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### Navigating the Linguistic Terrain: Immigrants' Personal Stories of Aspiration, Access, Identity, and Acclimation

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**Abstract:** This paper examines the impact of language on the experiences and acclimation of non-native English-speaking immigrants in the United States. Using Language Socialization Theory, the paper addresses stories of these immigrant participants in a focus group study to illuminate their aspirations, access to power, and issues of identity in their bid for acclimatization. Results indicate that no matter how desperately the demarcation is sought between language and social realities, the debate involves a deeper complexity of human relationships and comes muddled with many more inter-related and complicated factors. Given that the fluidity and constant evolution of a language is largely dependent on its users, I propose that speakers of English language should accommodate its widened user-base to provide a balanced power shift that enables free expression to all.

**Keywords:** accents, immigrant identity, language socialization theory, language use, multilingualism



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## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

Language is a powerful human construct that exists in every locality and domain. In any form, it is a vital human phenomenon, central to human existence and interconnectedness. Garabedian (2013) describes it as being "not only vital to the organization of our memories, it also functions as a necessary temporal, spatial and, accordingly, existential anchoring" (p. 611). It enables the means of articulation and expression for every human experience and relationship and is intertwined with many sectors of human endeavor. In contemporary society, trends in globalization, technology, and immigration policies have further facilitated easy accessibility to various languages, thereby heightening the necessity for competence in given languages. This interdependence between globalization and language manifests in socio-economic, political, religious, technological, and educational arenas, and other marketplaces of ideas (Kramsch, 2014), making language use germane to people's ability to effectively navigate and acclimate into chosen geographical locations.

This article represents a subsection of a larger four-month qualitative study (Adenekan, 2019) which investigates the implications of language on the experiences of the study's adult immigrant participants as they settle and adjust to living in the United States. The research question is this: *What kinds of experiences do immigrants have with language use, and how do these experiences impact their reality and perceived quality of life in the United States of America?* In highlighting participants' stories about how they navigate the linguistic terrain as they seek to acclimate and acquire the needed

empowerment into society, this article indicates that their experiences transcend language issues, and encompass other domains of life—socio-economic, psychological, emotional, and educational with respect to the numerous students in schools across the United States who are impacted by their immigrant status.

## Literature Review

To shed light on their experiences around language use and the impact they have on the reality and perceived quality of life of the participants of this study, this section reviews relevant research and studies on language and power, language ideologies, language and accents, and language attrition and intergenerational isolation.

### Language and Power

The pragmatic power of a language is described as the ability of that language to gain control over a multiplicity of domains, which include the political, socio-economic, religious, and other functional human preoccupations (Alim, 2016; Bourdieu, 1977, 1991; Cervantes-Rodriguez & Lutz, 2003; Gal, 1989; Lippi-Green, 1994, 2004; Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986a; Silverstein, 1979, 1987; Tomic, 2013). In his discussion about World Englishes, Kachru (1996) described the "pluricentricity" and "universalization" (p. 136) of English language as resulting from the act of the dispersal of the language to various regions in the diaspora largely due to colonization, thus resulting in a decentralization that encompasses demographic, cultural, linguistic, and literary "reincarnations" (p. 137).

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<sup>1</sup> I acknowledge that there is a gender spectrum and that myriad pronouns exist to refer to individuals in my writing. Throughout this article I will use "he" to refer to individuals who identify as male, "she" to refer to individuals who identify as female, and "ze" for

individuals who identify as gender-neutral. I have selected these pronouns because I believe they are more familiar for a diverse audience of readers.

Kachru further stated that this "universalization of English and the power of this language have come at a price; for some, the implications are agonizing, while for others they are a matter for ecstasy" (p. 135). According to his argument, therefore, to the one category that holds the hegemonic advantage, for whom English is ecstasy—it is mobility, it is access code, it is identity, and it is much more. For the other category for whom it is agony, however, it is alienation, it is rootlessness, it is impotence, it is disempowerment.

Being such an essential commodity, language has the propensity to be easily manipulated and exploited by those in power for purposes of exclusion and/or inclusion in the negotiations of significant power and the deconstruction of the balance of such power (Creese & Kambere, 2003; González, 2005a; Gutiérrez & Larson, 1994; Miller, 2012). This control is enabled and strengthened by such ideologies propounded to support the dominance of the language of power.

### Language Ideologies

Language use is commonly accompanied by various persuasions and ideological stances that prescribe and seek to control its usage. Silverstein (1979) defines language ideologies as "a set of beliefs about language articulated by users as a rationalization or justification of perceived language structure and use" (p. 193). These are the held beliefs about how a language should be used, they are the beliefs guiding what is deemed admissible and proper in the use of the given language. Scholars have also pointed out that these entrenched ideologies and persuasions are borne out of deep cultural, political, social, and

economic histories of a people (Blommaert, 1999; Davis & Phyak, 2017; Gal, 2005; Razfar & Rumenapp, 2014; Woolard, 1998).

Due to imperialism and colonization, the colonial language ideology was promoted in which the English language was imposed on the colonies (Pennycook, 2000). This obtrusion, coupled with globalism, has led also to the current status of English as a Language of Wider Communication (LWC) (Schmitz, 2014). The language ideologies surrounding the structure and use of the English language are multifarious and sometimes stand in opposition to

the enculturation of other users of the language. A case in point is the English only/standard only ideology, which prescribes, in places where English is used globally, that the acceptable and proper form of the language is the "standard English" (Morales & Rumenapp, 2017; Silverstein, 1996). Furthermore, the education system in the United States has grappled with the monolingual ideology for decades (Baker et al., 2001; García & Kleifgen, 2010; Giles et al., 1995; Lippi-Green, 2004, 2012; Paris, 2016; Santa Ana, 2004; Schieffelin et al., 1998).

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The debate is still rife on the legitimacy of standardization when there are so many varieties and regional standardizations. The question still remains when reference is made to standard English: Does "standard English" mean Queen's English, American, Australian, Indian, Nigerian, Canadian, or the so many other varieties that exist in various linguistic communities and by which people communicate effectively? (Leung et al., 2009; Razfar & Rumenapp, 2014; Watson, 2018). It is worthy of note also that these varieties and regional standardizations also

encompass issues of accents, whether regional or otherwise.

### Language and Accent

An accent is a particular way a speaker produces sounds as influenced by the speaker's dialect or native language. An accent gives insight into the speaker's national and/or ethnic identity and information (Carlson, & McHenry, 2006; Edwards, 1997; Kinzler et al., 2011; Labov, 2006). Although a long-debated concept among linguists, the critical period hypothesis posits that there is a window of age range, referred to as the age of acquisition (AoA) within which a person can acquire a language with near-native precision. Once the AoA timeframe elapses, there will exist a phonological interference of the earlier-acquired language (L<sub>1</sub>) in the acquisition of an additional language. This interference, in effect, is the origin of accent and is therefore difficult to unlearn or re-learn for the vast majority of people (Baker, 2001; DeKeyser et al., 2010; Flege et al., 1995; Patkowski, 1990).

