

The Native Speaker as an Othering Construct: Negotiating a Hybrid Third Space  
Identity Within a Binary Framework

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## Abstract

Within an English-speaking cosmopolitan context, the hybrid identity negotiations of 12 international people were examined. The purpose was to view the processes that influence participants' perceptions and the positive attributes they associate with being in a *third space*. The understandings were organized under the categories: language, culture and identity. The most salient theory utilized is from Homi Bhabha's *The Location of Culture*. Central texts include Canagarajah, Myhill, Bourdieu and Schecter among others. Analyses revealed that respondents' ability to flexibly compartmentalize elements of diversity in language and culture allowed them to maintain a strong core identity. Findings elucidate the importance of choice in participants' navigation of their third space identity, by using characteristics of hybridity to their advantage. By analyzing successful third space engagements, it maybe possible to transfer elements of individuals' traverse to immigrant and refugee high school students struggling with acculturation.

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## Chapter One

### Rationale

#### Introduction

Globalization and the English language, though not mutually exclusive, are deeply intertwined. English has become the *lingua franca* of commerce, entertainment and a plethora of other facets of contemporary life. English is ubiquitous and the countries where it is the official language are hubs for business and commerce. As such, immigration is a significant causatum. The Englishes spoken in cities like Toronto and New York and the *mélange* of culture that is being added to the cities through diversity make for rich and complex interactions and formations. Had there not been the history of imperialism and subsequent hierarchies created as a result, there would be no value given to or taken away from “difference” in uses of English nor one’s roots and routes. This historical legacy, though, has created degrees of belonging, constituted of three pillars: language, culture and identity. This interplay yields hybridized identities, and the amalgam of various cultures. Pavlenko’s (2004) introductory remarks in the collection, *Negotiation of Identities in Multilingual Contexts* poignantly states that,

The shifts and fluctuations in language ideologies and in the range of identities available to individuals have become particularly visible in the light of recent sociopolitical and socioeconomic trends: globalization, consumerism, explosion of media technologies, the post-colonial and post communist search for new national identities . . .(p. 2)

The aforementioned circumstances are representative of the milieu in which the research study will be contextualized.

My family's migration has generated within me a hybrid identity and this experience imbues my research for this study. Paralleling many immigrants' motivation, my family moved to Toronto, Canada from Greece so that they could provide me with greater opportunities for education and work. Such background facilitates my thesis topic: The *native speaker* as an othering construct: Negotiating a hybrid, *third space* identity within a binary framework. Using the theories of Homi Bhabha (1994) and others, I explore how social structures intended for integration simultaneously can be used to position people on the periphery. These imposed barriers rarely allow "outsiders" to successfully integrate into mainstream pathways, often creating a social hierarchy that is perpetuated by schools. As a teacher, it is my calling to identify the institutional rigidities that cause inequity and challenge them through research and, subsequently, actions.

The field of linguistics is wrought with the controversial notion of the native speaker, a difficult concept for learners and teachers of English to comprehend due to its ambiguity. What constitutes a native speaker? What knowledge is inherent in belonging to this category? How are non-native speakers conceptualized as a result of the existence of native speakers (Myhill, 2003, p. 78)? The definitions and uses of the term vary greatly. The scope of this study focuses on the native speaker as a binary framework defined or rejected by participants. Within this technical dichotomy, a third space emerges, one where hybrid identities are negotiated. The concept of a hybrid or third space identity is borrowed from Homi Bhabha (1994).

In his book, *The Location of Culture*, he uses camouflage as a simile for hybridity, “hybridity as camouflage, as contesting, antagonistic agency functioning in the time-lag of sign/symbol, which is a space in between the rules of engagement” (p. 277). Here he explains hybridity as a place, not of compromise, but of shifting tectonic plates battling one another, constantly changing and morphing depending on the atmospheric pressures among other forces. The variables in this complex space are constantly changing, as are the players. Therefore, the study is intended to be a snapshot in time.

My specialization in teaching English as a second language (ESL) has qualified me to teach core ESL and subject-adapted courses to new immigrants and international students. I have seen the power that language has had over my students’ lives, and their struggles with identity formation as a result. I have always been interested in the practical application of the theoretical third space (Bhabha, 1994), which has had an almost tangible presence in my classrooms. Studying the third space in relation to the notion of the native speaker enables the creation of environments more conducive to such complex identity negotiations. Awareness and fostering the emergence of hybrid third space identities stifles the proliferation of immutable dichotomous concepts like the native speaker, thus creating a climate of equity.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of my research is to examine the native speaker as a construct that *others* (essentializes/places on the periphery) people who have spent their formative years outside of the English speaking country where they currently

reside. Although the term native speaker suggests a binary framework, rooted in colonial discourses, the qualifying features that the term invokes are being contested both within and outside Applied Linguistics circles. In this context, Schechter (in press) states that, "Even the authenticity of the construct *native speaker* has become suspect, as participants who cross national boundaries endeavor to manipulate contextual frames in order to wrest control of influential varieties from those whose appropriation claims, based on innateness, were hitherto uncontested." In this same article, Schechter highlights third space framings as placing additional emphasis on what people do with language, and their agency. Similarly, within the binary framework of the native speaker, I endeavor to identify participants' negotiation of a hybrid, third space identity. This inquiry occurs through the examination of individuals' experiences who currently reside in an English speaking country but were born outside of it. Specifically, the study explores participants' perceptions of themselves in relation to the English language and their views on native speakers. This is coupled with the exploration of their understanding of negotiations in the theoretical third space within these experiences.

### **Statement of the Problem**

While teaching at the secondary school level, it was difficult to ignore the high correlation between students being labeled academically *at risk* of failing and being in the ESL program. A rough estimate of approximately three quarters of English language learners (ELL) at the secondary school where I taught were considered at risk based on the criteria that their marks were below a C average, and as a result they were deemed at risk for failing. Having known these students

personally, I could attest to the fact that the criteria rendering them at risk were unlike the general population in the school, not that generalizations are ever wholly accurate for any given group. However, statistically speaking, most students on the academically at risk of failing list are truant, chronically late, oppositional and so on. On the other hand, the ELL, mostly, were not manifesting any of these “typical” behaviours; rather the content and level of English needed to achieve a higher mark was beyond their current level of English.

