

SOCIOCULTURAL CONNECTIONS, LANGUAGE LEARNING ANXIETY, AND
COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE: INSIGHTS AND PERCEPTIONS OF THE ADULT
ONLINE SPANISH LEARNER

A Dissertation

by

JOELLEN ELIZABETH CORYELL

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

August 2007

Major Subject: Educational Human Resource Development

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ABSTRACT

Sociocultural Connections, Language Learning Anxiety, and Communities of Practice:

Insights and Perceptions of the Adult

Online Spanish Learner. (August 2007)

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This dissertation investigated the perceptions and experiences of online adult language learners in higher education. This was a qualitative study of thirteen women enrolled in online Spanish courses at two south-central Texas institutions of higher education. Three findings emerged.

Given the participants' awareness of the social nature of language and their collective appreciation that language must be practiced orally to be acquired, they took responsibility for their learning by creating their own communities of practice with native Spanish speakers at work and at home. They bore the primary responsibility for their learning and shaped their acquisition contexts to include Spanish experts from their offline communities. This allowed the students to contextualize and personalize their new language knowledge and embody multiple learning roles.

Language learning anxiety for these students was not located in the actual online learning tasks, but instead centered on socioculturally constructed understandings about language and their own personal and cultural connections to Spanish. The participants'

revealed the importance they place on demonstrating respect for culture through correct and precise language use. But instead of resulting in a barrier to their learning, the anxiety they experienced may have acted as an impetus in their continued Spanish study. Their insights into the sociocultural influences on language in formal and informal acquisition practices deepen our current understanding of foreign language affect and language learning anxiety.

Finally, an in-depth analysis was done on the subgroup of participants identified as heritage language learners. Their belief in the cultural metanarrative of the “proper Tejana” led this group of south-central Texas women to reject the Texas-Spanish dialect, Tex-Mex. The need to acquire *proper* Spanish and to live linguistically and culturally in two distinct worlds of English and Spanish significantly affected their acquisition processes.

The findings offer insights into Spanish learners’ perceptions of online language learning, their affective experiences learning Spanish as an adult, and the sociocultural connections they make to the Spanish language. The implications for future pedagogical design, online and off, are presented.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	v
TABLE OF CONTENTS	vi
LIST OF FIGURES.....	viii
CHAPTER	
I INTRODUCTION.....	1
The Present Study.....	4
Definitions.....	6
II HOW ADULT ONLINE SPANISH LEARNERS CREATE COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE	8
Introduction	8
Theoretical Framework and Related Research.....	11
Methodology	22
Findings	25
Shaping a Personal Learning Community.....	33
Evaluating Their Learning and the Online Modality	45
Discussion	47
Conclusion.....	49
III TO THE WORDS: NARRATIVE ANALYSIS OF ADULT ONLINE LANGUAGE LEARNING ANXIETY	53
Introduction	54
Characters	57
Background and Context.....	58
Setting.....	69
Analysis	71
The Action Begins.....	73
Resolutions	89
Reflections.....	94

CHAPTER	Page
IV	CULTURAL FANTASY NARRATIVES AND HERITAGE LANGUAGE LEARNING: A CASE STUDY OF ADULT, TEJANA SPANISH LEARNERS 99
	Introduction 99
	Literature Review and Theoretical Framework..... 101
	Method 111
	The Proper Tejana Metanarrative Cultural Fantasy 114
	Discussion and Implications..... 127
V	CONCLUSION 131
	Pedagogical Implications 132
	New Questions Raised and Future Research Directions 135
	REFERENCES..... 137
	APPENDIX A 149
	APPENDIX B 151
	VITA 153

LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE		Page
3.1	Downward Sloping Plotline	91
3.2	Upward Sloping Plotline	94

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Personal Journal, Entry #1, Florence, Italy (January 29, 1988): I have found that I feel I no longer have an identity, that I can't express myself, that I don't belong. I find myself speaking and thinking in broken English, like I hear when I try to communicate with people here. I hear myself saying "Ahh..." a lot, like the Italians do. I have also begun to automatically say *si* for *yes* and *scuzi* or *scuza* for *excuse me*. Hopefully this will continue and I will be able to think in Italian...

Personal Journal, Entry # 6, Florence, Italy (February 6, 1988): Last night, at a discoteque in the Oltrarno section of Florence, I met an undercover police officer. He had a gun and a badge! Very nice guy – does not speak any English. It was my first true Italian conversation. I loved it!

At age 21, I moved to Florence for my study abroad experience speaking no Italian. I am sure I barely pronounced *Italiano* correctly, but I had studied Spanish for four years in high school and college and had heard the two languages were similar. I had received very good grades in Spanish; my written assignments and test scores were excellent. I was not, however, very proficient in oral Spanish. The few times I was required to speak in class, I found myself in a panic. My heart would race and my mind would start to resemble the Teacup ride at Disney World...multiple swirling masses of ideas, nouns and pronouns, vowel and consonant sounds, verb conjugations, feminine and masculine endings...*wait, what did she ask? What was I going to say? Come on, Joellen, you know this, you know how to say this, what on earth is happening?* I could write paragraphs in Spanish and comprehend intermediate-level Spanish texts, could ace

This dissertation follows the style of the *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*.

written exams, and help others with their pronunciation, but when it came to face-to-face Spanish situations, I became so nervous and confused that I was rarely able to demonstrate what I knew. I felt stupid and embarrassed and was glad I was not often required to speak in the language I had studied for years.

However, learning Italian in Italy at a language school for foreigners was a very different experience. The instructors did not speak English, and would not speak it to me even if they could. All of the instruction was in Italian from the first day. The language was everywhere; I could not get away from it (though I tried a few times). My first few weeks living in Florence were some of the most difficult of my life. For someone who most would characterize as outgoing and social, I found living without the ability to communicate excruciating. The classes were intense – we learned the equivalent of one semester of college Italian in one month. In those first weeks, not only did I not speak Italian, but I found my English skills diminished with my concentrated study in Italian. As I wrote in my first journal entry above, I felt like I no longer existed. I desperately wanted to connect with people, but I believed I had not acquired enough Italian to communicate anything meaningful to them. The familiar anxiety I had had in Spanish was back in spades with Italian. I was miserable. I soon realized I had to figure out a way to work with my anxiety and risk embarrassing myself in my attempts to use what I had learned in class, or I would find myself on a plane home. I forced myself to communicate with Italians, and as the second journal entry indicates, I began to overcome my anxiety in oral exchanges. As a result, I became functional in Italian in

four months and had a cultural experience in Italy and around Europe that would influence my life for years to come.

When I returned home, I found I was also able to engage in oral Spanish conversations with little to no anxiety. Learning how to move past the emotional and physiological responses that interfered in oral communication in my third language had transferred into my Spanish oral abilities as well. I came to understand it was the need to communicate and the occasions to do so in the foreign language that provided me the impetus and opportunity to wrestle with my apprehension, my own cognition, and ultimately with my language output processes. When I was enrolled in Spanish classes, I was grateful not to have to speak Spanish often. But I realized in my Italian program that those oral communicative experiences were vital to my successful acquisition of the language. It was not until I studied English as a Second Language in graduate school that I learned of the affective learning construct termed *foreign language anxiety*, or language learning anxiety as I refer to it in this dissertation.

Since my study abroad experience, I have traveled to Mexico, Italy, and other European countries many times. In preparation for these excursions, I have wanted to brush-up on my language skills to communicate effectively once I arrived. My work and family schedules (not to mention my graduate school responsibilities) precluded my studying in formal language settings, so I invested in a number of alternative language instruction methods. I currently own multiple books, workbooks, cassette tapes and CDs that promise proficiency in beginning to intermediate Spanish, Italian, French, and German. I have also used Internet language sites extensively to aid me in my language

learning goals. Personally, though, I have found that without the chance to speak the language with others, particularly with individuals who are proficient in the language I want to learn, I have limited success maintaining and improving my communicative language skills and thus, my level of confidence.

The Present Study

Online language instruction advertises its benefits for anxious learners who dislike face-to-face, synchronous language interaction. Proponents of this type of instruction believe by taking away the requirement of oral communication in person, the affective needs of the student are better served. My own experiences lead me to be suspicious of these claims for those students who wish to communicate eventually in real-life situations in the target language. In addition, my career as an instructor of English to speakers of other languages has led me to view language acquisition as a social process which requires communicative interaction to construct meaning and build proficiency in four language domains: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Undoubtedly, my experiences in learning two languages as an adult, and wrestling with language learning anxiety, have shaped my career, my language instruction, and the focus of this research.

Without the requirement of interrelating to classmates and instructors in person, I questioned if language students would still experience language anxiety online. While some research is available on affect in online language learning experiences, we still need to learn more about how anxious learners perceive online instruction and their own language acquisition processes in the absence of face-to-face instructional interaction.

The original purpose of this study was to understand adult learners' perspectives on foreign language anxiety in online settings. Through the investigation, the research questions focused on why some adults choose to learn Spanish online, how they perceive their learning in this context, and how sociocultural factors impact their learning choices. Through extensive, semi-structured interviews, the respondents provided not only further understandings about language anxiety, but also offered rich insight into their sociocultural connections to language in general and their personal language acquisition processes, online and off, as well.

This document is organized into five chapters and two appendices. This introductory chapter offers my positionality as researcher, the purpose of the research, definitions of terms used throughout the document as I define them for the study, and the structure of the subsequent content. Chapters II through IV were written to stand alone and ultimately be submitted for publication. The findings of Chapters II and III are partitioned by commonalities among and distinctions between two groups of participants: Spanish heritage language learners and nonheritage language learners. Chapter II is a report of the situated communities of practice created by the learners themselves. The participants' high motivation to become practicing members of the Spanish-speaking community resulted in their creations of personal communities of practice that supplemented their online learning. Chapter III focuses on language learning anxiety and how it is perceived by students enrolled in online Spanish courses. The sociocultural influences on these learners' perceptions of language and their beliefs

about Spanish use in communicative settings inform not only our understanding of language learning anxiety online, but in offline settings as well.

Because I am an outsider to the cultural communities of the heritage language learners, I invited a Bilingual/Bicultural scholar, Lisa Gardner-Flores, to coauthor Chapter IV. She brought expertise in sociolinguistics and extensive experience teaching heritage language learners to the analysis. This chapter considers the sociocultural influences on acquisition processes of the adult Spanish heritage learner in south-central Texas. Through the eyes and hearts of the heritage language learners in the study, a complex, cultural metanarrative was found to affect how they perceive themselves, the Spanish language, and the local Spanish dialect, Tex-Mex.

Finally, Chapter V provides a conclusion to the study as a whole. Pedagogical implications, new questions raised by the study, and future research directions are provided. Two appendices including the Interview Protocol (Appendix A) and the Informed Consent form (Appendix B) follow.

Definitions

The following is a list of terms as I define them for this study:

Language: “A multi-dimensional concept that requires the interaction of linguistic subsystems, communication skills, domains of language, registers, and knowledge of the language” (Canales, 1989). I add a cultural component to this concept of language.

Language Learning Anxiety or Language anxiety: Anxiety that results specifically in a language learning setting, and that is both debilitating and facilitative in language acquisition settings.

Target language (L2): The language that is not a native language for the learner. It can be the learner's second, third, or fourth language, and it can be studied in the learner's native country or in a country foreign to the learner.

Interlocutor: This term refers to an individual with whom one speaks.

Language Production: This term is used throughout language acquisition literature and refers to the output processes required in speech creation.

Language Identity: The part of one's personal concept of self that is linked to language, culture, and communication.

Appropriation: Acquiring language through social interaction and making the language one's own. This definition is further clarified by Block (2003) who explains that language appropriation is "not just the passing of the external to the internal; it is the meeting of the external and the internal to form a synthesized new state" (p. 103).

Culture: Practices, products, values, traditions, ideas, art, and perspectives to which a group of people ascribe.

Heritage Language Learner: One who has a "family background in which a non-English language is, or was, spoken" (Valdés, 2005, p. 412).

Nonheritage Language Learner: One whose family background does not include a language (Spanish for this study) other than English.

CHAPTER II

HOW ADULT ONLINE SPANISH LEARNERS CREATE COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE

Introduction

Living in Texas, only a couple of hours from the Mexican border, Lola has friends and coworkers who speak Spanish. She would love to join-in their conversations and thinks, “it’s cool to be bilingual!” The executives at her work also value language diversity, so when she goes back to school to get her degree in business management, Spanish is the obvious choice. Her management team encourages her to take classes online since her work schedule would be difficult to change to fit the evening, face-to-face class start times. She enjoys using technology in her learning and finds the convenience and flexibility that online education offers essential to her busy schedule. She appreciates the autonomy her classes afford, but she misses the contact she has had with her classmates and instructor in traditional classrooms. Some of her online courses require social interaction among her classmates, but her Spanish course does not include these requirements. This is especially surprising to her because she believes practice and interaction in Spanish is critical in acquiring the communicative skills she seeks. Ultimately, she resigns herself to the understanding that online education means interacting with the academic content only. She decides a real connection with people is unrealistic online. She discloses,

I have no contact with people in my online class. I don’t even have contact with the instructor. And not getting it [interaction with others online], I felt like it

really was the epitome of an online class. You never had any contact with anyone.

Yet Lola's motivations have not changed – she is determined to acquire the valued second language of her community and will do what is necessary to attain her goals.

Acquiring a language as an adult is a complex phenomenon. Learning a first language is certainly facilitated through participation in a community of expert language speakers who engage the young child in a wide variety of communication opportunities. But how adults learn a second or foreign language (often referred to as the “target language”) may differ due to diverse educational settings, individual motivations, and goals for their lives, for their careers, and for their uses and abilities in the language (Haneda, 1997). Atkinson (2002) explains that “people use language to act in and on their social worlds: to convey, construct, and perform, among other things, ideas, feelings, actions, identities, and simple (but crucial) passing acknowledgements of the existence of other human beings” (p. 86). As social as the practice of language is, many researchers feel second language acquisition is best understood through a situated, sociocognitive approach to its study (Attkinson, 2002; Haneda, 1997; Lantolf, 1991).

Situated cognition, a sociocognitive theory of learning, values and considers the context and influences inherent in the educational environment. Central to the theory are communities of practice. Wenger (1998) defines communities of practice as collective learning enterprises comprised of socially-constructed practices and relations. In the educational context, the community of practice consists of instructors, other experts, apprentices, learning resources, and contextual influences that all bear on the learning and engagement (or nonengagement) of the learner (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Haneda

(1997) points out the community of practice in a foreign language environment also consists of several language communities which may include that of the classroom community, the students' professional and recreational groups, and situations that include fluent speakers of the target language. As the focus of the present study is language learning *online*, the community of practice must also include networked technologies, course-management software, and the milieu of influences that shape e-learning (Johnson, 2001).

One of the criticisms of some online language learning is the absence of meaning co-construction available to the learners (Pena-Shaff & Nicholls, 2003). Although new education technologies appear frequently, professional development, personal educational philosophy, and access to a range of technological resources dictate their actual use in practice (Canning-Wilson, 2000; Dillon-Marable & Valentine, 2006; Gopalakrishnan, 2006). Furthermore, the endeavor of providing flexibility for online students, in keeping with the *anytime, anywhere* mantra of online learning, presents a considerable challenge to the necessary interaction inherent in successful language acquisition. This study investigates adult learners' perceptions of their language learning and participation in online Spanish courses. The research questions focus on why some adults choose to learn Spanish online, how they perceive their learning in this context, and how sociocultural factors impact their learning choices.

Theoretical Framework and Related Research

Sociocultural perspectives on language acquisition regard language use in authentic, real-world situations as essential, not supplementary, to learning (Zuengler & Miller, 2006). The socially and culturally situated learning activity is fundamental to the learners' agency in co-constructing their roles and meanings (Kern, 2006). For language researchers and practitioners who assume this perspective, language is considered a required tool for participation in everyday activities. It is this participation that constitutes the learning process and acquisition outcomes.

A socio-cognitive frame is employed in this study and is supported by a number of language acquisition researchers in online language education (Belz, 2002; Lantolf, 1991; Lantolf & Pavlenko, 2001; Warschauer & Kern, 2000). An overview of situated learning theory and then a brief synopsis of the relevant literature of situated learning within the context of online educational settings and adult language acquisition are presented below.

Situated Learning Theory

This study is framed by situated learning theory described often by Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger (Lave, 1988; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). Situated learning, based on Vygotsky's (1978) social learning theory, has been used to understand human action and decision-making through a sociocultural perspective. Vygotsky believed that individuals co-construct knowledge in their own minds and together with the world in which they live. Accordingly, Lave and Wenger (1991) proposed that learning is a

function of the context, actions, behaviors, and culture in which it occurs. The social nature of interaction in learning is critical to this theory of knowledge acquisition.

Learners, therefore, are considered members of a community of practice which represents attitudes, behaviors, and values to be attained. Lave and Wenger (1991) refer to a community of practice as “a set of relations among person, activity, and world, over time and in relation with other tangential and overlapping communities of practice” (p. 98). Learning within this framework is not located exclusively within the individual; instead it is situated communally and involves the differences of perspective among co-participants (Hanks, 1991).

Situated learning theory also suggests that the people involved, including instructors, students, and other individuals that affect the learning (or lack thereof), bring their own values, culture, beliefs, and goals to the learning setting. These unique, individual perspectives shape the social construction of knowledge generation. Each person’s learning experience is considered in relation to the experiences of others to conceptualize all that brings them together as a community. The community, made up of learners (apprentices and newcomers) and experts (masters and old-timers), is also characterized by artifacts of their interactivity and inherent political and social influences. The degree to which the community’s members interact, or participate, with each other and the learning content is termed *peripheral participation* (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Research on participation and the applicable communities of practice as related to online learning and adult language acquisition are discussed below.

Legitimate Peripheral Participation

Legitimate peripheral participation refers to the process in which an individual engages in the community of practice. (Lave & Wenger, 1991) This concept allows for a way to discuss the associations and interactions between and among members of the community, and about actions, personalities, identities, artifacts, and communities of knowledge and practice. These relations and actions make up the sociocultural practice of living and learning. All kinds of practice, including limited peripheral actions within a wide variety of situations in which individuals may learn, are opportunities for humans (and systems and structures) to change (Hanks, 1991). It is by studying these specific practice situations that we are able to conceptualize some interactions indispensable to specific learning outcome goals.

Legitimate peripheral participation includes the interaction that takes place during specifically designed learning activities as well as from less formally structured engagement with the new learning content. Community members can occupy multiple roles in the process of participation. Some members may be apprentices, while some others may be experts. It is important to note all individuals in a learning community do not possess the same understanding or ability to participate in the activity, but their specific interactions and varied roles will structure when and how learning occurs. When an apprentice interacts with an expert, Hanks (1991) suggests:

The apprentices' ability to understand the master's performance depends not on their possessing the same representation of it, or of the objects it entails, but rather on their engaging in the performance in congruent ways. Similarly, the master's effectiveness at producing learning is not dependent on her ability to inculcate the student with her own conceptual representations. Rather, it depends on her ability to manage effectively a division of participation that provides for

growth on the part of the student. Again, it would be this common ability to coparticipate that would provide the matrix for learning, not the commonality of symbolic or referential structures. (p. 21-22).

The level that a learner participates in a learning activity dictates the degree to which she has learned. Hanks emphasizes that legitimate peripheral participation in the practice of learning is not a structure, but is a way of acting in the world.

Experts and Apprentices: Participation in Language Learning

In the case of language classes, the community of practice is social, cultural, political, and linguistic in nature (Lantolf, 1991). Those members of the community who are experts can include dominant or native language speakers, instructors, and possibly other classmates. In turn, apprentices may have a range of proficiency levels and varying degrees of motivation to learn the language. The interaction among the language community of practice can occur between experts, between expert and apprentice, between and among classmates with the same or similar proficiency, or between and among apprentices with different levels of proficiency. Accordingly, language acquisition can take place under extensively varying contexts. Apprentice access to participation, dependent upon communal attitudes and behaviors, may range from welcoming and legitimizing to unwelcoming and indifferent. But with the interactive nature of learning *in situ*, sociocultural theories insist the learner's individual agency in the learning process is equally as important to the experiences offered. Newcomers may work toward joining the community, simply meeting the community with neutrality, or shun and withdraw from it. Ultimately, we understand that legitimate peripheral

participation in learning is an interaction through which community members establish, communicate, and position themselves dependent upon their own sociocultural experiences, motivations, and expectations (Roebuck, 1991).

Research in Communities of Practice in Language Acquisition

In a language learning situation, the community of practice includes students, the instructors, native speakers, near-native speakers, classes, and the beliefs, values, and perspectives of these persons, the learning resources available, and the interaction among all the elements (Yang, 2005). As discussed above, fundamental to situated learning theory is gaining insight into how learning takes place through participation. The individual is considered a whole person with consideration lent to activity, agency, and social practice. Membership into the community of practice evolves as the individual learns to participate (Lave & Wenger, 1991). A few recent studies have considered situated learning and communities of practice in language education. They are described below.

Haneda (1997) studied her adult Japanese foreign language learners' face-to-face community of practice in a university setting. In her ethnographic, action research, she studied her students' learning community participation through the use of portfolios and their reflections of interactions with other students and with the teacher. She focused on their diverse proficiencies in Japanese as well as the multitude of "real world" communities which influenced learning in the classroom. In her classroom community, she discovered the importance of the teacher's role as facilitator and the changing roles

in which her students engaged in sub-communities in and outside the classroom. For example, in collaborative pairing exercises, Haneda coupled a higher proficiency student with a lower proficiency student to work on a reading and writing assignment. Each learner had developed her own vocabulary and meaning-making strategy to translate and gain meaning. Haneda noticed that a variety of interactive class tasks and assignments allowed the students to take various roles of expertise. In working together, they learned from each other how to use their respective techniques, thus being both apprentice and expert simultaneously. Consequently, her role as facilitator changed dependent upon the needs of the individual students and small groupings. As a result of her study, she calls for further research that focuses on the different parameters of the community of practice in language learning. She suggests that the role of the instructor, and the need to deliberately plan and provide responsive instruction, must be considered for language class settings.