In spite of these developmental issues, as an ideological construct around the notion of standardization (Lippi-Green, 2004, 2012; Schieffelin et al., 1998), foreign accent is a major cause of negative perception of the non-native immigrant by some native speakers of English. For example, Carlson and McHenry (2006) pointed out that when a person of British-influenced accent speaks, such a person is perceived as polished and refined, while the one of Asian-influenced speech is perceived as competitive, and so on (Cook, 1999; Leong & Hayes, 1990; Lippi-Green, 1994; Stewart et al. 1985). Tomic (2013) argues that people who speak with foreign accents are usually rated lower in intelligence, aptitude, and social-economic status, and are even often rated lower on the job scale skill level. This Language-trait Focused Discrimination (LTF/LTD) makes the issue of foreign accent a quintessential

“litmus test for exclusion” (Lippi-Green, 1994, p. 166) from access to social mobility, status, identity, inclusivity, and sometimes even gainful employment.

Numerous studies (Bresnahan et al., 2002; Derwing & Munro, 1997, 2009; Jaber & Hussein, 2011; McCrocklin & Link, 2016) have postulated that familiarity with an accented speech pattern is known to inherently improve comprehensibility; while intelligibility, on the other hand, focuses on word recognition and the ability to actually understand what is being said. Although Munro and Derwing (1995) surmised that it is possible for an accented speech to be comprehensible and intelligible, the African participants in Creese and Kambere's (2003) studies explained that they are often ignored when they speak and are frequently treated as if they are invisible. This erasure gives them such feelings described by Jhagroo (2015) as looking into a mirror and not seeing their own reflection. These participants also reported that people tend to focus more on correcting them than they do in paying attention to the content of their speech, indicating that the accented speaker is often discredited, perceived as a non-competent English speaker, or at best, perceived as a person of limited English language skills (Miller, 2012; Podberesky et al., 1990).

While not denying that an extremely small percentage of nonnative speakers easily pass for native speakers, Cook (1999) argues that the presumption that the presence of a foreign accent is a fault (César, 1999), a deficiency, and a failure on the part of the nonnative speaker to achieve native-speaker competence, is faulty and should be jettisoned. She further argues that measuring the nonnative speaker by that standard is a comparative fallacy that does not meet the bio-developmental definition of who the native speaker is, and will be akin to saying that ducks fail to become swans (Cook, 1999).

This nativeness principle (Derwing & Munro, 2009; García & Kleifgen, 2010) is antithetical to the notion of translanguaging (Baker, 2001; García, 2009; García & Li Wei, 2014; Li Wei, 2011; Williams, 1994): the process of integrating multiple languages in the same speech event, providing an opportunity where multilingual speakers' language becomes an integrated communication system through the use of various resources to navigate linguistic domains. It is described by García (2009) as “focusing on the language itself and how one or the other might relate to the way in which a monolingual standard is used and has been described . . . (with) no clear-cut borders between the languages of bilinguals . . . a languaging continuum that is accessed” (p. 47).

Furthermore, the nativeness principle and ideology are a manifestation of intolerance for foreign accents, which then becomes the criterion by which the immigrant nonnative speaker is perceived and judged. According to Cook (1999), they are “considered failures if they have foreign accents” (p. 195). This perception has in turn given rise to many accent reduction or modification therapy programs, which inherently work on the presumption that foreign accent is a dreadful thing and needs treatment, intervention, modification, or even eradication (Boucher et al., 2013; Jin & Liu, 2014; Munro & Derwing, 1995). Cook (1999) asks: “Why should English-speaking people who sound as if they come from Houston be accepted as L1 successes when Polish people speaking English are deemed L2 failures for sounding as if they come from Warsaw?” (p. 195) These language ideologies that demand conformity to a particular mold are thus selective in accepting regional accents, while at the same time denying foreign ones. These inhibitions sometimes

drive such decisions that could negatively impact heritage languages and their speakers on social, familial, and intergenerational interactions.

### Language Attrition and Intergenerational Isolation

An established practice within immigrant minority language groups is for individuals or families to defer to speaking predominantly English to their children, mostly in the hope that these children will cultivate the nuances of the more prestigious native language, in this case, English. As this goes on, language attrition, defined by Ecker (2004) as the “decline of any language” (p. 322) occurs, creating gaps in interactions in these families. Consequently, as the younger generation shifts away from their heritage language and identifies more with English as their first language, the ripple effect of intergenerational isolation is activated, thereby creating a condition that further alienates them from the older generation who do not speak the language of power (Cumming-Potvin et al., 2003). This estrangement, in turn, has the propensity to lead to language attrition (Major, 2010; Opitz, 2010; Yazıcı et al., 2010).

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### Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in Language Socialization Theory (LST), which has its roots in multiple disciplines and theoretical frameworks, including sociology, linguistic anthropology, cultural psychology, cultural-historical psychology, activity theory, sociocultural theory, discursive psychology, positioning theory, and many more. Through a preoccupation with close examinations of language use on both “macro-and micro-contexts” (Duff &

Talmy, 2011), LST researchers identify two major domains of socialization in which individuals acquire cultural worldview, viz. “socialization through the use of language, and socialization to use language” (Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986a, p. 163). The stance is that such an examination is not only limited to childhood language acquisition but “is open to investigating language socialization throughout the human lifespan across a range of social experiences and contexts” (Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986a, p. 163). As a result, continual socialization morphs the passive learner into an active user who contributes to meaning and outcomes of interactions within their given social community (Schieffelin, 1990; Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986a; Watson-Greco & Nielsen, 2003). In their framing of this theory, Schieffelin and Ochs (1986a) posit that “the process of becoming a competent member of society is realized to a large extent through language, by acquiring knowledge of its functions, social distribution, and interpretations in and across socially defined situations” (p. 168).

This socialization demonstrates how the mutual inclusivity of both domains is articulated in the speaker’s participation in social contexts (Duranti et al., 2012; Ortaçtepe, 2013). The perspective is that becoming a competent member of a given society is a precursor to effectively learning the language of that community. Conversely, becoming a competent member of the given society requires the use of language in all of its social ramifications. For the immigrant, acquiring the cultural worldview associated with the second language (L2) presents a difficulty that prevents entry into appropriate socialization through the use of the given language. This challenge in turn hinders effective socialization and the ability to participate within the social context that the language demands.

Language socialization is therefore germane to this research as it not only investigates issues of language acquisition but also takes these preoccupations a step

further by seeking to understand what role language plays in the process of an individual’s linguistic and social integration into community. LST is important for this study because of its emphasis and concern with understanding how a people’s language and communicative practices evolve and develop as the people subsist in varieties of social communities. The wide perspective provided by this theory provides the opportunity not only to focus on exclusive issues, but also on various other issues such as culture, ideological differences, issues of identity and subjectivities, power, and such other offshoots that may be connected with language acquisition and use (Duff & Talmy, 2011; Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986b). In this article, interpreting the transcribed data through the lens of LST gives the latitude to highlight the impact of language use on participants’ bid for acclimation.

### **Methodology**

This study was conducted in a large Midwestern city in the United States of America. Participants were identified by targeting non-native English-speaking immigrants in the city, although these individuals have varying degrees of proficiency in English language, which is not their first language. For initial participant recruitment, surveys and questionnaires were distributed to identified immigrants in these communities, and participants were selected based on availability and interest. There were twenty-four participants in the five focus groups.