Taking this observation a step further, previously 99% of my students were new immigrants to Canada. Subsequent to teaching at that school, I was transferred to a different school that had predominantly (99%) international students with abundant cultural capital. There were noticeable differences in the two groups’ achievement. This academic inconsistency among seemingly similar demographics (culture, country of origin, language) led me to the initial process of inquiry about the balance between language, culture and identity among the learners. The international students were not the preponderance of students being labeled at risk at the new school; and so I endeavored to learn about the disparities between the two groups. Primarily, what I found was that the international students knew they were going back to their country of birth at regular intervals (winter and summer break), and that after their completion of their four years in high school, unless they chose to study at a Canadian university, would go back to China. Furthermore, these students were in a cohort: they would travel from class to class together, and seemed comfortable with a large group of people who were from the same country and in the same situation. Lastly, the international students paid tens of thousands

of dollars per year in order to be enrolled in a Canadian public secondary school; therefore, their motivation could be different from those who pay indirectly through taxes. It seems as though these distinctions yielded modifications in the negotiation of identity, which I assessed to be linked to academic performance. It seemed, as well, that cultural capital was not directly linked to the concept of the native speaker for this demographic. I sought to investigate this aspect additionally in my study.

The process of conducting my literature review confirmed for me that research on the relationship between language, culture and identity has focused mostly on immigrants and refugees with limited choices; and the corpus of research concerning those people who possess agency and how they choose to manipulate and represent their identities has been more limited. This study sought to redress this lacuna. Among other issues, I was interested in whether those with more cultural capital adjust better to changes in their environment, even though they, too, are not native speakers of English.



## Chapter Two

### Theoretical Frameworks

#### Language Culture and Identity

Auspiciously, in the early stages during my contemplation of these topics and the dynamic theories concomitant with them, my supervisor, Sandra Schecter sent me her article on “Culture, Language and Identity” in the *Routledge Handbook of Language and Culture* (in press). This article encapsulates a plurality of hermeneutics and is the foundation from which I generate my conceptual framework. Schecter focuses on the divergences between three major discourses linking these three pillars, language, culture and identity since the mid-twentieth century. On the one hand, there are linguists like Fishman (1991) whose definition of ethnicity/nationality is inherently tied to the native speaker construct, associated with birthright and seen as normative. In direct opposition Schecter (in-press) cites Myhill (2002) for his ardent warnings against the perils of such linguistic hierarchies of authenticity and Canagarajah’s (2010) insistence on the deconstruction of the native speaker. Schecter’s (in-press) work has enormous depth and breadth of sources that have provided me with a roadmap through which I gather theoretical insight.

#### Othering

The hermeneutics of this paper are primarily concerned with the potential *othering* of non-native speakers of English. Othering used in combination with the terminology *center* and *periphery* are borrowed terms from Anthony Giddens’

(1984) *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration*. Giddens, defines those at the center, stating:

[They] establish themselves as having control over resources, which allow them to maintain differentiations between themselves and those in peripheral regions. The established may employ a variety of forms of social closure to sustain distance from others who are effectively treated as inferiors or outsiders. (p. 131)

Giddens also associates these terms with geographical delineations, the center being the west and the periphery the rest.

### **The Native Speaker**

John Myhill (2003) in his article, *The Native Speaker, Identity, and the Authenticity Hierarchy*, voices his consternation with the harmful effects that the notion of the native speaker of English can have on non-native speakers. Myhill postulates preeminent linguistics scholars like Joshua Fishman (1972, 1991) maintain the theory that native language is fundamentally central to identity. Using Fishman's logic, the diametric opposite leads to the belief that non-native speakers are inauthentic or deficient. Myhill argues that the native speaker is a social construct rather than a fact and warns of consequences which arise as a result of some people assuming that they are authentic while others are not. Myhill is unapologetic: "Fishman claim(s) the right to judge others for whether they are 'true' members of their ethnic group by his criteria" (p. 79). Also noteworthy is Myhill's hierarchy of authenticity concept. He warns that, historically, concepts like this one, which underscore "purity," have lead to tragic consequences. This hegemonic

approach to authenticity based on language is one that I have equated with the native speaker of English for the purposes of this paper.

Canagarajah (2007) takes an alternate approach to the native speaker rhetoric. Rather than emphasizing opposition to it, he reframes the construct entirely. His research shows that the dichotomous colonial-style labeling is antiquated, exceedingly so because currently the number of non-native speakers of English outnumber native speakers. He characterizes the English used internationally as *lingua franca* English (LFE). LFE has no geographical limitations, and as such is centered around multilingualism. Based on his definition, one of the effects is:

That all users of LFE have native competence of LFE, just as they have native competence in certain other languages and cultures . . . goes against our usual ways of using the concept of NS. Typically, one is a NS of only one language.  
(p. 925)

Canagarajah is suggesting that due to the fluid, variable, situational, emergent and hybrid nature of LFE, each person who uses it is concomitantly a native speaker and they negotiate meaning on a case-by-case basis. He describes LFE as an interlanguage that should not be measured against Anglo-American English because they are different varieties (p. 927). However the adaptive nature of LFE does not immunize the users from hybridized identity; on the contrary, they must continuously evolve and form new identities that facilitate the dynamics of LFE (p.929). Canagarajah acknowledges the surge in recent recognition of hybridity

and poses the question, “How do we practice a linguistics that treats human agency, diversity, indeterminacy, and multimodality as the norm” (p. 935)?

### **Third Space Hybridity**

Homi Bhabha’s (1994) philosophy of third space hybridity emerges where two or more often conflicting identities, that don’t wholly belong anywhere, generate a new space. I have interpreted his complex theory to look like a Venn diagram, where people have two (or more) cultures, the place(s) where they came from and the new place(s) where they are currently living. People may affiliate themselves on either side depending on the situation, or neither. In the instances where there is incongruence, innovation and evolution yield to a hybridity where the third space materializes, the space in the middle where the two circles overlap. Bhabha believes:

The borderline engagements of cultural difference may as often be consensual as conflictual; they may confound our definitions of tradition and modernity; realign the customary boundaries between the private and the public, high and low; and challenge normative expectations of development and progress. (1994, p. 3)

These types of negotiations render a person neither wholly as they were before, nor a new person, instead they are left somewhere in between, hence the element of hybridity and a third space.

Another element to Bhabha’s (1994) notion of third space is the cultural positionality of interpretation. He stipulates that in cultural exchanges, communication goes beyond what is said verbatim; rather, understanding occurs in

a third space that is rooted in positionality and interpretation, and above all relies on available “schemata and strategies of discourse” (p. 53). Bhabha believes that no culture is pure; instead culture is inherently hybrid because symbols negate any primordial constancy since adaptation and use are subject to an individual’s interpretation of them. He goes on to say that,

We should remember that it is the ‘inter’ – the cutting edge translation and negotiation, the in between space that carries the burden of the meaning of culture . . . by exploring this Third Space, we may elude the politics of polarity and emerge as the others of ourselves. (p. 56)

To explore the third space is to explore culture, the areas in between, that are not binary, thus enable unity, to see ourselves in others and vice versa.

