to be like normal you know? Like ‘hey what’s up’ and it doesn’t- I don’t feel comfortable and I want to to um how to put this um to- to- impregnate? Is that the word? To put something in the way I talk you know? Like to put your personality.

Excerpt 23, Marcela lines 444-447

I feel that when I speak Spanish I’m probably more connected with who I am or the way I grew up and the way I- I learn to be with the world and when I speak in English it’s a different part of me, you know it’s someone that has this more, like- I’m more connected with the part of me since I move here…

Marcela points to being more in touch with this other part of her she associates with English, though she still differentiates between being more connected to who she is when using Spanish and showing a different self when speaking English. Uriel differentiates between sounding like himself and acting like a “regular guy,” talking about his personality as something he has to consciously inject into his use of English. These descriptions further support the idea of English as a performance, where the language cannot fully capture individuals’ true identities. It also further reveals how participants conceptualize identities as more fixed, and that they believe there can be a “real” or “true” self. English is used until one can no longer perform in English—
in which case, they break from their performance and use Spanish to continue to get the message across. Participants did this a lot during class, where they’d be learning to perform English correctly but would often have to resort to Spanish in order to make sense of what they were learning. Students would sit around a table in class and speak in English to the teacher, and when something wasn’t clear to them, they might turn to their neighbor and ask a question in Spanish. A small aside conversation would take place in Spanish, sometimes including all students in the room, until the concept clicked. Students could then go back to English. This code-switching in the middle of class seems representative of switching between the performance of English for the teacher, to show understanding and to practice, and the revealing of the more comfortable self when there was a break in performance. Some scholars have argued that code-switching is an activity that creates a discursive third space (Bhatt, 2008), so it was important to note.

If participants’ real and comfortable selves are tied to the use of Spanish, it seems reasonable that they would want their own children to speak Spanish in order to maintain a true or real connection with them. The participants who had children all desired for their families to maintain the Spanish language, even if this didn’t play out in the way they hoped. Nobody denied a connection with their children, even if they did not speak Spanish, but one instance of momentary disconnect came up in an interview with Mariana:

*Excerpt 24, Mariana lines 214-217*

I remember when my oldest Miguel, when he starts talking his first words were in English and I remember my feeling was who’s this guy because part of me couldn’t related to him, even if I understood what he was saying.

Participants said they wanted their children to speak Spanish in order to be able to connect to them, connect to their heritage, and speak with family members living outside of the U.S. They noted many public contexts in which they and their children would speak English, but reserved
the home as a physical space for Spanish maintenance and family members as participants in this private space with whom they could speak Spanish. In cases where participants had married U.S. Americans, they often made an effort to still speak Spanish with their children when their partners weren’t around.

Teachers and coordinators also reinforced the notion that Spanish was the language associated with students’ true identities; it was treated as their default language. Outside of the confines of class time, and sometimes even as brief asides during class, individuals would elect to speak Spanish with other Spanish-speaking individuals rather than using English. Students and coordinators would speak in Spanish up until class time, and when the teacher would leave the room she would even prompt them to speak Spanish.

Field Notes Excerpt 4

Ellie has to make copies of a worksheet, meaning she has to leave the room for a few minutes. As she’s walking out, she says, “okay, be right back! Go ahead and (...) talk in Spanish.” She says it in a tone that communicates her expectation that she can’t control students’ use of Spanish behind her back anyway, like she is throwing in the towel at this point.

This emphasizes the feeling participants had that English was not something they necessarily used in their personal lives, to interact with other Spanish-speakers and family, but rather something they would use in the classroom in front of the English-speaking teacher and in the community when engaging in public interaction.

Foreignness enacted in private and public. Although participants talked about Spanish and English in terms of private and public languages, these divisions are not neat in reality, and it’s these interpenetrations of private language into public contexts and public language into private contexts that begins to characterize resident foreigner third space identity. Despite their
ease in claiming a Spanish identity, and perhaps their reluctance to claim an American one, participants’ foreign statuses seem to be at the forefront of supposedly Spanish-dominated contexts. Several examples of this came up in their talk; the first of these examples had to do with being corrected. In the private context of home and family, Marcela said, “when [my daughter] corrects me a lot it’s like ‘mom that’s not how you say it,’ and ((laughter)) that's okay with me. I tell her ‘I’m from Spain, I’m not from here.’” There are two important things happening here: First, the daughter points out that her mother is speaking incorrectly, drawing attention to her otherness. This is happening within a context that is typically associated with the comfortable self. Second, the participant continues to highlight her foreignness by pointing out that she is not from the U.S., which distinguishes her from her family members. Instead of just being ascribed a foreign identity, she is claiming one herself, in this case, as a strategy to account for her mistake. She is framing her mistake as reasonable. Participants are not only corrected when they are speaking in English, but also when they are speaking Spanish. Most participants mention that they often forget words in Spanish if they haven’t used the language in a while, but one participant gives a specific example where she herself attributes assimilating to U.S. ways of speaking for her mistake.

*Excerpt 25, Anita lines 375-384*

AU: I know it sounds weird but because oh come on how can you forget the Spanish word but sometimes it happens you cannot remember that word right away but

J: so when you’re in Mexico what does your family say and what do your friends say when that happens

AU: Nothing they just laugh. Just laugh. I have friends there and one she understands English a little bit and sometimes she laughs because I cannot say that word in Spanish.
Eventually you start forgetting a lot of the words and the way you say things and even my friend from Spain was recently, he was telling me ‘that's not how you say it in Spanish.’

