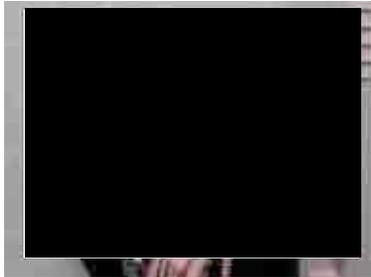


# LANGUAGE LEARNING BIOGRAPHY

## FAMILY BACKGROUND



██████████, currently eighteen years of age, first came to this country from Puerto Rico at the age of twelve. She was born in San Sebastian, Puerto Rico. Along with her mother and younger sister (age fourteen) and younger brother (age ten) she immigrated to the United States and settled in Pawtucket, Rhode Island where she was immediately placed in the ESL program in the Pawtucket School Systems. Upon arrival and entering into the American school system, ██████████ spoke, read and wrote very little English. The little she did know was from taking English in elementary school in Puerto Rico. ██████████'s first language is Spanish and she identifies herself as Puerto-Rican American. "I'm Puerto-Rican because that's where I was born, but I'm also American because that's where I live now, so I guess I am a Puerto-Rican American," responded ██████████ in a personal interview.



██████████, officially began to speak English

in elementary school in Puerto Rico, but she said she only really began to learn the language when entering the ESL program in Pawtucket, RI. Life was difficult for [REDACTED] and her family. They came to Pawtucket “to have a better life,” because in Puerto Rico, they were very poor and “going nowhere fast.” [REDACTED]’s father left the family when she was eleven, which gave the family no choice but to seek an immediate remedy. The choice: Immigrate to the United States. Why Pawtucket, Rhode Island? [REDACTED] had some cousins who already lived here and that is why they chose Rhode Island.

### FIRST LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

According to Richard Schmidt and the *noticing hypothesis*, “nothing is learned unless it has been noticed” (Lightbown & Spada, 44). Such is the case with [REDACTED] because she had to start somewhere to learn the English language and she immersed herself into it at the age of twelve, when she entered the American school system. “In a way, I was forced to learn English because it was everywhere around me” [REDACTED] said. The language barrier was difficult because there were a lot of words and meanings that [REDACTED] didn’t understand. She made

understanding the meaning of words a priority and focused very little on form. “I was more concerned with what things meant that I couldn’t really focus on the correct way to say it,” ██████ stated. Her intake of knowledge is defined in Bill Van Patten’s *Input Processing Theory*, where “learners have limited processing capacity and cannot pay attention to form and meaning at the same time” (Lightbown & Spada, 46).

Jean Piaget noted that “children’s language is built on their cognitive development” (Lightbown & Spada, 20). The earlier they immerse themselves in their second language, the better they will grasp it. The linguistics of learning a new language can be quite difficult. When first learning English, ██████ had great phonological difficulties. She said words ending in *s* were a major problem with pronunciation. The final *s* in words like *leaves* and *eats*, sounds like a *z*, so when she spoke she would always leave out the *s*. Another phonological difficulty was *ing* words. “I knew the rules when writing *ing* words, but when speaking, I would always leave out the *g*,” she stated. So words like *working* and *laughing*, ██████ would pronounce as *workin’* and *laughin’*.

██████ also went on to say that the English language is

“backwards” from her native Spanish. Dates for example are backwards. In Spanish, the day comes before the month, but in English, the month comes first. She went onto explain her difficulty with adjectives and how they come before a noun in English, where in Spanish they come after. She gave the example of *a blue box*. The adjective *blue* comes before the noun *box*. In Spanish, it would be *la caja azul*. The adjective *azul* (blue) comes after the noun *caja* (box). These rules just made learning English more difficult.

Nonetheless, it wasn't all a bad experience. [REDACTED] says that learning English had its benefits. Knowing the Spanish language was a plus, because a lot of words have the same roots and it made picking up vocabulary much easier. Words like *cafeteria* and *banana* are the same. Other words like *potato* and *tomato* are similar to the Spanish translation of *batata* and *tomate*.