In their study that investigated the situated learning context of a face-to-face English as a second language writing course, Young and Miller (2004) found that through the discourse practice of learning to revise a student's writing in English, the instructor and student co-constructed varying roles of participation throughout the four weeks of their observations. The framework of participation changed over time, which showed the student had transformed from a peripheral participant to a master of the discourse necessary to engage in interactive writing revision. Their conclusions extended the situated perspective of adult language acquisition by understanding participatory changes over time in the social-interactional contexts of language learning.

Changing roles and participation patterns by the students and instructors within the classroom context are the foci of the above studies. The researcher was present in the classroom, along with the students and instructor and within the context of the community of practice, itself. The following section considers the community of practice in online language learning, in which the roles and participation patterns of community members exist in a virtual environment shaped by technical and sociocultural influences.

Online Communities of Practice

Social-interactive contexts are less easily and consistently employed in online learning settings. The nature of online instruction is different from that which is face-to-face as geographical distance between instructor (expert) and learners (apprentices) prevents traditional interactions, conventional pedagogical activities, and customary opportunities for social construction of knowledge (Sorensen & Murchú, 2004). Recent studies have focused on the design and support of virtual communities of practice. Online communities of practice have been defined as the ways in which participants engage within the designed environment of a virtual community (Johnson, 2001). Borthick and Jones (2000) and Seufert (2000) established that certain proficiencies need to be taught to online learners if they are to be successful working in collaborative communities. A mastery of the technology (both hardware and software) and successful synchronous and asynchronous discussion and collaboration practices were noted as particularly valuable for effective online learning. In addition, unlike traditional face-to-face communities of practice, virtual practice communities are not explicitly defined by traditional face-to-

face group norms and dynamics and clearly defined members and borders (Palloff & Pratt, 1999).

Conrad (2002a) also found that learners who are somewhat new to online learning are not interested in the existence or building of community. Rather, they are primarily concerned with mastering the logistics and requirements of the course, including determining and attaining schedules, assignments, instructions, and materials.

For those adults who are more experienced online learners, the nature of virtual communities is often functional, pragmatic, and time-driven (Conrad, 2002b).

Additionally, Brown (2001) found some learners may take longer than others to build bonds of friendship, community and camaraderie. In her study, graduate students made judgments to engage personally in the online community based on textual input.

Timeliness, virtual personality, perceived intelligence, and writing ability were ascertained as important to the learner's commitment to others online. In his survey of research of online communities of practice, Johnson (2001) found that textual interaction can provide opportunities for social construction of knowledge. That research also found virtual communities may provide a favorable basis for introverts and extroverts to have an equal "voice," though Palloff and Pratt (1999) found that introverts may do better in online written collaboration than extroverts.

Cultural difference, though, can hamper the development of learning communities online (Wenger, 1998), as can an impersonal atmosphere in learning situations that do not require frequent connections among participants (Powers and Guan, 2000). Other research found online behaviors such as short and superficial

messaging and lengthy time between correspondences to be problematic in text-based interactions (Hammond, 1998). Additionally, a lack of synchronous instructor presence (Squire and Johnson, 2000) can influence the effectiveness of the virtual learning community's collaboration.

Situated Learning Theory and Online Language Acquisition

Translating situated learning theory to online language acquisition allows researchers to inquire about the engagement of the learner within the content and context of the learning situation (Yang, 2005). Yang suggests that by learning more about the interactions among the central elements of situated learning theory, we are able to reveal more about language development as a social process. Warschauer (1998) conducted a study of an English language writing class for international students at a Christian community college using a situated learning framework. His ethnographic inquiry allowed him to analyze the learning context of an online course for culturally diverse learners. Sociocultural influences on the learning context were found to weigh-in heavily in the interactions among the conservative institution and instructor and the culturally diverse international adult learners. In their interviews, the students were initially excited about using computers in their learning, but shortly after felt that the amount of assignments was excessive and often the assignment content was irrelevant to their learning goals. They expressed a desire to have more choice in the learning and writing exercises. In turn, they called for an approach that offered more self-direction and allowed them to work toward their own personal writing goals. Their actual community

of practice, though, was structured by strictly defined participation requirements, which facilitated learning well for some but not for all students. Warschauer concludes the report with the suggestion that instructors and students must critically reflect on the power structures at play in online language courses and that a critical collaborative practice is essential if online language learning is to fully encompass the broad sociocultural and personal variables influencing learning outcomes.

However, designing an educational virtual community is not an assurance that a community of practice will ensue. Johnson (2001) suggests that adequate technical support and skills instruction in technologically-based communication and collaboration are necessary for the culture of a community of practice to develop. He also suggests face-to-face contact may be ideal for the development of a virtual community of practice, though Wenger (1998) believes geographic proximity may not be necessary.

Spanish Heritage and Nonheritage Language Learners

As Spanish is a widely spoken language in the United States, in any given Spanish course the students may have had access to Spanish in their home. Heritage language learners can be defined as those who have been reared in a Spanish-speaking home and community, have heard Spanish spoken by other relatives and in the community, those who have been educated, at least in part, in Spanish-speaking countries, and/or those who may have spoken or heard the language at home or in the community and studied Spanish at some level in school (González-Pino, 2000). Spanish heritage language learners have a wide range of proficiency in the language; they also make up a

substantial percentage of the enrollment in higher education Spanish courses (Campbell & Peyton, 1998). Kondo (1999) found that most heritage learners are interested in improving their speaking skills more than their writing and reading abilities, and Valdés (1997) emphasizes cooperative grouping for social construction of language skills to be used for these learners. Moreover, dialect forms of the language, having unequal socio-cultural prestige, can affect the learning by and instruction of heritage learners (González-Pino, 2000; Roca, 1997).

Some college programs offer specific classes for heritage language learners, but the research suggests that oftentimes enrollment in these classes is low as heritage students opt in favor of the regular Spanish course offerings (González-Pino, 2000). In fact, mixed classes, made up of heritage and nonheritage learners, are still the rule in many cases (LeBlanc & Lally, 1997). In mixed classes though, González-Pino (2000) reported 76 percent of students surveyed found learning with mixed proficiency-level students helpful, and the heritage speakers generally enjoyed assisting the nonheritage speakers. Communities of practice such as these include members with a range of mastery of the skill being practiced and varying opportunities for students to experience positions of mentor and apprentice in different learning activities.

As is the case in face-to-face college Spanish courses, both heritage and nonheritage learners make up the online Spanish class enrollment. Recent studies in adult language learning have called for a sociocultural approach to acquisition that takes into account the importance of learning communities of practice and the value in collective meaning-making (Attkinson, 2002; Haneda, 1997; Lantolf, 1991). In

searching for an understanding of why some adults choose to learn Spanish online, how they perceive their learning in this context, and how sociocultural factors impact their learning choices, I chose to investigate their roles and participation patterns within this educational context.

Methodology

Participants and Learning Context

The participants in this study were enrolled, or had been enrolled within the previous six months, in a completely online, second-level or higher Spanish course. Additionally, the Spanish course was not their first experience with online learning. I contacted two postsecondary institutions in south-central Texas for study volunteers. One of the institutions is a community college, which I will refer to as CC. The students at this institution are required to take at least two levels of a foreign language. The other institution is a small, private university that I will call PI. It provides many online degree programs which require two or more classes in a foreign language.

I sent a message to leaders in the two schools requesting an introduction to Spanish instructors who were teaching online. Once I had been given contact information, I communicated with the instructors and sent them each a call to participate which they distributed to students in their second level and higher courses. Participation was completely voluntary, and the informants were instructed that their involvement in the study would not be made known to their instructors or institutions. The students

contacted me directly if they were interested in being interviewed about their experiences in learning Spanish online.

The online course context in which these students were enrolled included the instructor, students with varying levels of Spanish proficiency and experience with online courses, textbooks, computer assisted language learning tools including course management systems, CD-ROM, online reading materials, and the Internet for research. In the courses at both institutions, the participants were not required to engage in synchronous Spanish communication, but some assignments required postings to online bulletin boards (usually written in English). One of the institutions, PI, also required the use of recording software, and students had to upload their oral Spanish assignments. Although not required, the students had an opportunity to listen to each others' recorded files in this course.

The thirteen informants are adult women with an average age of 39 years. Each was asked to assess her Spanish proficiency from beginner to fluent. All of the participants were enrolled full-time in college courses and all but one worked full-time. In addition, all but three grew up in south-central Texas or farther south, near the border with Mexico.

Spanish for these women cannot be described generally as foreign. These women grew up hearing and seeing Spanish regularly in their neighborhoods and nearby communities. Many of the participants grew up hearing Spanish consistently with their friends and extended family members, but did not engage in participation in that language until their formal enrollment in Spanish classes. And others, with a wide

variety of self-defined proficiency in Spanish, grew up with the language in their homes. None of the informants had participated in Spanish-English bilingual programs in their public schooling, but many had taken Spanish classes in middle school and/or high school. As adults, the participants lived in regions of the United States that have large Mexican-American populations. Consequently, the participants hear and see the Spanish language almost on a daily basis.

Data Gathering and Analysis Method

I conducted semi-structured interviews with each of the participants, either face-to-face or via telephone. Each interview lasted between one and two hours. I first asked general questions about who they were, what their major course of study was, and how they would describe their proficiency in Spanish. It was my aim for us to create a comfortable conversation about their experiences learning Spanish online.

In conducting this study, I was not a neutral researcher. I came to the interviews with my own beliefs and understandings of how language is learned, which is through interactive participation in a sociocultural community of practice (Lantolf, 1991; Warschauer, 1998; Yang, 2005). In the process of talking with each of my participants, I made these considerations known. During the interview, I also revealed my positionality as a Caucasian doctoral student who has worked as an English teacher to students with different dominant language backgrounds and also as an adult Spanish learner. We took time to discuss our own experiences of adding school to our already full lives. I then asked questions about their general experiences learning online, about their conceptual

understandings of socio-cultural connections to learning Spanish, and a variety of questions about their feelings about online Spanish learning (for the full interview protocol, see Appendix). I often requested they add to their responses by telling personal stories which better illustrated their perceptions. I followed-up with many of the participants for further clarification of their data either via email or telephone.

After transcribing the data and listening to the interviews multiple times, I used a thematic approach to organize the information. Using constant-comparative and thematic analyses (Bogdan & Biklin, 2003; Glaser & Strauss, 1967), I first identified two overarching themes that helped to inform my conclusions regarding the situated learning context of their experiences. These themes centered upon the participants' motivations to learn Spanish and their shared beliefs in how to attain their individual learning goals. I then turned my focus to stories they told and the language they used to describe what, how, and where they learned. This process helped to further unpack their accounts and illuminate the themes more deeply. This process revealed these adult students took ownership of their learning in very creative and resourceful ways. Their approaches were decidedly social: the participants created new learning experiences, strategies, and contexts that built a hybrid virtual and physical community of practice.

Findings

The adult students in this study took online courses for many of the reasons distance education has become so popular to learners. They all expressed the belief that learning online generally provides them more "convenience" and "flexibility," which allows them

to study when and where they want. Many are also raising children, sometimes as single mothers, and are active, busy women. They chose to learn Spanish online because doing so allowed them to study while continuing to support themselves and their families financially.

High Student Motivation

The study's participants were not interested in taking Spanish only to complete a degree requirement; they wanted to improve their oral communicative abilities in Spanish. However, a distinct difference was found between the Spanish heritage language learners (HLLs) and the nonheritage language learners (NHLLs) when analyzing *why* they wanted to learn to communicate more effectively in Spanish. The HLL participants (eight of the thirteen students), chose to study the language to learn the "proper," or more standard, formal forms of Spanish. They believed acquisition of an academic register in Spanish was important in their interactions with Spanish-speaking family members, friends, and Mexican national citizens with whom they came into contact. Their purpose for taking Spanish was directly linked to the hope they would attain a deeper understanding and usage of the formal communicative uses of Spanish which included a deeper knowledge of grammar, vocabulary, and a mother-tongue accent. The NHLLs (five of the thirteen participants), on the other hand, wanted to acquire an improved level of oral Spanish that would allow them to communicate informally, yet effectively with their Spanish-speaking coworkers, friends, and neighbors. A conversational form of Spanish attracted them to the study of the language. Both groups

were highly motivated to learn and had specific learning outcome expectations connected to improved oral proficiency.

Heritage Language Learners' Motivations

The HLLs described everyday access to Spanish via family members and friends throughout their lives. Now as adults, they indicated there was a community-oriented expectation to speak proficient Spanish. For each of the HLLs in this study, their motivations and personal agency (individual engagement choices in one's learning) to acquire Spanish stemmed from a desire to reconnect with their Mexican heritage through an increased proficiency in standard Spanish. They all had heard Spanish spoken around them and to them in their homes and communities, and many were aware of the informal and formal uses of the language. In addition, they were now sensitive to the use of Tex-Mex, frequently spoken in south-central region of Texas. Their generally negative feelings about Tex-Mex, and their sincere desire to improve their Spanish through formal language education, had them focusing their energies on proper grammar, vocabulary development, correct accent usage, and the Spanish of their ancestry, from Mexico. They want to speak Spanish in a formal style and to use correct pronunciation because that is how they felt they *should* represent themselves in this context. The following excerpts illustrate these students' great desire and motivation to learn the language of their heritage.

When asked why she chose to take Spanish, Carolyn explained she wanted to learn "proper or true Spanish" in order to communicate effectively and appropriately

with her Mexican national boyfriend and his parents. Likewise, every HLL experienced feelings of inadequacy when being “caught” using informal Spanish or Tex-Mex.

Marina characterized the general sentiments of the HLLs when she explained she wanted to use “proper Spanish” so as not “to look stupid.” In general, the HLLs connected to Spanish in sociocultural ways, in that they identify with the language from a personal heritage position.

Linda explained her reasons for taking Spanish at her university and her expectations of learning “proper Spanish.”

The reason I took it, I knew I could have passed the CLEP (College Level Examination Program). I’ve um, I’ve heard about the CLEP and everything, but, the reason I took it is because, um, being from Texas, and especially from South Texas, we have a tendency, us Hispanics, to change the proper way of saying some Spanish words. I needed to get back into the proper, you know, language, and, and, not so much the annunciation, the annunciations you know are, are, pretty much the same in, in when you compare what’s called Tex-Mex to proper Spanish. But a lot of words are used incorrectly in Tex-Mex and I wanted to get back to knowing exactly how to use the proper Spanish words that I was not using, that I knew I was not using right. So I decided to take the class to help me remember *that’s* the correct word, you know, and I’ve been saying it incorrectly all this time.

Linda indicates with the words “back to knowing exactly how to use the proper Spanish,” that her choice to take Spanish and her engagement in the learning is linked to her language usage in her cultural community. She wants to “get back to knowing” but feels she needs to attend formal classes to be reacquainted with the correct usage.

Martha also indicated a need to speak properly because Spanish was inherently connected to her cultural identity. She told a story from her childhood when she questioned a term during a conversation in Spanish with another Hispanic child. Martha

said to her friend that she had never heard a particular word said in a certain way.

Martha explained the other child responded,

“Well, you’ve never heard it that way ‘cause you’re not a true Mexican.” And I say, “I’m more Mexican than you are.” And they say, “Oh, no you’re not because you’re fair skinned and blue eyed. So you don’t know our language.” And I said, “Yes I do.” So, some of it also physically, because of the way I look. I’m not very accepted.

Martha’s motivation to learn proper Spanish ties to her desire to be fully accepted in the Mexican and Mexican-American communities.

Jill’s first language was Spanish, but she now considers herself an intermediate Spanish learner. After a heartbreaking experience in her early school years of being ridiculed by teachers for using Spanish in school, she rejected her first language in favor of English. At the time of the interview, Jill and her husband had recently adopted six Hispanic children who also do not speak Spanish, and she wants to include the language in their upbringing. She aspires to learn “correct Spanish” because that is the culture her new family shares. She wishes she would have kept up her Spanish, but she explained that in her generation, fitting in meant not speaking Spanish and only speaking English. Like the other HLLs in the study, now that Jill is an adult, her reflective understanding of the importance of Spanish in her life moved her to reconnect with her Mexican heritage through language.

Nonheritage Language Learners’ Motivations

For the other five students whose cultural background was not of a Spanish-speaking country, the desire to learn Spanish did not stem from a personal Hispanic heritage

connection, but was still often sociocultural in nature. These women were intent on improving relationships with Spanish speakers in their neighborhoods and at work by engaging in the study of their language. Their levels of self-assessed Spanish proficiency were considerably lower than that of the HLLs. All but one of the nonheritage language learners considered themselves to be beginning Spanish students.

Their motivations to improve their levels of Spanish proficiency, though, were equally as focused as those of the HLLs. They, too, had a desire to communicate effectively and appropriately with other Spanish speakers at work and with friends. But the difference was the language form they aspired to acquire. The tone of the stories they told about wanting to communicate in Spanish was decidedly less-formal than that of the HLLs. In essence, they appreciate bilingual ability (“It’s cool to be bilingual!”) and they respect their friends and coworkers heritage and language enough to study Spanish. However, they wanted to be able to communicate in primarily social situations in which they believed an informal Spanish register would be most effective. They knew the importance of learning the language structurally but desired a conversational proficiency.

Each of the NHLLs wanted to be able to use Spanish at work. Trisha wants to learn Spanish to be able to speak with fellow soldiers about career options, in their language, in their neighborhood:

Well, it’s the second language in the United States. I would really love it [to speak Spanish fluently]. And I’m in a job field right now where I talk to people every day. And I have to talk to people who speak Spanish. You know, I would like to go into a neighborhood and actually explain to them what I do on a day-to-day basis, and how it could benefit them, in Spanish. You know, it will help me with my job, and you know... I talk to private service soldiers every day, and

when I call a house, you know, we speak in English. So, and I want, I want to say, you know, I “habla español.” Or whatever I’d like to say, and I would love to speak with them to make them feel more comfortable. Especially when I go visit them in the house and they’re like, in a Latino community. I would really, really love to have it.

Trisha feels it is appropriate to connect with Spanish-speaking Latinos in a way that respects who they are, culturally and linguistically. By explaining that she wants to speak their language, in their home, in their community, she confirms her desire to connect with people on a deeper, more-respectful level. Her focus is on a communicative competence that allows her to discuss the benefits of her professional services in a comfortable, social manner. It is work related, but it is also personal for her.

Barbara, the one NHLL who considered her Spanish at an intermediate level, wants to be able to communicate as though she were a part of the Spanish community. She is not interested in “book Spanish,” but instead desires to be street smart, linguistically speaking. She explained, “There’s *book* Spanish and *street* Spanish and I’m trying not to do book Spanish and look like, ‘Okay you learned this in *class*, and not, you know, it’s not something you’re, you’re doing at a level of loving Spanish.”

Pronunciation is very important for her.

If I have everything in order...I have to make sure, okay, if I say this word in the sentence, is it going to be right? Am I going to say it right? Does it make a difference? And, I think that they will understand it if I’m pronouncing it correctly, even if I don’t have all the words in the correct order, in the sentence.

Barbara wants her friends to know how much she respects them and the language they speak. When she suggests she wants to communicate “at a level of loving Spanish,” she tells us she desires a connection to Spanish which is deeper than simply a structural understanding of the language.

Lola's conversation about cultural respect, and how she unpacks recent language policy to relate it to her own personal experiences learning Spanish explain how some adult, nonheritage language learners come to the language classroom.

JC: How does learning the language help someone else's culture to be better understood?

Lola: I think it does because you have to learn how they pronounce different things and sometimes they don't have a word that describes something in your culture, so, that's a block right there, I think. I find it interesting to learn, especially the Hispanic culture, simply because they're living right next door. There's this big thing going on right now about the illegal immigrants and all this (pause) and of course [President George W.] Bush talked about this last night. So, it makes it come to the forefront of your mind. Why should we be judgmental about the language they speak? Um, we should be trying to speak their language because they're trying to speak ours! So, I don't understand the whole issue with it, actually, it makes me want to learn even more, actually. I just feel like it would make me a better person – I think it would make me a better person in the fact that I can communicate with someone who may not be able to communicate in English! It would just make me feel better about it.

Like the other NHLL participants, Lola's insightful and very personal motivations to learn Spanish suggest a need to relate to members of the Spanish-speaking community on a clearly respectful level. They realized the need to speak another language, and they desire to relate their respect for cultural diversity through their willingness and ability to communicate orally in Spanish. The NHLLs in this study believe learning Spanish is "the right thing to do." They want to be able to communicate functionally in Spanish at work and in their home communities. And although they are interested in correct grammatical form, their ultimate motivations are to be socially and culturally sensitive with people in their lives.

Both groups of participants had clear, personal goals for their Spanish learning. Their motivations centered on oral communication in Spanish that demonstrates a

connection and respect of Spanish culture and heritage. With such personal and focused ambitions, the expectations for their learning experiences and communities in which they practiced were also high. Interestingly, though, these students enrolled in a fully online course where oral communication is complicated by the lack of a face-to-face classroom environment. Therefore, the participants in this study chose to take matters into their own hands in order to create a learning situation that was conducive to achieving their educational expectations.

Shaping a Personal Learning Community

Because these women had specific goals for their acquisition of Spanish, they in-turn had explicit expectations for their learning and the community in which they practiced. They expected many and varied opportunities to exercise their growing Spanish knowledge. All the participants indicated they believed social interaction in Spanish was necessary if they were to attain their goals. In fact, the participants were overwhelmingly resolute in the need to engage in virtual or face-to-face communication in order to learn a language.