[I said,] ‘Oh I have a conflict in my schedule’ and [he] was like ‘that's not how we say it,’
and [I] was like ‘oh how you say it when you have a conflict in your schedule?’ ‘I don’t know but that's not the way it's like’ ((laughter)) it was like, well if he cannot find out the way to say it, you know? And then my girl friend, she is from Spain and she told me ‘I have a conflict in my schedule,’—digo in Spanish—it’s just say maybe because we have been here for this amount.

In this excerpt, Marcela is not only being marked as a foreigner in her way of speaking, but she is attributing her mistake and her friend’s identical mistake to their living in the U.S. for some time. Even though they are speaking the Spanish language correctly in terms of vocabulary and grammar, they are speaking it incorrectly in terms of culturally appropriate phrasing; they are essentially combining Spanish mechanical language with a moment of phrasing that is culturally relevant to the English language, much in the way Spanglish consistently mixes English and Spanish vocabulary, grammar, and culturally influenced phrases. This is the same participant who also talked earlier about differences in speaking styles between Americans and Spaniards, where Spanish-speakers speak passionately and like to bring up conflict but Americans try to avoid conflict. In discussing the concept earlier, she mentioned that English-speaking friends listening to her conversations in Spanish sometimes mistakenly think she is angry. Here is that excerpt again, to demonstrate the influence of English styles of speaking on participants.

In Spain we have a different conflict style with like--really express our emotions. It's like the way it is and I think that's very, uh, challenging for people here, you know because their reactions--like ‘oh, oh my God.’ With my husband, too, it's like he doesn't want conflict--is viewed in a totally different way, and we kind of like conflict a little bit just like <laughter> and so when we are, uh, discussing things and everyone wants to agree really fast you know because it's part of the culture, I feel like ahhh if we were in Spain we'd be saying ‘no but this.’ And sometime I do that and I drive them crazy, ‘ah Marcela, stop!’ <laughter>
Marcela indicated that perhaps she has started to adopt an American speaking style at home, since she claims to take up conflict sometimes. She also points out that her style of speaking at home can sometimes be markedly different from her family, and that they bring attention to this difference—again marking her foreignness. The reality of many participant situations is that they are the only ones in the household with a Spanish cultural identity—their partners are Americans who speak only English, and even if their children are bilingual they identify strongly with the country where they are growing up. Even in cases where the partner speaks some Spanish and the participant speaks some English, English is the language that becomes dominant in this private context, as families choose to favor the partner’s native language. In cases where both partners are native Spanish speakers, the home is still sometimes a space influenced by their bicultural children, who sometimes can only express themselves in English and are, to some degree, products of U.S. culture.

Even when interacting with other Spanish-speaking immigrants in the U.S., participants note that they are all from different Spanish-speaking countries that have different ways of saying things. They even pick up each other’s accents, making people back home question where they are from.

*Excerpt 28, Marcela lines 274-276*

When I’m in Spain, because I talk to so many people from Mexico here, that um for some people it’s really easy to catch accents you know and I think that happens to me. So they say ‘where are you from are you from Cuba? Argentina?’ ‘No I’m from Spain ((laughter))

Participants’ foreign status is also marked in public contexts, like when others comment on their accents, low proficiency in English or skin color associated with Latino/a identity evokes discrimination, or individuals are expected to speak in Spanish instead of English.
Although individuals may use English in public settings, like for work, their accents still mark them as Spanish-speakers, or at least as non-English speakers. The presence of an accent when using the public language of English not only forefronts an individual’s foreign status, but also challenges the competence they are trying to perform.

Excerpt 29, Mariana lines 167-180

I used to have a job where I used to have to answer the phones a lot of the time and uh people sometimes say ‘is there someone there who speaks English’ And I said I’m speaking English ((laughter)) But you know I don’t take it personally anymore but I think, of course I have an accent but even if I doubt if I take classes and I try to reduce my accent it’s going to be there because like I said I came, I’m almost 48 and I came here, you know when I was 33 you know all my life I spent all my life speaking Spanish. …
I mean even if they don’t say, it’s a little like, are you sure you can be in the position that you are, and you don’t speak—I mean, sometimes it’s like, you feel like you’re not sure that you’re sure you are intelligent enough to do this kind of thing?

Excerpt 30, Naomi lines 202-204

When you try so hard when you study so hard and when people laugh at you when people criticize to you it is when you feel oh my God, this is not my home- yes why should I be struggling with this.

Excerpt 31, Uriel lines 623-626

I can imagine it’s harder for people who are older than me cuz you spend your whole life living like an adult and then suddenly you feel like a child again.

Mariana illustrates how the pointing to her foreignness by others causes self-doubt, whereas Naomi shows that people marking her otherness bolsters her resistance in feeling like she belongs where she resides, in the U.S. Uriel sums up a feeling that most participants came to one way or another: the idea that putting oneself in situations where their English was clearly marked by foreignness meant compromising power and authority, essentially making them feel like children. In some cases, participants even talked about learning from their children who were
able to speak English at a higher proficiency because of their involvement in English-speaking contexts, or having their children translate for them.

Excerpt 32, Ema, lines 166-170

When I go to the store or to the dentist with [my children], for example if we go to the dentist for the braces that they have, when I go on the bus, walking, I talk to my children in Spanish, but when I have to make an appointment, I ask my daughter how I can say in English to the dentist to pull out a tooth, and she explains it to me in Spanish or in English.