## **BILINGUALISM**

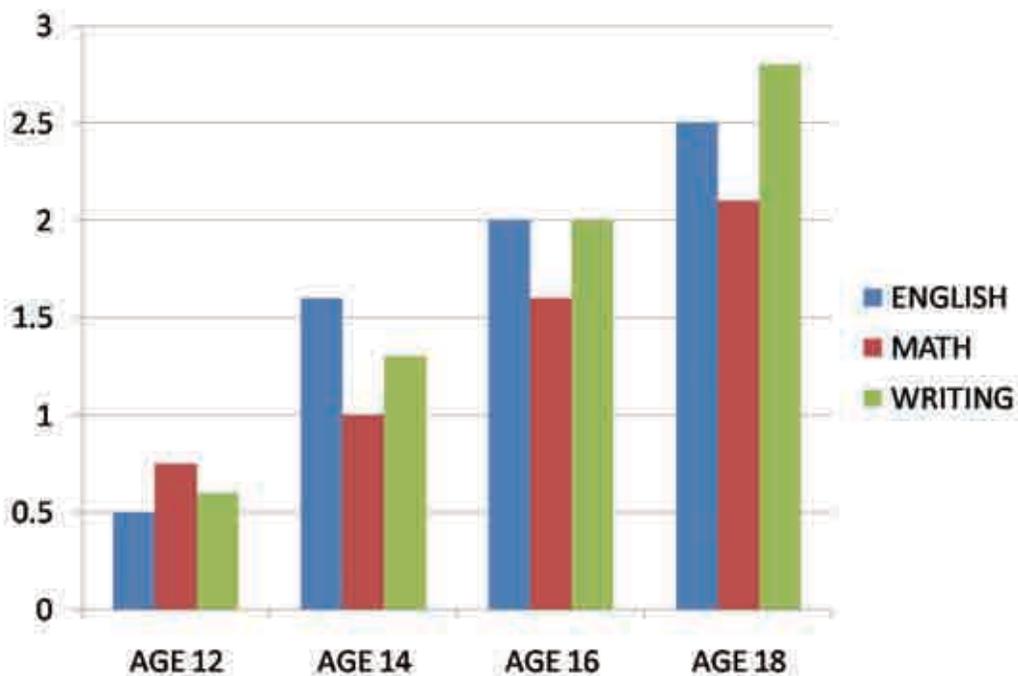
Today, [REDACTED] can read, write and speak English fluently, but it wasn't always like that. She speaks English at school with her friends. At home she speaks English with her sister and brother, but communicates with her mother in Spanish. She is also fluent in Spanish,

which makes her bilingual. [REDACTED] is actually a *sequential bilingualist*, because she first learned the Spanish language and then she moved to the United States and was forced to start a new language. “I think it’s important to know both Spanish and English because it’s the two languages most people use in the world...I’m ahead of the game,” [REDACTED] stated. [REDACTED] uses about the same amount of English and Spanish in a day. She would rather speak Spanish because she is more comfortable with the language. She likes to sing in Spanish, but communicates better in English.

Nonetheless, [REDACTED] is currently a Senior in the Public Relations Academy and is interning at the State House interpreting, which she couldn’t have done if she didn’t learn the English language and maintained her bilingualism. “It was hard for me, but I wish I had come to the United States when I was much younger...because I would have learned the language quicker,” [REDACTED] said. She said that at the age of twelve she struggled more than her six year old sister and two year old brother. She says that her sister speaks better than she does and that her brother speaks the best of all. [REDACTED] has a strong Hispanic accent, where her brother doesn’t have one at all. However, being bilingual didn’t interfere with her academic grades, but on the contrary improved

them. The graph below shows ██████'s progress, academically, in English, Math and Writing from the ages of twelve to eighteen. The information in the chart was obtained from her ELL records, with her permission.

**██████'S ACADEMIC PROGRESS**



At the age of twelve, ██████'s scores were really low. English was new to her. However during a six year span, her scores improved dramatically, especially in writing.

## COGNITION AND LANGUAGE LEARNING

████████ started school in the middle grades and her cognitive abilities were average. She did whatever she could to grasp the language. She had an ambition not just to know what things were, but she wanted to know the meaning of them and take it a step further. This is best described in David Ausubel's *Subsumption Theory* and *Rote vs. Meaningful Learning*. *Rote Learning* "involves the mental storage of items" (Brown, 91) where *Meaningful Learning* is the "process of relating and anchoring new material to relevant established entities" (Brown, 91). █████████ learned new information, but she wanted to make more of it by using the new information more critically.

According to Robert Gagne's *Types of Learning* that human beings use, █████████ exhibits *Principle Learning*. *Principle learning* "is a chain of two or more concepts... [that] function to organize behavior and experience" (Brown, 100). In class, █████████'s teachers label all of the items from the desks to the walls. At home, █████████ modeled her teachers and labeled everything too. "Labeling made learning English much easier...I learn by seeing things in front of me...so when I saw words and the items attached to them, I was able to make more sense of

it and use it better,” stated [REDACTED].