### **Study Design**

Focus groups were used as the primary means for collecting responses to questions. This format was best suited for the study as it provided the opportunity to collect needed responses from multiple participants concurrently (Hesse-Biber, 2017; Patton, 2002; Saldaña, 2009; Yin, 2016). The face-to-face format enhanced the opportunity to

observe and note participants' body language and expression, and to ask follow-up questions for clarification, if and when needed. It also harnessed the advantages of group dynamics and interaction to provide rich discussion and varied sources for validity. The research sought deep and meaningful narratives from participants (Duke & Mallette, 2011), thereby eliciting the need for them to "talk about their experiences, their feelings, and their intuition surrounding the issues [the research was] examining" (Butin, 2010, p. 97), enabling the identification of patterns, themes, and consistencies across all responses. The focus group research method also provided the latitude to design such protocols that veered group discussions toward addressing those issues that answered the research question, which formed the initial baseline for the questions asked. In the course of responding to these questions, other questions were asked to follow up on issues raised and/or to seek clarifications.

### ***Identification, Selection, and Composition of Participants***

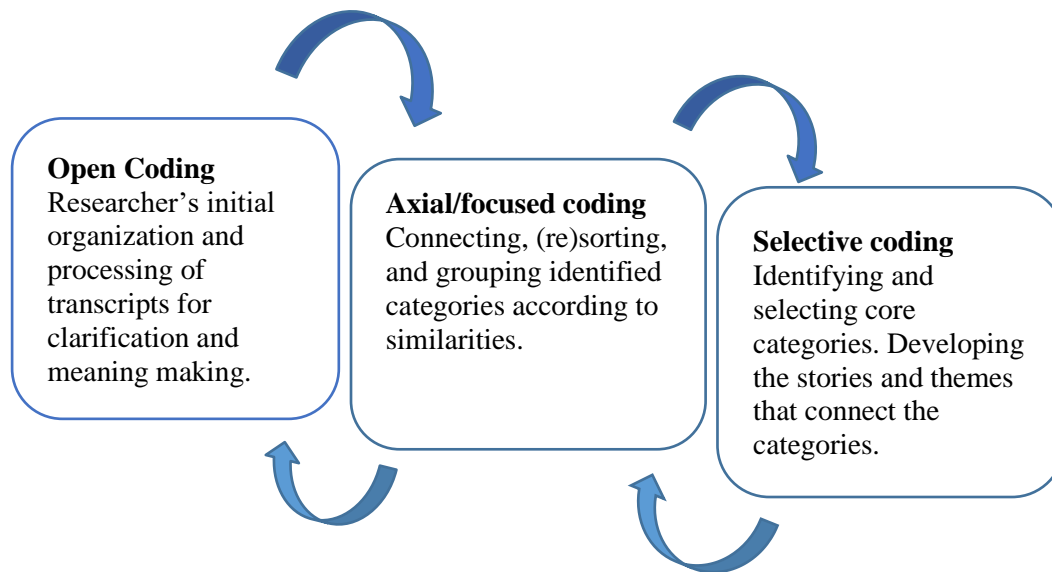
Participants were of mixed nationality, mixed ages of arrival in the United States, diverse family dynamics, mixed-gender groups, diverse cultural backgrounds, varied religious inclinations, different native languages, and mixed-age groups of immigrants eighteen years of age or older. The length of stay of participants in the United States ranged from two years to forty years. Participants' career levels, both in their home countries and in the United States, were mixed and diversified, ranging from students, white and/or blue-collar workers, home-makers, mid-career level workers, executives, business owners, and/or retirees (Appendix A). Apart from varied levels of proficiency in English ranging from conversational to highly proficient, participants also spoke 20 other languages in total (Appendix A). The culturally-and-language-rich participant sample, coupled with the multitudinous grouping approach

in terms of age range, race, nationality, religion, and gender, not only provided diverging perspectives on the issues of immigrants and language use in the United States, but also, varied sources for information validity. For ease of communication and group dynamics, all participants were required to be able to converse minimally and comfortably in English: As González (2005b) put it, "this is the language in which my academic discourse resides" (p. 128).

Since this study focuses on immigrant experiences, participants were chosen through purposive and snowball sampling methods by targeting immigrants in the city. An initial survey questionnaire (Appendix B) was administered to identify adult immigrants in churches, a neighboring parochial school, social communities, and ESL class groups in two community colleges' and through personal contacts. This stage included articulating the research objectives, collecting initial demographic information, and screening interested participants. Selection process for participation was based first on responses, availability, and willingness of respondents to participate. A follow-up logistics survey (Appendix C) was then administered to participants who were willing to commit to the research. Determination about meeting date and time was made based on responses garnered from this survey. Other relevant logistics information was communicated to participants by phone, text message, or email. Based on the stated day/time availability, participants were selected to form five focus groups (FGs). Each cohort consisted of four to seven individuals.

### ***Working Logistics of FG Meetings***

FG meetings were held in available community spaces that were conducive to such gatherings: in a meeting room at a local church complex and assigned classrooms in a community college. On the first day

**Figure 1*****Constant comparison coding methodology***

Note. This diagram depicts the linear coding progression in CCM.

of each FG meeting, participants completed additional questionnaires that served to provide more information (Appendix D). At the first meetings for each cohort, relevant information about research objectives, cohort logistics, and guidelines for group participation was shared (Appendix E). During FG meetings, I served as facilitator and note-taker; and a research assistant was in charge of audio recording and technical details for most of the group meetings. Already prepared semi-structured interview protocols or questions (Appendix F) were posed to facilitate an easy flow of discussions. Participants were asked to respond to these questions and encouraged to share stories surrounding their responses.

Prior to the second meetings, I listened to the audio recording of the earlier meetings, came up with additional questions to clarify points of confusion, and/or to dig deeper into participants' stories. These

narratives served as springboards for subsequent discussions.

Additional prompts were used in the second meetings to further delve into the narrated stories of participants (Appendix G). Other questions were posed as needed.

### **Data Collection**

Participants' responses were audio-taped and transcribed. To protect participants' confidentiality, pseudonyms are used for transcripts that are included in this article. Verbatim transcriptions included nonverbal utterances, as I determined these to be of practical necessity to provide an interpretative determination of meaning from non-verbal cues (Halcomb & Davidson, 2006; Lapadat & Lindsay, 1999; MacLean et al., 2004; Poland, 1995). Transcript collection timeline for this study spanned four months. Transcribing, coding, and transcripts



analyses were done concurrently as data became available.

### **Data Reduction and Analyses**

Transcript analysis was conducted through the grounded theory (GT) approach (Charmaz, 1996; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Kolb, 2012; Strauss & Corbin, 1994)—a “general methodology for developing theory that is grounded in data systematically gathered and analyzed” (Strauss & Corbin, 1994, p. 273). GT is helpful for developing “mid-range theories” that may be “minor working hypotheses and all-inclusive grand theories” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 33). This inductive approach was best suited for this study as it provided the latitude for transcript interpretation which research like this needed. Using the Constant Comparison Method (CCM) (Glaser, 1978; Glaser & Strauss, 1967) helped me to make meaning from transcripts presented through multiple perspectives by a continual and concurrent coding and analyzing system.

I highlighted the relationships between the various categories of codes generated from the transcripts (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). According to Strauss and Corbin (1994), CCM helps the researcher to “illuminate the conceptual relationships between concepts/categories (a phenomenon, i.e. a problem, an issue, an event, or a happening) and their properties in the theory development” (p. 145). Through this method, “the researcher continually sorts through the data collection, analyzes and codes the information, and reinforces theory generation through the process of theoretical sampling” (Kolb, 2012, p. 83).