Mariana seems to have started to reconcile with her foreign status being at the forefront of interactions in her realization that she may never get rid of her accent. In class, the teacher reinforced the idea that having an accent marked foreign status while pronouncing words and phrases “correctly” meant that one could pass as an American. Perhaps most revealing of the way Ellie conceptualized students’ goals for language learning was the day she praised a student for his pronunciation. Her eyes got wide and she looked down at him, saying, “You sounded just like an American boy when you said that just now!” This statement at once displayed the perception that immigrants learning English are successful if they can pass as an American in the way they speak, and marked this achievement as unusual.

Ironically, the very act of putting oneself in an ESL class signals otherness, and foreignness is highlighted on a daily basis in the classroom just by comparison between “the right way” and wrong way to speak and act, or “our way” versus “your way.” As a participant observer, I witnessed a lot of these comparisons. For example, the teachers and Spanish-speaking coordinators would often make remarks in reference to certain words and sounds by saying, “Hispanics have a hard time with this,” or “all you Hispanics say this wrong.” This seemed to be accepted by students—if it offended them, they did not show it. During one week in particular, Ellie made “punctuality” the focus of class, writing the word on the board, making students
pronounce it, and telling them that Hispanics have a problem with punctuality. As mentioned in the discussion of methods, Ellie became frustrated one morning that students were inconsistent and late in coming to class, and one bilingual coordinator told her it was a “cultural thing.” Students often brought their “private language” into the public sphere of the classroom in order to try to answer questions or understand words. This would either create an aside conversation with other Spanish-speaking students and result in a final answer of sorts to relay back to the teacher, or the teacher and student would come to an impasse in understanding each other. In the following excerpt from my field notes, Anita is isolated in her interaction, since other students don’t seem to have an answer to help her out.

*Field Notes Excerpt 5*

_We spend some time going through the pronunciation book. When we get to the words leather/lather, Ellie asks Anita what lather is. Anita says that it’s when you wash your hands and it makes the “espum.” This is not the full Spanish word (espuma), nor is it an English word, but she seems to be trying to derive an English word from the Spanish. Ellie stares at her blankly. “The what?” Anita says, “Espum? I don’t know what the word is in English.” Ellie says, “well I’m pretty sure it’s not that word.” Then Ellie offers up the word “foam,” moving away from the misunderstanding._

*Analysis Conclusion*

I argue that foreignness moving to the forefront of every context, that is, being a perpetual foreigner, constitutes adult immigrant liminality. Participants expect to be treated as foreigners or others when they are in a country away from home, and often do face discrimination or feelings of self doubt, incompetence, or childishness; this expectation, along with the fact that they are still not completely comfortable with English and so identify with Spanish so strongly, leads unsurprisingly to their claiming of just one identity without much explicit exclamation of feeling in-between. When mistakes are pointed out in their talk or
actions, participants reclaim their foreign status by using that identity as a justification, to show their mistakes are reasonable. Despite their claims that they are truly and only Mexican/Venezuelan/etc., they also use the justification of foreignness when they make mistakes in their “comfortable” language—like when Marcela said she had a conflict in her schedule because she had been living in the U.S. for so long. Even though participants don’t necessarily claim it, adult immigrants living in the U.S. are inhabiting a third space characterized by the partial integration into U.S. culture that comes necessarily from having cultural interactions over time and learning and using English in conjunction with the culture of it, the “language beyond words,” as well as being marked as a foreigner in all contexts—specifically as a resident foreigner in the U.S. The status of foreigner functions as both a roadblock in achieving success and proving competence, and a justification for communication mistakes and difference. One major way that participants made sense of their liminality was to distinguish between cultural doing and cultural being, creating a split between enacting and identity and claiming one.

Making a distinction between cultural doing and being, or enactment versus claiming an identity, is a way that participants can make sense of their complex social positioning, one in which they are expected to assimilate but are still considered foreigners. This marking of foreignness is not just thrust upon them, though; they emphasize their difference in their descriptions of cultural difference and separation of language functions and contexts. Although multilingualism and multiculturalism are desired, especially for their children, participants describe their status as though they can never reach a point where they are considered native—and they don’t seem to want to. If they believe that they will be foreigners in the U.S. despite all efforts, it is surely important to them to maintain some clear sense of belonging. Even though
they resist the idea of falling somewhere between rigid identity categories, the reality is that they
describe being foreign in all contexts.
Chapter IV
DISCUSSION

Scholarly studies have conceptualized third space identity and made it easy to understand by simplifying it to well-defined scenarios that emphasize the “either/or” approach. It has been described in literature as liminality, in-betweenness, and feeling neither from here nor there; it is accepted as an indefinable experience that lies outside identity categories. At the same time, this social position has been called both challenging (Young, 2009) and liberating (Yep, 1998); Bhabha and other prominent scholars in this area have called it productive, advantageous, empowering, and enlightened (Rutherford, 1990; Kalua, 2009; Marotta, 2008). Yep (1998) says that the marginality of multicultural individuals can be empowering because these individuals are able to see things “from both the center and the margins—a perspective that those who attempt to prescribe labels for us simply do not have” (p. 83). This view is probably an attempt to reframe a potentially stressful state of being in a positive light, and is not necessarily untrue. However, it does not always reflect the lived experience of first generation immigrants living in the United States, who prefer to reject liminality rather than embrace a new identity status. According to participants, it is the inability to fully enact a non-foreign identity and hide a Hispanic one that hinders success and keeps certain groups on the margins of society; the notion of gaining multiple world-views through marginality as a positive experience may be idealistic, as participants do not describe liminal status as advantageous to them in daily life.