Interestingly, though, the participants all had extensive experience in other online courses, and they each acknowledged those courses generally lacked much social learning interaction. Yet, they had enrolled in online Spanish courses anyway. With such high motivations for improving their oral proficiency, and strong beliefs in the need for interaction while acquiring a language, I wondered how it was they conceptualized their learning in their online language course. In discussing their experiences, the students

explained their participation, at varying levels, with the content and activities provided by the professor in the course. But they also offered their offline experiences in Spanish as insight into their learning. The two educational contexts, online in the course and offline in their Spanish communities at home and work, were combined in order to aid the student in achieving her Spanish learning goals. By analyzing the stories and language they used to describe and narrate these two contexts, an insight into how these motivated language students shaped their learning experiences was gained.

The Online Experience

The language the participants used to express their online Spanish course contexts illustrated their overall assessment of the focus of that experience. They talked about grammatical structure, word-for-word translations from English to Spanish and from Spanish to English, how specific words should be pronounced, verb tense usage, and employing appropriate accent marks in writing. By in large, the way they described the online Spanish course was very structural in nature and focused on the way Spanish was configured and produced outside of a holistic, contextual notion of language acquisition. I want to caution the reader in believing the students did not appreciate this experience or always found it superfluous to their own goals. For some, this attention to grammatical/word-level and structural detail was precisely what they desired, at least in part, from the class. Others found the study of language rules and sentence structure helpful, though a bit tedious.

An in-depth study of morphological units and verb tense analysis provided the students a way to “learn information” about Spanish. Participants talked at length about studying vocabulary words, parts of speech, translations from Spanish to English, and some historical and cultural aspects (in English) about a variety of Spanish-speaking countries. Assessments consisted primarily of fill-in-the-blank or multiple choice responses. The participants perceived the crux of the course was memorization.

Indeed, many of the students appreciated an in-depth study of morphological units in the language. Martha illustrated how important finding “answers” were when she was online. “It will frustrate me when I can’t find the answer [online].” Later she indicates just how critical her online course experiences were for her in finding information and answers,

I just don’t give up. I just keep on going until I can find the correct thing...I took it online only because I felt confident enough to know that I would be able to research any part [of Spanish] that a teacher can’t answer right away.

She considers her class an essential source of Spanish *information*.

Similarly, the participants also told stories of course activities that required they learn words that were different in various Spanish-speaking countries. Nancy told about a time when the course content included a word for *pen* that she had not heard. “You know, *pen* is not *pen*, you know, *lápiz*, it’s like the proper word, like *bolígrafo* or something like that.”

Almost all of the participants chose to discuss the use of accent marks in their written assignments. The instructors of their courses graded heavily on correct accent usage, which meant the students spent much study time endeavoring to perfect their

understandings of when and where to mark the written emphases. When they talked to me about the course's assignments, the focus was on language mechanics and perfect insertion of Spanish words, verb tenses, and accent marks. Even in those assignments that required the students to upload their own Spanish oral recordings, the emphasis was on word-for-word translations and appropriate grammatical structure.

What they did not talk about was a connection to meaning and communicative context. They felt their work in the class was considered important to learning *about* the language, but not necessarily to learning *how to communicate meaningfully* in that language. Rebekka revealed she felt virtually alone in the course when she disclosed, "It was just all on me." And Lola summed up the participants' overall beliefs about the non-social nature of online courses in general with this assertion, "Not getting it [interaction with the instructor and classmates], I felt like it really was the epitome of an online class. You never have any contact with anyone." The participants' preconceived understandings of the nature of e-learning and subsequent experiences with online courses and instructors prevented most of the students from pursuing any meaningful associations with their classmates or even the course instructors.

It was apparent the perceived lack of communicative opportunities led to a shift in their language learning focus in the course and a feeling of isolation online. The students participated in online learning activities, turned in assignments, and completed examinations. The role each played in the online community was mostly as apprentice and at times, researcher. But with a lack of social Spanish language interaction among

the online course members, these students fell short of fully participating with the language and with others in the online learning community.

Creating Personal Communities of Practice

Faced with the desire to increase their oral Spanish proficiency and a perceived lack of opportunity to do so online, the learners in this study turned to family members, friends, coworkers, and other members of their offline communities for help. Each informant personalized her learning experience to incorporate an offline group of Spanish speakers in which they could ask questions, practice newly acquired language skills, discuss language forms, and ask for help with their online assignments and tasks. They utilized offline interaction to supplement their online course activities and community of practice, and in the process, increased their legitimate peripheral participation in learning Spanish.

The decision to disengage in online personal relationships for clarification and assistance from their online peers, and often even from the instructor, could have stunted many of the students' movement toward legitimate peripheral participation in their learning of Spanish. However, these students chose to create further opportunities to socially construct their newly formed understandings and competencies in Spanish with offline community members with whom they often already shared a relationship. Spanish billboards and business signs, periodicals, radio, television, and every-day conversations are readily available opportunities to see and hear the language for Spanish learners in south central Texas and many larger U.S. cities. The students in this

study used these contexts to try out different participatory roles and engage in legitimate peripheral participation.

In order to gain insight into how they shaped the whole of their learning experience, I focused again on the language they used to describe their opportunities to engage in Spanish offline. In contrast to those experiences online, the participants described their offline Spanish interactions as opportunities to put into communicative practice the structure and vocabulary they learned in the course. In effect, their offline Spanish communications allowed them to put those “answers” and “information” into context.

For the participants, offline Spanish encounters provided an opportunity to produce and respond in Spanish based on context, interest, and motivation. The beginning students talked about brief conversations with Spanish speakers that included body language and other visual cues with which to comprehend and react. Many of the intermediate or more advanced students told stories of discussions and debates they had with family members and friends about the online course content in meaningful, culturally connected ways. They conferred about the origins of certain words and phrases and reminisced about Spanish stories, poems, and songs from the past. The interactions were laced with emotion and housed in relationship. The focus of these exchanges was personally meaningful, a co-constructed significance.

Both the heritage language learners and the nonheritage language learners located Spanish speakers whom they designated as authorities in Spanish. Both groups also chose to practice with individuals with whom they wanted to foster relationships.

They chose Spanish experts and other co-participants with whom they felt safe asking questions, making mistakes, clarifying responses, and asking for assistance on assignments. But the analysis showed there were differences between the HLLs and the NHLLs with respect to their personal, extended communities of practice. I turn now to examine these differences in depth.

Nonheritage Language Learners' Offline Communities of Practice

The NHLLs sought out coworkers and friends to engage in oral Spanish practice. In addition, they were also willing to risk practicing with acquaintances who spoke little English in order to bridge the language barrier though co-constructed, though limited, bilingual interaction. As Spanish music, headlines in the market, and Spanish conversations can be regularly heard even in the offline communities of NHLLs, supplemental experience with the language is often possible. They chose to learn Spanish in order to communicate with Spanish speakers at work and in their home communities. They felt a need to connect to these Spanish speakers in a way that showed respect for cultural and linguistic diversity. As such, these individuals in their personal lives were the very people with whom the NHLLs chose to practice. In some cases, they had already established comfortable, communicative relationships with these experts. Barbara, who wants to communicate in a street-savvy Spanish vernacular supplemented her online Spanish course by interacting with her Spanish-speaking friends and coworkers. She has discovered through those interactions that she is learning formal Spanish in her online class, but that in their circle of friends, she can be more informal. Lola and Trisha initiated Spanish conversations with coworkers in order to clarify and

practice what they had learned online. They felt comfortable attempting their new language abilities with experts with whom they had established relationships.

Some NHLLs preferred to practice with fully bilingual members of their offline community. Trisha chose to practice with her bilingual coworkers,

...because they're able to translate it better. I would think it would be more natural...I think it would be easier if they had to translate from Spanish to English and English to Spanish...to understand the struggles that I'm going through.

In other cases, NHLLs chose to engage in Spanish interaction with new acquaintances whose English proficiency closely matched the participant's own Spanish proficiency. Often, the tone was comfortable, yet exciting. Kelly, who admits she is still a beginner in Spanish, also enjoyed practicing her Spanish with community members whose English was also at a beginning level. Kelly told of a time she practiced her Spanish at the local swimming pool.

Kelly: I met this lady, and she said, "No hablo inglés." And she goes, well, I only know a little English, hardly anything at all. But I said [in Spanish], 'Well, I know a little Spanish and you know,' I told her that. And I asked her, you know, "Como se llama," I asked her her name. And she said her name, and she said, "Y tú?" And I said, "I'm Kelly," you know. So, we had a little dialogue there.

JC: And how was that?

Kelly: It was cool. It was great! You know, I wanted to talk more!

For many of these learners, the Spanish practice in which they engaged seemed relaxed and "safe," and often the communications left them feeling more confident in their Spanish abilities. Even when their lack of sufficient proficiency and mispronunciation was met with giggles and correction, the offline practice community provided opportunities to approximate and socially construct, or re-construct, the content they had

encountered online. Their participation in the offline community varied from daily interactions to occasional chats – all informal and initiated by the learner herself. However, most of their encounters allowed them to practice in social, informal conversations with those whom they deemed knowledgeable and who were willing to participate with them. These experiences constituted a promised link between their motivations to learn Spanish and the manifestation of their personal Spanish language goals.

Heritage Language Learners' Offline Communities of Practice

The HLLs, however, literally stayed closer to home when bringing in offline experts into their personal communities of practice. Each based her choices on previous experiences she had had with family members whose Spanish she considered “proper.” These individuals were often parents or grandparents who were first generation immigrants to the United States from Mexico. Their motivation for studying Spanish directly influenced the offline communities of practice they constructed to supplement their online language learning. With these offline community members, many of the learners were able to participate more purposefully and fully in tasks that converged with their individual learning goals.

The HLLs' motivations to learn Spanish focused on a more formal speaking style. All of these students considered themselves intermediate to fluent speakers of Spanish. Time and again, they stressed their desire to learn, or relearn, improve, and maintain their proficiency in “proper Spanish.” They want to move away from using Spanish slang or dialects. They regularly watched Spanish television and listened to

Spanish radio stations to supplement their learning. These students were able to complement their online Spanish learning by accessing a familial community of Spanish experts. At times, these individuals provided a safe environment of dialogue, critique, and expanded knowledge construction. Other times, these students were faced with cultural disconnections between what they learned growing up, what their offline experts believed was correct, and what was taught in the online Spanish course.

Martha and Jill utilized their relationships with their Spanish-speaking parents to practice the new vocabulary and grammatical forms they had learned online. Martha revealed she reflected and considered the online content and then brought her ideas and opinions to her parents for discussion. "I'm thinking about it, and I actually conversed with my parents about it, like the opinions, and what I read, and then I would tell them." Martha also clarified and extended her online assignments through meaningful discussions with her immediate family. She practiced and displayed her Spanish with them, her offline Spanish community. She felt a sense of pride in her learning and in her new, polished Spanish proficiency.

Linda also preferred practicing Spanish with her family members because it provided a safe place to practice. She preferred to speak with someone who had approximately the same Spanish proficiency as she had.

You know you're speaking to someone who knows just as much Spanish as you, I think it's easier for the words to come out slow, and you not be so worried about saying something wrong, because they're at that same level. And they can understand you, and they're not gonna look at you confused. Like the difference in talking with a professor and talking with someone in my own family. Someone in my own family, I can just take off, and feel very comfortable with whatever's coming out of my mouth, versus speaking to a professor is like, oooh, I've got to

think about what I'm saying, before I say it because I don't want to look like a fool.

In Linda's family, she is becoming one of the experts because of her work and participation in the online Spanish course. HLLs experienced the roles of learner and burgeoning expert as they had opportunities to teach others in their offline community about what they had learned online.

But some offline community experiences resulted in cultural divisions over what is considered correct Spanish. Rebekka grew up in close contact with her Mexican grandparents and prided herself on her Spanish ability – the best of her cousins and siblings. However, when she was in high school, she was told that the Spanish she spoke was improper.

I'd say, well I thought it was like this way. And they'd say, no, that's how they teach you here in Texas, but it's not really that way...I thought to myself, "Huh, so all this time. All this time I thought I was saying the word right." ... I thought I was speaking proper Spanish all my life, and I wasn't.

Rebekka chose to practice what she learned online with her mother and other Mexican nationals at her work. She discussed with her mother the differences between what she had learned growing up and what she was being taught in her online Spanish course. But she did not confront her grandparents about the differences: "I didn't want them to say well, they're lying to you or something, because that's how my grandparents are."

Rebekka navigated her offline community of practice in order to speak with those she knew to be experts, but chose not to disturb the precious relationship she had with her grandparents by engaging in a critical discussion about the differences between the course Spanish and that of their upbringing.

Often, the offline community interactions for the HLLs were fraught with cultural stigma when she mispronounced or used a form of the language the offline expert believed to be incorrect. Carolyn chose to practice and clarify the Spanish course content with her boyfriend and his parents. These experiences offline were not always easy, as she found herself using Spanish slang from her youth, which was often met with a quick correction and reprimand.

Carolyn: Yeah, yeah, I speak with my boyfriend.

JC: And how does that go?

Carolyn: It goes alright, you know, he's um, I like speaking with him because his family is from Mexico, so his parents don't speak English. They speak only Spanish. So it's really hard for me to communicate with them. And he tries to talk with me in Spanish as much as he can, because he wants me to be able to communicate with his parents. So, and plus, it's um, being that Spanish was his first language, he knows the proper way, you know, certain words, certain words that I don't realize are slang. (laughs) And so, you know, for instance, if you're talking about a little boy, like someone who's little, it's *niño pequeño*, and *pequeño* being *small* and so, you know, *chiquito* is also *small*, and so I think I was saying something and I used the word, *chiquito*, and he's like, "that's slang for *small*." You know, I would have thought that *small* is *small*. I mean, how many ways can you say the word? So, he's like, "that's not proper."

The experience Carolyn related shows that she has learned about the usage of *pequeño* and *chiquito*, but she has also learned about the cultural understandings of those words in context. She had not decided whether that was a good experience or bad, but her learning is clear in the retelling.

These heritage language learners have many chances to practice what they have learned online in their home communities. By their focus on learning the structure and form of Spanish academic language online, they have an opportunity to learn the language away from the familial community in an independent way. They can

concentrate online on increasing their vocabulary, practicing verb tenses, and gathering information about the language to equip themselves for more proper conversations offline with those whom they deem Spanish experts. The offline component of their communities of practice consists of the very people for whom they chose to learn Spanish.

Evaluating Their Learning and the Online Modality

At the end of the interviews, I asked the women why they felt they had or had not learned, and if they would choose to take another online Spanish course? Their answers exemplified the students' perceptions of their overall learning experience. Through these questions the student came full circle in their perceptions. In considering whether their expectations had been met, and if they had improved their Spanish, the general consensus was that indeed they had learned, albeit to varying degrees. More interesting, however, were their sentiments regarding the responsibility for their learning. Those who felt they had learned a significant amount while enrolled in the online course were very engaged online and offline in Spanish. They used the new information they gained online in critical, analytical ways – through dialogue and debate with those they deemed experts offline. They enjoyed the content and activities of the class, and were cognitively proactive in their practice offline. They took responsibility for their own learning and were metacognitive in their actions, choices, and increased abilities.

Others, though, were disappointed in their learning in the classes. Although they were critical of the lack of social interaction in the class and feedback from the

professor, they consistently took responsibility for their lack of meaningful improvement in Spanish. Comments included, “That’s my grade, I know that’s my work,” and “I could have actually worked around school instead of the other way around.” These students believed that if they had just worked harder in the class, spent more time studying – if life with work and family had not happened – then they would have learned more. Only one student blamed the instruction, or lack thereof, because for much of the class she was blocked from gaining access to the online course management system.

And although the sentiment that learning online means the responsibility for learning is “all on me,” eleven of the thirteen students said they would likely take another online Spanish course. The flexibility and the access to the learning content when and where they needed generally took precedence over their preference for social interaction in the class environment. They often suggested they believed face-to-face was the best way to learn a language, but life’s circumstances dictated they continue to study online. Their ability to supplement this preference with people they knew and respected in their offline communities made the prospect of learning Spanish online in the future a palatable possibility.

One of the students who said she would not study language online again had acquired three other languages as well (all in face-to-face contexts), and was simply against the idea of online language learning. The other, based on her experience in the online Spanish class, believed she was too old to learn a new language. This experience unfortunately resulted in her reassessing her original goal to become functional in

Spanish. For these two learners, the offline Spanish community was not enough to supplement the lack of social interaction they believed necessary within the course itself.

Discussion

The data describe the students' peripheral engagement with Spanish through receiving input and processing new and previously learned linguistic forms and knowledge with their offline community of practice constituency. Within situated learning theory, experts, masters, and old-timers are acknowledged and accomplished members of the community of practice while novices, apprentices, and newcomers are negotiating their new membership and levels of participation. All involved are said to take on multiple roles over time, depending upon the motivations, agency, and fluctuation of expertise levels (Lave & Wenger, 1991). The roles of "apprentice" and "expert" were not fixed in the online language courses, with the addition of offline practice community members, in this study. For these students, experts included not only the instructor, but also Spanish speakers outside of class, including family members, friends, and coworkers. Even the students themselves found they were capable of varying levels of expertise in certain practice situations.

The data revealed an insight to these learners' perceptions of legitimate peripheral participation with their expanded communities of practice. The participants described a community of practice that consisted of both online and personal offline components. The online environment included the instructor and resource materials required for the course, a computer with Internet access, learning assignments, and the

institution's technological network and subsequent processes inherent in gaining access to the course. The offline constituency included members of the target language and cultural community identified by the individual student. Although it may be argued that these students did not specifically value the collective and co-constructed knowledge of the online population, as is often expected in effective formal communities of practice, their extended community's collective knowledge (including that of the instructor) was greatly prized. Consequently, these adult learners demonstrated a need for social, communicative interaction in order to meet their own personal language learning goals.

The adult online students in this study were extremely dedicated to their learning and accepted the instructional delivery in a business-like, pragmatic fashion. Much like Conrad (2002a) found, these learners approached the course much like a contract which required students to invest many hours in their educational efforts. Although taking an online class does not mean the responsibility is completely on the student for her learning, the overarching theme in this study was that the students felt they were *on their own* in their language classes. They desired more interaction with and feedback from the instructor, and because these were *language* courses, they were surprised at the lack of Spanish communicative exchange required. Given their awareness of the social nature of language, their collective appreciation that language must be practiced orally to be acquired, and their high motivations for improving their Spanish proficiencies, the participants chose to include others outside the online environment to round-out their learning experiences. In the beliefs that they were primarily responsible for their learning, they molded their acquisition contexts to include Spanish experts from their

offline communities. New Spanish knowledge to which they were introduced online was practiced, clarified, questioned, and critically examined offline. This allowed the students to contextualize and personalize the language, embody multiple learning roles, and bring the language to life.

In these interpersonal interactions offline, they had opportunities to participate more fully with Spanish and with those who speak the language regularly. In some cases, the learner was able to refine her Spanish knowledge with coworkers, family members, and even chance acquaintances who were willing and interested in a Spanish communicative exchange. As participating apprentices in these interactions, the reciprocity that occurs in dialogue provided for the nonverbal and contextual language cues unavailable to them in their online courses. In other cases, students analyzed and evaluated what they had learned online with other experts, and in these interchanges, the learners were able to participate as knowledgeable Spanish speakers appropriating the role of more experienced community experts. These flexible and varying roles are important as individuals learn to negotiate and manage their participation in the target language community of practice (Haneda, 1997 ; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Young & Miller, 2004).

Conclusion

The nature of language, the medium for most adult social activity, may indeed be the driving force behind understanding this study's situated definition of a student's community of practice within and supplementary to the online course. Although the

class content and learning activities were provided online, face-to-face interaction, synchronous Spanish communication, and extensive opportunities to socially construct their new language knowledge were not perceived as adequate by the participants. However, based on their motivations, oral Spanish improvement expectations, and beliefs in the need to practice in the society in which they desired to communicate more effectively, the extension of their personal communities of practice increased their participation in their own Spanish acquisition. By taking what they learned, their assignments, questions, and critiques to their own personal community of experts, the students engaged in learning and practice activities that bridged the cognitive zone between the online course context and offline Spanish-speaking community. A few of the participants seemed well-aware of this connection; they were students who felt they had improved their Spanish significantly while enrolled in the online class. Instructors of online language courses need to continue to find ways for their students to bridge their online learning to their offline lives and for that link to be valued and developed.

For students whose motivation to study a language is for improved oral communicative competence, social interaction opportunities in the target language, online and off, should be considered in the instructional design. Needs assessments early in the course may be used to ascertain the personal expectations of the students, and individualized instructional facilitation can better be planned. The use of computer mediated communication should also be built in to language classes to address student engagement and communicative language competency standards (see Standards for Foreign Language Learning in the 21st Century, 1996). The use of chat rooms, e-mail,

and MOO (Multi-User Domain Object Oriented) environments is considered a useful incorporation of written and oral discourse and can offer the learner support in improving communicative competence and confidence (Roed, 2003; Shang, 2005; Simpson, 2005; Weininger and Shield, 2003). Ultimately, professional development in online teaching and new technological resources designed to increase virtual social language construction will hopefully augment the lack of sufficient collaborative language interaction offered in some online language courses.

The creation of community for online education is essential to the construction of a successful learning setting (Conrad, 2002a; Palloff & Pratt, 1999). The extension of the community of practice of an online language course found in this study can also be seen as a significant facilitation resource in areas that have large Spanish-speaking communities. Online language instructors may choose to build-in offline Spanish community experiences in order to enhance and complement the online instructional context. In addition, learners' individual communities of target language experts should be valued and validated by the online (and traditional face-to-face) instructor in their facilitation of critical language and cultural discourse practice. For those students who do not have access to native or expert Spanish speakers offline, instruction must include opportunities for communicative exchange within the "walls" of the virtual classroom and possibly on virtual fieldtrips facilitated through the class. Brown (2001) suggests creating online activities early in the course for students to learn about each other to assist them in finding commonalities. A few face-to-face meetings, if possible, can also build relationships necessary for a sense of community to occur (Conrad, 2002a). As in

traditional classrooms, not all online learners will participate equally in community learning and growth (Palloff & Pratt, 1999), but in virtual language classrooms, communicative exchange in the target language must be valued and facilitated with the tools, resources, and individuals available to instructor and students, alike.

