

Language Learning Biography-Exemplary/Exceeds

Background



██████ was born in Bani, a city in the Dominican Republic. The city is located on the southern part of the island, about an hour's drive west of capital of Santo Domingo. Bani is a tightly knit community with its residents identifying their city as, 'Tierra de Poetas y Liberators', or Home of the Poets (Otto and Daniel 2010). (*Tejeda and Otto Piron, 2010*)

██████ mother was a successful woman who was a nurse and teacher at a local high school. She had been fortunate enough to take English classes in college, where she learned to read and write basic English, and learned a little of conversational. At the age of 4, her mother had decided that she wanted to immigrate to the United States, to start a new life, but she could not take her three daughters with her at first. ██████ mother wanted to build a solid foundation in the US, eventually sending for her three daughters one at a time. While living in the Dominican Republic, ██████ and her two sisters attended a private elementary school; academics was highly valued in their family and community. Spanish is the national language of the DR and the main language spoken in the homes and community. However, For the next 7 and half years ██████ lived with her grandmother, waiting to be reunited with her mother. Finally, the day came when ██████ immigrated from the United States; she was 11 years old. The family was finally united in Boston Massachusetts, where they lived for two years before moving to Providence, RI.

One of ██████ first early memories of how she began to learn English was by watching television. "I loved to watch the show *Full House* because it was a funny family show !" She could identify with the characters and the language that was used in a family setting. When her first summer here ended she entered a bilingual program at her middle school. She would speak very little English, because she was very self-conscious of using the language. She said that even though she could understand English, she would continue to speak very little to no English for almost 3 years. It was not until she attended high school that she began to speak English. During her high school years she chose to enroll into ESL courses instead of bilingual courses. She said she chose to do this so that she could begin to use and practice her English speaking skills and knowledge more. She chose to do this, because she wanted to enroll in a United States college and earn her degree in business management. Once she began to attend college she felt more confident in her abilities to speak, write, and read in English. She accomplished her goals; she became proficient in English and graduated with an associate's degree in business management.

Today ██████ is a 27-year-old woman who is a stay-at-home mom to her 18-month-old daughter. Her daughter is learning how to speak English, Spanish, and Creole (her father's native language). However, ██████ still prefers to speak mostly Spanish or "Spanglish," a mix of English and Spanish at home and with close friends. She still struggles to identify herself with a particular cultural group, but feels during her adult years she has

adjusted more to American culture. Her future goals are to continue or education in business management and begin her career in business once her daughter is old enough.

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FEINSTEIN SCHOOL OF EDUCATION AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

Jennifer Antonelli

LANGUAGE LEARNING BIOGRAPHY...

Introduction / Background

FACTORS INFLUENCING LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

Factors



Influencing Language Acquisition

(No Author, Outdoor Empowerment, 2007)

Exploring Bilingualism

When █████ first came to the United States she claimed that she went through a *silent period*, in which she spoke little to no English. She said that she began to understand the language but was too self conscious and unsure of herself to speak much of it. The *American Speech Language and Hearing Association* (2010) suggests that this is a very normal phenomenon. The association further explains that, "When children are first exposed to a second language they are mainly focusing one listening and comprehension" (*American Speech Language and Hearing Association* 2010). However, in █████ case she remained in the silent period for about three years. █████ has described herself as shy, which is another factor that can influence the progress of learning a second language. (*This will be discussed in more detail under the Personality Factors section*).

During [REDACTED] early adolescent years she was transitioning from knowing her native language to learning a second language, while still maintaining her first language at home. This process is called **Additive Bilingualism** (Lightbrown and Spada, 2009). Additive Bilingualism is often contrasted with the concept of **Subtractive Bilingualism**, in which a person loses their first language while learning another (Lightbrown and Spada, 2009). Research suggests that Additive Bilingualism is beneficial for second language learners, because children will be able to, "...express their ideas and knowledge in ways that are richer and more elaborate than they can manage to do in a language that they do not know so well." (Lightbrown and Spada, p.26, 2009). Since [REDACTED] says she still speaks Spanish at home, she does not feel that she is forgetting her Spanish, or she is not experiencing **language attrition**. She feels that talking to her daughter and family is often in Spanish is helping her not to forget her native. However, she did mention that when she visits her Native country her dialect of Spanish is now very different than that of her native country.