Consequently, third space does not exist only in people, but in culture too, and its creation and meaning rest heavily on the existing architecture of dialogue. If that discourse is wrought with binary structures like the native speaker, then those are the criteria available for people to negotiate their hybrid identities. If such dichotomous characterizations were to cease to have value, then perhaps negotiation of third spaces could occur more equitably.

Claire Kramsch’s (2009) epithet for this same discursive space is *third culture*. Where Homi Bhabha is more theoretical, Kramsch directly relates the space to language education. Kramsch characterizes third culture as a notion that: “was proposed as a metaphor for eschewing other dualities on which language education is based: first language (L1)/ second language (L2), C1/C2, Us vs Them, Self vs Other” (p. 238). She focuses on differentiating between positivist dualities that tend

to essentialize culture and denote the third space as fixed, with poststructuralist schemata, that is where she has situated her concept of third culture. Also noteworthy is Kramsch's definition of the term culture: "The personal background that might account for variations in individual verbal behaviours, whether they be attributed to national, racial, or ethnic culture or the culture of a particular social class, generation or gender" (2009, p. 242). Her definition serves as a reminder and a warning to the complexities of interpreting third culture to those who wish to pursue the topic. Her analysis presents the future application of third culture as an "epistemological principle that might inform both the research and the practice of language education" (2009, p. 248).

### **Identity**

The concept of identity is complex and multifaceted, for this research study I intend to use the poststructuralist view of identity. David Block (2007) utilizes seven key perspectives to define identity in this discipline: race, ethnicity, nationality, migration, gender, social class and language (p. 3). Primarily this study will be concerned with language and ethnicity with social class as a controlled factor. The other categories will be considered implicit and will be called upon only if the interviewee chooses to discuss them. Homi Bhabha (1994) suggests that to look at the third space simplistically as a hybridization of the previous culture and new culture would be to essentialize cultures and people and to categorize them as having knowable traits. It appears to be difficult to avoid this essentializing perspective when using common social science perspectives. As Block (2007) notes, "Both the biological determinism and social structuralist approaches to identity are

formulated as forms of what is known as essentialism” (p. 12). Block (2007) gives Chris Weedon’s (1997, p.32) definition of identity as fundamental to a poststructuralist understanding: “Weedon proposes a subjectivity which is precarious, contradictory and in process, constantly reconstituted in discourse each time we think or speak” (p. 14). Block maintains that neither others for us, nor we for ourselves, form identity; instead, the constantly changing environment in which people change and are changed by, creates the framework for these identifications of identity.

### **Ethnic Identity**

Fishman and Garcia (2011), in their *Handbook on Language and Ethnic Identity*, discuss the nuances associated with the interpretation of identity. Fishman (2011), in his introduction, concludes that interpretations of identity are contextually biased. He describes the phenomenon as follows: “Identity, therefore, represents a field of forces that is constantly politically manipulated and exploited by all the manifold parties invested in it” (p. xxix). The authors cite a psychological study regarding attribution theory (the perception of linguistic varieties) as a perceptual and cognitive process. They state motivation as a key factor in the attribution process. Findings indicate that certain dialects provoke stereotyping and sweeping generalizations. Communication, they conclude, is far more complex than *how* something is said. Judgments about the effectiveness of communication are dependent on listeners’ attitudes toward the country or region where they perceive the dialect to have originated. This study is indicative of the authority that accent attribution may have over people’s perceptions (Fishman & Garcia, 2011).

Fishman and Garcia's second chapter, "Social Psychology," focuses on individual impetus to the degree that people relinquish or retain their language. To understand this phenomenon, they have broken identity down into personal and social identities. The latter refers to where ethnic/cultural identity is derived, rooted in ancestry and kinship. Fishman and Garcia (2011) suggest that people's association with ethnicity/culture does not have to be rigid to be stable. Rather, malleable, environment-specific self-expression is possible while still maintaining a strong core identity. However, the relevant negotiations are dependent on how the language they speak is perceived by the society they are embedded in, since, "institutionalized practices, stereotypes and labels" play an integral role in this complex process (p. 19). Therefore, one's acceptance of, or reluctance toward, the dominant language in tandem with the heritage variety, is dependent on many variables.

### **Cultural Capital**

According to Bourdieu's (1977) framework, cultural capital accounts for a large measure of successful and unsuccessful academic behaviors, a conviction that is echoed in the prolific study of Annette Lareau (2011). She interprets Bourdieu's work to be fundamental to understanding how schools perpetuate certain social inequalities. She emphasizes key terms in Bourdieu's theory such as *habitus* suggesting:

The notion of habitus stresses the set of dispositions toward culture, society, and one's future that the individual generally learns at home and then takes



for granted . . . . which then can be translated into different forms of value as individuals move out into the world. (p. 361)

This habitus becomes more complicated to study when it is moved across borders, it can get *lost in translation*. However, it is a proven component to identity formation and academic success therefore cannot be ignored. The participants I selected all function within the framework of unequal power relations because they chose to move to an English speaking country for “better” education, work and other reasons.

Bourdieu (1982) uses French philosopher, Auguste Comte’s simile of “language as a ‘universal treasure’” and a “form of wealth” in his fundamental analysis of legitimate language to show the value that is placed upon language (p. 467). According to this simile’s logic the “universal treasure” would appear to belong to everyone. Therefore, it produces “the illusion of linguistic communism” structure proven to be legitimate only in theory (pp. 467). Participation in language yields its preservation. Through rigid structures and other institutionally imposed barriers to its usage, one produces and perpetuates the status quo, a social hierarchy based on linguistic structures. The appearance of accessibility notwithstanding, the “wealth” that language generates typically subsists only within the habitus of academia and accessibility is limited. Within this structure, teachers are seen as gatekeepers by virtue of their control of teaching speaking and writing which are the tools to communicate thoughts (p. 469). Expressed thoughts are controlled by language. The schemata language produces and is produced by legitimize some ideas and practices and terminate others. Bourdieu suggests that contemporary interpretation of Comte’s simile has more obvious literal implications

than when it had been first written. Language as a universal treasure like other forms of capital, requires a specific milieu to have access.