The strategy of labeling, mentioned above, relates to the *Cognitive Strategy of Imagery*. *Imagery* is “relating new information to visual concepts in memory via familiar, easily retrievable visualizations, phrases, or locations” (Brown, 135). In addition, [REDACTED] tried to use other strategies like *Repetition*, *Translation* and *Note-taking*. [REDACTED] enjoys writing and reading on a daily basis and she writes everything down and practices over and over. She has a fear of making mistakes in public while speaking so she would purposefully delay presentations in class so that she could observe the others presenting so she would have a better understanding of what to do. This particular strategy is the *Metacognitive Strategy of Delayed Production*. Moreover, [REDACTED], relied on her American friends to correct her whenever possible and give her feedback. She also questioned her teachers all of the time for clarity and better explanations. These strategies are the *Socioaffective Strategies of Cooperation* and *Questioning for Clarification*.

## **PERSONALITY FACTORS AND MOTIVATION**

[REDACTED]’s motivation to succeed is immense. She believes in herself and makes every effort possible to achieve goals. She exhibits

*global self-esteem*, where she assesses her “own worth over time and across a number of situations” (Brown, 155). [REDACTED] is very talkative and can be labeled as a “social butterfly.” She is definitely a leader opposed to being follower. Socially, she has a lot of friends and maintains strong bonds with them. She says she likes to talk to everyone because it’s a good way to improve her English. She realizes she is not an expert at speaking English, but she’s not afraid to immerse herself and try. She is a huge *risk-taker* and she doesn’t care what other people think or say about her. “I want to go to college and get a better education than my mother had...I want to be successful and that is my *motivation* to succeed,” said [REDACTED]. This could be labeled as *instrumental motivation*, where she is motivated to move up in life.

Even though [REDACTED] likes to talk, public speaking is a huge fear. It triggers *anxiety*, but not to the point where it’s *debilitative*. The reason behind the public speaking *anxiety* happened in eighth grade when [REDACTED] did a presentation on beetles. Everyone in the class went up and gave their presentations. One student spoke about Poodles, another about Pugs and yet another about Dobermans. She realized every student was talking about dogs. When it came to her turn to present, she had a whole project on Beetles—the insects, when she

should have done a project on Beagles—the dogs. Of course she was embarrassed, but she gave her presentation anyway and learned from her mistake. Ever since that day, she dreads public speaking. In a way, this *anxiety* is *facilitative* in that it's helped her become a better learner.

### SOCIOCULTURAL FACTORS

“Culture is a way of life...[where] we exist, think, feel, and relate to others” (Brown, 188). ██████ loves being Puerto-Rican, but so too does she love being American. “I know there are people who don't like Puerto-Ricans and who call us *Spics*, but that's not going to stop me from achieving my dreams,” she said. ██████ plans on going to college and majoring in political science and possibly attending law school. She plans on visiting Puerto Rico, but not returning to live there. She misses the livelihood and weather, but that's pretty much it. Even though the United States and Puerto Rico are two different culturally diverse countries, ██████ maintains involved in both cultures. She is not *socially distanced*, but on the contrary *integrated* into both cultures.

██████ maintains contact with family in Puerto Rico through email and phone calls. When possible, ██████ frequents the local Puerto Rican establishments and participates actively in church and local Spanish Youth Groups. ██████ ended our interview by making a bold statement of who she is: “*I am who I am...I can't change now and I*

*don't want to change. I love living in America and I love being Puerto Rican...as Mylie Cyrus says in her song, [I've Got The Best of Both Worlds!](#)”*

## Assessment Result

Criterion	Rating	Criterion Comments
Presentation of a Second Language Learning Case Study	5.0	Your case study is very well done Ricardo. You obviously understood this project and how to conduct the interview to get what you needed.
Understanding Of Important Theories & Research in Second Language Acquisition (SLA)	5.0	Very well done. The theories you chose were very well selected for the content. You might have talked about learning vs. acquisition--which was she more involved with or was she involved with both equally?
Understanding Of Learner Factors Involved in SLA	5.0	Excellent work describing the learner factors and relating them to course concepts.
Understanding of the Contextual Factors Involved in SLA	4.0	You might have said more about the context in which she was learning language and how that aided or detracted from her learning (her teachers, the special programs she might have been in, her friendship group, other contexts where she might be using English other than school). I got some understanding of this from your discussion, but it wasn't directly discussed.
Professional Presentation Of Information (including use of technology)	5.0	Super job Ricardo. Consider this a 5+ I really enjoyed reading your biography about learning Genesis's story.