

Language Learner Analysis

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Section I: Report - Case History

Viviana Jimenez is a 22 year old, full-time college student at CSUMB. Her major is Spanish and she aspires to be a Spanish university professor one day. Viviana was born in the municipality of San Jose de Gracia in the state of Aguascalientes in Mexico. When she was 13 years old, her family and herself, immigrated to the U.S from Mexico. Her family, like many other immigrant families, decided to immigrate to the U.S. in the hopes to have a better life abundant with opportunities for employment and education. Since the moment that she entered the U.S., Viviana explained that she was put in English Language Development (ELD) courses. Therefore, as a newcomer in eighth grade, Viviana described that she was not only in regular courses with other English speaking students, but she also at one point participated in these English learning courses to start getting exposure to the English language.

Currently, Viviana explains that she mainly uses Spanish at home and English at school. However, she explains that because her major is Spanish, she finds herself using Spanish more and therefore believes that her abilities in English are decreasing. Also, she and her family currently reside in Watsonville California, where a vast majority of the population speaks Spanish, and finds herself communicating more in Spanish than in English. In an effort to combat this, Viviana explains that she has tried to increase her reading habits in English. She especially reinforced this because she is aware that in order to become a college professor, she still needs to attend more university studies to receive her masters and her doctorate. Viviana believes that she needs to acquire a balance of both languages so that she could feel comfortable using both languages.

Although Viviana felt embarrassed speaking English, she feels that she has certainly gain more confidence. Viviana described how self-conscious she was when she started speaking because she was terrified that people would notice the manner in which she pronounced certain words. However, she explicitly thanked her former middle school teacher, her family, and closest friends for all the support that they have given her through this very challenging process.

Section II: Analysis of the Sociocultural Processes

Immigration impacted Viviana's life considerably. Although she was excited at first for the new adventures that awaited her in the U.S., she describes that the change made her incredibly nervous. As mentioned earlier, Viviana became really self-conscious of the way she was speaking English and entered a similar state as the "silent stage," where the shock was so drastic that it appeared as if she was not making progress in her speaking (Igoa, 2005, p. 118). However, once Viviana appeared to start learning English, she explained that she was transferred to courses with native English speakers. She explained that this was very challenging because the load of the course was too advanced for her language abilities. Viviana noted that she thinks this was because the courses with native English speakers were more centered on "literacy" while the ESL or ELD courses were centered on improving both "literacy" and "oracy" skills (Garcia, 2009, p.61). As a result, Viviana feels that she is able to write English better than actually being able to speak it. She concluded that because the teachers realized that she was able to understand and produce some English vocabulary, she should have been able to succeed in the other courses. Viviana unknowingly proved some misconceptions wrong. For example, Viviana's situation proves that by simply teaching students how to speak English, it doesn't necessarily mean that those speaking abilities will help them be successful in various subject areas (Walqui, 2000, p.

26). Also, although Viviana was in the same school environment as her fellow classmates, she feels she was not given the same opportunities and resources, as it is usually believed (Walqui, 2000, p.31).

Although Viviana did admit to have experienced culture shock because of the cultural differences between Mexico and U.S., she explains that the fact that she currently resides in a city where a large amount of the population is of Latino descent, has allowed her to integrate to the U.S. culture while still retaining her traditions and customs. Therefore, Viviana has experienced acculturation and didn't necessarily experienced assimilation because she didn't "have to give up all of her previous values in order to become part of the mainstream culture," (Igoa, 2005, p. 119). Therefore, Viviana always finds herself translanguaging because she uses Spanish and English languages "bilingually" to communicate with others in her community (Garcia, 2009, p.44). She also described her speaking discourses as being a form Spanglish. And although Spanglish tends to have a negative connotation for certain individuals because the Spanish used in the U.S. is different from that spoken in other Spanish-speaking countries, Viviana demonstrates that she has competent "linguistic knowledge in Spanish and cultural knowledge of the U.S." because she is using language based on her needs (Garcia, 2009, p.46).