As indicated in Figure 1, the first step was an initial “open,” line by line coding for generating broad groupings. During transcription, I started an annotative codebook for emerging themes such as accent, loss of confidence, integration, missed

opportunities, diversity, and language attrition. After uploading transcripts into Nvivo 11 data analysis software (QSR, 2017), I continued analysis through “axial” coding by identifying recurrent coding, which focused on sorting, re-sorting, and rearranging transcripts into similar groupings and categories. These were re-sorted and re-categorized in “selective” coding to specify relationships between the themes gleaned from the transcripts (Hallberg, 2006).

To formulate the final themes shown in Table 1, I identified and sorted the codes that are most recurrent from the coded transcripts into “main categories,” and then re-grouped, re-categorized, and re-named them into similar clusters or “subcategories.” The discussions in the “Findings” section are a further re-grouping of these subcategories. This coding process was used to sort through and interpret the multiple perspectives of transcripts collected so that, as Strauss and Corbin (1994) insisted, I may be true to the voices of the participants.

The selected transcripts are the ones that represent most succinctly, in my estimation, participants’ responses to the points being discussed, and the ensuing themes that were generated. Furthermore, in order to ensure that readers fully understand the discussions, excerpts that were used in this study were inclusive of the contexts within which utterances were made, and the portions that are most relevant to the point(s) being made are in bold letterings. Some excerpts are used more than once to reiterate certain points in the study.

The presentation of these findings as themes is a methodological decision that allows for the transparent presentation of responses in a sensitive and systematic way that portrays the social reality of participants’ stated experiences.

**Table 1**

*Thematic categories and subcategories*

<b>Main Categories</b>	<b>Subcategories</b>
Immigration, Diversity, and Language Use	Value of Competence vs. “Handicap of Language” Perceptions, Attitudes, and Dispositions Language and Culture Language and Racism Socialization, Integration, and Language Use Isolation, Belonging, and Identity Affinity with other Immigrants
Accents and Language Variation	Effects of Prior Language Experience Perceptions, Attitudes, and Dispositions to Foreign Accented Speech Patterns Accent Modification Therapy The Ambivalence of Accents Language and Employability Level of Education and Career Prospects
Coping, adaptation, and overcoming odds	

**Findings**

Immigration brings diversity of nationality, ethnic origin, color, and language into the communities where immigrants reside. This interaction between different peoples and cultures brings about a series of follow-up factors discussed by FG participants in the present study. For the participants to tell their stories, and for me to represent these stories in the most undiluted form that I can muster, these selected transcripts represent participants’ responses to the

research question: “What kinds of experiences do immigrants have with language use, and how do these experiences impact their reality and perceived quality of life in the United States of America?”

**Aspiration and Survival**

Participants shared the reasons why they came to the United States, and as with every immigrant story, these reasons are as diversified as they are unique, spanning economic, political, and personal realms.

Some are here because of family relocation, others moved because of terrorist activities in their home countries, while others moved because they want a better life for their families:

**Anna:** I come from a poor family and we couldn't afford a lot of things, and I felt that it's gonna be a **good opportunity** for me, for us, to have a better life. (FG 4\_2)

**Joseph:** How I came to the U.S. was a little bit different. Where I was working, there was some kind of **suicide bombing that crept into the country**, so it was like a real quick decision for me I would say. (FG 3\_1)

**Daniel:** **We all came here with different aspirations, but we came here, and we are here**, and the experiences are somehow. (FG 2\_2)

They each had different reasons for coming to the United States; the reasons are as diversified as are the people. For some, these experiences are positive; for others, they may not be. No matter what these reasons are, however, participants place a strong premium on their ability to adapt—providing them with an inroad to better placement, better opportunities, and better integration. They do not in any way consider themselves as not having what it takes to communicate. They are driven by the desire to succeed.

### **Access to Significant Power and Employability**

The need to survive and thrive is ingrained in humanity, and so, irrespective of the underlying factors for migration, immigrants also need to earn a living and take care of their loved ones. When searching for employment, half of the FG participants expressed employment-related difficulties. They shared that they often are left wondering how the selective process is impacted by their foreign-accented speech, their unfamiliar names, and their

lack of American qualifications. They also worry about the selection process, especially when pitted against American-born competitors:

**Veronica:** I apply for a job for instance, um, I think that's always an issue. **I'm always concerned that will my accent be an impediment to my getting the job, in spite of my qualifications?** So, I think it, it will always be a struggle for, I think, a foreigner. I mean, 35 years is a long time. . . . I've spent more of my life here than anywhere else. . . . I definitely think, that um, **there's times I've considered that perhaps my accent prevented me from getting, doing, being, whatever the thing they need.** (FG 2\_1)

Just as Veronica shared in this excerpt, participants concurred that even though it is hard to prove, there is always the struggle, the wonder, and the sense of unease that surrounds the self-reflection that follows after a failed job search. Veronica's incertitude reflects the immigrant that accented speech, "*prevented (me) from getting, doing, being, whatever the thing they need.*" For these participants, not only do they not have cogent proof to back their feelings, but they are also powerless to do anything about it.

As a result of the various hurdles they have faced to get employed, participants shared in the excerpts below that because they feel the need to constantly prove their competence, they have to bring a level of dedication to the workplace that is different from what their counterparts in the United States bring. This work ethic, in turn, makes it easy for them to be exploited and overworked as a result:

**Rabia:** I have that problem because **my boss will actually take jobs from other people and give it to me** because "oh you did it quickly, you did it well, you didn't make errors, this person keeps making errors," and

then it became too much and it became a problem and I kept getting promises, “we will hire more people,” **you keep getting more work because you do it and you do it like this (tapping fingers rapidly) - my boss actually said “you do it like this, (tapping fingers rapidly) like a machine.”** (FG 1\_1)

These are expectations immigrant participants put on themselves because they feel the need to hold on to whatever jobs they have. They need to avoid anything that will put them through having to go through the job-seeking experience they have had, and as a result, Grant explained that,

when you go to work, um **you feel like you need to do the best job, you feel like you need to be the best job. You’re scared of saying anything against people. You can’t defend yourself. You have to follow what they say and do it.** (FG 4\_2)

The following exchange with Amber further illustrates this problem:

**Amber:** We bring in a lot to the table because of our experience, we have to work harder, and I think that’s what makes us better people, we appreciate it more.

**Facilitator:** Why do we have to work harder?

**Amber:** Because **we have to prove that we are valuable employees.** Grant said he had to show employees that he was worthy of the job.

**Facilitator:** And that’s another question I was going to ask. **Who put these expectations on us?** Do we put it on ourselves; do they put it on us?