CHAPTER III

TO THE WORDS: A NARRATIVE ANALYSIS OF ADULT ONLINE LANGUAGE

ANXIETY

To the Words

When it happens you are not there

O you beyond numbers
beyond recollection
passed on from breath to breath
given again
from day to day from age
to age
charged with knowledge
knowing nothing

indifferent elders
indispensable and sleepless

keepers of our names
before ever we came
to be called by them

you that were
formed to begin with
you that were cried out
you that were spoken
to begin with
to say what could not be said

ancient precious
and helpless ones

say it

W.S. Merwin

Introduction

Merwin's (2005) poem may have been written to illustrate the complexities of employing words and meaning in poetry. But his prose also speaks to the language learner. Adults choose to learn or improve their knowledge of additional languages for a variety of reasons and in a variety of settings. The acquisition of an additional language includes learning phonological and syntactic structure, semantic and pragmatic knowledge for contextual suitability, pronunciation and accent, and comprehension of the cultural and sociolinguistic connections to the language. The process requires multiple opportunities to engage in practice of the target language that includes input, input processing, and output between communication partners. For sure, adults experience language acquisition processes differently as they bring personal characteristics shaped by previous experience and influenced by culture, race and ethnicity, gender, identity, and ego to the learning setting. Young (1999) states "to study how we learn a new language is to study how the body, mind, and emotions fuse to create self-expression" (p. 13). At the core of acquiring a new language, students learn how to communicate their own personally meaningful and conversationally appropriate messages through new structures and systems of the target language (Horwitz, 1999).

Foreign or second language acquisition is often studied within the framework of a sociocultural constructivist learning perspective (Block, 2003; Lantolf & Pavlenko, 2001). That is, cognition is a process that includes social and cultural activity within the particular educational situation and the learner's individual, interpersonal context (Vygotsky, 1978; Wright, 2000). Block (2003) further explained that learning involves

actively engaging and constructing self-identity and knowledge, and the learner develops (or fails to develop), and participates (or chooses nonparticipation) all via interaction with other communication agents. Unfortunately, foreign and second language learning can leave some individuals feeling anxious, self-conscious, and frustrated (Gregersen & Horwitz, 2002; Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986). MacIntyre (1999) defines this tendency to experience an anxious response during language learning or communication as language learning anxiety. It is often a fear or apprehension of being expected to perform in the target language, and it is associated specifically with functioning in that language but not related to performance anxiety on the whole (Gardner & MacIntyre, 1993; Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986). This anxiety may be brought about due to previous experiences with language learning, with learners of another culture, or for various other sociocultural reasons (Hodne, 1997; Price, 1991; Young, 1991). Anxious learners are not likely to participate actively in language class.

In the classroom setting, verbal interaction, face-to-face with peers and instructor, is the most anxiety-producing task for students (Young, 1991). But with a trend in language education toward the use of distance technology, instruction does not always include face-to-face interaction. Without the requirement of relating to classmates and instructors in person, do language students still experience language learning anxiety? Although a growing body of empirical studies of language e-learning is forming, no research to date has specifically studied language anxiety in online foreign or second language programs. We have a unique opportunity to learn more about

this emotional response when synchronous, face-to-face interpersonal interaction in the target language has been removed from the requirements of the course.

Learning Language Online

The purpose of the current research is to understand adult learners' perspectives on foreign language anxiety in online settings and to glean fresh insight into the phenomenon that has previously been anchored in traditional classroom interactions. In this interview-based study, I analyzed the narratives of adult online language learners' understandings about language and their own personal Spanish acquisition practices. It is my belief that their experiences can enrich and develop the research and practice of language learning and teaching by developing our understanding of the processes that are involved in acquiring and improving a language as an adult. In this paper, I depart from the traditional approach to structuring the report. Instead, I draw upon the metaphor of a play in which my participants are actors in their own unfolding language acquisition dramas. As such, I have constructed the paper beginning with the *characters* of the play (the women who shared their stories), the *background and context* of the play (to aid the reader in understanding the current status of affect and anxiety in language learning contexts), and the *setting* of the play (affect in adult online education and language learning and the specific settings the informants learned and participated in the study). The *analysis* section is next, and then *the action begins* in our theatrical production. This section is what would traditionally be called the findings of the study; here it is a convergence of multiple stories and perceptive insight into language learning anxiety,

online and off. The *Resolutions* section then presents the plotline movements of the informants' Spanish acquisition narratives. We will consider *how* the informants talk about their experiences and came to the narrative denouement. Finally, the *conclusions* suggest how the insight these adult learners offer affects future language pedagogy in both online and traditional classroom environments.

Characters

Twelve women who volunteered for the study identified themselves as English dominant speakers. The individuals were in their twenties to fifties. Each was asked to rate herself in terms of Spanish proficiency; Three are at the beginning level, four are at the intermediate level, three are at the advanced level, and two are fluent Spanish speakers. Two of the women identified themselves as African-American, one as white, and one as African-American and Caucasian . These participants believed themselves to be beginning to intermediate learners of Spanish. The remaining eight participants identified themselves as Hispanic, Mexican-American, and Latina. Using Valdez's (2005) definition, this group of eight learners can be considered Spanish heritage language learners because their family background included a non-English language that is, or was, spoken. Each of these participants identified herself as an intermediate, advanced, or fluent Spanish learner. All of the informants were enrolled full-time in course work, and all but one was employed full-time. These adult women consistently chose to take online courses for the "convenience" and "flexibility" they offered. Their names in this article are pseudonyms.

As this study was born out of my own experiences with language learning as a monolingual adult learning Spanish and Italian, I was not simply a neutral observer to the research. I believed it important to reveal to my participants my own positionality as a Caucasian woman who has worked as an English teacher to students of other languages, and as a student who has, at times, experienced language learning anxiety. This disclosure seemed to aid in creating an open-dialogue atmosphere for our conversations.

Additional characters were introduced in the narratives the participants imparted. These individuals include the instructors of the courses, who were all of Hispanic ethnicity (some were originally from Spanish-speaking countries), family members, friends, coworkers, and even political and sports figures. Of note were those individuals who were not mentioned in stories at all: online classmates. This is a result of there being little to no social or Spanish interaction among the members of their online courses.

Background and Context

Language Learning and Emotions

There is a direct link between emotions and learning in general, and between emotions and language learning in particular (Coreil, 2001). We associate language as very personal and linked to our self-value and identity. Breen (2001) contends that much of the research in language acquisition focuses on the relationship between learners' mental processes and the grammar of the target language in order to describe generalizable

models of development. Bekerman (2001) explains that *self* and *identity*, as described in the discipline and profession of psychology, are central constructs for the understanding of what we think, feel, and how we behave. He also suggests that culture is “managed and constructed continuously in social concert thus bringing to the foreground issues of power and contestation as central to its construction” (p.465). Self, the union of identity and culture, is continually developing within the context of historically and natively situated social events. Negotiating one’s identity and loyalty to culture and heritage (which includes the native language), through the process of acquiring a new language, can cause concern about losing or giving up one’s own unique self (Hodne, 1997).

Lantolf and Pavlenko (2001) offer a sociocultural activity theory of second language learning that frames this study. They contend that language learners are people who play active roles in their learning, that they learn with human agency and construct the conditions and provisions of their own education. This approach does not consider the learner in an isolated, decontextualized language learning vacuum, but instead takes into account the historical, social, and cultural framework that learners bring with them to define the learning setting.

Bakhtin (1986) stressed that the generation of speech acts is a process that requires individuals to appropriate the words, expressions, and intonations of others. Continuous and constant social interactions with others allow each individual to assimilate language structures and meanings as one’s own, and for one’s own purposes. The exchange of utterances, and other expressive language components, is put into the individual’s personal context of understanding and is dependent upon the nature of the

continual response and anticipation of speech. This experience is called a dialogic exchange, and the process can be applied to the learning of both first and second languages. Block (2003) further explains appropriation means taking something from someone else (the target language), and creating it as one's own. He describes this experience as being "not just the passing of the external to the internal; it is the meeting of the external and the internal to form a synthesized new state" (p. 103). It is imaginable that the idea of transforming oneself through language may be an unfamiliar exercise for some learners, and one that may be cause for uncertainty and anxiety.

Krashen's (1982) Affective Filter Theory focuses on the concept of affect in second language learning experiences. He suggests that when personal experiences and prior knowledge are encouraged in the learning setting (and even when they are left out), individual connections are made and emotions are brought into play. Krashen suggests that if students are to acquire a new language, they need comprehensible target language input and a low affective filter. In essence, one's affective filter, through which language input flows, must be relatively low in order for acquisition to occur. Although Krashen has been criticized based on the difficulty of testing his theory (Brown, 2000; Lightbown & Spada, 1998), language teachers are certainly aware that if students feel unsafe, anxious, embarrassed, or worried, they may experience high levels of anxiety which will require important cognitive resources to be used in dealing with the emotion. Processing of the input may subsequently be hindered, which can lead to lower levels of language performance, and thus language acquisition.

Foreign Language Anxiety as a Construct

Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) explain the nature of foreign language anxiety in the following way,

Adults typically perceive themselves as reasonably intelligent, socially-adept individuals, sensitive to different sociocultural mores. These assumptions are rarely challenged when communicating in a native language as it is not usually difficult to understand others or to make oneself understood. However, the situation when learning a foreign language stands in marked contrast. As an individual's communication attempts will be evaluated according to uncertain or even unknown linguistic and sociocultural standards, second language communication entails risk-taking and is necessarily problematic. Because complex and nonspontaneous mental operations are required in order to communicate at all, any performance in the L2 is likely to challenge an individual's self-concept as a competent communicator and lead to reticence, self-consciousness, fear, or even panic (p. 128).

Language learners can be concerned or threatened about presenting themselves genuinely when using a mode of communication in which they have a limited range of knowledge. Anxiety in learning a new language is generally considered an emotion that is experienced by adults, although studies on anxiety include students from secondary education (Haskin, Smith, & Racine, 2003; Horner & Redmond, 2002), as well as undergraduate, and graduate university levels of study (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986; MacIntyre, & Gardner, 1991a; Bailey, Onwuegbuzie, & Daley, 1999; Price, 1991; Young, 1991).

MacIntyre and Gardner (1989; 1991b) studied whether learners who experienced general anxiety would necessarily also encounter the emotion in the process of learning a new language. They found that students with general anxiety did not necessarily experience that response when learning a language, while other students who experienced anxiety in language class did not feel anxious in a wide variety of other

settings. If a student begins to associate an anxious response specifically with language learning, and expects to feel anxiety in language class and settings in which the new language is used, the student is considered to be experiencing language learning anxiety (Gardner, 1985).

Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope (1986) add that language anxiety is a combination of communication apprehension, test anxiety, and the anxiety of being negatively evaluated by others, but they believe that the amalgamation of these affective factors is something unique in the foreign language acquisition setting. Supporting the idea of the uniqueness of language anxiety, MacIntyre and Gardner (1991a) did a factor analysis of 23 scales of trait anxiety, state anxiety, communication apprehension, interpersonal anxiety, novelty anxiety, audience anxiety, math anxiety, and anxiety as it pertains to French tests, French use, and French classrooms. They, too, concluded it was reasonable to separate language anxiety from other forms of anxiety, meaning that those who experience high levels of anxiety in other subjects may or may not experience it in a language class, while those who do not experience anxiety in other situations may suffer from it when learning a new language.

Research has shown language anxiety includes feelings such as trauma, dread, wanting to hide, disability or inability to learn foreign language, losing a personal positive self-concept, as well as such physiological experiences as rapid heartbeat, sweaty palms, and shaking hands (Cohen & Norst, 1989; Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986; Price, 1991; Young, 1991). In addition, studies indicate that anxiety mainly causes problems with listening and speaking activities in class or in testing situations (Horwitz,

Horwitz, & Cope, 1991; Madsen, Brown, & Jones, 1991; Price, 1991). The respondents in Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope's (1986) study reported the sensation of "freezing up" on an exam, even though they felt confident they knew the information prior to the testing experience. They also described the phenomenon of having the word, phrase, structure, etc., elude them, a temporary loss of ability to retrieve knowledge they possessed, when faced with an exam or on-the-spot need to produce in the target language. The students believed careless mistakes in spelling and syntax, or not being able to remember what they felt sure they knew were problems caused by language anxiety.

Other studies also showed that anxious students feel they are left behind by too hurried a pace in classroom lessons (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991a), and although anxious students do not always receive low grades, many have had previous negative experiences in language classes (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986, 1991; Price, 1991). Price (1991) found anxiety-causing incidents for college language learners often stem from being nervous about speaking in the classroom due to a real or imagined threat of embarrassing oneself or being ridiculed. Concerns about making mistakes with pronunciation or not using a specific accent add to the experiences of anxiety-ridden language learners. Interviewees also were concerned with not communicating well enough to be understood effectively. In some cases, anxious language students avoid studying and even attending the foreign language class to alleviate their apprehension (Horwitz, et. al, 1991).

Ganschow and Sparks (1991, 1996), however, believe that a lack of natural ability in language, possibly stemming from a disability in language processing in the

native language, and not language anxiety as defined above, causes difficulties and lack of achievement in a foreign language. They believe these difficulties, in turn, produce anxiety in a student about foreign language learning. The research done from the perspective of language learning disabilities and deficits suggests that difficulties with phonological, semantic, and/or syntactic coding cause problems in using language to code information.

Whether language anxiety stems from native language processing disabilities, from pedagogical classroom approaches, from personality and other individual and cultural influences (Gregersen & Horwitz, 2002; Lalonde & Gardner, 1984; Jackson, 2002; MacIntyre & Charos, 1995, June; Skehan, 1991), from previous negative experiences with language classes or learners (Chen & Chang, 2004), or from a combination therein, the student's affective domain must be considered in language education. Personal feelings of inadequacy, lack of language learning aptitude, and fear of embarrassment can be painful experiences. One can understand how such negative responses and perceptions could affect the ability to attend to a language learning activity.

Affect in Adult Online Learning

Online delivery is the preferred instructional technology of post-secondary institutions for the future (Reynard, 2003). In the rush to provide online instruction across the educational spectrum, students' affective experiences in online courses were often overlooked in research up until recently (Hara & Kling, 1999). Initial researchers of

distance education anxiety suggest many students experience this emotion based on issues of finding time and space to work quietly, not having ready access to technologies, and feeling isolated (Jegade & Kirkwood, 1992). Recently, however, studies have linked online adult student affect to inadequate computer knowledge, dissatisfaction with the course and course components, and concern about Internet access and technical problems (Cheney, 2000; Conrad, 2002b; Cuneo & Hamish, 2002; Hara & Kling, 1999; Kelsey, Lindner, and Dooley, 2002; Saunders, Malm, Malone, Nay, Oliver, & Thompson, 1998).

Hara and Kling's (1999) study of online graduate students suggests distance education technologies and online learning may increase some students' anxiety and frustration due to a lack of prompt feedback, ambiguous assignment and course resource instructions, and technical troubles. Conrad's (2002b) study, which also focused on adult graduate students enrolled in an online program, reported students wanted to organize the time and place where their studying and interaction with the course would occur and to access course materials and resources in advance of beginning the course. This pre-planning period with access to course schedules and materials before the official start date was vital to their perceived comfort levels in the course, though it could create conflicts with instructors' contracted schedules or their ability to complete the course in advance of the first day of class.

In researching online classes that build-in social interaction with course content, Saunders, Malm, Malone, Nay, Oliver, and Thompson (1998) investigated graduate students enrolled in a course that provided an Internet-based tool for students to interact

with each other. Three stressors resulted in anxiety for the students: the unease of text-based communications; the difficulty of managing self, others, and the computer setting; and the frustration of inconsistent computer and Internet access. Cuneo and Harnish's (2002) study found that students who experience anxiety online were more likely to engage only at a surface level, signifying they were interested in rote learning and memorization without reaching much understanding of underlying meanings of concepts and complex subject matter. These students were more apt to be apprehensive about appearing ignorant of skills or subject matter with their postings in online conferences, while students who engaged more deeply with the content (those who approach learning by studying for meaning and interact actively with the content in ways that connect the subject matter to their own lives) had much less fear about communicating in online course discussions. The authors conclude 15% to 25% of students are commonly surface learners and will become a "lost generation" in the world of e-learning (p. 19). They posit that these students will be at-risk in online conferencing environments that expect students to engage in higher-order thinking, problem-based, and inquiry-based learning activities.

Kelsey, Lindner, and Dooley (2002) found in their qualitative study of online doctoral students that they were generally very satisfied with the convenience and support of the program, though work conflicts, access problems with resources and materials, feelings of isolation, problems with technology and registration, and time pressures to complete course requirements were revealed as areas of apprehension and dissatisfaction. However, convenience was found to be extremely important in

understanding overall student satisfaction with online education. The majority of the adult students worked full-time, many had families, and all would likely not have been able to pursue the degree if it were not available to them in the online format.

Finally, with regard to specific subject learning anxiety, Taylor and Mohr (2001) found that college students in Australia who suffered from math anxiety generally did well and were satisfied with their online math course. The instructional design included student-centered strategies, informal language, a quick success format, reflective math learning essays, and feedback from the instructor. Much like anxious language learning students, some of the learners in their study also revealed the experience of in-class question-and-answer situations were unnerving, but the online course was found to help students overcome math anxiety and boost their confidence for future math study.

Sociocultural Contexts and Online Language Learning

Within a socially constructed view of language learning, Lambert (1999) advises that by adding the dimension of an e-learning setting to the educational context, new challenges as well as opportunities abound for instructors and learners. Web-based instruction is often customized for a particular, homogenous cultural group of learners (McLoughlin, 1999). In fact, some researchers argue that technology is instilled with Euro-American values and that it advances determinism and undercuts the values and needs of culturally diverse learners (Damarin, 1998; McLoughlin, 1999; Walls, 1994). Unfortunately, there can be a tension between the need to provide a culturally flexible and sensitive learning environment while developing instruction and infrastructure for the cognitive styles and

preferences of individual students (Damarin, 1998). The cultural system of a classroom affects participation, interaction styles, and power negotiations, and though technical access and support in online learning environments may be intended to provide channels of communication for learners, design components may cause cultural misunderstandings and marginalization (McLoughlin, 1999). Reeder, MacFayden, Roche, and Chase (2004) further contend that missing elements in electronically mediated communications, inside and outside of the language classroom, include “context perception, parallel visual channels, direct eye contact, gestural information, side talk, dynamic real-time repair mechanisms, avoidance mechanisms, and in general the flexibility we normally expect to obtain or emerge between conversational partners” (p. 100).

When examining affect in online language learning, the social and cultural contexts of the target language, and that of individual learners and instructors, must be taken into consideration. The body of literature within the study of sociocultural context and online language education provides an understanding of the complexity of interweaving language learning with underlying cultural biases, social conceptions of communication, and learner individuality. These factors can influence an assortment of affective variables that come into play in language acquisition environments. However, Roed (2003) suggests removing the face-to-face structure of traditional classes and replacing it with a setting that allows for asynchronous learning because it may relieve some forms of anxiety for some language learners. The “anytime, anywhere” concept of online learning may also allow for a less-hurried approach to instruction and learner

processing, fewer requirements of on-the-spot production in the new language, and less opportunity to feel embarrassed in front of classmates who are physically present.

Setting

In the present study, the participants took online Spanish courses from a local community college and a four-year university. A call to participate was sent to a list of current or recent online students. Volunteers, that is those who were interested in discussing their emotional and possibly anxious responses in their online Spanish learning experiences, contacted me directly. Their specific participation was not revealed to the instructors or institutions. The participants were currently enrolled, or were enrolled within the past six months, in a second course or higher in Spanish. They had also taken at least one other online course, meaning they were already familiar with the structural and technological aspects of online learning, and had at least a beginning course in Spanish prior to enrollment.

At the time of the study all but one of the participants lived in south-central Texas; the remaining volunteer lived in the north-east of the United States. Spanish is a language spoken frequently in the communities in which the participants lived; there are Spanish radio and television stations, newspapers and magazines, billboards and businesses, and opportunities to hear (and often engage) in Spanish conversations. The online courses provided students with Spanish texts, course materials on CD-ROM, audio files for listening tasks, and some of the courses required the learners to upload personal Spanish response recordings for evaluation on correct vocabulary,

pronunciation, and usage. The participants were not required, however, to communicate or engage in dialogue synchronously or asynchronously in Spanish with other students or the instructors. In fact, the learners in this study perceived their courses as “the epitome of an online class. You never had any contact with anyone” (Lola). They described the instructor feedback on their performance generally as either *right* or *wrong*, *full credit* or *no credit*.

Data Gathering

The interviews were semi-structured and were conducted face-to-face and via telephone. Our conversations focused on their attitudes, motivations, and general affective experiences in class and with their language learning processes. I focused on discovering the types of emotional responses they had in the course and requested detailed stories about times when they felt anxious in language learning experiences while enrolled in the class. I also engaged the participants in conversations about sociocultural factors including identity, ego, and language appropriation (making the language one’s own through social interaction) that might be at play. By providing a space for these learners to discuss their experiences, I hoped to glean a deeper understanding of language anxiety than has previously been rendered. The interviews lasted one to two hours; no incentive was given for participation.

Analysis

The research questions included how and why adult language students experience language learning anxiety with respect to online Spanish courses. My aim was to tap into the meaning-making processes the students employed in their learning of Spanish including the *why's* and *how's* behind their affective responses. By reflecting on the many experiences adults have with language and with learning new languages, and on how culture and society influence the ways in which they conceptualize communication, insights into affect in language education can be gained. These reflection processes value experiences of the past by using them to understand the present and prepare for the future (Clews & Newman, 2005).