Moreman (2011) talks about the importance of examining the lived experience of his participants, that is, providing detailed descriptions of their experiences, through qualitative interviews. The present study follows same line of thought, and utilizes participants’ own detailed accounts of their social position and the roles of culture and language on their identities.
In the following discussion, I will use the analysis of these reports to expand on the idea of agency that individuals realistically have in claiming or disclaiming identities, including disclaiming third space identities.

Often, scholars interested in third space concepts examine identity negotiation strategies of individuals whom they consider “complex” in terms of identity (Miller, 2010; Moriizumi, 2011; Mythen, 2012). These are people who identify with multiple and often distinct cultures, and who may not be able to answer the question where are you from without some explanation. Individuals with hybrid and third space identities are considered complex in terms of identity, though the terms “hybrid” and “third space” compound all of these unique identities into a simplistic category; these terms essentially come to mean: identities that do not fit normative categories. Studies about hybridity and third space are valuable in the determination of identity categories and the problems that they create when individuals strive for belonging to a pre-determined category or to understanding the idea of self. However, literature does not address in depth the situation of first generation immigrants who are actively assimilating through language acquisition. Understanding the nature of this experience beyond the challenges of defining a middle ground could broaden the discussion of third space and prove beneficial. The aim of this study is to contribute to that discussion by examining the way that the individuals report their own social positioning through their conceptions of identity, culture, and language. Honing in on their conceptualizations of these elusive concepts illuminates the nature of liminal identities and furthers an understanding of the third space they inhabit. Scholars such as Young (2009), Calafell (2004), and Yep (1998) who themselves grew up straddling between categories, have written partially auto-ethnographic accounts reflecting on their own social positioning, which begins to touch on the question of lived realities; however, the present study focuses on the
experiences of first generation immigrants, who have a unique perspective because they have not
grown up with undeniable (and sometimes inescapable) ties to multiple cultures. First generation
experiences, as I explain below, add a particularly interesting aspect to knowledge of third
spaces, as the identities of individuals in that situation are truly in transition; they are perfect
eamples of identity fluidity. These individuals have often experienced both a clear and
recognizable cultural identity and a liminal one, giving them a unique insight into the role that
language and culture play in the shaping and transitioning of identities.

The participants in this study insisted that they could only achieve their goals in learning
English if they learned about U.S. culture and participated in it; learning the mechanics of
language was not enough to successfully participate in U.S. society. The main goal for
participants was to maximize English proficiency so that they could reduce perceptions of
incompetence that they felt were attached to a foreign status. This maximum proficiency could
lead to social and professional success, and in the least would allow for smoother social
interactions on a daily basis. Although the process of language and cultural assimilation deemed
necessary for the goal of being regarded in a positive light seemed to shift participants’ cultural
identities, they were reluctant to claim any new form of identity. They made sense of this
contradiction by differentiating between cultural doing and cultural being, meaning that they did
not consider the enactment of a new identity through activities such as speaking English to be the
same as internalizing that identity. They differentiated between residing in a place and calling it
home (residing vs. belonging), and considered English a performance whereas Spanish was part
of who they were (English as public vs. Spanish as private). Even though these individuals
claimed various Hispanic identities only, in effect rejecting third space identities, the reality of
their interactions suggested that their claims had little influence on a necessarily shifting identity.
Markers of foreignness or change in identity emerged not only when they were trying to enact a U.S. identity, but also when they spoke with friends and family from their countries of origin. The influence of new communities and cultures led to blending culturally distinct ways of speaking; one participant was even mistaken for being from the wrong Spanish-speaking country because her vocabulary and accent were influenced by U.S. Spanish speakers using different dialects.

In the rest of this section, I will briefly discuss the ways in which this study contributes to existing scholarship on third space and hybrid identities by expanding on the analysis above about: the lived reality of first generation immigrants, the extent to which language and culture play a role in shifting identities, and the extent of agency individuals have in shaping (or rejecting) third space. I will also discuss the limitations of this study and suggestions for future research.

**First Generation Immigrants and Rejecting Third Space**

The contribution of this study, which analyzes the experiences reported by the participants, not the experiences themselves, is that it examines the unique experience first generation immigrants have in negotiating third space, and it reveals an alternative to third space negotiation, which is *third space rejection*. Most studies on third space or hybrid identities focus on individuals who feel that they belong neither here nor there and on the strategies they use to navigate this mysterious liminal space. This scenario could be illustrated by U.S.-born biracial, multi-ethnic, or multicultural individuals, who despite being members of a well-defined class are still defined by their physical features and labeled as “other.” In these cases there is no denying that these individuals are negotiating multiple identity categories, and they have been doing so for all or most of their lives. First generation immigrants in this study, who have spent years
immersed in one particular culture and who have thus cemented a socially recognizable cultural identity, do not accept their identities as existing in between when they are living in the U.S., even though their accounts reveal that they are indeed existing in a third space. Instead of negotiating the fact that their identities are shaped and changed by participation and identification with multiple cultures, individuals resist or reject a third space identity.