**Amber:** Yeah. **I think we do. But it’s because of experiences with people who are not nice to us.** (FG 4\_2)

Based on these discussions, the prevalent feeling was that the bid for economic autonomy is often stunted because of the possibility of language-trait-focused discrimination, which in turn furthers the sense of inadequacy and insecurity. Giving their parting shots, the following participants said:

**Grant:** When **you start figuring um that your accent and your skin color and things like that, all go together, and people will respect it or people will not, or people will take it as an advantage to just take advantage of you.** Um so that was my experience. . . . but **I feel the oppression and the segregation, and it still happens.** (FG 4\_2)

**Nina:** What might be a problem is, **the jobs are not there and if you are pushed against the white person and an immigrant, yes then they would not like you, irrespective of how well um educated, um how good you are at the job that you do. . . . I think it all boils down to money at the end of the day.** If that is all out of the picture, then they’ll be accepting of you no matter what you are. . . . Good and bad will come afterwards. At least I, my skin color is different, whether I’m different from you maybe at the base of it I’m not, I’m just a person. But the first impression you get when you see a person is that he or she is dark, then you see the accent, then you see the culture, you start bringing up all these things. . . . At least in the workplace. (FG 3\_2)

**Amber:** But don’t you think it’s unfair that not only we come to a foreign country, we

have to learn the culture and language and then constantly we have to um fight with this. **Why can't they just accept us? The only thing they have to actually do is to accept us.** You know, I'm not expecting them to, to, to you know, learn about my country, it's just like, you know, just accept us. (FG 4\_1)

This plea is the heart cry of immigrant participants in the study. Amber put it quite succinctly when she said, “*you know, just accept us.*” Although they are aware of the reality of the possible hardship of moving into another country, they are only asking for acceptance, for the opportunity to be heard, for the opportunity to be given fair chances to live, for the opportunity to be given the fighting chance to thrive in their adopted countries.

### Identity, Isolation, and Belonging

Participants shared that the relationship between the need to preserve and maintain their unique identity in their newfound land and domain, their sense of isolation, and their need to belong, often follows from both external and internal pressures. They feel the tension of balancing an identity that should guarantee their inclusion into U.S. society, while on the other hand, staying true to the identity into which they were born. Participants expressed the need to keep their identity intact by focusing on those things that help to preserve their original cultural identities. This is the tension explicated by Veronica and Amber in the following excerpts:

**Veronica:** We want to feel that we belong (yeah) and if we are not “other”, then we're part of the mainstream. (FG 2\_2)

**Amber:** We as immigrants, we struggle with two different cultures – with our own, then American. So, we either follow this American dream or we don't. (FG 4\_2)

**Veronica:** Can I take it a step further and say even maybe **belongingness? We want to feel that we belong, and if we are not “other,” then we're part of the mainstream.** (FG 2\_2)

That feeling of total inclusion is often unrealizable because of the various layers of cultural and language barriers with which they are confronted. The feeling that they are unable to use language effectively leads

to isolation, as shared by Ziggy in the following excerpt:

**“They are only asking for acceptance, for the opportunity to be heard, for the opportunity to be given fair chances to live, for the opportunity to be given the fighting chance to thrive in their adopted countries.”**

**Ziggy:** They sent me back two years. . . . And being in class, in school, those were like just listening, and it feels like you are a wall . . . and it feels like a wall, you see them like talking among themselves but you were like in a corner just like that. And you know you want to learn fast like your peers because like the access. . . . after many years I just like doing listening to radio, I started listening to like, talk show on radio and I start **mimicking their voice like repeat, though I don't understand a lot of words** (laughter) **it is like dah-dah-dah, and then I am trying to get the accent. . . . I think that's thing, you want that belonging, so that you won't be left alone, or like be a loser or a loser and you don't want people talking about you that you are, or you are wearing tight pants, you should be**

wearing baggy pants like that. So I started changing my clothes, just to be part, of you know. (FG 1\_2)

For the students, the education system fails to value and honor their unique identities. To avoid isolation and feeling “*like a wall*,” such students figure out a way to assimilate, thereby effectively silencing their unique identities. This effacement is further reiterated in the comment below:

**Kathy: When I cannot communicate with people, I always stay alone.** Usually I am very talkative person, I am sociable person. I’m open to the world, but when I can’t speak, I’m just stay here and do nothing **and watch people and how they enjoy things that they do together.** And this is a very big problem, yeah, because when you cannot communicate, you **just looking for person who speaks your language, which is not always...**(FG 5\_2)

Furthermore, even though they crave acceptance and belonging in society, it is not fully realized because they also struggle with the need to preserve their language and culture in order to justify and maintain their unique identity in a foreign land. The need to make these choices thus often leads to other internal struggles and tensions. Amber and Grant shared their struggles as Polish and Ecuadorian immigrants, not only with the general American society but also sometimes within their individual immigrant communities:

**Amber:** I also find myself in a situation what **I don’t belong in the Polish community anymore.** I am 100% Polish. . . . but it’s like, you know if you are in a certain group, you act like the rest of the group, you look like the rest of the group, you belong. But if you wanna do something a little bit different, or

you have different dream, or your goals are different, you kind of start to feel isolated, yeah, **but I’m not in the American group either. So, I’m kind of kind of in the middle,** you know?

**Grant: I live in two different worlds.** My job, my school, my networking, the professional environment that I am part of. And then when I go home, **it’s a totally different environment. It’s another world.** My parents, my family, my traditions, **so I manage both worlds,** like so I . . . work in that environment, work, school, to be a part in different organizations and then go into my home, I have to cook, I have to help my parents, and if the car is broken, I have to do mechanic work. Things like that because . . . **it’s like living two different worlds. . . . your parents, they don’t know the system, they didn’t know the meaning of school. It’s like they (also) live in two different worlds.**

**Amber:** A lot of people think that you have to work really hard to make a good living. **So, they don’t go to school, they don’t learn language because they think it’s pointless.** You have to work hard, so sometimes when I talk. . . . you know, sometimes you have bad days and you wanna complain and they just say, “Oh my God! Why are you complaining? I have to clean this and this many houses, but you just go to the library and smile, and you complain?” And that’s not what I meant. It’s not like, oh my God, I go to work at the library, you know, it’s just that I have feelings too and I deal with different people. I have two kids and I have to balance my work, school, my kids, and **sometimes it’s not just easy but because I am different, and I chose different, you**

**kind of, you know, you kind of suffer. . . . Yeah. Do we go to school and better ourselves or we just stick to our jobs and have a nice living and maybe support a family back home, so I think only immigrants struggle with this. I don't think Americans really think about it.** (FG 4\_2)

The pressure to belong to both worlds, to preserve and realize new dreams, and to carve a life acceptable in both instances is a constant struggle. It is the reason behind the decision by some immigrants to become as totally Americanized as they can by distancing themselves from their native languages and cultures. Discussing the attitude of the older Korean generation in the United States regarding the use and promotion of the Korean language as a language of interaction amongst themselves in the United States, Chung says:

**Chung:** Yeah, I think **some old people in Korean elderly**, the first generation, the 70s, 80s, they, **their generation doesn't wanna speak Korean to their children because they have some problem with some speak English**, so they don't want their children . . . cannot speak English well. So, I think that's a mistake because bilingual has lots of benefit, and **I think our identity, language keep, help to keep our identity**. As a Korean, I want to keep my language to my daughter, we're at Korean school, every Saturday, I'm really proud of them because we can keep our language.

**Kathy:** Language and culture are everything, as you said your identity. This is important I think.

**Chung:** If we forget our language, then people lose their culture and everything. (FG 5\_2)

No matter what generation (first, second, or third), age, or category immigrants belong to, their need to belong is constantly juxtaposed with the culture, the language, and the need for identity and preservation. To immigrant parents, therefore, this need to maintain an identity drives their desire to transmit those cultural values to the next generation who, by virtue of being born and raised in the United States, may not have access to the same native cultural values their parents had.

To bridge these gaps, and in the bid to maintain and transfer their linguistic and cultural identity, most immigrant families then actively seek to communicate with their children in their languages in the hope that at the very least, these children will understand their native tongues, even if they do not speak in those languages. This bilingual imperative is also evident in the bid to infuse the sense of identity and belonging and to minimize the impact of intergenerational isolation that may occur if the children lose the heritage language.