### **Heteroglossia**

“Language Communities,” a chapter in *The Routledge Language and Cultural Theory Reader*, translated from the original work of Karl Vossler (1932), described Mikhail Bakhtin’s characterization of language. Bakhtin describes language as an artificially created entity whose maintenance requires vigilance. On the forces of unification based on language, Vossler warns that division always lurks. As an antidote to linguistic division, Vossler quotes Bakhtin’s theory of heteroglossia: “Ineradicable difference, the fact that even the most unified, standardized language or culture is shot through with otherness and historical relativity. He views heteroglossia as a democratizing agent in a world of closed static, hierarchical and oppressive forces” (p. 251). According to Vossler’s summary of Bakhtin’s inference, linguistic variation is standard within heteroglossia. By this logic, the divisiveness of rigid uniformity in language use is quelled. Through heteroglossia, discord on the basis of language ceases to play a major role.

### **Translanguaging**

Ofelia Garcia (2009) describes translanguaging as a facet of bilingualism. She believes that translanguaging goes beyond simple code-switching because it transcends words. The term refers to the place where meaning is created in the complex language practices of bilinguals. “For us, translanguagings are *multiple discursive practices* in which bilinguals engage in order to *make sense of their bilingual worlds*” (p. 45). Garcia differentiates translanguaging from language shift,

as follows: A language shift is used temporarily; mixing is initially encouraged in order to procure a trade-off, one language yielding to the other ultimately generating monolingualism. She asserts that translanguaging is preferable to language shift in schooling practice, arguing that it enables interrelationships between languages. Garcia's (2009) research suggests that bilingual programs are most effective for multilingualism when there is flexibility involved in classroom language practices.

Garcia (2009) discusses the benefits of translanguaging through a case study conducted in a kindergarten classroom in New York. However, her findings evidence that despite the empirically proven advantages translanguaging provides, stigma is often attached to the practice of translanguaging. In her final remarks about the study Garcia contends:

Too often bilingual students who translanguage suffer linguistic shame because they have been burdened with monoglossic ideologies that value only monolingualism. The result of this linguistic shame is always the shift towards the dominant language and monolingualism, robbing students of the possibility to develop their bilingualism. (p. 308)

Garcia's (2009) book also evaluates international bilingual education models. The studies she has conducted and referenced indicate that among the foremost bilingual models, those with flexible translanguaging practices are most effective in fostering and maintaining multilingualism.

## Chapter Three

### Methodology

#### Study Overview

Considering the poststructuralist assumptions consulted in the conceptual framework, the *interpretivist paradigm* (Glesne, 2011, p.9) is inherent in the design of this research study. This qualitative research study includes semi-structured interviews in tandem with an analysis of relevant contemporary discourse about the relationship between language, identity and culture to test and confirm my findings. This protocol follows what Patton (2002) refers to as the “standardized open-ended interview” because it is comprised of questions that are “carefully worded and arranged with the intention of taking each respondent through the same sequence and asking each respondent the same questions with essentially the same words” (p. 342). The Venn diagram is intended to serve as a sensitizing concept because according to Patton’s definition, these types of questions, although standardly worded and structured, enable the respondent to relate to many experiences. Thusly, this section of the interview is geared toward respondents’ own particular negotiations of identity.

Corrine Glesne (2011), in her chapter “Meeting Qualitative Inquiry,” cites Homi Bhabha as a prominent example of one of the foremost postcolonial scholars. The nature of third-space engagements, and the relationship between language, culture and identity therein, is therefore studied within the poststructuralist and postcolonialist paradigms. Glesne concludes that: “The central purpose of these various ‘post’ traditions, can be described as that of *deconstruction*” (p. 13). Glesne’s

emphasis on deconstruction parallels this study's stance on the concept of the native speaker of English. The role of the researcher may also be analyzed through the lenses of postcolonialism and poststructuralism. Glesne states that researchers' positionality, values and even their language, though unavoidable, impact every aspect of their study.

## **Research Design**

**Research questions.** The following research questions were used as heuristics to elicit data for this study:

- 1.) Describe the relationship(s) between language, culture and identity for members of a cohort of young adult international students.
- 2.) In what ways can members of this cohort be thought to inhabit a hybrid or third space with respect to their cultural and linguistic identifications?
- 3.) What applied and theoretical implications do these research findings hold?

**Participants.** Participants were adults who have lived outside of their non-English speaking country of origin for more than three years but fewer than ten. They were recruited through verbal discussion with the researcher about the thesis topic with people who are known to the researcher. Participants were asked if they knew others who would participate, resulting in a snowball-type technique. Selected adults were either employed in English-speaking contexts or students in graduate school. All participants were fluent in two or more languages: of the twelve participants, two are proficient in five or more languages, another two are proficient in four languages, six are proficient in three languages, and two in two languages. All

spoke English fluently: although English is not their first language, uniformly their proficiency is high.

Participants chosen for this study were, at the time of the interviews, in their mid to late twenties or early thirties. They were selected because of their perceived hybridity, having been born and raised in a country where the language is not English, and currently living or studying in a cosmopolitan city, either Toronto or New York. While subject selection was not formally controlled, all respondents had adequate cultural capital and a habitus that fostered their hybridity. They could generally be characterized as global citizens, individuals who had travelled extensively and interacted with other transnational people.

Table 1 shows respondents' ethnicity and gender distribution by their city of residence.

Table 1

*Respondents' Gender, Ethnicity and Place of Residence*

	Toronto	New York
Gender		
Male	2	7
Female		3
Ethnicity		
Middle Eastern	1	3
European		3
South American	1	4

**The use of interviewing within qualitative methodology.** Elliot George Mishler's (1986) elucidation of the role of context and narrative in the interviewing process emphasizes that how a question is asked, as well as the individual asking the question, influence respondents' answers. Mishler encourages researchers to embrace their subjectivity by compelling them to acknowledge that language is not understood uniformly. He describes language as being defined on a relative basis that is uniquely interpreted by the researcher and respondents. In this study, cultural and linguistic subjectivity inform the findings. In fact, the distinctive ways in which respondents interpreted questions enabled additional analysis beyond the responses themselves. For example, when respondents were asked whether they perceived themselves as having an "accent," their individual interpretations of the word *accent* varied significantly, in this manner, providing deeper understanding into their discernments of marked and unmarked varieties of English. Mishler's warning was not intended to diminish the findings generated from the different understandings of language; rather, he proposed that opportunities for deeper analysis occur when misunderstandings and diversity are acknowledged in the early stages of research.

Patton's (2002) description of the qualitative inquiry strategy of inductive reasoning, emphasizes the ability of emergent themes to guide analysis. Inductive reasoning is combined with deductive reasoning when open-ended interview questions are created and utilized. Open-ended questions are derived deductively; however, the answers they generate "permits the respondent to describe what is

meaningful and salient without being *pigeon holed* into standardized categories” (p. 56).