Since [REDACTED] began to learn English at 11, she has had time to develop a solid foundation in her first language before she learned her second language. [REDACTED] is a **Sequential Bilingual**, which means she first learned Spanish and then learned her second language after the age of three (Cloud, 2010). Today, [REDACTED] says she can think and speak in English and without having to go back and translate word for word in her native language and considers herself to be bilingual. [REDACTED] can be described as a **Balanced Bilingual**, or a person who is proficient in both languages. When she thinks of words in both Spanish and English, they operate more like synonyms, because she is "balanced" in both languages (Cloud, 2010).

[REDACTED] also mentioned she speaks a mix of Spanish and English at home and to Spanish speaking friends, she referred to this as "Spanglish." She defined Spanglish as; interchangeable using the words or complete sentences with another bilingual Spanish speaker unconsciously. This act is referred to as **code switching**, when a bilingual person is speaking, they can insert words, phrases or longer parts of speech when speaking with another bilingual (Brown, 2007, p.72).



PDF Biography_Timeline.pdf

“The younger, the better” myth: Age and Second Language Acquisition

Many people believe that age plays is the main reason for success of failure of second language acquisition. However, the collective research about the effects of age on second language acquisition points in the direction that there may be potential advantages to learning a second language during an early age, but there is no evidence that adults can not overcome those disadvantages,” becoming successful language learners (Brown, 2009. p 81). Some of the advantages of learning a second language when at an earlier age are: speaking without an accent, having more time to learn the language, and learning in meaningful contexts. Then again, adults may have more advantages in learning vocabulary quicker, understanding pragmatics, and have a better background knowledge. At times, they a reported being able to better use syntax (Brown, 2009).

██████ thought that learning English was a very long and difficult process. She remembers hearing how age does matter, and people trying to push her to use English, so she could be a more successful language learner. ██████ began to learn English at 11 and still has a foreign accent. Evidence suggests that one a person is beyond the age of puberty; they do not acquire authentic pronunciation of the second language. This idea supports the idea that their may be a **critical period** for acquiring a second language, at least in the developing authentic control of the phonology of the foreign language (Brown, 2007). However, Cook (1995) suggests it is important not to judge second language learners by the accents or small grammatical errors and not to use a native accent as a way to measure proficiency of a second language. Nonetheless, when comparing ██████ to her sisters and her mother, who are all English language learners, they all have varying degrees of a foreign accent, but they all have successfully acquired the language in about the same amount of time.

Learning Styles

██████ describes her pre-college schooling experience and in the Dominican Republic and the Unites States. She was very studious and would spend a lot

of time alone in her room attending to her studies. She preferred to work individually and not with groups. Unless she had to give a presentation, than she would rather work with a group so she would not be the only one speaking, regardless if it was in English or Spanish. Until [REDACTED] entered community college she was very hesitant to participate in class. But, once she entered community college, she said she finally felt more confident with her English speaking skills. She also shared, that having a daughter, has helped her become more confident in speaking English because she feels less inhibited about how she sounds. It seems that this new found confidence has helped her to take more commincatative risks.

Learning styles can be described as an individual's natural or preferred way of learning and retaining information and skills (Reid 1995). In relation to second language acquisition a person's general approach to learning can either aid or hinder their language learning process. The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, a question that helps people identify their personality characteristics, identifies four dichotomous styles of learning (Myers , 1962. Using this information **combine with** the information [REDACTED] shared with during the interview, suggests she has an **introverted learning style**. Learning styles can aid or hinder an individual's second language learning process. For example, a major liability of being introverted means that a person may avoid taking linguistic risks when speaking, which was apparent in [REDACTED] story. On the other hand a major asset of being introverted means a person will take time to process information, have good concentration and are self-sufficient learners (Erman, 1998. P.178). [REDACTED] had admittedly expressed how she was very hesitate to engage in speaking during her early years, nevertheless, benefits of being introverted, later in life most likely aided her becoming a successful second language learner.