In this same vein, although participants all expressed the desire and need to transfer their language (and culture) to their children, they highlighted that there is a dichotomy between those who actively seek to teach their children the language and those who simply give up. To Chung, it is a thing of pride to take her child to the Korean school on Saturdays to learn the Korean language and culture. The same applies to Rida, who said that,

**Rida:** I don't guarantee my grandchildren would get it, but **my girl . . . she speaks Arabic very well. The reason was I want her to feel comfortable when I visit my family back home.** I want her to communicate and enjoy their company. (FG 2\_2)

Veronica and Daniel belong to the other side of the spectrum. When queried about their children's ability to speak their native languages, Veronica's response was emotional, while Daniel's was more rational:

**Veronica: I knew I have failed. I just fail in that area, so I can't, I can't speak to it because my kids are angry they can't speak the language or understand the language. I raise them speaking English because that's all I spoke, so I cannot even pass on anything and it's a little depressing I can't even talk about it.**

**Daniel: If yours was F, mine is probably F plus or F minus, it's the same way. My kids understand when we speak but they cannot speak it fluently. What I observed, and it was confirmed by my kids and some of their friends, at the earlier ages they do not care about it. But when they went to college that's when they really realized that "boy!" it is something to be a second generational African," and so they go to the African Students Association and they enjoyed it and so it's part of the discovery. (FG 2\_2)**

While parents sometimes get overwhelmed by their children's inability to fluently speak their native languages, Daniel shared here that young adult children eventually begin to gravitate toward identifying the values in maintaining that sense of identity by joining societies affiliated with their cultures, and/or by taking their language classes as electives in college when offered. Both Daniel and

Veronica also affirmed that some of the younger generations go to the extent of seeking to learn their languages on such public platforms as YouTube, so as to further strengthen and celebrate the unique identity that their language and culture affords.

### **Acclimation, Adjustment, and Adaptation**

Participants express the necessity to acclimate into mainstream society. Their need to adjust is multidimensional, encompassing both linguistic and cultural forms of socialization. They shared that since language and culture are inexorably linked, to use English effectively in the United States, they also have to learn the culture.

**Rida: Wherever you go, you need to learn their language and their culture and adopt it. Adopt the good things of the culture. It's good idea. Even though you're going to work hard on it, and you're going to suffer sometimes, but it's good.**

**Veronica: Language and culture are interwoven.**

**Daniel: Language is indispensable to being successful anywhere, but the cultural context of it is so important. Uh, the use of the language years ago, differs from the use of language today. . . . And it's all within the cultural environment and so it's very, very important that when you're doing the language you, you, put it in the context of the culture. (FG 2\_1)**

According to these participants, since understanding the cultural context within which a language functions is key to successfully navigating language use, for immigrants, the knowledge of the culture surrounding a language solidifies a person's knowledge and awareness of the language, while at

**“The multifarious experiences of immigrant participants around language use influence all areas of their lives—social, cultural, psychological, and/or economic.”**



the same time intensifying the person's sense of identity, which is often already so lacking. The sense here transcends not only simply knowing a specific language, but also in learning, knowing, and interacting in any language whatsoever.

Sometimes, acclimation, adjustment, and adaptation involve changing the trajectory of their career path. Participants shared that they often fear that their linguistic ability may not be as acceptable, as exemplified by Ola's claim:

**Ola:** When I first came, I was going to be like an elementary school teacher, that was what I wanted to be. I was applying to schools trying to get school jobs, like an assistant class teacher and things like that. But it was so hard. Everywhere I went to, every place I applied to, everybody was just like okay, **you have an accent, how are you gonna teach little children, they will not understand what you are saying**, you know, different things like that, I will say I got discouraged and I changed my mind. (FG 1\_2)

There is the awareness that coming to the United States is a life-changing decision that puts the onus on them to overcome whatever barriers they encounter. Coming to that level of acceptance frees them to come to terms with various hurdles they have to surmount; it frees them to pursue their goals of striving towards lives of fulfillment.

### Discussion

The data show that the multifarious experiences of immigrant participants around language use influence all areas of their lives: social, cultural, psychological, and economic. Furthermore, these experiences are important in that they provide the ability (or otherwise) for immigrants to integrate and gain access to the power they need to acclimate and

improve their quality of life. These experiences also inform decisions about their children, and by implication, their posterity.

### Aspiration, Access, and Acclimation

Participants were acutely aware of the importance language plays in society and the need to achieve a level of ability that favors their functionality. From the perspective of education, the language (in)capabilities of these immigrants is a handicap. The education system fails to harness the power of immigrant students and their ability to speak multiple languages. Data suggest that even though they sometimes struggle to navigate the linguistic terrain, immigrant participants usually do not consider themselves as not having what it takes to communicate. In line with their aspirations, they are hardworking and determined and believe that having the ability to speak other languages means that they are smart and capable of navigating the linguistic and accrued challenges they encounter in the United States.

The participants perceive their language use in the United States as closely tied to the ambivalence of their foreign-accented speech patterns. Accent can be the source of major hindrance to access preconceived ends. It impacts many areas of their lives—employment, educational success, social interactions, and even access to resources.

This inference is based on what some participants shared about either having had to change their preferred career path because of their accents. They were often perceived as being uneducated, or avoided speaking English for fear that they will not be taken seriously. These findings are consistent with those of other researchers who posit that foreign-accented speech patterns have the propensity to elicit negative perceptions (Carlson & McHenry, 2006; Cook, 1999; Leong & Hayes, 1990; Lippi-Green, 1994; Stewart et

al., 1985; Tomic, 2013). As these earlier studies show, there is the tendency to judge a speaker's presumed intelligence based on their foreign accent, which in turn could influence access to job placement and socioeconomic status, and by extension, acclimation. It suggests that who these immigrants are and become in society—their ability or inability to achieve what, when, where, and how—is closely linked to their identity as foreign-accented speakers of English.

### Identity, Isolation, and Belonging

For some immigrants, there is a strenuous tension between their desire to hold on to their identity as permanent and fixed while seeking to carve out an American identity. They straddle both worlds and sometimes have the sense that they belong to neither. There is a tangible fear of the loss of identity provided by their unique speech patterns. For some others, losing such speech patterns is the guarantee to access and seamless assimilation into society (McCrocklin & Link, 2016; Miller, 2012; Ortaçtepe, 2013; Rost, 2014; Tomic, 2013). Consequently, this inability to correctly match the identity, culture, and the language leads to isolation.

Immigrants long to immerse their children into their culture but are sometimes cautious because they want to shield their children from the negative experiences they had. They want their children to fit in—to be Americanized—so that they can have easier access to societal benefits. This assimilation often creates the tension between how far they should go to promote the acquisition and active use of their heritage language. This negotiation is one area where the role of language and literacy education in and out of school can become very useful. Making available

such resources that honor and promote literacy in both English and various heritage languages will encourage parents and caregivers to ease their children and wards more comfortably into effectively merging the acquisition and use of both languages (Cummings, 2014).