Patton (2002) suggests that questions should be sequenced beginning with “noncontroversial present behaviours, activities and experiences” (p. 352). The first series of questions were designed to generate context and comfort between the researcher and the respondents; as questions progressed they became more personal, specific and calling for opinion, rather than knowledge-based. For example, question eight asks why respondents moved to an English-speaking country. Although the question is open-ended, it requires the respondent to answer with information in their existing knowledge base. However, in question twenty-three, closer to the end of the interview, respondents are asked to qualify themselves as “insiders, outsiders or in-between,” meaning that they gave their opinion on the perception of their status within the society where they currently live. Unlike question eight, the latter is not information generally gleaned in common conversation.

In his book on research interviewing, Mishler (1986) explores the gap between the natural process of asking/answering questions and systematic research procedure. During conversation, a natural flow may extend from one topic to the other. However, when interviews are viewed from the technical and behavioural standpoint: “Interviewers and analysis treat each question/answer pair as an isolated exchange” (p. 11). Mishler argues that viewing questions/answers in isolation leads to “decontextualizing of questions and responses,” ultimately creating issues in the analysis of the data generated from the behavioural definition



of interviewing (p.11). Therefore, in an attempt to avoid respondents perceiving each question in isolation, questions were considered for their synergistic effects as well.

## **Data Collection**

**Use of semi-structured interviews.** Participants were asked to answer questions in-person, through a semi-structured sequenced interview that consists of twenty-five questions regarding their experiences and perceptions of the English language and if/how they have shaped their identity (Schechter & Bayley, 2002). I also used an interactive graphic organizer (Venn diagram) that participants were verbally guided through. This Venn diagram enables the production of what Freire (1970) termed, *generative themes*. These generative themes are dynamically produced by the interview process because of the participants' ability to interpret and reconfigure the Venn diagram any way they want (p. 97).

Interviews were conducted in English in both New York and Toronto over a period of one week. The duration of the interviews varied, with the average time being thirty-five minutes. At the end of the formal interview questions, participants manually filled out the Venn diagram following the researcher's prompts. Respondents led the discussion that followed the making of their Venn diagrams. The discussion was punctuated by subtle promptings by the researcher based on the words participants had written in each of the Venn circles. The interviews were audio-recorded with an iPhone and subsequently transcribed.

## **Data Analysis**

Patton (2002) summarizes the procedure of coding as: “Analyzing the core *content* of interviews and observations to determine what’s significant” (p. 463). I transcribed each interview verbatim. To analyze the data gathered from the interviews and Venn diagrams, I coded semantic gestures (Murphy, 2013). I coded participants’ answers through a priori codes. I kept track of coding memos and took note of the reason for creating the code and code descriptions. Once the data were coded, they were input into a matrix (Patton, 2002, p.473).

## **Ethics Review**

Upon approval from York University’s Ethics Review Committee, I arranged for interviews with the twelve participants. Consent was administered once participants had agreed to the terms outlined. These terms were discussed verbally as well as read in written form. I highlighted the sections pertaining to confidentiality. In specific terms, participants were assured that pseudonyms would be used to protect their identities and that materials would be stored securely. In addition, they were made explicitly aware of the option to nullify participation at any time, resulting in the deletion of all applicable materials immediately (see Appendix B).

## Chapter Four

### Empirical Findings

The data have been organized under the three heuristics I used to order my questions to respondents: language, culture and identity. Of course, in reality these concepts are not readily separable. Accordingly, one notes in respondents' comments their dynamic interplay.

#### Language

**English proper.** Frequently, in second language acquisition (SLA) the rigid binary between native/non-native speakers serves as a dichotomous divisor. This demarcation places the native speaker at the center, as a gatekeeper to the language and others everyone else. For this partitioning to occur, one must believe that a correct way to speak English exists. For example, Baumgardner (2006) writes that the standardization of English is: "still an ongoing process, developed over a period of some five hundred years" (p. 666). Other scholars are more nuanced in their views. Deviations from the standard form of English are habitually characterized through the deficiency lens, ultimately seen by educators as: "*deficiency* not as *difference*" (Kachru, 1986, p. 21). The supposed "deficiency" lends itself to the creation of an authenticity hierarchy that is premised on the native speaker construct. Myhill (2003) problematizes the authenticity hierarchy: "That which is 'more authentic' is valued more highly than that which is 'less authentic,' and native language in particular is designated as determinative of authenticity" (p. 81).

Relevantly, participants were asked if they thought there was an appropriate way to speak the English language. Two participants said that there definitely was

not. Dong-ju and Ricardo believed that it depended on the individual and various other factors, which they could not elucidate in detail. What Ricardo did say was, “No, I think from a foreigner’s perspective, English is very diverse. English is the language that has most different accents and different ways of expressing things.” Almost always when asked this question, respondents drew a comparison between British and American English. The majority of other participants agreed that they thought there was a correct way to speak English and that it was based on British English and common principles of correct grammar. Most succinctly, Omar summarized what the others had expressed in various forms, when he said,

Ya, because if you want an English person to be speaking English from the U.K. they’re speaking proper English and the American is not. . . . But doesn’t that make his English wrong? No, it’s not wrong. It’s just the slang or the accent, so I don’t think it’s wrong. I don’t think there’s a right or wrong. But of course it’s wrong when you’re a foreigner and you speak another language, you’re always gonna have an accent in English.

Above, Omar makes several assumptions, among them, that British English is unmarked, that American English is a legitimate variety, and that all other “accents” are “wrong.” However, if British English is “proper,” and American English is a variation of it, then would foreigners’ English not be another version too?

Paradoxically, many others reiterated this concept that excluded international English, their English, from the list of admissible English varieties. The same concept applied to Arabic, when Abdullah spoke of his accent in Arabic: “Yeah, I do. There’s a lot of accents and dialects. You can tell where someone is from, but it’s not like

you're English and speaking Arabic." He spoke about his Arabic accent being regional rather than foreign, paralleling Omar's hypothesis on the English language. The contradiction here is that the participants used proper grammar as the criteria for English correctness. The majority of participants have attended graduate school in an English-speaking country; thus, their academic vernacular could be considered grammatically superior to that of the average native-speaker, assuming that graduate school is not the norm. Using the participants' logic, grammatically adept people like themselves are the rightful speakers of English. This point is recurring: respondents act as gatekeepers to the English language who place some people on the periphery.