The interviews were designed to create comfortable, safe environments within which the participants could discuss their experiences openly. My intention was to provide a space that attempted to balance the inherent power structures of interviews and encourage a conversational setting that would respect their ways of relating meaning in their lives (DeVault, 1999; Reissman, 1993). In these discussions, I tried to clarify with the informants the underlying meanings they had constructed as often as possible. When asked to explain why they felt they had these responses during certain activities, the students often provided vignettes or longer stories to illustrate the meaning behind their emotional reactions. Their stories shed light on their conclusions and responses to interview questions, while extended questioning explored how they made sense of their stories.

The narratives offered included experiences in their online class, in previous language courses in face-to-face settings, and in social and cultural language encounters they had had over their lifetimes. The participants and I spent time during the interview to examine why they felt they had responded to different tasks and practice as they had. These initial conversations often signaled the sensitizing concepts, “important features of social interaction” (Bowen, 2006, p. 3) I investigated in further iterations of the analysis. Together, our reflexive discussions allowed us to consider and reconsider the beliefs and motives that shaped their stories, which in turn helped shape the comprehensive analysis I did later across the data. With their permission, I recorded and transcribed our discussions.

The constant-comparative method (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Glaser & Strauss, 1967) was then used to get a connective sense of the data by identifying codes across the transcripts and then grouping the codes into categories and subcategories. The types of anxiety-triggering tasks and communicative actions in which participants engaged online and outside of class in their study of Spanish, how they experienced language anxiety, and why they believed they felt this anxiety became the major categories of the comparison analysis. The overarching connection between these experiences and sociocultural influences also became a focus.

The data were then examined using narrative analysis to see how the informants structured their accounts to make sense of the events of their stories (Reissman, 1993). The previously mentioned sensitizing concepts were located throughout the stories and vignettes that symbolized important features of their experiences. The interpretations of

their experiences, as they described them, and as we considered them throughout the interviews, were analyzed individually and then collectively. A holistic-form mode of analysis, which focuses on the structure of a story, facilitated the examinations of the participants' narrative interpretations (Lieblich, Tuval-Masiach, & Zilber, 1998).

Looking through the data, I identified story movement as the informants recounted events of language learning anxiety. I paid close attention to how these women created meaning from these events, and how they shaped their understanding about language and culture in the process. In our play metaphor, the action is the way the meaning moves forward. Focusing on the action of my informants' narratives, I charted the trajectories of their anxiety and Spanish acquisition accounts to construct the whole story of how they resolved their personal dramas. The results of comparative examination of the content and the holistic-form analysis of the way in which the stories were described and resolved are provided here.

The Action Begins

Stories are about characters with problems and how they deal with them. If we explore the action in the story, we can get at the underlying meaning as created by the teller.

First, we are going to look at what the participants said (the content of their narratives) and the cultural significance they place on the stories they offered. Then, we will consider how they discuss their experiences, focusing on the movement and structure of how they describe the aspects that comprise their stories.

Regardless of self-perceived confidence level and ability in Spanish, the women in this study experienced anxiety and apprehension with activities that were associated with the online course. Given there were no requirements to interact synchronously in Spanish in their courses, which research shows is the most anxiety-laden activity in face-to-face instruction, why did these women experience these emotions learning Spanish online? Their answers to this question are what we already know about anxiety in online education and about language learning anxiety in traditional classrooms. The participants experienced frustration with hardware and Internet access problems, lack of technical and instructor support, and ambiguous instructor expectations and assignment instructions. They also expressed high levels of anxiety on timed assessments, the possibility of receiving no credit on an assignment under the full or no credit system, not being able to find answers to language questions, insufficient feedback about their personal progress, and feelings of isolation online.

The analysis of the participants' stories about learning Spanish exemplifies and clarifies the reasons they experienced anxiety. Their anxiety is less about the actual online language activity and more about their socioculturally constructed understandings about language in general and the inherent cultural connections to the Spanish language more specifically. Consistently, and across ethnicity, the learners in this study believe in language as a precise and inflexible medium of communication in which each individual is solely responsible for that which is comprehended in dialogue. For these learners, there is *one right way* to communicate meaning in a given social or academic context. They believe if they do not speak Spanish the right way, the cultural sensitivities of the

Spanish interlocutor or instructors may be offended. Sociocultural understandings of language influence their learning of Spanish and their experiences with language learning anxiety.

The action of their language learning and anxiety stories is partitioned into three subsections. *One Right Way* describes the approach to Spanish production my informants take by focusing on *what* they say with regard to their Spanish learning and practice experiences. *Sociocultural Influences on Spanish Practice Opportunities* illustrates the reasons *why* the participants approach language learning and practice in the ways they do. And finally, the *Resolutions* section examines the stories as a whole by looking at *how* they talk about their experiences and ultimately resolve their problems.

One Right Way

I spend most of my time making sure I understand the question and I'm answering it *right*, so I stress out like, "ooh, am I saying this word right?" I have to make sure it's *right* when I'm doing it. (Barbara)

For the adult learners in this study, speaking Spanish correctly means knowing an exact word, phrase, syntax, pragmatic understanding - *way* - of getting across one's meaning. Although these students had different levels of self-assessed proficiency, level of confidence, and background knowledge in Spanish, each indicated an anxiety about the possibility of *incorrect* usage. The participants echoed previous research about language anxiety in that they are concerned about being perceived as unintelligent and linguistically incompetent when producing in the target language (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986; Price, 1991). Insight into this apprehension is gained by the learners in the

present study as they adhere to the belief there is *one right way* to communicate. With such a narrow view of correctness, producing in Spanish with the right pronunciation, vocabulary, and verb tense is of great concern and affected their every utterance and written production in the language. These learners consider language as if it were fixed and unitary. They conceptualize Spanish proficiency as a possession. Therefore, there are those who have acquired this possession (Spanish authorities, natives, or experts) and those who have not (learners). In their minds, these experts possess the right way of speaking. My participants are in quest of that prized knowledge. In understanding what “right” meant for these learners, the heritage and nonheritage language learners define it somewhat differently.

Nonheritage Learners’ Perception of One Right Way

The nonheritage language learners only had English in their upbringings and started taking Spanish in high school or college. They are aware of different ways of speaking Spanish based on the formality of the situation, for example, they know the version of Spanish taught in a college language course is “book Spanish” (Barbara). Although they believe there to be value in learning a more formal version for work-related purposes, their experiences with many Spanish-speaking experts, often friends and coworkers, also call for knowledge of a more social, casual version of the language. For these learners, believing there are different appropriate ways to produce Spanish in each of these situations was a source of significant angst.

“Right” for the nonheritage language learners often centered on remembering learned vocabulary, verb tenses, and pronunciation. These courses were focused on

learner autonomy without significant social interaction. Tests and assignments were often discrete-point tests which were graded upon the accuracy of the students' memory and ability to recall structural aspects of the language. In addition, the written assignments were often graded with full credit or no credit awarded. For example, if a student had too many errors on the written task, she was awarded no points. And, as the exams were often graded by the computer immediately, the students found they were penalized for expanding their thoughts in short answer test items, while more communicative, subjective evaluations were not included. Research has shown that the culture of online learning values speed and quick response (Reeder, MacFadyen, Roche, and Chase, 2004), but for this study's participants, anxiety was triggered when they engaged in quizzes and exams requiring a timed response. Their belief in strict correctness in language production heightened their anxiety in these and other untimed tasks.

To supplement her online course, Kelly chooses to practice with her bilingual friends offline. Her faith in the notion of *one right way* was reinforced by her interactions with her friend, Lisa, who consistently focuses on correction. Kelly is reluctant because, "She [Lisa] says that she's going to be critiquing me, you know, if I'm saying it right and all that. So, that's just the hardest part."

Trisha is very concerned about even attempting to produce in Spanish because she does not feel she has enough knowledge about verb conjugation. She is intimidated by speaking and writing in Spanish because she feels she is unable to communicate precisely the right way, "I [get] anxious. The anxiety started building up and I started

freaking out...with Spanish, I do need feedback like you know, every minute. Until I'm accurate." She ultimately believes she needs one-on-one instruction because she wants to know exactly where her problems are with homework and speaking exercises. Her focus on correctness intimidates her from taking risks in appropriating the language as she constructs meaning in authentic communicative tasks. Her need to know the *right way* before she attempts the practice tasks stagnates her acquisition processes, and ultimately, she drops the course.

While these students are aware of the need to perform to a precise standard in academic settings, they also experience embarrassment when speaking with native Spanish interlocutors who point out some ways of communicating in Spanish is too formal for social settings. When the learners use personal pronouns and a vocabulary that is considered overly formal for everyday conversations, they are chided for their *inappropriate* Spanish usage. These incidents lend support to the students' belief in a particular way of speaking in formal and informal situations. These experiences reinforce their anxiety about their limited proficiency in the two forms. Barbara believes she is a good language learner, but speaking with those she considers experts is a very daunting idea, "...especially like when speaking to a native Spanish speaker, I get very stressed out." Even thinking about those experiences elicits an anxious response for her and the other nonheritage learners. Barbara felt the knowledge of Spanish she was acquiring in her online studies was important and helpful, but she believes she also needs to gain access to the type of Spanish her coworkers and friends speak. She is in quest of a conversational form of the language that does not sound like she just came from

Spanish class. She states, “There’s *book* Spanish and *street* Spanish and I’m trying not to do book Spanish and look like, ‘ok you learned this in *class*,’ and not, you know, it’s not something you’re, you’re doing at level of loving Spanish.” She continued with an example of a time she was with a group of Spanish-speaking friends,

I had a roommate, and we were all talking, standing around the room one night, you know, before we were all going out to drink and dance and stuff, and whatever, and we all started talking about Spanish, and I said, um, “Yo nombre es” and I’ll say my name, whatever, and they’ll say, “Oh, that’s book Spanish, no one says *yo* before anything.” [laughs] and I’m like, “Oh” [with embarrassment].

Like Barbara, the nonheritage language students believe there is *one right way* to communicate meaning in Spanish that is dependent upon the formality of situation. Because they have not yet acquired that *way*, they are extremely concerned about engaging in Spanish practice. However, though on-the-spot oral Spanish tasks prove very anxiety-provoking, Barbara and the other nonheritage language learners insist that formal study can only take them so far in their quest for improved Spanish proficiency. Without required social Spanish interaction in their online courses, they take it upon themselves to practice that which results in their feeling so “stressed-out.”

Heritage Learners’ Perceptions of One Right Way: Like the nonheritage language learners, the heritage language learners are also intimidated by speaking with Spanish authorities, but they define the *right way* to speak Spanish differently. Rebekka admits, “I don’t know if you’re like me, but when I speak to people who I know who speak very *proper* Spanish, I get tongue-tied.” Although these informants grew up in an environment that may have included Spanish and/or a Spanish dialect like Tex-Mex, they had not studied the language at school nor acquired the language to their

satisfaction. These students understand language preciseness, *the right way*, as the standard, academic register in Spanish. They believe the personal convenience of online Spanish education provides clarification and insight into the “real Spanish” to which they were not privy as youngsters. They indicate their embarrassment when speaking to people from Mexico and other Spanish experts (such as the instructor), in part, because when they use Tex-Mex they are not understood.

Linda explains her concern in communicating with Spanish experts, “I think you speak to someone who knows the language properly, it makes you feel, if you say something, that anxiety does, does occur.” She continued to explain the difference between “proper Spanish” (*the right way*) and the local Spanish dialect,

The reason I took it [Spanish] is because, um, being from Texas, and especially from South Texas, we have a tendency, us Hispanics, to change the proper way of saying some Spanish words...a lot of words are used incorrectly in Tex-Mex and I wanted to get back to knowing exactly how to use the proper Spanish words that I was not using, that I knew I was not using right. So I decided to take the class to help me remember *that's* the correct word, you know, and I've been saying it incorrectly all this time.

Linda echoes the sentiments from across the heritage language learner narratives. Many can speak the Tex-Mex dialect within their home communities, but they have chosen to learn formal Spanish online in order to learn the proper or right way. Martha suggests the Tex-Mex dialect itself signifies *the incorrect way* of speaking Spanish, “It’s not so much I don’t like the term [Tex-Mex], but the term is referred to someone who does not speak Spanish the way it *should* be spoken.” Carolyn further defines the *right way* as “true Spanish,” which is “totally different” from the dialect spoken in south-central

Texas. Her experiences practicing Spanish with her Mexican boyfriend reinforce her understandings of the concept of language preciseness and *one right way*.

Being that Spanish was his first language, he knows the proper way, you know, certain words, certain words that I don't realize are slang. [laughs] And so, you know, for instance, if you're talking about a little boy, like someone who's little, it's *niño pequeño*, and *pequeño* being *small* and so, you know, *chiquito* is also *small*, and so I think I was saying something and I used the word, *chiquito*, and he's like, "that's slang for *small*." You know, I would have thought that *small* is *small*. I mean, how many ways can you say the word? So, he's like, "that's not proper."

When communicating with him, Carolyn is aware of her deficiencies in what her boyfriend considers the *right way*. She learns that there is only one way to have communicated the meaning of *small* in Spanish - with the word *pequeño*, and decidedly not with *chiquito*. This knowledge leads her to feel anxious about speaking in Spanish without all the tools necessary to do so *properly*.

Linda had a similar experience at work when she became very conscious of her improper Tex-Mex usage and the anxiety she felt by not knowing a specific Spanish word. She had been pressured into taking a call with a Spanish-speaking client on the phone because her coworkers believe she speaks the language. Linda was reluctant to volunteer because she felt she would not be able to communicate in the proper form, but she attempts to help anyway:

They were trying to tell me that the bumper on the car had been, you know, damaged, on their vehicle, and I, I felt, stupid [laughs] because I didn't know how to say *bumper*! So I said, ahh... "bumper?" with an accent. And at that point, it makes you feel, oh my goodness, I really don't know what I'm saying. I need to go backwards. You know. I need to learn what *bumper* is, what *windshield wiper* is, and all these little names that, the little words that you don't think are going to come up in an every day conversation, when the language is needed. And at that moment it was needed and I couldn't, and I felt silly, about *bumper*.

Linda is concerned that she has not acquired what is necessary to be understood by Spanish natives or experts. This attention to Spanish precision consistently led the heritage language learners in this study to experience anxiety when communicating with the instructor, peers, clients, and family. Across the stories, the learners indicate their intimidation by the concept of one right way to speak Spanish which induces language anxiety in many communicative settings.

The heritage language learners took Spanish online because they felt it was a quick and safe way to improve their vocabulary and clarify the ways in which they were using Spanish incorrectly. Lack of personal and timely feedback from the instructor and not being able to find an answer to a specific question were sources of anxiety they experienced in the online course. For students who view the course as a primary source for learning the appropriate way to communicate in Spanish, feedback and answers are foremost in their hierarchy of learning needs. The collective insights of language precision buttress the next section.

Sociocultural Influences on Spanish Practice Opportunities

The belief that there is a *right way* to communicate in Spanish influences these learners' Spanish production, even though they define that way differently. The data also indicate that a connection between culture and heritage with the Spanish language has an influence on Spanish learners' perceptions of communicative appropriateness and competence. When delving into why the participants believed there to be such a precise standard for correct Spanish, the informants offered stories of social interaction in the

language – narratives that typically described face-to-face, synchronous communication. These stories were from across the lifespan, including the time they were enrolled in the online Spanish course. Stories from the past with family members, neighbors, and coworkers, and even stories from watching Spanish television represent clarification and extensions of their understandings of language and its relationship to sociocultural expectations.

Consistent with the literature in language learning anxiety, the participants express anxiety and embarrassment over feeling as though they appear inept or unintelligent in the eyes of their Spanish-speaking interlocutor. However, deeper probing tapped into their anxieties about the sociocultural connections they make with language and the importance they place on communicative, intercultural and intracultural respect. Across the stories the women tell, a fundamental element of their language learning anxiety stems from their unwillingness to offend the cultural sensitivities of a Spanish native or authority. For the nonheritage language learners, the concern is based on risking the perception that they do not respect the Hispanic culture enough to speak *correctly*. Stories that indicate a great regard for the language and its cultural associations to Hispanic identity fuel the idea of language correctness to higher levels of importance. Likewise, the heritage learner participants experience an anxiety in Spanish language practice by risking the possibility of not living up to a personal cultural standard that includes speaking “proper Spanish.” For these learners, the threat of appearing uneducated and disrespectful to their own heritage by *misusing* the language

with native or dominant Spanish speakers results in deep-seated angst in often emotionally-encumbered practice opportunities.

Nonheritage Language Learners' Communicative Experiences: Barbara identifies herself as mixed race - African-American and Caucasian. As an outsider to the Hispanic culture, she is concerned she will somehow offend her Hispanic friends by committing errors in their Spanish conversations, "I don't want them to think that I don't respect it by not saying it right." She finds herself particularly anxious about using correct pronunciation in a conversation with a good friend. Although he tries to help her, she is concerned her novice attempts will be perceived as not respecting the culture enough to learn the language sufficiently *before* engaging in Spanish interactions.

He's like, "No one's going to die if you're saying it wrong!" And I'm like, "I know they're not, but I just feel bad." And because it's, to them, it's their *heritage*, and I should respect it by saying it right! [laughs]. I don't want them to think that I don't respect it by not saying it right. ...And a lot of that comes from work, 'cause our company is very diverse, and that diversity is seen as a big thing. And it's respecting everyone's views and their background, and I take that VERY seriously.

Barbara equates the Spanish language with the Hispanic culture; therefore, a mistake in the former is an insult to the latter. Current political and sociological structures at her work have contextualized her concept of respect for diversity with regard to language. She takes these beliefs with her when she engages in Spanish learning online, at work, and with friends. It is understandable the correction she gets from her instructor online and her practice community offline is very difficult for Barbara. She feels she knows when she has said something incorrectly and would rather correct herself than be corrected, yet she still insists on engaging in the very activity that causes such personal

unease - face-to-face communicative practice in the target language. Barbara admitted she tries to speak Spanish every day at work and in her personal time with her friends.

Similarly, Lola and Trisha engage their coworkers in oral Spanish practice and for assistance on coursework for their online classes. Lola wants to speak Spanish because “it’s cool to be bilingual!” She hopes to participate more fully in her community and at work by being able to speak the heritage language of so many of her friends and coworkers. The current national political backdrop regarding Spanish and immigration also affects her motivation to learn the language.

I find it interesting to learn, especially about the Hispanic culture. There’s this big thing going on right now about the illegal immigrants and all this [pause] and of course [President George W.] Bush talked about this last night. So, it makes it come to the forefront of your mind. Why should we be judgmental about the language they speak? Um, we should be trying to speak their language because they’re trying to speak ours! So, I don’t understand the whole issue with it, actually, it makes me want to learn even more actually. I just feel like it would make me a better person – I think it would make me a better person in the fact that I can communicate with someone who may not be able to communicate in English! I, it would just make me feel better about it.

Political influences, including the move to one national language and the controversy over immigration policy have shaped her experience in learning Spanish and her motivation to become bilingual. But the impact of policy and the sociopolitical nuances involved impact her level of comfort practicing outside of class:

Sometimes I feel kind of stupid because I almost feel like sometimes if I try to speak Spanish to a Hispanic, they think I might be trying to talk down to them because, “I know English, stupid!” So you never know! It’s one of those things where you almost feel like it’s become a political issue. Yeah, because you do listen to people sometimes and you’re sitting there trying to speak Spanish, struggling through it and they might very well be appreciative that you’re trying it, but sometimes there’s those few people who are like, “You know, I speak English perfectly well!”

Lola does not want to be offensive by speaking Spanish with someone who might believe she assumes they do not know how to speak English. Her interest in speaking to friends and coworkers in their heritage language, along with the fear of offending the Spanish-English bilingual acquaintance, present dichotomous sociocultural and political influences on Lola's target language practice. Her complex understanding of cultural and linguistic sensitivity shapes her affective responses to the learning of Spanish.

Trisha, an African-American who works with people of many different ethnic backgrounds and clearly values diversity, wants to learn Spanish so she is able to communicate with them "at their level." As a career counselor, she indicates her respect for diversity equates to learning to speak the language associated with her clients' ethnicity and culture. She believes to connect with the individuals with whom she works she needs to meet them in *their* community, in *their* homes, with *their* language. She requests that when her Spanish-speaking coworkers come to her office they speak the language with her, translating their greetings and phrases so she can learn from them. But when Trisha needed to record herself for oral assignments online, she felt completely powerless and incapable of producing much of anything. She reveals,

When it comes to the Spanish [online], every time I'm getting ready to open up the oral part, I'm like, oh my God. I don't know what the heck I'm doing. The teacher is fast. And it's her native tongue, it's not mine. You know, but I would love to make it fluent. To tell you the truth, I'm actually dropping the class because of it. But I really do want to learn it, so this is not the last time I'll be taking it. So I'll actually probably sit in the classroom, at least for Spanish. So that's where I'm at with it.

Trisha's reaction to her assignments illustrates her anxiety in producing online for the native Spanish-speaking instructor, without the face-to-face contact, feedback, and

interaction, keeps her from being able to learn effectively in the online setting. Her desire to truly meet people where they live, literally and figuratively, simultaneously motivates and intimidates her. Accordingly, the lack of interaction online, communicative give and take in the target language, precludes these learners from being able to construct relationships in Spanish that allow them to blend and demonstrate their personal respect for the culture, language, and interlocutor concurrently.

Heritage Language Learners' Communicative Experiences

Similar to the nonheritage language students, the Spanish heritage language learners in the study are also influenced by cultural connections to the language. However, these participants have both an interpersonal and intrapersonal connection to Mexican-American culture, and as such, indicate a concern for not being able to speak the language of their heritage “appropriately.” They believe that because they are Hispanic, they should be able to speak better than feel they do. Carolyn’s comments succinctly describe the sentiments across the heritage language learner narratives, “I don’t know how to speak Spanish, and I’m losing out on my culture. I *should* know it.” Believing that they have the cultural obligation to speak the language properly certainly influences how they view their learning and acquisition processes.