Furthermore, as pointed out by LST theorists, since language is “a concomitant analysis of learning through praxis—in the everyday activities of communities of language users” (Duff & Talmy, 2011, p. 96), for immigrants’ children, straddling both worlds and maintaining a balance between the two is one with which they have to deal. As a result of differing viewpoints and values, there is often intergenerational isolation between the parents and

**“At the core of this conundrum, however, is the issue of power and access—who has access to power and who does not... Who has an identity and who is stripped of theirs?”**

children. Moreover, living in a geographical location where the heritage language is not actively spoken presents an extensive challenge for both. Eventually, either or both parties give up and succumb to speaking English only, thereby further limiting the opportunities for the children to learn their heritage languages, and thus creating further

isolation between the generations (Cumming-Potvin et al., 2003) and the potential for language attrition (Major, 2010; Opitz, 2010; Yazıcı et al., 2010).

In essence, these immigrants crave that sense of “*belongingness*” (Veronica, FG 2\_2). They desire a society where, like everyone else, they can access equitable opportunities and empowerment to realize their preconceived goals.

### Conclusions

This article analyzes the responses of FG participants to identify the impact of language use on their aspiration, access, identity, and acclimation into

society. Data suggest that since these non-native English-speaking immigrants and their children partake of intersecting (Crenshaw, 1991; Davis, 1981; Loewenberg & Bogin, 1976) and multiple identities, and possess such experiences that are peculiar to immigrants and users of English language, participants intermingle discussions about language use, immigration, and access to power, showing how closely tied together these concepts are in their minds.

It seems to them that no matter how much people seek to demarcate these social realities, the debate is not cut and dry because it involves a deeper complexity of human relationships that surmounts mere political or linguistic rhetoric. It comes muddled with many more complex factors tied together because there is a greater multidimensional complexity to being an immigrant and using the English language in the United States. As fundamentally tied as language and culture are to each other, various other parameters present substantive tension for immigrants in the use of English language that transcends mere competence in the use of language, such parameters that extend to the core of their validation as human beings: their right to belong, their right to thrive, their individual identity, the identity of their posterity, and their God-given right to be.

Based on the findings of this research, one of the issues immigrants face is striving to understand why their English is not accepted, why they are told that their English is not good enough. At the core of this conundrum, however, is the issue of power and access. Who has access to power and who does not: who has access to jobs, who has access to upward mobility, who is counted as “one of us,” and who is not? Who has an identity and who is stripped of theirs?

While not downplaying the intricacies and complications of sociolinguistic interactions, this study posits that as language is dynamic and changes as human experiences change, and since the population-base of global users of English language has shifted to create a similar shift in the population of the people who are traditionally referred to as native speakers of English, educators should consider those changing dynamics that will enable the accommodation of widening users of English, and the expanding need for which the language is used.

Examples of the issues raised in this study are abundant in schools. They are school children who feel inadequate because of a lack of proficiency in English. They are individuals whose identity remains marginalized because they do not speak English according to acceptable norms (Greene, 2011; Santa Ana, 2004). They are DACA students who struggle to pay attention in class because their future is uncertain. They are students in our classrooms whose father, mother, uncle, aunt, brother, sister, or family member has been deported, and they are not sure who is next, and if or when they will see their loved ones again. They are students whose behavior and attention span have shifted dramatically because they are afraid to share their pain or because they believe that sharing will mean being mandatorily reported to ICE. They are the children all over America’s schools caught between ideological crossfires, used as pawns to score political points and advantages.

Educators and policymakers need to consider the impact of the summation of these experiences on students. Not only do they have to walk these political tight-ropes, but they also need to navigate education in English as they do so. Since the complexity of language use impacts immigrants in so many ways, judging a person solely on the basis of how well that person conforms to specific, one-sided parameters is unethical. There is the need to address and question those language ideologies that hold

certain groups of people captive and shackled to the norms of another group. If language ideological stances align with given cultural, political, social, and economic histories of certain people groups (Blommaert, 1999; Davis & Phyak, 2017; Gal, 2005; Razfar & Rumennapp, 2014; Woolard, 1998), then this factor presupposes that proponents of ideological stance for a particular language may not necessarily represent the interests of the whole. For a language like English with a widening user-base, the ones who propose and hold up standards for its use are therefore often not necessarily the other ever-growing vast majority of people who use English language for all purposes in the world today.

Not surprisingly, the FG participants in this research seem to understand the concept of “linguaging” as defined by Swain (2006) as a concept that “convey[ed] an action—a dynamic never-ending process of using language as a cognitive tool” (p. 96) and “the process of making and shaping knowledge and experience through language” (p. 98). Going by this definition, language transcends *Language* (with the capital L)—a noun, a thing, a concept; it becomes a verb—something that we do (García, 2009; Kramsch, 2014; Morales & Rumennapp, 2017). To the nonnative speaker, linguaging is unavoidably intertwined with various practices and norms that directly emanate from differing cultural realities and experiences. That is to say that nonnative speakers of English *language* differently because for them, it goes beyond “the use of language codes whose distinctness is monitored by the standardizing agencies of nation-states such as language academies, grammar books, and of course, schools” (García & Kleifgen, 2010, p. 45). It equally incorporates their socio-cultural experiences.

The proponents of English-only, American accent-only, and/or standard language-only ideology seem to care more about identity, how the language sounds, and how an immigrant's accent is different

from that of the U.S.-born speaker. The question that arises, however, is whose standard and whose identity? Is the emphasis not on upholding and maintaining the identity and the standard of the proponents of that ideology? Is this ideological stance not oblivious of the fact that to the immigrant, the way they speak English, with all of its (accented) nuances, is what constitutes that speaker's identity? The present system demands total compliance with another culture, which echoes Duranti's (2009) call that “development is only possible when we take into account the language expertise, language inheritance, and language affiliation of all learners . . . regardless of the language attributed to them” (p. 137).

In what way(s) then do the present language ideologies advance the development of immigrant learners? The responsibility rests on educators, literacy researchers, and policymakers to push for effective and sensitive plurilingual communication (Rost, 2014) with a broad-based group of language participants by investigating issues pertaining to immigrants' language use. According to Freire (1970), language and literacy are essential mechanisms for social reconstruction. Educators should see students as “whole human beings with complex lives and experiences rather than simply as seekers after compartmentalized bits of knowledge” (hooks, 1994, p. 15). This recognition creates a knowing (Banks & Banks, 2013; Gonzalez, 2005; hooks, 1994) that permits students the freedom to value their own culture, language, and identity. This acknowledgment serves as a veritable vehicle for social reconstruction.

Furthermore, language should be used more effectively to meet the needs of contemporary society. To the immigrant, literacy transcends the ability to read and write and encompasses the ability to use language in all its derivations (Miller, 2012; Jhagroo, 2015; Sabourin & Bélanger, 2015). The focus

should be on changes that will widen the capacity for people to gain communicative competence (Hymes, 1972) in areas germane to their needs. This message is reflected in García and Kleifgen's (2010) assertion that

Educators meaningfully educate when they draw upon the full linguistic repertoire of all students, including language practices that are multiple and hybrid. . . . Effectively educating emergent bilinguals, even in programs that teach through the medium of English, must include, and support the dynamic bilingual practices by which bilinguals construct knowledge and understanding (p. 43).

A case in point here is that some ESL/ELL curricula focus on older theories on pronunciation, as crucial as that is, to the detriment of developing those skills that build what the people need for empowerment in their individual lives. According to Duranti (2009), "Language use and the notion of ethnicity and social

identity are inextricably linked. Because of this, special attention must be paid to the way many bilingual learners actively construct their own patterns of language use, ethnicity, and social identity" (p. 137).