Participants in this study deeply connect to an identity associated with their home countries where they grew up. Instead of embracing the entirely new cultural identity that they create as they partially assimilate to U.S. culture, they resist the chaos of unclear identity categories by claiming very distinct cultural identities disassociated with the U.S. (*I am Mexican, I am not like people from here...*). This sentiment comes in part from being marked as foreigners in the host country because of their accent, low English proficiency, skin color, or other visible aspects that set them apart. These feelings are compounded by their observations of cultural misalignments where participants do not see eye to eye with the U.S. mentality and feel the pressure to hold on to their heritage for their own benefit and that of their children while living in an environment where they feel the need to suppress their identity in public settings—where they must perform non-foreignness in order to achieve desired goals.

Although adult immigrants to the U.S. may resist third space identity, insisting that they are and always will be Venezuelan or Mexican, or Spaniard and that they will never consider themselves from the U.S., this identity distinction is contradicted in their own descriptions. It is already apparent in the stories of the participants that identities are contested and foreignness is enacted in contexts where they feel they are not foreign, such as with friends and family in their home countries. Participants themselves even begin to justify their break from expected cultural and language behavior in these settings with claims that they have lived in the U.S. for so long
(i.e. having a conflict in schedule) that they have unwittingly began an assimilation process. Even if they are not enacting a U.S. American identity in these situations, the influence of other Hispanic cultures and languages may shift their identities; because they have so much interaction with other resident foreigners in the U.S., specifically in this case, other Spanish-speaking individuals who are identified as belonging to the same group when in the U.S., they may adopt particular terminology, accents, and general ways of speaking that are not considered U.S. American but are not consistent with their home country either. For example, consider the participant who was mistaken for being Argentinian or Colombian when she was really from Spain. In sum, my study suggests that the emergence of a third space identity is inevitable.

Why would first generation immigrants deny a third space identity in their accounts of their experiences in the U.S.? Participants conceptualize culture as mentality, and view their own mentalities very differently from those in their home countries. These differences in mentality are very visible in their interactions, for instance, when Ellie comments on the issue of punctuality and observes how Americans value this characteristic while Hispanics tend to be more lax. Accepting a third space identity would suggest some degree of adopting these mentalities, but instead participants described them as incompatible with the mentalities of their native countries. Perceiving mentalities as incompatible or opposite (like seeking conflict versus avoiding conflict) would make it difficult for individuals to conceptualize a union of the two. Those who experienced discrimination and attributed it to a culture that is intolerable of difference would also be less willing to associate with that culture. Participants also feel pressure to maintain a strong sense of cultural identity, not just for themselves, but for their children and generations to come. It is a way to feel connected to a real or perceived identity in an environment that is exclusive about who can belong. It is a way to maintain a level of comfort
and a sense of control where speaking English is often an uncomfortable experience, making individuals feel like children or even diminishing their sense of competence. The lived reality of individuals in a third space is that they are in many ways denied full membership in identity categories, but they are not necessarily struggling to be authentic members in that category. First generation immigrants do not necessarily come to the United States and learn English for the purpose of taking on a new identity, nor do they want to relinquish their old one; however, they cannot avoid the influences that a new language and participation in another culture have on their cultural identities. Despite the fact that English is only considered a resource for self-improvement and global connectedness, expert use of the language requires a certain level of cultural integration that can have wider implications for individual social positioning. Ironically, individuals who want to master English for the purpose of improving their professional lives can only achieve this goal if they put themselves in situations where they compromise their authority and power—participants often cited that they felt like children or that they felt dumb. Although it is unlikely that they would be denied the cultural identity attached to their home countries, their integration into U.S. culture does undermine their ability to enact that cultural identity as they would be expected. When visiting their native countries or speaking with family and friends back home, they may be labeled as Americans rather than being considered Mexican, for example. However, there are certain constraints to enacting a purely U.S. American identity. Participants will always be marked as foreigners, either because of their skin color or their accent, which they know is a permanent condition. These constraints make it impossible to ever fully integrate and be accepted as U.S. Americans. The experiences of these participants point in the direction of individuals feeling the need to belong to some group, challenging the notion that a third space can be a liberating experience; as Young (2009) posits, that not being able to check a specific
box in the census is not an emancipatory experience. First generation immigrants seem to be rejecting or evading this experience, and so they emphasize that the United States will never be home. They differentiate between living in the U.S. and actually having a “home” identity, a place where they are fully accepted.

The inevitable movement into a third space for immigrants living long term in the U.S. is not as ideal as scholars like Yep (1998) and Bhabha (Rutherford, 1990) suggest. It is perhaps for this reason that first generation immigrants make sense of their social positioning by rejecting the third space; they simultaneously distance themselves from a U.S. American identity by conceptualizing it as a public performance and align themselves with a “home” identity, one that corresponds to their native country. In reality, as individuals begin to reach the goal of feeling comfortable enough with English to speak it like a native, they report experiences that suggest that these separate identities are no longer distinct—that is, the performance starts to become more than a performance so that U.S. “culture” infiltrates their talk when they are enacting their supposed “pure” identities.