Ehrman and Leaver (2003) researched nine specific styles of learning and how they relate to second language acquisition. One of the learner styles Ehrman and Leaver identify and compare is impulsive vs. reflective. Characteristics of a reflective learner are they are more likely to be slower with giving responses, yet will tend to be more accurate with their answers (Brown, 2007). However, and impulsive learners are more willing to make guesses and if they are accurate, that would better aid language learning. (Rubin and Thompson, 1982) [REDACTED] mentioned in her interview that she did not want to speak English for the first few years in the Unites States, which may have hindered her learning process at that time. However, being a reflective learner may also be an asset to learning a second language because they are more accurate and may make, "larger leaps from stage to stage" language learning. Still, Rubin

and Thompson (1982) consider impulsivity as a more prominent characteristic of good language learners.

Personality Factors

Until [REDACTED] entered community college she was very hesitating to participate in class and give answers in either language, but especially English. However once she entered community college, she is not sure why, she finally felt more confident with her English speaking skills. She also shared with me that having a daughter has helped her become more confident in speaking English because she will talk to her in English at times or teaches her new words and she does not feel worried about how she sounds, which has led her to do so with other English speaking persons.

According to Lightbrown and Spada (2009) there are a vast amount of personality characteristics that also affect second language learning. [REDACTED] who shy, may have had many inhibitions during her earlier years as a second language learner, which can negatively affect the language learning process. However, during her adult life she is becoming more of a moderate **risk taker** with language, as described above. As a mother and a continuing education student, I feel that her willingness to take more moderate risks may be linked to her having more self confidence as an adult and an English language learner.

Social Cultural Factors

Acculturation can be described as the process of a person creating a new identity and assimilating into a culture that is separate from their own (Brown, 2007). [REDACTED] explained that she has trouble identifying herself with a particular culture. She said that this is something she still struggles with. She explains, "I did not enjoy American food until recently. I still do also do like to attend American clubs or sport events." However, she says she does enjoy celebrating the holidays, like Thanksgiving or gift exchanging on Christmas, baby showers, window shopping and watching movies in English. She also wants her daughter to be able to fluently speak both Spanish and English. According to Larsen and Smalley (1972) she is experiencing "**culture stress**"

in the third, next to the last stage of acculturation. Before becoming fully assimilated into the culture, the last step, individuals begin to slowly accept the differences of the culture that surrounds them, eventually becoming empathetic towards people of their second culture.

The Importance of Motivation

One of the most powerful affective variables to consider when explaining the success or failure of acquiring a second language is **motivation** (Weiner, 1986; Deci, 1975; Maslow, 1970). As previously mentioned, during [REDACTED] middle school years, she went through a silent period in which she spoke only Spanish at home, at school and with her friends. However, she made the conscious decision to enroll in the ESL program instead of the Bilingual program and became very motivated in learning English fluently. She said, "I realized I wanted to go to college and earn my degree in business management, and to do so I needed to become fluent in English". She also knew she would be an asset in business, being bilingual in Spanish and English. Her family supported her decision and helped her to practice her English. She began to practice using English socially at home and with close friend and academically at school. According to Gardner and Lambert (1972) her attitude towards acquiring a second language would be described as mostly **instrumental orientation**, or a way to attain goals. Her goal was to learn English so she could enroll in a United States college and attain a degree and begin her career in business. However, [REDACTED] second language learning can be described as involving a mixture of instrumental and integrative orientation. What is most important is that she was motivated, wanted to accomplish certain goals, and took charge of her language learning process!

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Assessment Result

Criterion	Rating	Criterion Comments
Presentation of a Second Language Learning Case Study	5.0	Your introduction to your second language learner is extremely well done and thoughtfully presented. The photographs enhance your text and it is clear you carefully researched her birthplace and early history. Consider this a 5+.
Understanding Of Important Theories & Research in Second Language Acquisition (SLA)	6.0	Superbly done. Very impressive discussion employing important SLA concepts and theories to explain her experience learning English. Bravo!
Understanding Of Learner Factors Involved in SLA	6.0	Excellent discussion of age, learning style, motivation and personality and their effect on her learning of English. Your discussion of these factors was very interesting and well informed.
Understanding of the Contextual Factors Involved in SLA	5.0	Throughout the presentation you discussed the contextual factors that influenced her learning. You accounted well for the sociocultural variables.
Professional Presentation Of Information (including use of technology)	5.0	Your use of photographs and your timeline enriched the text presentation. Overall, your paper is well written, but there are a few things to note (some appear to be typos). Excellent use of Chalk & Wi to present your paper.