The panacea is for education practitioners and policymakers, who are interested in building bridges among people groups, to appreciate language use that is needful for the students in their care. There is the need to consider, for example, how such factors as education in English, the acceptance (or not) of their accents, the burden they have to bear as a result of immigration, and the myriad of other circumstances, affect them as individuals in school and society. How should educators and policymakers cater to the whole child by seriously (re)considering basic assumptions, fundamental principles, and practices? This provision will afford immigrants in the United States, students or otherwise, the ability to acclimate more seamlessly, irrespective of their levels of English-language acumen.

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## Appendix A

## Meet my participants

*Detailed profile of Focus Group participants*

FG#	Name	Nationality	Languages spoken	Age	Age at Arrival	Length of stay	Education	Profession	Other Information
<b>FG1</b>									
	*Daisy	Philippines	Cebuano Tagalog English	39	24	15	Bachelors	Medical billing	
	*Funke	Nigeria	Yoruba English	31	15	16	Graduate	Medical billing	
	*Nick	Philippines	Tagalog Ilocano Pangalatok English	39	27	12	Graduate	Engineer	
	*Ola	Nigeria	Yoruba English	42	30	12	Graduate	Nursing professor	Banker in her country
	*Rabia	Nigeria	Yoruba English	47	31	16	Graduate	Accountant	
	*Ramon	Philippines	Tagalog Ilocano Pangalatok English	39	27	12	Graduate	Engineer	
	*Ziggy	Philippines	Tagalog English	40	16	24	Bachelors	Transportation	
<b>FG2</b>									
	*Daniel	Ghana	Fante Ga English	60	18	42	Doctorate	College Administrator	
	*Loise	Philippines	Tagalog English	64	59	5	Associate	Nursing Assistant	
	*Rida	Syria	Arabic Aramaic Kurdish English	54	37	17	Bachelors	Teacher	
	*Veronica	Nigeria	Yoruba English	50	15	35	Graduate	Librarian	

FG3									
	*Crystal	Nigeria	Igbo English	52	31	21	Graduate	Insurance Claims	
	*Flora	Brazil	Portuguese English	40	34	6	Bachelors	Home-maker	Human Resource officer in home country
	*Jacob	Nigeria	Igbo Yoruba Hausa English	35	29	6	Graduate	Physician	
	*Merry	Nigeria	Yoruba English	34	19	15	Graduate	Accountant	
	*Nina	India	Guterati English	61	42	19	Bachelors	Librarian	
FG4									
	*Amber	Poland	Polish English	35	20	15	Student	Librarian	
	*Grant	Ecuador	Spanish English	30	17	13	Graduate	Administration	
	*Leah	Columbia	Spanish English	47	30	17	Graduate	College Professor	
	*Liz	Mexico	Spanish English	20	15	5	Student	Student	
FG5									
	*Chung	South Korea	Korean English	44	37	7	Bachelors	Student	
	*Jessica	Peru	Spanish English	28	24	4	Bachelors	Pharmacy Technician	Pharmacist in home country
	*Kathy	Bulgaria	Bulgarian English	44	34	10	Graduate	Student	Lawyer in home country
	*Olivia	Ukraine	Ukrainian Russian Polish English	44	42	2	NA	Student	

*\*All names are pseudonyms*

**Appendix B**

**Initial Survey Questions**

Please answer the following questions.

1. Name:
2. Nationality:    Age:
3. Circle:    Female    Male
4. Circle Religion:    Christian    Moslem    Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_
5. Contact phone number:    Contact email:
6. How many months/years have you been in the United States of America?
7. How old were you when you arrived the United States?
8. Reason for coming to the United States (Circle best option(s))  
Education      Better Opportunities      Humanitarian  
Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_
9. Level of education in home country:
10. Profession/Job in home country:
11. Language(s) spoken:
12. Circle level of spoken/written English  

<u>Spoken</u>	<u>Written</u>
Very Fluent	Very Fluent
Fluent	Fluent
Moderate	Moderate
Very little	Very Little
13. Circle willingness to participate in research  
Oh yes!    Maybe    No, thanks

## Appendix C

### Logistics Survey

Thank you so much for agreeing to participate in this focus group study. For logistic ease, each focus group will consist of between 5 and 7 participants who will meet for two hours on two different days. To facilitate a grouping that is agreeable to your schedule, please circle your preference. **Please indicate 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> (etc.) choice in the bracket beside your selection.** Thank you.

1. What day of the week is most convenient for you?

Monday (\_\_\_\_) Wednesday (\_\_\_\_) Friday (\_\_\_\_) Saturday (\_\_\_\_)

2. What is the most convenient meeting time for you?

4pm. - 6pm. (\_\_\_\_) 5pm. - 6pm. (\_\_\_\_)

**Appendix D**

**Focus Group Questionnaire**

1. Circle level of spoken/written English before coming to the United States of America?

**Spoken**

**Written**

Very Fluent

Very Fluent

Fluent

Fluent

Moderate

Moderate

Very little

Very Little

None at all

None at all

2. How long have you spoken English? \_\_\_\_\_

3. Why did you learn English? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

4. How many members of your family speak English? \_\_\_\_\_

5. Circle how often you communicate in spoken/written English with members of your family?

**(Spoken)**      Frequently              Moderately              Rarely              Not at all

**(Written)**      Frequently              Moderately              Rarely              Not at all

6. Rate their average proficiency level:

**Spoken**

**Written**

Very Fluent

Very Fluent

Fluent

Fluent

Moderate

Moderate

Very little

Very Little

None at all

None at all

7. What other languages do you use with your family members? \_\_\_\_\_



## Appendix E

### Guideline for Group participation

- ❖ Please turn your cell phone and other devices off.
- ❖ Facilitator is keeping notes. So please allow only one person to speak at a time.
- ❖ Please signal when you want to speak, and avoid carrying on side-bars or separate conversations.
- ❖ As facilitator, I may sometimes need to interrupt and/or move you along in your conversation to allow others to participate, or call on specific participants to solicit and/or clarify certain points made.
- ❖ Keep questions or comments off the topic outside the focus group session.
- ❖ Please be courteous and respectful to fellow participants in the group.

## Appendix F

### Focus Group Protocol 1

1. How did your language experience before coming to the United States shape your experience here?  
Was it helpful? Share your story.
2. What effect(s) did your professional qualification have on your language experience
3. As a new resident in the United States of America, how did you feel having conversations with an English speaker?
  - a. Has that feeling changed? How? At what point? If not, why?
  - b. What has been your experience so far?
4. Does knowing how to speak English (whatever level) help you in any of the following experiences?
  - a. On your first day in the United States...
  - b. Going to the store alone for the first time...
  - c. Looking for accommodation...
  - d. Trying to find a job...
5. What is the effect of your accent in language use? Share specific examples.
6. How do you think other people view your accent?
7. Has anybody ever talked to you about it? What do they say? How do you feel about it?
8. Was there ever a time when you were misunderstood because of your accent?

## Appendix G

### Focus Group Protocol 2

1. What effects do the experiences you shared have on your successful integration into American society?  
Share your thoughts.
2. What were your expectation coming to the United States?
3. Are those expectations realized? How? If not, why?
4. Share your most vivid surprise when you first came to the United States.
5. If you there is one way to summarize your thoughts about your language in the United States, what would it be?