Section III: Classification of Learner

Viviana can be classified as a L2 learner because her home language is something other than English. And more specifically, she is an ESL student because she attended the various programs and classes that were established to assist in the process of learning English (California Pathways, 2000, p. 6). Although Viviana did receive additional help in various English courses, she is stated that she was able to achieve different goals thanks to the support of fellow students,

teachers, “peer groups” and especially “home support,” (Walqui, 2000, p.38). Whereas some English learners are forced by their family to strictly use their L1 at home, Viviana’s family allowed her to express herself in either language. However, Viviana does state that since her parents hardly speak English, the majority of their conversations are in Spanish. Also, it can be noted that Viviana’s situation resembles the example provided of Jae-Young, where both students had previous schooling in their home country in which they were able to acquire excellent academic skills, it resulted in being more “equipped to focus on learning English,” (California Pathways, 2000, p. 11). Since her Spanish abilities were also very well established, Viviana’s language abilities are defined as “additive bilingualism” were the student’s L1 is kept as L2 is learned (Garcia, 2009, p. 52). Lastly, Viviana points out that the way she uses either language depends on the “status” that the language has in that specific context (Walqui, 2000, p.35). For example, she described that in Mexico she was encouraged to learn English as a foreign language but didn’t have the same support as she has here. She believes this is because since English is seen as the primary language in the U.S., society just takes it as a norm that English will be learned and used by all of its residents.

References

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- Igoa, C. (2005). The Phenomenon of Uprooting. *In P. A. Richard-Amato & M. A. Snow (Eds.), Academic Success for English Learners*. White Plains: Longman.
- Walqui, A. (2000). *Second Language Acquisition and the Schooling of Immigrant Students*.

Appendix

Viviana: I was like thirteen and a half. I was in eighth grade in middle school. And that's when I started to learn and had to learn because I moved from Mexico to the United States. So before starting to learn English here in the United States, I took a class where I had like English for beginners but it was different because I would just be like translating from a book but it is not the same as like learning the sounds and more in detail. And I would say that I had some knowledge just like from basic words like tree, or the colors, the months, the days of the week, just basic stuff.

Me: So now that you know both languages, what language do you think you use the most?

Viviana: It's hard because since I am in the United States, I speak English but my major is Spanish. And when I am at school I speak English but sometimes also Spanish since it's my major and at home I speak Spanish most of the time.

Me: If, let's say that you are with a friend that speaks both languages, which one do you think you prefer?

Viviana: I think Spanish.

Me: Is it just because of the fact that it's your first language or just, why is that?

Viviana: I think it's just the fact that it's my first language.

Me: What are your current educational goals or employment goals? Do you require English as part of that?

Viviana: I would say that for my career I have to have like knowledge in both of the languages. And yeah, I think I need like knowledge in both of them, it's like a balance.

Me: So how has the fact that you learned English helped you achieve those goals or those goals that are in process?

Viviana: Well I think learning English was an important part to reaching my academic goals because without it I wouldn't be able to be where I am like I wouldn't be able to finish high school and go on to college and finish all the general requirements. It is very important to my career.

Me: And do you plan to continue attending university, college?

Viviana: Yeah, I want to be a professor so I want to get my masters and a PHD in the future.

Me: And, so what memories do you have about learning English? In general, do you remember being frustrated or?

Viviana: I think being embarrassed like to pronounce the words wrong and being like ashamed because people like would notice that I wasn't speaking the right way. I think that stops sometimes people from practicing English and learning the language.

Me: Where those people that not necessarily made fun of you were they just classmates or adults as well?

Viviana: I think classmates.

Me: And was there like, I don't know if you are comfortable, was there a specific anecdote that you have? Like for example, I remember, and I remember this vividly, that we were doing a presentation and I mispronounced costume and that was it for me. Do you have anything similar?

Viviana: No I don't have any like memory that happen like exactly but I was afraid of like doing something like that, like someone making fun of me because I didn't pronounce it the right way.

Me: Aside, you already mentioned that you had a teacher that was really supportive, did you also receive a lot of support from home or was it kind of you have to speak Spanish at home?

Viviana: I think the support was more from school because at home it was just Spanish.

Me: But when you speak English, say with your siblings, your parents don't stop you from speaking English?

Viviana: No they don't.

Me: And I know you don't remember your worst experience but do you have any good experiences that you do remember? Maybe that you felt that you accomplished something?

Viviana: Well I received an award in middle school for like English development so that was something important for me in making that transition to go to high school.

Me: So when you started learning English it was strictly in school?

Viviana: Yes.

Me: Aside the practice necessary, what are your goals in learning English, what are your plans for improving and so on?

Viviana: Well I think as I develop my Spanish I develop English. I think a good way to do it through reading in English cause sometimes when I feel like I used too much Spanish maybe I am like getting away from English or like I feel like my skills are decreasing. But I think reading is a helpful way to like practicing and not forget it.

Me: And what kind of reading do you think has helped you? Do you turn to something more basic or something strictly academic?

Viviana: I think a mixture. Newspapers and stuff like that.