Regardless of what the participants' logic dictates, in practice they themselves are part of the perpetuating belief system of the binary construct of native/non-native speakers of English. Abdullah proved this point when he spoke of his English proficiency: "As I experience- practice more English, I get better. To get a ten, it would require at least ten years of getting exposed. I'm in my seventh year so I think I'm an eight. Like not even Americans are a ten. Ten is perfection... the more you practice, the more you get points." According to his rationale, which corresponds with the one often disseminated by language teachers in SLA contexts, learning English is a means to an end. There is an end, and that end is native-like fluency, the ultimate goal. Teachers teach with that conclusion in mind; they are always preparing their learners for it. Students study with the same objective, only to find that in practice, native-like fluency is unattainable. The cycle ensues, teachers are frustrated by their learners' progress, the learners struggle, but all along the

English language remains a beacon of hope. The English teachers who taught the participants, mostly native speakers of English, bequeathed the legacy of this myth to their learners. These participants, as shown in their answers, believed that a “ten” was not only achievable, but favorable. However, respondents could not accept that international English can be a legitimate variety like any other, that they may never reach a level ten, as taught in school, and that, moreover, this is an unrealistic objective. Rather, learners use the tools they need, when they need them, and have a greater breadth of knowledge based on their multi-lingual and multi-cultural existence. They believed that, as will be shown in subsequent sections, a proper English exists and can be aspired to.

**Gatekeepers.** Three of the participants, Luciano, Jose and Dong-ju went to American schools in their country of birth; and English was the medium of instruction from kindergarten onwards. With the exception of Luciano, who changed his Venn diagram to the ratio of sixty: forty for the relationship *Argentina: New York*, neither Dong-ju nor Jose changed the ratio of their Venn circles. They left them at fifty: fifty. Luciano’s sixty: forty ratio is paralleled by his identification of the language that is most closely tied to his identity. When asked, he said that both languages were equal, but Spanish was slightly more connected to his identity than English. Luciano attributed his post-secondary educational trajectory to the milieu in which he was educated. When asked about his motivation to move to an English-speaking country he responded by saying, “I was educated in institutions that led to the United States, to come to the United States. In terms of the language itself, it’s not even considered.” He deemed English to be as natural to him as Spanish, yet felt

more closely tied to Spanish. Although he did not consider himself a native speaker of English, he rated himself a ten (*with one being the lowest and ten the highest rating*) when asked to rate his own English proficiency. Similarly, Dong-ju did not consider himself to be a native speaker of English, although he did rate himself as having a proficiency of ten. Jose too, rated his English proficiency as ten; however, his reasoning differed from the others when asked if he considered himself a native speaker. Although he was not definitive, his answer suggested that he did consider himself a native speaker:

I think that a native speaker is someone that- I mean, I guess, I consider myself a native speaker because I've taken English in school so long that when someone says native speaker, for me it is a synonym of fluency, when someone says, what is your fluency, sometimes I'll answer by saying, native.

All three participants have completed primary and secondary school in English, in addition to undergraduate and graduate studies in academic institutions in the United States. Still, they did not, with certainty, qualify themselves as native speakers of English, even though they rated their proficiency as ten (*perfect*). This distinction would suggest that academic language is not the only criteria required of the native speaker label.

Thomas Paul Bonfiglio's (2010) chapter, "Deconstructing the Native Speaker," examines the historical trajectory of the native speaker and connotations associated with it. Bonfiglio's scrutiny of the hermeneutics concomitant with the creation and proliferation of the term native speaker also goes beyond simple grammar. He says,

Thus the folkloric notion of “native” here is one laden with the ideology of “heartland” and “homeland” and the ethnicity (or perceived lack thereof) of the speakers in the fictional spaces as such. These notions inform the empowerment of the native speaker. (p. 9)

It appears as though native fluency in English is elusive, even to those who have absolute control over the language. Luciano is a writer for a very popular financial magazine and his English language articles are read by millions of people daily. Both Jose and Dong-ju work for global companies and negotiate major business deals in English. Superficially, it appears as though anyone capable of such complex interactions in English, who has had their entire education in English, would technically have the requirements for native speaker designation; yet these respondents did not necessarily perceive themselves this way. This incongruence begs the question, *does one require permission to access native speaker status, and if so, from whom?*

**Othering.** In the absence of a prologue regarding the multiple nuanced definitions of the word *accent* from the researcher, participants’ permutations of its interpretation were unlimited. Participants were asked if they perceived themselves as having an accent, and if so, how they knew. Their responses revealed that almost always someone else told them that they had an accent, they could not perceive it themselves. Replies ranged from, “other people tell me I pronounce it wrong” to, “a lot of people make jokes about my English and I feel uncomfortable” and were punctuated by, “my pronunciation is not one hundred percent and never will be, nor do I want it to be.” These answers from Luciano, Daniela and Cesar, respectively,



were echoed in other respondents' explanations. Luciano defended his accent: "I've limited my assimilation, I want to keep my accent on purpose." His sentiment was not unique. Others, too, felt that they would like to maintain their linguistic variety; they thought it added to their character.

When discussing language, culture and identity on a personal level, it is imperative to keep in mind that words like *accent*, *language*, *nationality*, and *identity* can take on various meanings depending on who deciphers them. Concomitantly, within participants' country of birth these terms take on many meanings due to cultural and linguistic divisions. Jonas was born and raised in Solothurn, Switzerland where students are educated in several languages. He speaks Swiss German, German, French, Swedish and English fluently but says: "I really don't want to speak in German, I don't identify myself with this language." Despite speaking Swiss German with his family, he was vehemently opposed to speaking German and having any association with Germany. He was vividly aware of the meaning behind the nuances of linguistic affiliation, because he said that there were approximately twenty-six different states in Switzerland and that each possessed their own unique variety. Another European country that has a strong vernacular divide is Spain. When asked where she was from, Daniela said she was from Barcelona, not Spain. She made this distinction because of the internal dispute between the Spanish and the Catalan languages and cultures. Other respondents mentioned the difference between their Argentine-Spanish and the Spanish spoken in other Latin American countries, as did Ricardo differentiate between the Sao Paulo-Brazilian he speaks versus the mainstream Rio de Janeiro accent that is more standard, and described

how both of those vary from the Portuguese spoken in Portugal. Notwithstanding participants' knowledge of linguistic varieties, they did not view their own international English accent as an acceptable variation in English. Rather, they saw their dialects through a deficiency lens, and within the binary of native/non-native speakers of English.

**Translanguaging.** Hybridity is intrinsically challenging to measure for the simple reason that it is, by nature, dynamic, particularly when in relation to a concept as conjectural as identity. As such, the process of analysis obliges the researcher to seek to disambiguate variable responses. For this reason, the interview protocol design purposely separated certain questions that are facets of the same concept to see if participants' answers would differ when asked to choose among unambiguous variables. In the middle of the interview a question about what language was most closely tied to participants' identity was asked. Several questions later, respondents were requested to volunteer the language they used in specific instances (for example: counting, directions, anger and so on). Whereas the pattern showed that many participants could straightforwardly select a language they felt represented their identity, they all had difficulty doing the same for specific instances, barring work which was always done in English. During the latter stage, several participants said verbatim, "this is difficult, because it depends."