**Conceptualization of Identity, Culture, and Language**

This study also illustrates the way in which individuals may conceptualize identity in general and how that contributes to the rejection or denial of a third space. Many scholars talk about identities as being located in interaction, as existing through enactment, whereas much of society views identity as being more fixed and stable, a thing one has. Though scholarship has already noted the challenges that arise for third space individuals when identities or places are categorized as things, being the very conceptualization that puts them in an uncomfortable liminal position, it has not examined how this conceptualization might be embraced by
individuals as a way to make sense of complex social positioning. The fact that participants themselves may not perceive their identities as existing in interactions allows them to make sense of assimilating to the culture of the host country while still maintaining the integrity of their Hispanic cultural identity. Participants talked distinctly about doing cultural membership, or enacting a U.S. American identity, in contrast to actually *having* that identity. Their perpetual state of foreignness, despite their efforts to overcome it, solidifies their feelings of belonging to their native cultures. However, many individuals move to the United States for new job opportunities or to study; after all English is an international language that is highly valued by businesses and organizations not only in the U.S. but worldwide. Moreover, technology and media have helped spread U.S. popular culture like television, music, and books on a global scale. Many individuals believe that the best way to acquire the language is to learn it and perfect it within its cultural context, so they consider that moving to the U.S. is the best way to become successful and to provide an opportunity for their children to grow up bilingual. In effect, they are required to some degree to take part in the culture if they want to fully learn and use the language. English is not necessarily pursued for the love of culture but because it is seen as a resource for success. Language ideologies that associate English with power and global success put pressure on non-native individuals to master the language or run the risk of being labeled incompetent. By participating and adopting culture only as a performance, but not fully internalizing it, they are able to understand themselves as fulfilling the necessary steps for mastering English like a native while maintaining a clear cultural identity; this way they are able to accept their foreign status in the United States knowing that it is only a requirement to achieve their higher goal, which is to become fluent in a language that commands prestige worldwide, while keeping their innate identity intact.
As I have previously mentioned, this conceptualization is more of an ideal than a reality: Enacting an identity does seem to be the same as “having” that identity, since the enactment of English and U.S. cultural ideals over time influences the way individuals interact when they are no longer trying to perform. However, the fact that participants do not conceive identity as existing in interaction illustrates their compartmentalization of identity or what they think it means: “I have my innate identity and what I am doing in the host country is simply acquiring a skill.” Although individuals may not be able to fully enact a U.S. American identity, as they will not look and sound like their social counterparts or meet the expectations Americans hold for being “one of us,” they are enacting something that is not entirely the same as their previous identity. They are not completely from the U.S., and not completely from their home countries anymore either, thus, they are enacting some third space or hybrid identity.

Learning how participants conceptualized culture versus how they conceptualized language added to the understanding of their distinction between cultural being and doing; their discussions of culture were centered on cultural difference, which to them is akin to a difference of mentality that cannot be compromised; this was a way to distinguish between themselves and U.S. Americans. This conceptualization of cultural difference created a schism between the notions of adopting a language and adopting a culture. Third space and hybridity research points to language as a key strategy and sometimes a necessity for enacting a particular cultural identity, such as the case in Moreman’s (2011) study where Linda did not speak Spanish:

“the ability of lack of ability to code switch closely ties to the ability or lack of ability to express on or the other of her/his cultural identities…Linda’s mother pointed out that Linda did not know Spanish and, in turn, did not know Latina/o customs and behaviors.
This lack of knowledge became a point of contention between Linda and her mother.”

(Moreman, 2011, p. 207-208)

In the case of first generation Spanish-speaking immigrants, the English and Spanish languages did signify certain enactments of identity and had certain implications for other identities, such as a competent identity or a foreign identity, but the acquisition and use of English was not an attempt to express a cultural identity. If “expressing” an identity means to show one’s true or inner self in an outward manner, then Spanish would be the language associated with expression and even though the goal of English was to become proficient to the point of thinking in English and feeling fully comfortable using it, the notion was that the language would only be associated with performance. Whereas bicultural individuals may try to learn or perfect a language in order to be able to express or better understand an identity that they feel is a part of who they are, first generation immigrants who come to the U.S. with an already clear sense of cultural identity are learning English as though they are learning a skill: to gain a resource, be seen as successful, and have more flexibility in their interactions. Even though first generation immigrants have not had their entire lives defined by liminality the way their children might, it does not mean they can completely avoid a move into a third space. However what they do with that identity offers a new way for scholars to think of third space identity negotiation.

The Nature of Third Space and Agency

Some Hispanics living in the U.S. who identify with two cultures and two languages have claimed and shaped this space through the hybridization of Spanish and English (Spanglish), which consists of the fusion of certain syntactic and lexical elements common of languages and
cultures in contact. Some linguists have posited on the reasons for this phenomenon as the result of a “shared experience” (Hart-González, 1985, p. 86), the enactment of a reality that is common to all Hispanic immigrants. Participants in this study revealed this sentiment and spoke of the nature of their identity position in the U.S. through expressions of their “community” here. When talking about community, they are actually referring to first generation Spanish speakers living in the U.S. This emerging group with which they identify and where they share common experiences is different from the culture they left behind in their home countries, and it is also different from the culture of the host country. Participants refer to this “new” paradigm in ways that reveal that their membership belongs neither with constituents in their home countries nor with U.S. Americans but aligns with a cohort of resident foreigners.