A respect for her online instructor and her beautiful command of Spanish affected Carolyn’s motivation (and anxiety level) to perform well in the course. She divulged she spent thirty minutes recording one sentence in Spanish because “she’s [the instructor] gonna listen to me speaking Spanish, and I just want it to be right. I try really hard to speak, like, proper Spanish.” Carolyn and the other heritage learners are not only

interested in meeting the course requirements but also meeting the expectations of the instructor who shares their cultural heritage.

In continuing her story about speaking with a client on the telephone and not yet knowing how to say “bumper” in Spanish, Linda provides clarification about her anxiety and why she had this response.

It threw me to mis-concentration and everything that I was trying to communicate with this person [voice is very soft here] you know, when you feel, of course, when you feel like you’ve just been shoved down, it’s like, ooohh, everything else just goes wrong. I remember, like kind of getting like hot, from somewhat embarrassed, um, [because] there were a lot of Mexican-American people around me when I was trying to communicate with this person, I felt that much more sillier, because it was like, ooh gosh, I volunteered to take the phone call, and I can’t do this. So I’m looking red in the face and my heart’s beating a little faster and then more words coming out wrong when I knew some of the words I was saying [but said them incorrectly]. And, um, in the language itself, it flows, it flows very smoothly when you’re speaking Spanish, and, one break in, for me, when I carry on a conversation, one break in something that I say wrong, I would have to say that it does cause anxiety ‘cause it throws me off and then everything else that I say is like, gosh, I can’t believe I just said all that and it was all wrong, and I do this almost every single day!

Linda connects her own culture (Mexican-American) with the ability to speak Spanish *the right way*. But because she feels deficient in her Spanish-speaking abilities, and feels she should be able to speak at a higher proficiency level because she is Hispanic, she experiences language learning anxiety when speaking with natives and experts.

In fact, multiple stories were offered by the heritage language learners that indicated the need to meet a cultural expectation of proper Spanish that included the insistence of not attempting to speak if one were unable to do so correctly. Nancy’s story about watching a local Hispanic boxer on Spanish television was laced with embarrassment for him. For her, his use of slang and improper dialect poorly represented

her south-Texas city. She suggested he should have used an interpreter rather than disrespect his heritage by not speaking correctly. Likewise, Marina and Martha felt strongly that Hispanics who make mistakes or produce improper Spanish should be corrected immediately. It is apparent the informants believe it is preferable not to speak the language at all than to speaking it badly. With a zero-tolerance attitude for incorrect and improper Spanish usage, these heritage language learners place added pressure on themselves in their online learning and offline Spanish experiences.

When a perceived Spanish expert is unable to understand what the heritage language learner is trying to communicate, an added layer of affect shapes the experience. The imperative of speaking correctly, with a certain flow and style, is culturally constructed for these learners and influences how they acquire the language. They do not want to offend the cultural sensitivities of their Spanish interlocutors, and they do not want to look badly in the eyes of their heritage community.

Resolutions

With respect to language acquisition practices, my informants shared stories of anxious online and offline Spanish exchanges. These brief moments in time are the collective climax of their narratives. We can understand the meaning of what they tell us by looking at the construction of their accounts. Here we want to reflect on how the plot unfolds - the structure of the telling. At this point, we need to focus on four narratives I have excerpted previously.

The first two stories deal with anxiety that someone might be offended if her Spanish is not correct. When Barbara tries to speak Spanish with her Hispanic friends, she uses the personal pronoun, *yo*. She experiences embarrassment and anxiety when they tell her she is being too formal in her Spanish for that situation. Barbara believes if people truly respect the culture, they must speak the language correctly. Her anxiety increases in this communicative setting because she is worried her improper usage may offend her friends' cultural heritage. Likewise, Lola's story about striking up a conversation with an Hispanic acquaintance indicates her anxiety about offending someone who also speaks English. She learns that underlying sociopolitical assumptions about her motives in the communication could result in offending her Spanish practice interlocutor.

The other two stories are about the embarrassment she experiences when she makes a mistake in Spanish. Carolyn's story about speaking with her boyfriend increases her anxiety about using words that native Spanish speakers would consider slang. Through that experience, she learns that there are times when only one specific word is appropriate and proper (*pequeño*), and if she is not careful she, herself, will come across as improper. Similarly, Linda's experience with not knowing how to say *bumper* in Spanish leads her to feel embarrassed about her incomplete Spanish vocabulary and her inconsistent ability to make herself understood in the language of her heritage. The heritage language learners' cultural connections to Spanish increase the pressure to use proper Spanish at all times, particularly with individuals they deem as Spanish experts.

In all these stories about language learning anxiety, the speaker is describing discomfort about what they say. If we look at the brief moments in time they are recounting, the dissection of language learning anxiety as my participants experience it can be plotted as is shown in Figure 1.

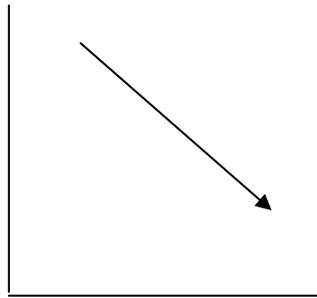


Figure 1: Downward Sloping Plotline

As the feelings the characters experience are not good, the movement of the action plotline goes down. At this point in our play, the audience may believe a downward moving plotline would likely lead to negative learning outcomes. But the important point is that the “play” does not end there.

A good director uses both wide-angle shots and close-ups to produce the intended effect of the play. The four stories are our equivalent of the close-ups; now we need to shift to a wide-angle look at the data to understand the rest of this study’s story. Consistently, my participants were determined to acquire Spanish. All but one completed the online course and all were committed to further study of the language. Some would choose to continue in online Spanish courses. Others decided that to meet their Spanish learning goals, they would need to enroll in face-to-face classes. And every participant

suggested their informal learning exchanges with people from their home and work communities would continue.

Unfailingly, the heritage language learners are committed to acquiring a formal version of Spanish. They believe they need to get back what they have lost, both linguistically and culturally. Carolyn laments, “I’m Hispanic, [yet] I don’t know how to speak Spanish, and I’m losing out on my culture. And I should know it, and my parents should have taught me and stuff.” She, like the other heritage learners in the study, feels she is missing out on an important part of her heritage. Spanish education promises a path to acquiring that missing component.

The nonheritage language participants are also committed to continuing their Spanish instruction. Many believe it is beneficial for their careers to speak Spanish well. In addition, they desire to communicate in the language of many of their friends as a sign of cultural solidarity in a political era that devalues languages other than English. Barbara is committed to continuing with Spanish, and she is interested in doing so online:

I asked if there were a third level ... because of my question they’ve now, you know, surveyed the class, and they’re trying to get a third level of Spanish for online students, instead of me having to go on campus to take it.

Additional study in Spanish is not a requirement in her program, yet she is resolute in her bilingual goals. Her dedication to becoming proficient in Spanish is supported by the confidence she has in finding offline opportunities to practice her language skills. Even Trisha, the student who decided to drop the online course, is committed to continuing her Spanish education. However, she chooses to learn in a face-to-face class. She offers,

“I’ll be going and SITTING in the classroom. I’ll take it the way I like it. ... probably taking a class through a local library [with] a tutor. I’m back, I’m fully charged, and BAM, I’m ready!”

What is so clear here is that the participants’ motivation and persistence were not derailed by their language learning anxiety. Even though their courses did not provide Spanish interaction among students and other Spanish speakers, these students personally chose to supplement their online learning with that very anxiety-laden experience. Each found native speakers with whom to converse during their online courses because they believe those experiences are essential in attaining oral accuracy and proficiency in Spanish. Instead of being a barrier to their language learning, the anxiety may have actually been a stimulus for their acquisition processes. They know they want to communicate effectively in Spanish, and they know they will have to wrestle with their anxiety to meet their goals.

The wide-angled lens of holistic-form analysis allows us to see the true direction of our play’s plot. The characters change the direction of the plotlines – the movement of their actions shifts the direction of the line back up as they consistently choose to interact with Spanish. Even though they experience anxiety in the process, they opt to continue learning the language both formally and informally. The participants’ plotlines can be outlined to visually capture the movement of the action. The charting of their true, collective plotline can be graphically represented as shown in Figure 2.

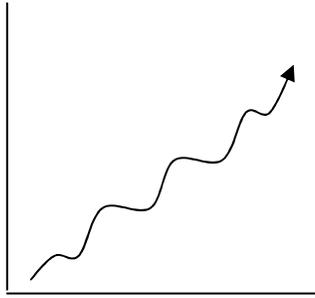


Figure 3.2: Upward Sloping Plotline

The movement of the plotline is not always upward, as the anxious communicative experiences temporarily reposition the line downward. While the participants experienced anxiety in varied ways, they used these experiences to stimulate, rather than impede, their learning. We can consider language learning anxiety as the antagonist of the play, while the denouement finds our characters choosing to push on in their studies. As our metaphorical play has come to an end, the curtain closes and we are left with our thoughts about what we have learned.

Reflections

By not including Spanish social communication requirements online, the Spanish courses in this study created a unique opportunity to learn about language learning anxiety. Students in these courses did not have to interact in Spanish in either synchronous or asynchronous tasks. A reasonable question at this point might be: *is autonomous online language learning that excludes social language interaction a help or hindrance with respect to language learning anxiety?* I argue that this research

demonstrates that language learning anxiety still exists in online language instruction because it lives within the learner and among interlocutors, rather than positioned solely in the instructional modality.

Through their narrative reflections of communication in relation to culture and identity, the participants and I unpacked their perceptions of language and language acquisition processes that create anxiety for them when they speak Spanish. The informants believe the goal of language learning is to acquire a somewhat elusive “right way” to communicate, and until/unless they acquire that way, they will continue to experience anxiety in the process of learning and speaking Spanish.

The insights from these learners provide rich understandings of why they conceptualize Spanish as a precise and inflexible structure – a possession owned by instructors, native speakers, and other experts. In organizing their personal meanings of Spanish learning experiences, they tell stories of language use in sociocultural contexts as a part of the online language course, previous educational experiences, and with coworkers, friends, and family. The combination of wanting to appear linguistically competent and not wanting to offend the cultural sensitivities of their Spanish interlocutors triggers these students to experience language learning anxiety. For these adult learners, not only do they believe that one needs to negotiate meaning in one’s own language, settle on a way to communicate that message into the new language, and hope that the pronunciation and word choice/usage are comprehensible and appropriate, but they also must consider their own personal culture and that of the listener. With all that

is involved in this conceptual and cognitive exchange, it is remarkable the learner even makes the attempt at all!

The literature has shown that face-to-face interactions in the target language are the most anxiety-laden tasks learners encounter. Consequently, online language instruction is touted as reducing anxiety by removing the requirement of interacting in person (Beauvois, 1998; Kelm, 1992). However, the anxious students in this study choose to voluntarily engage in those same interactions in their offline communities. Their motivations to acquire communicative Spanish override the anxiety that laces the experience. In fact, the anxiety they experience may be an impetus to persist in their Spanish studies.

The participants want to engage in oral communication and other types of social Spanish interaction even though it can induce apprehension and nervousness. They believe these experiences are important in gaining an understanding and skill-level required for fluency in Spanish. Thus, language learning anxiety was found to be less about the actual online language learning task and more about socioculturally constructed understandings about language in general and the inherent cultural connections to the target language in particular. In addition, the findings suggest the lack of social language interaction online does not necessarily serve the student well if she intends to use the language in authentic communicative experiences offline.

Real-world communication requires flexibility with respect to cultural and linguistic appropriateness. As language is a social, reciprocal exchange, comprehension is a co-constructed responsibility for understanding which is shared between two people.

Language class is an appropriate practice field for engaging in communicative exchanges and grappling with the anxious responses students will undoubtedly have in the real world. Students need to be aware of the many ways to get across their ideas in the target language. Meaning can be communicated in a variety of appropriate ways. Therefore, an approach to language instruction should value flexibility and risk-taking rather than inculcate language inflexibility and dialogic precision. Communicative practice in online foreign language classes should provide ways for the student to appropriate the target language and culture in social situations. But if the online course does not provide these opportunities, this study suggests adult language learners may choose to create those exchanges themselves.

Finally, this current research demonstrates that in today's global sociopolitical environment, adult students take their own valuation of ethnic and cultural diversity with them into the language classroom. Since the events of September 11, 2001, a focus on culture, one's own and in conjunction with others, has inspired the way Americans consider many issues, from politics to education to daily living. Language and culture have always been linked, yet this study illustrates the impact of society's cultural and political movements on individual learners' constructions of diversity, language, and heritage.

Merwin's poem, *To the Words*, captures the adult language learner's anxiety in today's complex sociocultural communication requirements:

When it happens you are not there

O you beyond numbers
beyond recollection

passed on from breath to breath
given again
from day to day from age
to age
charged with knowledge
knowing nothing

It is we, the communicators, who must collectively make sense of our prose, and we, the speakers and listeners, who must wrestle with the cultural, political, and social meanings behind our dialogic successes and failures. Knowing that adult students of language come to class with these personally complex, contextual understandings of self, language, and culture, our pedagogical approaches for the future, online and off, must be equally as contextual and culturally sensitive.

CHAPTER IV

CULTURAL FANTASY NARRATIVES AND HERITAGE LANGUAGE

LEARNING: A CASE STUDY OF ADULT, TEJANA SPANISH LEARNERS

There is something fundamentally different about learning a language, compared to learning another skill or gaining other knowledge, namely, that language and self are so closely bound, if not identical, that an attack on one is an attack on the other.

Cohen and Norst

Introduction

Bakhtin (1986) stressed that the generation of speech acts is a process in which individuals engage by appropriating the words, intonations, and expressions of others into their own personal linguistic and meaning armamentarium. Social communication and interactions with others allow both first and second language learners to assimilate linguistic structures and meanings as their own. The dialogic exchange, reliant upon the give and take of response and anticipation of reply and reaction, is made up of utterances and other expressive language characteristics individuals use to contextualize and comprehend the communication. Block (2003) further explains language appropriation as “not just the passing of the external to the internal; it is the meeting of the external and the internal to form a synthesized new state” (p. 103).

Similarly, Romaine (1995) discusses the interrelationship between what bilingual Spanish speakers believe of their own communicative code and the attitudes that monolinguals express of bilingualism. She states, “minorities often ‘accept’ the stigma

attached to their way of speaking by the socially dominant majority” (p. 289). Thus, the internalization of others’ attitudes towards language speaking and development becomes significant when discussing the attitudes of students towards learning and production of their own heritage language (HL).

As defined by Valdés (2005), the heritage language learner (HLL) is one who has a “family background in which a non-English language is, or was, spoken” (p. 412). Carreira (2004) further distinguishes the HLL from first and second language learners while also recognizing the variety of language skills of those within the heritage language continuum. She suggests that three criteria define the heritage language learner: “A) the learner’s place in the HL community, B) the learner’s personal connection to the HL and heritage culture through his/her family background, and C) the learner’s proficiency in the HL” (p.2). These criteria depict the importance of community, extended family, and motivation in the language learning process. In addition, Valdés and Figueroa’s (1994) study clarifies the terms *elective bilinguals* and *circumstantial bilinguals*. While an elective bilingual has been educated in the language through an academic program, circumstantial bilinguals have learned the language primarily through oral interaction with family and community members. Thus, the term heritage language learner used herein refers to an individual who has experienced Spanish language contact through home and/or community but has had little opportunity to study the language in an academic setting.

These distinguishing characteristics exemplify the myriad differences that exist among U.S. Spanish speakers’ language abilities. They also express the need to research

the attitudes that circumstantial bilinguals hold in regard to heritage language production. Such attitudes toward Spanish and colloquial variations rely upon both internally governed and externally controlled factors.

In accord with this precept, this study examines the language attitudes that Spanish heritage language learners who are enrolled in an online Spanish class have toward their own language production. The courses in this discussion, offered through institutions of higher learning approximately three hours from the Texas/Mexico border, were not geared specifically toward the heritage language learner. However, many of the students who enrolled in them were of Hispanic origin and spoke Spanish to varying degrees. We are proposing that an interpretive paradigm can elucidate the dialectic tension between a prestige variety and a vernacular variety of Spanish as heritage language learners express their attitudes of language learning and production while taking an online Spanish course.

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Interpretivist inquiry considers how people make sense of their experiences, settings, and interactions with others. Along with a sociocultural lens, this study was undertaken to consider the affective experiences of adult heritage language learners. Sociocultural theory is based on understanding the cognitive processes of learning. The focus is on the socioculturally meaningful symbols and artifacts of society in which language plays a central role (Zuengler & Miller, 2006). Zuengler and Miller suggest, “of significance for second language acquisition research is the understanding that when learners appropriate

mediational means, such as language, made available as they interact in socioculturally meaningful activities, these learners gain control over their own mental activity and can begin to function independently” (p. 39). This study is informed by three areas of literature: language acquisition and heritage language learning across attitudinal and sociopolitical factors, and then of theory and studies in code-switching (the use of two languages or dialects).

Attitudinal Studies

To better understand the linkages between community, individual language use and language development, sociolinguistics have turned to the Social Network Approach. This analytical construct, rooted in anthropology and sociology, suggests that bilingualism can be better understood by analyzing the social ties that exist between individuals and their different circles of influence (Wei & Pong Sin Ching, 2007). First, the power relations between groups and community structures offer a macro approach to understanding language production. Second, cultural practices that include language choice, code-switching, and the attitudes of individuals provide a micro perspective of language production. Network analysis in the United States indicates that Spanish maintenance in different varieties is influenced by geographical proximity to Mexico, the adjacency to other Latin American countries, continual influx of immigrant populations, and large bilingual populations residing within the United States (Mendoza-Denton, 1999). For example, such factors as generational and extended family contact provide a means by which second and third generation Hispanics are able to maintain

varying degrees of bilingualism (Campbell & Christian, 2003, May). Thus, heritage language learners' networks make available informal language acquisition mechanisms as originally defined by Krashen (1982).

Experimental studies have elucidated the development of Spanish heritage language usage in the Southwest and the psychosocial factors that surround its loss, development, or maintenance. For example, Romaine (1995) reports a trend that began in the 1970's with the emergence of sociolinguistics to objectify attitudinal studies within the discovery paradigm. This move to codify attitudes toward language development can be appreciated through the use of survey instruments (Pearson & McGee, 1993; Beaudrie & Ducar, 2005) and matched-guise experiments (Romaine, 1995). Such studies and methods have been instrumental in explaining the multifarious nature of heritage language acceptance and production, including the internalization of societal stigma towards heritage language production (Pearson & McGee, 1993; Beaudrie & Ducar, 2000; Montes-Alcalá, 2000; Rivera-Mills, 2000; Pletsch de García, 2002).

Several studies have found varying attitudes concerning heritage learner language usage in the home and community domains. For example, one of the first language attitude studies was conducted in Dade County, Florida, by Pearson and McGee (1993). Through a poll of junior high school students, Pearson and McGee found that subsequent HL generations tend to increase their use of English and thus decrease their use of Spanish. Likewise, Rivera-Mills (2000), who conducted a sociolinguistic survey in a California community, found that language attitudes change across

generation and social class. While second generation respondents maintained strong language loyalty to Spanish, third generation respondents expressed less loyalty and preference toward speaking the heritage language. Likewise, this study indicated stratification across preferred language usage, with lower socioeconomic groups indicating a higher preference for Spanish.

However, in the same year, Montes-Alcalá (2000) conducted an attitudinal study of college-aged HL students in California. Her respondents primarily expressed positive attitudes toward code-switching, the phenomenon of shifting from one language to another, which is typical where multiple languages come into contact. In another study conducted by Elias-Olivares (1976), it was found that older generations devalued the vernacular Spanish spoken in the Southwest while younger Mexican-Americans attributed ethnic pride to this speech production.

According to studies conducted by Galindo (1996) and Pletsch de García (2002), proximity to the Mexican border facilitates Spanish language maintenance; however, it does not necessarily change HL attitudes toward the vernacular Spanish dialect. Galindo found that code switching and lexical borrowing were more prevalent among border populations than for those Texans who reside in cities further from the border. This premise was substantiated by Pletsch de García, who conducted a survey of 965 public school students in the Mexico/U.S. border city of Laredo, Texas. She found that while 60% had learned Spanish as their first language in the home domain, an equal number reported their first written language to be English. Yet, 41% identified their primary means of communication to be what they termed as “Tex-Mex” as compared to English

(33%). Thus, while Montes-Alcalá (2000) and Elias-Olivares (1976) found positive attitudes toward code-switching, both Galindo and Pletsch de García found that border residents devalue code-switching rather than regard it as an innovative language technique. While code-switching is recognized as a means of communication that is prevalent in daily speech patterns, respondents consider the nonstandard speech form to be a less desirable linguistic variation.

Sociopolitical Factors

Kondo-Brown (2003) argues that “ socio-psychological perspectives on bilingual development indicate that HL loss or maintenance is a complex matter due to the many socio-psychological factors that interact with learning environments and influence HL learners’ language behaviors” (p. 5). Studies in language sociology implicate the sociopolitical climate of attitudes towards language production. Cervantes-Rodríguez & Lutz (2003) document the historical relationship that power and language have had in “shap[ing] the English-Spanish asymmetry in the United States” (p. 529). These researchers’ historical claims clarify the hegemony predominant in the nation’s formation. They state:

With immigration came a rise in nativism and pressures to use English only. Such pressures... were rooted in notions that shared past shaped “American values,” that linguistic pluralism threatened the basic unit of the nation, and in ideas concerning the role of the federal government in the language question in times of international conflict, as well as in basic notions that rejected the argument that ethnolinguistic groups should be granted special protection to ensure their survival. (p. 529)

With the advent of the Civil Rights Movement, linguistic publications emphasized sociohistoric perspectives that examined the difficulties that minority groups confronted regarding cultural assimilation and bilingualism (Lipski, 2000). The first Bilingual Education program was born from this sociopolitical climate of the 1960s. However, HL speakers have typically learned their heritage language in a subtractive climate. Instead of approaching heritage language education adding to the wealth of language and cultural knowledge HL learners bring to the classroom, a subtractive method does not value bilingual skills. While monolingual speakers are applauded for learning a second language, HL learners have traditionally been relegated to language instruction whose primary role is to promote the complete assimilation of Spanish-speaking primary school children into English classrooms.