Patterns formed as respondents answered the first of these two questions regarding which language (if any) was more closely tied to their identity. Participants who had spent some time in a North American high school, whether in the country they were born in, or in North America, mostly chose a fifty/fifty ratio,

with the exception of Dong-ju, who has three languages which he considers all equally intimate to him. Also, Omar said that since he had spent his developmental academic years in English, he believed English was more tethered to his current identity than Arabic. Omar held that, “English is probably, because of the age I guess. From eighteen to twenty-five is where you really base your personality preference . . . this is the time you’re kind of forming yourself. I was basically speaking English.” He attributed this to his proficiency in English being far greater than that of his Arabic. Although most of the participants, save for a couple, were in this same situation, they did not identify more with English. Six of the twelve participants struggled to select only one language as a marker of their identity and ultimately selected to relate both (English and the language of the country they were born in) to their identity. The remaining six unequivocally chose the language associated with the country where they spent their childhood and formative years. A pattern emerged, indicating that the formative years are markers of language choice in relation to this question. The first query was quite vague. It served as a generalization, and as such required detailed probing for a more comprehensive answer. Later, a series of questions were asked of participants relating to certain identity markers and the language(s) that they performed these undertakings in. Participants’ answers were always qualified by, “to whom am I speaking?”, “in which country”, “it depends”, “sometimes, but mostly.” It therefore appeared problematic for respondents, when pressed, to be precise in answering what was essentially an extension of the former question. Despite being divided in half for the first question, with regard to the latter question, mostly all transactions were conducted in English

for all twelve respondents. Noteworthy was an anecdote from Luciano that described how and why he did certain things, such as determining geographical direction, in English as opposed to Spanish. According to his answer, when he is in Argentina, his brain goes to English and translates accordingly.

The cardinal points I do in English because, I'm never gonna forget this, when I was in the fourth grade, someone said, 'never eat Saudi wheat!' So I do north, east, south and west. Sometimes I have to go to English to get that one right. Sorry, the alphabet I also have to do in English because I learned it like that.

Swearing was the easiest of the categories for respondents, except two, to comment on: English, they said, was the language they swore in regardless of where they were, when asked about the expression of anger. Many attribute how naturally they swear in English to popular culture. Several participants laughed at the recollection and claimed that several English swear words were simply universal, not really English, just the collective terminology for expressing anger. Likely, that question was not an accurate indicator of language choice since the topic was considered ubiquitously English associated. Other topics were more revealing. One participant alleged that when he talked to himself, he really knew what language was leading his life at that time. Omar suggested adding a component to the list of things people did in a particular language: he believed that the language one dreamed in would be a sound indicator of one's subconscious identity negotiations. Abdullah said, "I dream in English sometimes, because all my interactions are in English." If someone's entire life is lived in the English language, it seems logical that

their dreams and thoughts would be in English too. Perhaps then, negotiating a hybrid identity is done subconsciously, and only when real-time “clashes” occur, is it deemed a conscious act. If so, it would then be unfair to ask what language certain things are done in, because responses would be conscious answers, whereas actual practices would only be known upon observation of these behaviours.

Gabriela recalled a time when she went to a therapist who was a native speaker of English. He had asked her to speak in Spanish during their sessions, assuming it was more natural for her. Of this experience, she recalled feeling “awkward,” because although she could express deep emotions interchangeably in either language, she felt uncomfortable doing so in Spanish with someone she knew was not a native speaker of Spanish. Communication is a negotiation, Gabriela asserted, and her point illustrates that language choice is not solely decided by the speaker; rather, it is dictated by the context too. Luciano believed that his English and Spanish changed depending on whom he was talking to. If the person was from Argentina, he would instinctively utilize more Argentinian phrases than if they were Columbian, and so on. It is also vitally important to remember that this group of twelve people are constantly travelling, between languages and cultures. They have learned to adapt efficiently and as such are hyper in-tuned to the subtlety of circumstances. Amir had extreme difficulty with this question. He said that while he mostly did everything in English when he was in Toronto, “When I talk to myself, sometimes I do it in Farsi.” In spite of having transitioned to a mostly English lifestyle, his thoughts remain tangled between the two languages. He went on to say,

That's why I struggle, that's why I said I don't know if English is the language that represents my identity. Because I look at language as an instrument for me to express myself and sometimes I feel like I can express myself much better in English because it is a richer language.

The richness of English compared to Farsi was something Amir contemplated. Ultimately, he was not able to decide if he perceived English as richer than Farsi due to his education, or if it was in fact true. Correspondingly, Ricardo said that his thinking generally occurred in Portuguese; however, increasingly he caught himself thinking in English. Ricardo's reaction is similar to those of other respondents who also noted how quickly they had adapted to the dominant culture. Respondents were unanimous in asserting that they change the language they communicate in depending on their audience and the context. Remarkably, the participants showed a lack of awareness on how they functionally participate in English identity marked situations, yet nostalgically attribute their identity to another language. Although, this is precisely what their responses related.

Participants were sensitive to their hybridity, cognizant that it was why they had been asked to participate in the interviews. That knowledge notwithstanding, they did not tend to purposely utilize the word *hybridity* in their answers, nor focus on those aspects when replying. In examining the data for statements alluding to hybridity, some examples were found of instances where respondents did not wholly embrace any of their nationalities, instead occupying the third space. Daniela captured this sentiment when she spoke about why English was the language she used for her work interactions, "This image that for my job I'm selling goes more

toward English. Actually, I live a double life a little bit.” Her response indicated that occupationally she felt compelled to speak English to succeed, while other aspects of her life could be carried out in Spanish. It would appear that her use of “double” is synonymous with hybrid, or third space, where she selects the language most advantageous to her success in a particular area. Other obvious instances of participants’ ability to use hybridity to their benefit were present in the data.

Luciano said that he was able to attend events and have insider-like status in both Spanish and English circles in New York, because: “For me, speaking English or speaking Spanish are exactly the same.” His ease with translanguaging was beneficial to his occupation, where he relied on interviews with influential figures that could be conducted with ease in either language, and switched comfortably between both when needed.