Whereas current scholarship on third space accepts the notion that individuals will be thrust into a third space and focuses on the challenges of this positioning and the strategies for shaping it, it does not contemplate the possibility that individuals may recognize and reject this third space. This study raises the question of whether individuals are willing to claim membership in a specific identity category when constituents in that category view them as “other”, and are not ready to accept as legitimate members of the group. Theories like Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) tend to attribute some agency to individuals when it comes to using language to show membership or non-membership, stating that individuals are more likely to speak like those around them if they want to present themselves as more similar to that group (Tracy & Robles, 2013). Although members of this study wanted to use English to participate in U.S. society, acquire a skill for professional life, and to avoid certain negative connotations associated with foreignness (i.e. incompetence), they did not claim to use the language with others to be seen as “one of them.” When they used English formulations to
speak in Spanish with family members for example, it was not a strategic move for identity negotiation; rather, it was an unconscious marker of foreignness that revealed to some extent the group the “self” belonged or did not belong to. Even if participants say that they are undeniably Mexican, and undeniably not U.S. American, they have little control over whether other members of those identity categories accept them or not as such. Individuals who have grown up in Mexico are not likely to be cast out as non-Mexican by their family and friends, but it does appear that they are labeled as different in some spheres of the culture. Despite the distinction they make between residing and belonging, they are influenced by the culture of the host nation and any deviation in language or cultural norm, not only in the adoptive country but also in their native one, signals and reinforces the notion of their membership in a new community. It could be argued that shifting to a third space identity is not something that can be avoided, despite efforts by individuals in that predicament to maintain a clear cultural identity that aligns with their home country.

Language is seen by participants as something that they have agency in learning; it is their responsibility to put forth effort into English acquisition, specifically by putting themselves in potentially uncomfortable situations in order to immerse themselves in the language. Individuals who stayed in their comfort zones and were inconsistent in coming to class were seen by other students as not applying themselves and maybe not wanting to learn the language after all. The need for English, however, is not seen as an option. Participants commented, in a matter of fact manner, that they live in a country that speaks English, and so they have to learn. One participant specifically said she did not want to learn English at first, but realized that she had to speak the language if she was going to live in the U.S.
There is little agency in avoiding a third space identity, since so much of belonging is dependent on the legitimacy of a person’s identity that is stipulated by the group. Although participants try to claim that they are not “from” the United States, it is undeniable that participating in a culture other than their own and speaking a language that is tied to culture (implicating a certain mentality; like having a conflict in expressing schedule concepts) is going to reshape participant identities in a way that makes them foreigners even in their homes and hometowns. Participants see a difference in their own experiences and those of their children— younger individuals who grow up with multiple cultural influences, that is, who indisputably claim third space identities. There are certain things about language that will keep participants from being considered “from here” completely, such as their accents, which they claim they will never be able to overcome.

It is possible that emphasizing a foreign identity (which participants do not categorize as third space) is an attempt to reclaim agency in social positioning. In a space where individuals are constantly treated as other, it may be liberating to reclaim power by proudly stating one’s own otherness. Whether this sentiment is felt on a genuine level or not, it is motivated by a desire to embrace and emphasize differences that are often generated by persons of the host culture and often acted out in defiance: you say I’m not from here, and I say “good”. Or it could be a combination of this imposed “otherness” and expressions and perceptions of cultural differences that highlight their separation from a U.S. identity

**Conclusion and Limitations**

Third space theory does not discuss the tension between the desire to enact certain components of a specific cultural identity (U.S. American) and resist a shifting identity as one enacts aspects associated with that identity. This study illustrates that first generation immigrants
to the United States, unlike bicultural individuals who have grown up in this country, do not necessarily think of a U.S. American identity as a goal to attain, nor do they want to shift away from their previous cultural identity. Particularly when it comes to the English language, the reason many first generation immigrants are here has to do with their desire to learn English, which enjoys prestige and worldwide recognition, to achieve professional success, or to gain some kind of social/lifestyle advantage. If individuals see cultural participation as the best way to learn English, then they must make sense of their participation and the influence it has on their cultural identities. If they resist the notion of an in between identity, then it is very telling of how they conceptualize what it means to “have” an identity.

Third space researchers have talked about the challenges and strategies of negotiating a third space or hybrid identity, but have not delved in depth in the lived experience of first generation immigrants who reject third space identity, and how the notion is conceptualized. This study addresses this with two main points: first, it describes how participants may create a conceptual split between the performance or the enactment of identity and the actual claiming of that identity; and second, it discusses the limited agency immigrants have in shaping identities through claiming or disclaiming them.

As a foundation for understanding immigrant conceptualization of assimilation and identity, this study takes a partially emic approach to describing the relationship between language, culture, and identity. This foundation revealed a tension between two goals: achieving maximum comfort in speaking English through understanding the culture and perfectly executing the language, and claiming an unchanged home identity. This tension adds a layer to previous scholarship on the challenges of identity negotiation, as it considers the case in which individuals do not claim feeling some affinity to the culture that is shaping their identity.
Previous scholarship about hybridity and third space may simplify the concept of complex identities by categorizing them all together as “in between” identities. This discussion acknowledges the simplification of the notion of hybridity as a general category, and highlights how this category combines all resident foreigners in the U.S.; this combination has a diluting effect on the enactment of distinct Hispanic identities (i.e. a mixing of distinct dialects, adopting new Spanish accents, and a sense of community that reaches beyond other individuals from the same country) and contributes to the shifting of immigrant “home” identities.