A case in point is California's Propositions 187 and 227, English-only movements directed primarily at Spanish-English bilingual programs that influenced the nation's notion of appropriate educational offerings and the idea of *one* national language. The result of this legislation has shaped the way law-makers and communities view bilingualism/multilingualism in political, societal, and cultural ways. Other states, including Texas and Arizona, have found that California's decision to ban bilingual education, and the media's vast coverage of the arguments made against bilingual programs, has affected their education system choices. In addition, inconsistent quality in bilingual programs and a push toward English-only curricula have found even Hispanic communities and parents reconsidering the value of public bilingual education for their children. The result has been that many Hispanic students have been educated

only in English in schools, but have been informally introduced or trained in Spanish at home. Spanish variations and code-switching are, in part, products of a variety of educational opportunities heritage language learners are provided and have become areas for research with regard to understanding complex linguistic and sociocultural factors affecting language teaching and learning.

Code-Switching

Since the first Heritage Language Conference in 1999, much interest has ensued concerning bilingual linguistic variation. The current literature tends to have recurring themes that include linguistic comparisons, standard language identification, dialect varieties, specific linguistic distinguishing factors and sociolinguistic anomalies that set heritage language learners apart from second language learners. Of special interest to this research are those studies that recognize dialect speakers as knowledgeable heritage language producers. Rubio (2004) likens the Latino language experience to the term “heteroglossia” used by Bakhtin. This hybrid speech that separates itself from the prestige language, English, and the heritage language, Spanish, is constructed from two discourses that interact within dual social realities. Rubio suggests that language hybridity resides in making certain language choices. The interplay between dual cultural norms and ethnic experiences set against the larger national mainstream culture, create a distinct minority experience that can be better expressed through this hybrid language. Thus, language variation becomes prevalent among Spanish speaking bilingual populations.

The term, diglossia, originally defined by Ferguson (2007), refers to the use of two languages in separate domains, the public and the private spheres. In these terms diglossia signifies a stratified usage of the two languages where English is recognized as the prestige language and Spanish becomes relegated to the home domain. However, more commonplace to Southern Texas is a multi-domain usage of both linguistic codes. Thus, researchers recognize the distinction between diglossia, a linguistic separation of two languages, and the phenomenon of code-switching, which commonly occurs when languages come into contact (Silva-Corvalán, 2001).

Linguists have recognized that code-switching contains certain innate linguistic rules. For example, Poplack (1982) finds that intrasentential code-switching, which takes place within the same sentence, constitutes a complex linguistic structure that requires knowledge of both languages. Likewise Cantero (2000) recognizes morpho-syntactic lexical changes that produce new words from both languages to require agility along the language continuum. However, other linguists have identified grammatical simplifications to mark U.S. Spanish dialects as nonstandard. Some of these include simplified or regulated morpho-syntactic forms (Gutiérrez, 1997), lexical borrowings from English, archaic words with historical roots in Colonial Spanish, and phonological differences.

In order to understand the importance of these differing viewpoints as they pertain to heritage learners' language attitudes, it is useful to review the Markedness Model developed by Myers-Scotton (2002). This model purports that bilingual individuals' choice of verbal code depends upon a cognitive capacity to read input from

the speaker and the context of conversation. The complex mental function of the bilingual thus “reads input it receives from past experiences..., from perceptual sources (the senses), the current context, and psychological and sociolinguistic associations that participants connect with the different linguistic varieties available to the speaker in the current context” (p.121). The complexity of this process becomes quickly discernable from this description, which recognizes the interplay that exists between speaker, context, and recipient of the speech act. The HL speaker switches with ease across a bilingual continuum as if in a dance between the two languages.

Thus, when code-switching is the norm within a community of bilingual speakers, it becomes the unmarked linguistic choice (Myers-Scotton, 2002). Bilingual speakers use code-switching within a speech community for different reasons. These have been tabulated by Baker’s (2001) subheadings to include:

- to emphasize a particular point in a conversation
- to substitute a word in another language
- to express a concept that has no equivalent
- to reinforce a request
- to clarify a point
- to communicate friendships or family bonding
- to relate a conversation held previously
- a way of interjecting into a conversation
- to ease tension and inject humor
- relates to a change of attitude or relationship
- to exclude people from a conversation
- when certain topics are introduced. (pp. 103-104)

As observed from this list, the majority of code-switching functions that bilinguals identify relate to the language variety as a means of communicating and establishing

relationships with others. Communication, in this sense, becomes more important than grammatical correctness.

However, when removed from the context of a bilingual speech community, the combination of code-switching, borrowed lexicon and phonological differences become marked as different, even “incorrect.” Suddenly, the bilingual speaker recognizes that the patterns of speech that are so common to him or her are not valued by others who speak what is considered to be a standard variety of the language. In contrast, Silva-Corvalán (2001) states, “technically no dialect or accent is more correct or inherently better than another. The idea of correctness is a social, not a linguistic concept” [Gardner-Flores translation] (p. 20). She continues by explaining that certain dialects can be subjectively determined to be inferior because they may be isolated to regions or spoken by social groups of less prestige. Moreover, she states, “this is why for certain individuals who become bi-dialect speakers, the adoption of a standard dialect or accent is advantageous for socioeconomic reasons. In other words, they learn a standard dialect but at the same time maintain a vernacular variety in order to communicate with their ‘group of origin’” [Gardner-Flores translation] (p. 20).

With heritage language resource centers now funded through the U.S. Department of Education and support from professional organizations such as the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL), heritage language programs on United States college campuses strive to understand the social, economic, political, and structural ramifications of language variety within Spanish, thus promoting an HL pedagogically sensitive approach to language instruction. Multiple linkages

between programmatic development and the desire to serve Spanish heritage communities suggest the need to examine HL learner attitudes toward language learning and production. That is the focus of this study.

Method

Data Gathering

Interviews were conducted with seven self-identified Hispanic females who were enrolled currently or within six months of the interview in an online Spanish course at one of two higher education institutions in south-central Texas. All of the participants had grown up in the same area or closer to the border with Mexico in south Texas. Their ages ranged from their twenties to their fifties, and all can be classified as circumstantial bilinguals. While they had varying levels of confidence in their abilities to communicate in Spanish, all spoke with family and friends in Spanish or the Spanish variety, Tex-Mex.

The semi-structured interviews were conducted in English and lasted between one to two hours. Questions focused on the affective experiences they had in their Spanish courses and with Spanish communication outside of class. They were also asked to provide stories in order to elucidate the emotions and reactions they described. After the interviews, e-mail and telephone correspondence was used to further explain any questions that came up in the analysis.

Data Analysis

The interviews were transcribed by the interviewer and subsequently analyzed through a variety of qualitative methods. The stories told by the participants were the focus of this analysis because stories offer insight into why they described their experiences in the way they did, and how cultural and societal influences affected these descriptions. The first iteration of the analysis involved a thematic constant-comparison method (Bogdan & Biklin, 2003; Glaser & Strauss, 1967) to extract the narratives that described the participants' reflections about Spanish in their college courses and in their home communities. The specific language, words, and phrases the informants used for the Spanish that was taught in school and that which was spoken by Mexican nationals were listed as codes for each participant. By comparing these codes across the data, we found the participants were consistent and persistent in their distinctions between "proper Spanish" and the local dialect they designated as Tex-Mex. The language used to express their thoughts about Tex-Mex was then indexed and compared to the list that was compiled about Spanish. Themes began to develop about the reasons these participants had such strong opinions about Spanish and Tex-Mex, and these were further analyzed by looking at the stories the women offered in explanation.

In examining the participants' stories, symbolic convergence theory was used to unpack the meaning within their accounts. Symbolic convergence theory "explains the appearance of a group consciousness, with its implied shared emotions, motives, and meanings, not in terms of individual daydreams and scripts but rather in terms of socially shared narrations or fantasies" (Bormann, 1985, p. 128). *Fantasy*, as Bormann defines it,

pertains to shared interpretations of events that fulfill a group's psychological need. Additionally, he explained that these fantasies are often created by group members in authentic events, and have been reported in historical works, the media, or oral histories.

Bormann (1985) suggests that members of a community who share a common perception often organize a fantasy theme unconsciously and without providing distinct details on the specific characters and settings involved in the community's fantasy plot line. Additionally, he contended that outsiders are often unaware of or unfamiliar with the meanings and emotions associated with these themes. In our analysis we also focused on the multiple roles and subjectivities the participants played. Their stories of school, home, and community illustrated the constant role of *learner*. The participants grew up with the influence of the American linguistic metanarrative, that is, of Spanish language and cultural discrimination with the pressure to acculturate to Anglo-American society. At school, they were to be consummate learners of the English language and American cultural values that are inherent in monolingual Texan education. At home, they were shaped by generations of Mexican and Mexican-American culture, which provided a range of oral education opportunities in Spanish, English, and Tex-Mex. Now, as adult women, wives, mothers, workers, daughters, granddaughters, and students, our informants would reflect on those roles in their English and Spanish (and Tex-Mex) situations. By examining their varied positionalities as learners, and incorporating symbolic-convergence theory, the analysis helped to unpack the cultural fantasy metanarrative and resultant fantasy subthemes with which these Tejana learners connected.

Using symbolic convergence theory to analyze narratives involves three steps. First, discover and arrange the communicative constructions that make up a group consciousness. Second, note the effects the group consciousness has on the participants' meanings, motives, and communications. And third, explore why and when the group shares the fantasy theme. Our analysis in this study is focused on identifying the cultural fantasy themes with which the participants created meaning, communicated understanding, and made decisions within the language learning experiences they had.

Method and analyst triangulation was employed. The authors of this report, in conjunction with a group of highly-experienced Tejana Spanish/English bilingual teachers, worked together to unpack the relationships with language and culture our participants shared. Discussions of cultural loyalty, reviewers' stories of their own experiences growing up Hispanic in Texas with two languages, and conversations about Spanish and English language acquisition ensued. With attention to our own positionalities and personal, reflexive approaches to the analysis, the findings were then brought back to the participants for member validation of the overarching themes, subthemes, and discussion.

The Proper Tejana Metanarrative Cultural Fantasy

The setting in this study is made up of towns and cities in south and south-central Texas. The main character is the "proper" Tejana – the Mexican-American who has grown up in Texas, whose ancestors and even living relatives originated in Mexico, and whose parents and possibly grandparents have chosen a life that includes Spanish but is infused

with American culture and the English language. The “proper Tejana” may not have been formally taught Spanish, but it, and its variations, have influenced her everyday life. Spanish and English are a part of who she is. She can readily communicate with those in her local community and with those from Spanish-dominant countries. The “proper Tejana” knows she is to be true to her familial roots and to her family’s adopted country. She knows the traditions of both the Mexican and American cultures. And she commands fluently the language of both countries while flawlessly negotiating the ins and outs of the unique entity of her bicultural/bilingual self.

The immigration and acculturation process, influenced by so-called traditional American values, *one* national language, and education policies that generate heated debate about the value of heritage languages, bilingual programs, and the schooling of illegal aliens, has resulted in a fracturing of cultural cohesiveness among non Anglo-American groups. The participants in this study struggle with themselves as Hispanic English speakers and Spanish learners. And they grapple with their disappointment in their Tejana upbringing that did not provide one of the key elements in their shared fantasy: fluency in formal Spanish. Fluency in standard Spanish is the symbolic cue that links communication to culture, physically and metaphorically. The participants strive to accomplish the fantasy, to be the “proper Tejana,” by engaging in formal Spanish classes to acquire *true Spanish*.

We argue that it is through the cultural fantasy of the adult Tejana Spanish learner that sub-themes have emerged from the data and can be connected to the meaning-making, decisions, and actions of the participants in this study. Their belief in

this fantasy is strong because influential voices in their lives continue to inspire its retelling. Ultimately, this “proper Tejana” fantasy shapes their conception of themselves, of their home communities, and of their language learning perceptions, actions, and responses. Their subsequent belief in sub-themes is essential in how they experience both the instruction and themselves as Spanish learners.

As learners in both linguistic and cultural contexts, these women find themselves trying to put together the complex puzzle of living in two worlds. Each is positioned both in and between worlds simultaneously, linked through heritage and history, yet feeling disconnected from the Hispanic world when she is unable to communicate in ways she feels are appropriate. So many of the voices she hears in that world tell her to learn *proper* Spanish with the resultant promise of a reconnection to her cultural and linguistic heritage. Subthemes from the data further describe this metanarrative, which in turn, provide a lens with which to consider research and pedagogy for heritage learners.

Fantasy Sub-Theme: Hispanic-Americans Should Know True Spanish

The “proper Tejana” is fluent in both English and Spanish. The participants in this study were fluent and confident in English but found that when they engaged in oral Spanish communication with coworkers, friends, Spanish “experts” and sometimes even family, their use of Tex-Mex was met with disdain and disapproval. These women, in adulthood, possess a shared value in their heritage and a common understanding that Spanish is an integral element of the Mexican culture. Their belief in one “true Spanish” is supported by interactions they have with native Mexicans, Spanish professors, and other Spanish

authorities. Through explicit discussions and implicit communication cues with those in the Hispanic community, these women understand they should know how to communicate in standard Spanish. The participants described situations in which they were *embarrassed* that they were unable to speak “proper Spanish.” Each of the participants described their desire to speak and understand standard Spanish because they felt it was the path to a closer connection to their cultural heritage. Linda, Carolyn, and Martha impart important insights that deftly illustrate their shared cultural understanding.

Linda describes a troublesome experience she had at work when she was asked to converse in Spanish on a customer service call.

I had an instance at work where, um they, I work for an insurance company, and uh, one of the phone reps had a problem communicating with the person they were speaking with. And they asked if anyone could speak Spanish, and well, I didn't immediately volunteer because of the Spanish I didn't know. But it took a while for someone to say, “You can understand it, and you can at least communicate, so why don't you try getting on the phone and communicate.”

They were trying to tell me that the bumper on the car had been, you know, damaged, on their vehicle, and I, I felt, stupid [laughs] because I didn't know how to say *bumper*! So I said, ah... “bumper?” with an [Spanish] accent. And at that point, it makes you feel, “oh my goodness. I really don't know what I'm saying...And at that moment it was needed, and I couldn't, and I felt silly, about *bumper*.”

Linda is expected to be able to communicate well, but we can tell she is reluctant *because of the Spanish she didn't know*. Finally someone volunteers her, but when she takes the call, her worst fears are realized. She feels incompetent and silly. The next excerpt from her interview reveals why she experiences this discomfort:

I consider myself semi-fluent. ‘Cause I can understand it, I can speak it, I can write it, but some of the words sometimes may be used from my Tex-Mex vocabulary versus the *real Spanish*, that we *should* use. In communicating with

someone who knows the proper language, you know, you can get a smirk from them and when you're using something that is not proper, sometimes they have a problem understanding what you're trying to get across to them, and, with myself speaking with someone, say, from Mexico, you know, they can look at you puzzled with some of the words that I use. And I felt like, you know, it was important that I learn what the correct words were for what I considered Tex-Mex because, um, you know, when you get that puzzled look it kind of makes you feel silly. Like, "oh my goodness, I've said something that they don't understand, that means that was Tex-Mex."

Linda's description explains the importance she places on being able to use the language of her heritage appropriately. She also reveals the unease she has about realizing she is using Tex-Mex during the interaction. The dichotomy between the two language forms, *real Spanish* and Tex-Mex, illustrates the tension Linda feels when communicating with individuals in her cultural community – at least those who she deems proficient in "proper Spanish." She connects her heritage with her need to speak Spanish and not Tex-Mex.

Carolyn's boyfriend is from Mexico, and she practiced her Spanish with him in order to better communicate with his Mexican parents. She deems her boyfriend an expert with whom she can practice her Spanish, but he made it clear in this exchange that she should know better than to use Tex-Mex:

I mean, he knows so much about Mexico and he knows about the government and he, you know, and he just, *I'm Hispanic*, and he, I think a lot of times, you know, when we do work together, and we, he's trying to show me how to say something, I know a lot of it has to do with the fact I'm Hispanic, but I don't know how to speak Spanish, and I'm losing out on my culture, and I should know it, and my parents should have taught me and stuff, so, so I know it gets frustrating for him, and it gets frustrating for me.

...um, being that Spanish was his first language, he knows the proper way, you know, certain words, certain words that I don't realize are slang. (laughs) and so, you know, for instance, if you're talking about a little boy, like someone who's little, it's *niño pequeño*, and *pequeño* being *small* and so, you know, *chiquito* is also *small*, and so I think I was saying something and I used the

word, *chiquito*, and he's like, "that's slang for *small*" So, he's like, "that's not proper."

One can surmise from this account that Carolyn is hurt by this exchange. It is more than just a language student's simple confusion of words. Not only is her boyfriend a Spanish language authority, but he also plays the role of the informant of Mexican culture for Carolyn. When we focus on the use of the culturally and emotionally-charged word, "proper," it helps us to understand the meaning these Tejana learners place on the value of "true Spanish," and the less than valuable Tex-Mex. There is an underlying understanding that Carolyn *should* know the right word, the "proper" word, and her usage of what her boyfriend termed slang, *chiquito*, was unacceptable. If what she says is not proper, it must be improper; in fact, Carolyn believes her use of Tex-Mex is improper and inherently, she is too. The meaning is clear and brings about profound emotion - after all, she is Hispanic; this is the language of her heritage. These women feel inappropriate in their improper use of the language because they are Latinas, and as such, they believe they should know the *true* version of the language.

Martha is strongly intolerant of the use of Tex-Mex and her belief in the need for Hispanics to learn and use *correct Spanish*. "The term [Tex-Mex] is referred to someone who does not speak Spanish the way it *should* be spoken. And a lot of these people I have met, it's almost like they've refused to learn Spanish correctly." She goes on to explain an integral cause for her strong feelings,

Growing up, and talking with people, and you know, "I've never heard it that way." "Well, you've never heard it that way 'cause you're not a true Mexican." And I say, "I'm more Mexican than you are." And they say, "Oh, no you're not because you're fair skinned and blue eyed. So you don't know our language."

And I said, “Yes I do.” So, some of it also physically, because of the way I look. I’m not very accepted.

For Martha, whose very heritage is questioned by her appearance, learning Spanish the way it *should* be spoken provides her a connection to a cultural community that she feels does not immediately accept her. She is clear that the use of Tex-Mex indicates a lack of education, and her choice to learn Spanish while she was growing up, and now in college, denotes her commitment to her heritage through linguistic competency.

Fantasy Sub-Theme: The Proper Tejana May Have to Go Backwards to Go Forward

None of the participants was afforded bilingual education in the formal schooling of her youth. Throughout their upbringing they were well aware of the devalued status of Spanish in America and of the less appreciated Tex-Mex within the Hispanic-American community. In many cases, bilingual education was not offered in the schools they attended; none of the participants were given the opportunity to learn the language of their heritage in formal education settings. All but one, however, chose to take Spanish in their secondary education. Through recurrent interactions with authorities in the classroom and in the Spanish speaking community, who were often from Mexico, the learners in this study developed a perception that knowledge of the Tex-Mex dialect has no value in acquiring a standard, more formal version of Spanish. These interactions were laced with sometimes painful, often embarrassing responses within the participants. As they were forming their conception of this shared cultural understanding, their desire

to acquire *proper* Spanish became greater while their motivations to move away from the use of Tex-Mex became more impatient.

The range of proficiency and speaking confidence varies in all adult language learners and is no different within the heritage learner population. Some of the learners in this study spoke Spanish first, but are now dominant English speakers. For Jill, the reason she no longer speaks Spanish fluently is due to early elementary experiences in an all-English private school. She recalled times of being punished for speaking Spanish, and she was made to believe her language was inappropriate and unacceptable. She quickly became fluent in English realizing the only way to fit-in was to refuse to speak Spanish at home or at school. As a secondary student and into adulthood, she explained she had “picked up” Tex-Mex from her peers, but she regrets not continuing to speak her first language and offered, “I lost a part of me, a part of me growing up.” She is now enrolled in formal Spanish classes to go back to get back what she lost.

Rebekka prided herself in her ability to speak Spanish. She grew up with Spanish-speaking extended family members, and she felt she was the most advanced of the other grandchildren in her family. But Rebekka’s early experiences in a Spanish class resulted in the shock that she was not speaking correctly. At first, she questioned the differences between the Spanish in her class and her own version.

And they’d say, no, that’s how they teach you here in Texas, but it’s not really that way, well, you know how professors are, they’re like, “you were taught Tex-Mex, and you’re saying it wrong, and you’re using the wrong dialect, and you’re not rolling your r’s right.”

But she soon buys-in to the rhetoric of the cultural and educational fantasy that devalues the use of the dialect. She admits, “It didn’t really upset me, upset me, it just kinda like, I

thought to myself, ‘huh, so all this time. All this time I thought I was saying the word right.’” Rebekka’s impression of her proficiency is deflated; her way, her version of the language from her heritage and home was wrong and clearly not considered a strength or foundation from which to learn the more standard form of the language at school.

Carolyn also believed her upbringing would be helpful in her decision to learn her heritage language, but she quickly realized the less than valuable knowledge she brought with her to class.

I thought, you know, growing up with my parents speaking Spanish and you know that was kind of the family language. [pause] It was never taught to me, but I thought I could probably go into this knowing a little more than the next person. But it’s totally different. It’s not, I grew up listening to more of the Tex-Mex, you know, the slang, and this is all proper, proper, true Spanish.

After enrolling in the class, Carolyn does not recognize a benefit in having access to Spanish in her home as a child. What she gathers from the formal Spanish course is how much she does not know. She believes her own cultural experiences to be insignificant in her acquiring Spanish.