Some limitations of this study were already mentioned in the Methods section, but there are others which have become apparent in the light of my analysis. First, this study focuses on individuals who identify Spanish as their first or dominant language. Although Spanish-speaking immigrants make up a large part of the population in the location where this study took place, there are also many other resident foreigners who are actively learning English. These individuals may have different experiences and goals, which could broaden our knowledge about the experiences of first generation immigrants living in the area. The researcher’s own language background was one reason for focusing on Spanish-speakers, but language was still an obstacle in some aspects of the data collection process. Greater Spanish proficiency, or partnering with someone who had that capability, would have allowed for the inclusion of a wider range of experiences. The fact that participants were still learning English could have contributed to deficiences in the articulation of some stories and explanations during interviews in English. There were other limitations as well associated with the scope of the participants. The number of students and coordinators available who felt comfortable enough to interview in English influenced both the number of interviews completed and the gender identities of respondents. Although this did not interfere with exploring these particular research questions, future studies
may find it useful to include more interviews and to differentiate between the experiences of male and female participants. Including more interviews could capture a wider variety of experiences, which could be analyzed in terms of levels of participant proficiency and the tendency to claim or reject shifting identities. Moving out of the scope of the classroom could be useful for another study; in some cases, participants’ husbands worked jobs put them in English-only situations so that they’d have to learn fast. Perhaps their feelings of belonging differ from individuals who are still very aware of the fact that they are in the learning process.

This study focused on individuals living in the United States, but further research could also expand on the implications of the English language and identity by studying Spanish-speaking immigrants to other nations, perhaps Great Britain or even countries where the dominant language is not English. It may be illuminating to compare the experiences of immigrants learning a foreign language other than English, and how those experiences of foreignness or membership correlate to the findings on this study. This would tell researchers more about social pressures to conform that may be unique to the U.S.; it may be useful to explore the intense patriotism that some individuals argue is a mask for prejudice (Tracy & Robles, 2013).
Chapter V

REFERENCES


Lane, P. (2010). “We did what we thought was best for our children”: a nexus analysis of language shift in a Kven community. *International Journal of Social Language, 63*, 63-78. doi: 10.1515/ijsl.2010.014


Appendix I

Interview Guide

Introduction

The purpose of these interviews is to gather data for a case study I’m doing as part of a graduate class and my thesis at the University. I chose to observe this classroom in hopes that I would gain insight to how students learning English use language and how that language use impacts who they are. In this interview, I’d like to ask you questions about your use of language and your perceptions of how it affects who you are to get a better sense of your experiences inside and outside of the classroom. Your name will not be used in any written papers, to make sure that no one can identify you with any answers. You have already consented to the interview with the consent form. Do you have any questions before we begin?

Background Information

Native country:

Native language:

Other languages spoken:

Years lived in the U.S.:

Opening questions

1. Where are you from?
   Probe: Born? Raised? Live now?

2. How long have you lived in the United States?
   Probe: What made you decide to move to the U.S.?

3. Can you tell me what it’s like to live in the U.S.?

Questions About Language Learning

4. What is the importance of learning English?
   Probe: For you, for your family, for any person in the U.S.?

5. What challenges do people face if they don’t speak English, or don’t speak it well?
Probe: Can you think of a situation when you or someone you know had difficulty with language in a social situation? What happened and what problems did it cause?

6. What is the importance of speaking Spanish?
Probe: For you, for your family, for anyone who speaks Spanish?

7. What challenges do people face if they don’t speak Spanish, or don’t speak it well?
Probe: Can you think of a situation when you or someone you know had difficulty with Spanish in a social situation? What happened and what problems did it cause?

8. Can you describe your experience transitioning from Spanish use to English use?
Probe: What challenges have you faced in learning English?

Questions about contexts for language

9. When do you speak Spanish and when do you speak English?
Probes: In what contexts? Why? Are there exceptions?

10. What is it like to try to use Spanish in the home? Do you face challenges?

Questions of Identity and membership

11. How do you respond to the question “where are you from?” when asked?
Probe: Do you/others think of yourself as more American, more Hispanic, or somewhere in between?

12. How important is language to who you are?

13. How would you describe the community you are a part of?
Probe: Americans, Hispanics, immigrants

14. Do you feel you are accepted as an American? Does it matter?
Probe: If you don’t consider yourself American, do you feel accepted in the community?

15. Do you think the immigrants who move here are ever considered “from here?”
Probe: Do they feel like they are accepted as a member of this community?

16. Do they lose anything if they achieve that?
Probe: Do they want to be a member? Can they be a member and still be a member of another community?

17. Can you tell me about a time you felt you didn’t belong?
Probe: Someone didn’t accept you or you felt like you weren’t a member of a group

18. When someone speaks Spanish/English, what does that say about who they are?
Probe: How do other people view them?
Questions about language goals (agency)

19. How is the language learning process going so far?
   Probe: What’s your goal? Have you reached it?

20. What are you going to have to do to maintain both languages?
   Probe: What challenges will you face?

Questions about multilingualism

21. What is the importance of knowing multiple languages?
   Probe: Is multilingualism a good thing?

22. What does it mean to be fluent in English? In Spanish?
   Probe: What counts as being fluent?

23. Can you tell me about a time you felt uncomfortable speaking Spanish? Speaking English?

24. How will knowing both languages change your situation in life?
   Probe: How does speaking both influence a person’s life?

Closing Question

25. How do you see the future of Spanish-speaking immigrants in this country?
   Probe: Will the experiences you have described be different for future generations of immigrants?
Appendix II

Participants by name, native country, and role in ESL organization (all names have been changed)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Native country</th>
<th>Role</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Marcela</td>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>Coordinator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mariana</td>
<td>Venezuela</td>
<td>Coordinator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naomi</td>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>Coordinator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anita</td>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>Student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uriel</td>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>Student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ema</td>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>Student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paula</td>
<td>Ecuador</td>
<td>Student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gabie</td>
<td>Peru</td>
<td>Student</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>