The participants’ cultural and social communities also helped to shape the idea that knowing Tex-Mex actually impedes the acquisition of “proper” Spanish. Ultimately it is their belief that they need to go backwards in order to go forwards in the “proper Tejana” fantasy. Linda explains this concept succinctly,

I needed to get back into the proper, you know, language, and, and, not so much the annunciation, the annunciations you know are, are, pretty much the same in, in when you compare what’s called Tex-Mex to proper Spanish. But a lot of words are used incorrectly in Tex-Mex, and I wanted to get back to knowing exactly how to use the proper Spanish words that I was not using, that I knew I was not using right.

Linda considers her Tex-Mex version of Spanish to be laden with mistakes, incorrect, and valueless. Although she acknowledges her pronunciation and accent is appropriate, Linda felt she had to look outside her Hispanic, Spanish-speaking community to learn proper Spanish. In this next story, Linda explained how although her own Hispanic-American community used a specific word all of her life, she ultimately changes her understanding of the word in favor of the meaning provided by the professor who resides outside of Texas:

Linda: We grew up knowing a word, which was called, *albóndigas*, and we grew up knowing that *albóndigas* were eaten in this season which is the Lenten season for we Catholics, I'm not familiar with other religions, but that's the practice I do, so, so *albóndigas* were, to us, were, like, a fish patty, or salmon patty. In that classroom setting, when the professor, that first class I had taken in college like four years ago, had said, "No, an *albóndiga* is a meatball." And they had a picture of a meatball, and a meatball and spaghetti. And, I remember insisting that I was correct! 'Cause we grew up knowing, all our lives, that an *albóndiga* was the salmon patty, the fish patty. You know, it was every year, so how can we, you know, I was already 27, probably when I did that class, and it's like, "You're not gonna tell me that we've been saying it wrong all this time!" An *albóndiga* is a salmon patty! I remember, with that professor, and we had to continue the conversation after class (laughs)...

Interviewer: And so, how did it end?

Linda: Of course, she was right. She says, ok, we're going to have to go do a little research, we were laughing and so, we figured it out. And all along, and now, I state my case when I hear that it's used, very, very commonly in the Tex-Mex language that an *albóndiga* is a salmon patty. And you hear it over and over again at my house, and it's like, "you can't eat meatballs! You're supposed to eat fish!" "No, '*albóndigas*,' we're gonna have salmon patties." [and Linda says back] "You're saying it wrong!"

Linda is willing to give up her lifelong understanding of the word in order to "get back" to the *real Spanish*, the proper language of her heritage. And she shares this information

with her community, continuing in a cycle that reinforces the devaluation of the language at home.

The participants are aware that although they felt they were functional in communicating in Spanish, their personal, community-based versions of the language are inferior. The translation of the cultural belief that heritage learners who know Tex-Mex not only do not come to class with a treasure trove of previous, relevant experience and knowledge, but that their access to the dialect may be a hindrance to their acquisition of standard Spanish. They bring this idea to their higher education Spanish courses from previous formal Spanish education and from their home communities. Then, the interactions they have with the college courses and instructors reinforce this belief which contributes to the continued retelling of this sub-theme within the home and educational communities.

*Fantasy Sub-Theme: The Proper Tejana Lives (Linguistically) in Two Worlds,
Not Between Them*

The learners in this study consider Tex-Mex the linguistic manifestation of a bilingual, bicultural society in Texas. They believe this dialect to be “offensive,” “wrong, incorrect,” “embarrassing,” “shameful,” “invented,” “invalid,” and “low class.” I questioned these assumptions to learn why these women had such disdain for the dialect. Their answers were clear: they believed to stay true to one’s bicultural self, distinct lines must be drawn between the two “worlds.” Equal respect had to be given to both; a blending of the two was unacceptable as it might blur one’s loyalty to one or the other.

Martha explains that she lives in two worlds, an English world and a Spanish world. Tex-Mex is unacceptable to her and anyone with whom she speaks. She considers herself fluent in Spanish and studies extensively in order to improve her vocabulary and “correct” Spanish usage. She has read extensively to learn about Mexican history and practices what she learns in class with her family members. She is proud of her Mexican heritage and has researched her ancestry extensively. Yet she is also passionate about her American heritage, is knowledgeable about U.S. politics, and is quick to point out her loyalty to the U.S. When asked about English and Spanish and with which, if any, she identified more, Martha explains her dedication to separate, but equal worlds,

I pretty much live in both worlds, I mean I’m real close with my parents, so, when we’re out together we’re only speaking Spanish, but then my mom, [quick breath in] “Let’s speak English because there’s someone who he [the father] might know, it may look like bad manners,” so she’ll speak in English. I’ll go, “Oh who cares?” [laughs] But, well English, maybe because most of my friends here in the office, they don’t speak Spanish, so it’s not like I could, it’s not like I could say something I’d say in Spanish, or refer to certain cultural things. So, I keep it separate.

Martha is clearly aware of a need to keep the two languages, and worlds, separate. Her express distaste for Tex-Mex stems from her belief that it is a lack of education and often desire to connect deeply with an Hispanic cultural heritage that has led to the dialect’s development and use.

Marina’s self-acknowledged obsession with correct grammar in both English and Spanish, and her intolerance of Tex-Mex also confirms her belief in a dual existence for cultural allegiance. She refuses to speak Tex-Mex or to go back and forth between English and Spanish. Here she describes how she handled a time she found herself situated between the two linguistic worlds:

I kind of just tell them, basically, um, like, um, you know, “Oh, I didn’t realize we’re going from Spanish to English, um are we going to speak in Spanish or did you want to speak in English? Because I like speaking in Spanish, and if you want to do that, that’s fine.”

Marina admitted she often corrects people’s grammar in both languages as well. Marina believes she is demonstrating her loyalty to both languages, and subsequently to both cultures, by devoting herself to grammatical precision in English and Spanish. She insists that Hispanics who do not choose to use correct Spanish can be characterized by their clear choice not to better their lives and not to attend college. She further believes that Hispanic women who choose not to learn correct Spanish often stay in the home, do not work, and raise children. Marina understands education and specifically education in formal Spanish are essential in providing opportunities for women to break the cycle of traditional, patriarchal norms within the Hispanic community. Although her assumptions are strong, her sentiments about those who speak the dialect and do not engage in formal Spanish study were echoed across the data.

Living in two worlds linguistically is a way in which the participants in this study differentiate themselves as truly bicultural. With the stigma attached to Tex-Mex and those who use it, the choice seems clear to these learners as to how to demonstrate their loyalty to both communities. Internal and societal pressures are upon these women to stay true to the “proper Tejana” fantasy requiring them to adhere to the notion of mutual exclusivity between two distinct linguistic worlds.

Discussion and Implications

In analyzing the data using symbolic convergence theory, we can see that the participants ascribed to a shared cultural consciousness regarding the Spanish language. Bormann (1985) points out, “when participants have shared a fantasy theme they have come to symbolic convergence in terms of common meanings and emotions that can be set off by an agreed-upon cryptic symbolic cue” (p. 131). A recurrent conception from the data in this study became a symbolic cue which triggered complex emotion and resulted in specific responses in the participants’ description of their learning. This cue was the perception that there is a *true and proper Spanish*. It was clear from the data that the participants considered Tex-Mex an improper form of Spanish to use, particularly with speakers from Mexico or individuals considered authorities in the Spanish language and culture. These women explained that they had grown up in communities and families in which Spanish was spoken, but often their version of Spanish had morphed into the culturally and geographically situated Tex-Mex adaptation.

The fantasy metanarrative and subthemes help us to understand the cultural belief systems with which these heritage language learners experience formal Spanish study. They believe fluency in a true form of Spanish is an important component of their connection to their Hispanic culture. They acknowledged an apprehension of not living up to a cultural standard that includes using only “proper Spanish” when speaking with Mexicans nationals and other Spanish experts, and believe the collection of cultural and linguistic access and experience with which they come to class are not useful in the acquisition of a standard Spanish register. They must go backward to go forward in the

acquisition of proper Spanish and ultimately, in fully acquiring their cultural heritage. Finally, the belief in the cultural fantasy metanarrative of the *proper Tejana* has led this group of south-central Texas women to separate their lives into two distinct worlds. The resultant character duality leads to the rejection of the Texas Spanish dialect, Tex-Mex. For these learners, Tex-Mex is not a language, does not signify their biculturalism, and is simply not an option.

“Intergenerational transmission” of heritage languages, cultivated through transfer of language knowledge from generation to generation within communities and families, is often critical to the strength of the heritage language community (Campbell & Christian, 2003, May). But the present study suggests that some Spanish HL learners believe they must extend outside of the home community to gain access to the true and proper Spanish language. Linguistics scholars differ on their definition and acceptance of Tex-Mex. Most seem to agree with Cornell (1997) that Tex-Mex is a dialect. However, others contend that Tex-Mex has become a formal language in and of itself (Baird, 1994). The debate can be compared to the Ebonics controversy, when an Oakland school district recognized its existence as well as its cultural and historical value and required Ebonics instruction be given to those students in the district who used it. Their decision sparked another heated national debate about what was to be considered a language and a dialect and what value, if any, could be placed on languages other than English in the United States. Wolfram, Christian, and Adger (1999), from the Center for Applied Linguistics, confirm there are differences in social status among dialects and languages. They indicate social and language bias, not linguistic adequacy,

have been the driving forces of whether a dialect or variety of a language is socially accepted.

In addition, instructional approaches are recommended for students learning a heritage language. These include cooperative grouping and peer tutoring (Valdes, 1997), content-based and sociolinguistic instruction (González-Pino, 2000; Merino, Trueba, & Samaniego, 1993), and pedagogical interaction between the instructor and students that establishes connections with their heritage cultures and dialect forms (Romero, 2000), personal and academic interests (Clair and Adger, 1999), and individual language and cultural experiences brought to the educational setting (Oh & Au, 2005). In fact, research has offered effective instructional strategies for HL learners for over a decade, yet often professors are unfamiliar with successful program models and the specific needs of these students (González-Pino, 2000). As well, for those institutions who offer distinct courses for heritage language learners, often these students prefer not to enroll in HL classes because they either believe they have a better chance at a higher grade in Spanish courses for nonheritage language learners and/or they do not like feeling culturally singled-out in the educational setting (González-Pino, 2000; Klee & Rogers, 1989). Unfortunately, the heritage language learners in this study are clearly not aware of the research conducted on Spanish dialects and their linguistic complexity and validation, nor do they know of the value of the linguistic and cultural knowledge they bring to class. The findings help us to understand how cultural and societal influences may affect some members of the Texas Hispanic community in their learning of Spanish

in higher education settings and the disconnect between what we know from research and what is done and perceived in practice.

The metanarrative fantasy of the Tejana who is fluent in all bicultural and bilingual matters drives these learners in their linguistic perceptions, expectations, and actions. Bormann (1985) contends that not all members of a group share the same fantasies. Therefore, it must be noted here that the experiences and fantasy themes found in the data of these participants may not be universal among all Hispanic-Americans, or even Hispanic Texans, who are learning Spanish. However, the insight that cultural and societal influences have on learning a language, particularly learning one's own heritage language as an adult, is a useful framework within which to consider language acquisition in post-secondary education. Dominant linguistic and cultural groups, with their commentaries, articles, and policies, can affect how a minority group contemplates its shared communal knowledge and language choices. These perspectives, as well as relevant heritage language research, must be considered by both instructor and learner when designing language learning goals, activities, and outcome expectations.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this dissertation was to explore the affective experiences of online Spanish language adult learners. Participants from two postsecondary institutions in south-central Texas were interviewed to gain insight into their perceptions of their own language acquisition processes, of affect in online language learning, and of their sociocultural connections to language learning. The findings outline the insights the respondents offered across and between ethnic subgroups.

The participants were highly motivated to learn Spanish. Each chose to enroll in online courses because of the flexibility e-learning offers. They discussed their belief in the need for communicative practice in language acquisition processes which led them to form offline communities of practice that supplemented what they learned online. Their personal communities of Spanish practice consisted of Spanish speakers from their work, neighborhoods, and families.

The face-to-face interactions the participants sought out in their home communities were the experiences they related when asked about their emotional responses to language acquisition. Through a series of qualitative and narrative analyses, the stories they told about producing in Spanish offered rich insight into the sociocultural connections they make with language. Their motivations to acquire communicative Spanish overrode the negative anxiety responses that laced many of their experiences. In fact, the anxiety they experienced may have been an impetus to persist in their Spanish studies.

Finally, a narrowed focus on the heritage language learners' perceptions of Tex-Mex and Spanish inform us about a cultural metanarrative that affects how some adult Tejana students experience their learning of Spanish. Tex-Mex represents the blending of the two cultures. But the heritage language learners in this study believe in order to be loyal to both their American and Mexican heritage, they must speak and live in two separate worlds.

This research on affect in online language learning is unique as it specifically investigated language learning anxiety in instructional settings that did not require face-to-face or even asynchronous Spanish interaction. In addition, the sociopolitical and cultural influences that affect adult heritage and nonheritage Spanish learners provide an important framework within which to examine current instructional practices. Increased understanding of the complex and multifaceted experiences of the learners in this study may help instructors better plan for and facilitate Spanish language learning, both online and in traditional face-to-face classrooms.

Pedagogical Implications

The anytime, anywhere view of online instruction is an appealing marketing concept for adult learners and instructors alike. But the goal of completely autonomous online learning, which does not include extensive social interaction, may not be sufficient in disciplines and within communities that value verbal interaction for facilitation of learning outcomes (Spangle, Hodne, & Schierling, 2002). Reeder, MacFadyen, Roche, and Chase (2004) found that course management systems and other Internet-based

instructional systems promote a culture of speed, openness, reach, question/debate, quick response, and informality. Tools are available for Internet chat, e-mail, and discussion boards, but if instructors choose not to use these, or other communication tools (i.e. MOO, Multi-User Domain Object Oriented environments), the instruction may be perceived as inflexible and isolating for the student (Roed, 2003; Shang, 2005; Simpson, 2005; Weininger and Shield, 2003). Though some studies have shown anxious learners do not always do well in online social-constructivist activities (Cuneo and Harnish, 2002), others have found that apprehensive learners appreciate computer-mediated communication because it reduces their stress levels compared to face-to-face interactions (Beauvois, 1998; Kelm, 1992).

Additionally, instantaneous, qualitative, and descriptive feedback is not always easily programmed in many e-learning tools. In this study, the students only interacted with the computer, Internet, and instructional software online. Objective assignments and assessments with right/wrong response outcomes made up the majority of the didactic feedback they received. The resultant self perception of performance, without real-time Spanish interaction with classmates or instructor, leads the informants of this study to hold tightly to their understandings of language precision requirements. Coupled with cultural exchanges the learners had with Spanish outside the online class, these students' anxieties may have been increased, rather than alleviated, because of the *lack* of Spanish interaction online.

The findings of this study suggest that those who experience language learning anxiety may still benefit from and desire pedagogical approaches online that incorporate

collaboration and social target language interaction. Future research directions need to include ways for these types of interactions to include other learners, native speakers, and the instructor for authentic communicative feedback and cultural exchanges that encourage risk-taking and language appropriation. Moreover, anxious adult learners need an environment that creates opportunities for them to construct understandings and abilities in an encouraged risk-taking environment. Language class is an appropriate practice field for engaging in communicative exchanges and wrestling with the anxious responses students will undoubtedly have in the real world. Communicative practice in online foreign language classes must provide ways for the student to appropriate the target language and culture, while valuing the offline experiences to which they may have access. Additionally, students need to be aware of the many ways to get across their ideas in the target language. Approaches to vocabulary and pragmatic language acquisition, the social, cultural, and linguistic knowledge inherent in communicative exchanges in a language (Kasper, 1997), should be included in instruction. This approach would expand the student's realm of possible correct language production rather than limit it.

Finally, adult language pedagogy must take varying individual and contextual factors into account, thus providing a safe affective space in which to learn. Sociocultural connections to language need to be individually explored and invited in to the learning experience. In fact, sociolinguistics, including research that validates language dialect, diverse cultural backgrounds, and prior knowledge and experience should be foundational in creating learning outcome objectives in language instruction.

New Questions Raised and Future Research Directions

Some of the new questions that came to my mind through the process of this research are:

1. In online language courses that facilitate social target language interaction, do learners also incorporate offline members into their community of practice?
2. How would professional development programs best meet the needs of instructors who want to incorporate social-constructivist language instruction online?
3. If this study's sample were to have been comprised of traditionally-aged college students (18-22), would similar or dissimilar results be found?
4. How do heritage language learners closer to the border with Mexico conceptualize Tex-Mex and their acquisition of Spanish? How would their perspectives compare to those of learners a bit further north?
5. How can online language instruction better serve the needs of heritage language learners? Of nonheritage language learners?

Implications for future research should include investigations of additional online language communities of practice. For example, an exploration of virtual communities in foreign language instruction that include a variety of social interaction may differ greatly from the findings of this study and lead to instructional design that better facilitates the co-construction of the target language. Moreover, situated learning could frame the study of online language instruction for learners whose geographic regions do not contain many target language speakers.

As for language learning anxiety online, it may be useful to adapt the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope, 1986) to the virtual classroom environment. This scale currently includes 33 items in a 5-point Likert-scale, in a self-report questionnaire format. It has been used in correlational studies to examine the relationship between language anxiety and a variety of constructs (Ganschow & Sparks, 1986, 1996; Saito, Garza, & Horwitz, 1999; Sparks & Ganschow, 1991), which may be useful in better understanding language learning anxiety in online instruction.

Finally, additional research on heritage language learner affect in online and offline instruction is warranted. The complex cultural and linguistic bodies of knowledge these learners bring to the instructional setting, along with their own sociocultural connections they make with the Spanish language, must be investigated thoroughly for instruction to meet their needs.

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APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

General Questions

1. Which language do you consider your native or first language? Why?
2. What other languages do you consider yourself fluent?
3. Do you consider yourself a good language learner?
4. Do you consider yourself beginning, intermediate, or advanced in communicating in Spanish?

Questions about online learning

5. Why did you decide to take this class online?
6. How do you feel about using computers and technology in your learning?
7. How do you know you are learning in your online course?
8. What kinds of online learning activities do you like best? Worst? Why?

Questions about sociocultural connections in language learning

9. How do you describe your own ethnicity or culture?
10. How do you think Spanish-speaking cultures might compare to your own?
11. Learning a new language often includes understanding a new culture. Can you tell me about a time where you were aware of the differences and similarities between your culture and that of a native Spanish speaker?
12. Which of the languages do you identify with more?
13. Which languages do you feel more loyal to?
14. When you use Spanish do you have conflicts/tensions about using the cultural values of English or Spanish?
15. Do you feel more anxious using Spanish while native Spanish speaking people are present or when bilingual Americans learning Spanish are present? Why? How is the experience different? Can you give me some examples?

Questions about affect in online language learning

16. Tell me about your experience in learning languages other than English.
17. Tell me about online language learning experiences you have liked.
18. Tell me about experiences that may have been uncomfortable or disturbed you about your learning or practice in Spanish classes online.
19. How do you feel when you need to speak in the Spanish? (examples)
20. How do you feel writing in Spanish? (examples)
21. When you find yourself in a stressful situation, do you primarily worry, or do you actively seek a solution?
22. Do you have any ideas of ways to make the language class less stressful?

23. Do you think learning online is better or worse for learning a new language?
Why?
24. How do you feel now after addressing this issue?

APPENDIX B

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

I have been asked to participate in a research study about foreign language anxiety in online language courses. I was selected to be a possible participant because I am 22 years of age or older, and have been enrolled in the past six months in an online foreign language class, second level or higher. Thirty potential participants from colleges or universities will take place in the study. The purpose of this study is to examine the emotional experiences of adult students who study a foreign language online, and understand how those emotional experiences affect their ability to learn the foreign language. Additionally, the purpose is to find out how students cope with these emotions.

I understand the following about this research:

- If I agree to be in this study, I will be asked to participate in an interview with the researcher and I will be asked about:
 - my experiences in learning the foreign language
 - what kinds of emotional responses I have had during those experiences.
- This study will be used in partial fulfillment of the requirements of a Doctor of Philosophy for Joellen E. Coryell
- The interview will be audio-recorded and will last approximately one hour
- I may be asked to participate in an online “chat” with the researcher and other language learners in which the written text of the discussion will be saved.
- The chat session will take no more than an hour.
- The risk of participating is minimal, but could include memories of personal emotion associated with language learning or related experiences that could be painful to remember.
- I will receive no monetary compensation for my participation.
- This study is confidential
 - My name will not be used in any written report
 - The audio tape and written copy of my interview will be in the secure possession of the researcher
 - The instructor of my course will not know that I have participated
 - I will not be able to be identified as a participant in any report that might be published.
- Research records will only be directly viewed by Dr. M. Carolyn Clark, Dr. Zoreh Eslami-Rasekh, Dr. Jennifer Sandlin, and Dr. Larry Dooley, who are members of the research committee.
- The tapes will be not be destroyed after the completion of the study, but will be consistently kept secure.

- My decision whether or not to participate will not affect my current or future relations with my college or university.
- If I decide to participate, I am free to refuse to answer any of the questions that may make me uncomfortable or ask that the researcher not include all or any part of my interview responses.
- I can withdraw my consent at any time without penalty and have the results of my participation, to the extent that it can be identified as mine, returned to me, removed from the records, or destroyed.
- I can contact Joellen Coryell (210-313-7693; jcoryell@neo.tamu.edu) or Dr. M. Carolyn Clark (979 – 845-4086; cclark@tamu.edu) with any questions about this study.

This research study has been reviewed by the Institutional Review Board – Human Subjects in Research, Texas A&M University. For research-related problems or questions regarding subjects' rights, I can contact the Institutional Review Board through Ms. Angelina M. Raines, Director of Research Compliance, Office of the Vice President for Research at (979) 458-4067, araines@vprmail.tamu.edu.

I have read the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers to my satisfaction. I have been given a copy of this consent document for my records. By signing this document, I consent to participate in the study.

Signature of the Participant: _____ date: _____

Signature of the Investigator: _____ date: _____

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