**The laws of attraction.** Both Toronto and New York are epicenters for cultural diversity. Consequently, the potential for multi-nationals to aggregate in these places with others like themselves is far greater than in other cities. Replying to an inquiry about who they chose to spend their time with, native or non-native speakers of English, responses were mixed. The majority of participants said that they were more comfortable with non-native speakers of English, even if those people were not from the same country or did not speak the same language that they did. However, Jonas and Ricardo are married to native-speakers of English, and, as a result, have accrued social ties through their wives to native-speakers of English. Gabriela said that when she first arrived in the United States she was shocked that her classmates had no concept of where Chile was. They thought she

was from Africa. However, she admitted she now relates more to Americans. She spent most of her time with native speakers of English, but for different reasons: “New York has many Puerto Ricans and Dominicans, but I do not identify with them. Theirs is a more Caribbean culture whereas Chile is more Western, so I identify more with Americans.” In this instance Gabriela elected a cultural over linguistic connection. She went on to say, “The thing is that my life is so split between going here and there, that I wanna say both.” Aside from these three, the other participants, preferred to socialize with non-native speakers of English. Rationalizing their response, they cited common laws of attraction. Jose believed, “Certain people kind of aggregate with certain people. I hang out with certain friends from Argentina and we speak Spanish.” Similarly, Luciano, a friend of Jose’s from Argentina, described the attraction:

I think that there is a feedback loop, a perpetuating cycle or a snow-ball effect when you’re hanging out with international people. . . . Networks perpetuate themselves. At the same time, at some sort of subconscious level there’s a greater capacity to create a connection with those people. Particularly when you’re a sort of global person like me.

Jose’s and Luciano’s replies considered the pull factors they have to other non-native speakers, while Omar discussed push factors which led him to separate himself from native speakers. He could not identify with Americans because he said that they lacked culture and were not family oriented. As a result, he was more comfortable with non-native speakers because he found similarities in their behaviours, such as speaking more emphatically or being more passionate and



expressive of core values. Generally, when given the choice, participants pursued companionship with like-minded individuals or people from their same ethnic and cultural backgrounds.

**Power dynamics.** Respondents were aware of the advantages that accrue through educational and linguistic environments that have power. When asked if they believed there was a linguistic hierarchy, and if so, to quantify their answers, every respondent said that the zenith was English. Answers varied, but generally highlighted economical and political power as significant. Dong-ju articulated this sentiment when he said: “Political dominance, essentially the influence and power that the country can exert. Take a look at the languages that people learn that’s not native to them.” The latter part of Dong-ju’s statement conveys each of the interviewees’ common denominator, why they were pulled into the English orbit to begin with. Although all participants were cognizant of the connection between language and power, they focused predominantly on commerce and communication in their answers. Few went into specifics the way Luciano did when explaining his understanding of the linguistic hierarchy and its connection with historical process related to colonialism:

Clearly there exists a lingua franca which now is English. There is no doubt about it. Again, I would tie that to socio-economic, geo-political circumstances because the U.S. is such a dominant country, because of the wars . . . English is the most practical language. If you don’t speak English you’re missing out on the world and your capacities are limited. Then when you get past this quote on quote reserved currency of languages, and by

reserve currency I mean the U.S. dollar is a global reserve currency, if you're trading commodities they always trade in dollars so you have lira and I have pesos and I wanna buy something from you I have to go change into dollars and pay you in dollars and that's the similar thing that happens in language from a lingua franca perspective.

Luciano alluded to colonialism when he mentioned wars. Stemming from wars is the dominance of currencies like the U.S. dollar, which became the medium for trade following the war. Omar said that English was the most powerful language, "Because it is probably the most spoken language . . . mainly control the world economy and so many things." In fact, English is not the most spoken language, it is third; the most spoken language is Chinese (Lewis, 2013). This is a common misconception repeated by many participants, however, participants' responses are telling in that they understand English to be a powerful international language. Jose added a confounding feature by asserting that English was not inherently any better than any other language. Another participant asked, similarly, "Does that mean one person is better than another because they speak a language? It's better, it's an advantage." It seems as though participants, while asserting that the English language is not fundamentally better than any other language, at the same time understood that speakers of it are better off.

**Social media.** Participants were asked to comment on the language that was dominant in their interactions with social media, considering that social media has become such a conspicuous part of contemporary life. Eleven of the twelve participants used mostly or only English. One participant divided his time equally

between two languages when interacting with social media. Select participants elaborated on their responses by saying that it depended on where they were. If they were visiting their country of birth, the ratio tended to sway slightly away from English. The other concept that was recurring throughout the interviews was one of hybridized speech. One participant used the term, “Spanglish,” while others recalled conversations in Arabic using the Latin alphabet. Since the type of social media used were not specified, one would assume that the people they communicated with were English speakers too, since their interactions occurred largely in English. Social media is relatively novel. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and so forth have become popular within the last eight years, matching the amount of time the participants have lived in North American cities. Hence, it is logical that since social media have flourished while participants have lived in English speaking contexts, the functional language for interactions over these media would be English as well.

### **Culture**

**One plus two does not equal a third space.** *“In the United States or Canada would you consider yourself to be an insider, outsider, or somewhere in-between? Explain your classification of your perceived place in society in relation to the dominant Canadian/U.S. culture.”* This was the last formal question asked of participants. Of the twelve interviewees, none considered themselves to be outsiders. Two, with hesitation, said that they were insiders. One of the two, Luciano, qualified his answer by saying that he felt this way only in New York, not so for the rest of the United States. Gabriela, who had spent the greatest amount of time in an American high school of the respondents, was the other self-ascribed insider.

While Amir and Omar also spent one year in a North American high school, they did not identify themselves as insiders. The remaining ten participants regarded themselves as “in-between.” When asked to definitively select an answer from the three options, a few wavered and calibrated their answers by saying “on the verge of becoming an insider, mostly insider but not completely, insider if I want,” and so forth. For coding purposes, I categorized those people who did not use the term insider with certainty as in-between. There does not appear to be a pattern, nor is there an obvious marker for what makes someone an insider. Jose, said that,

I’m still an outsider, but for the most part, I’m probably closer to the inside. I guess just because I can understand and am aware of most things going on, events, or how to do things, I know the city very well, for example, I know the way things work in the United States the way anyone else who lives here does.

Jose did not specifically name the quality that inhibited his insider status. Conversely, Medina articulated a clear reason for her in-between status, “I’m the type of person who can fit in everywhere and with many kinds of people but I still like to keep my identity and what I brought with me so that’s why I feel like I’m somewhere in-between.” Similarly Ricardo discussed his Brazilian heritage, “I think I’m a mix of two cultural backgrounds, maybe three cultural backgrounds...it’s something that I cannot change, you cannot abandon your roots.” Here he alluded to hybridity, conceivably as a welcome alternative to insider status.

Omar explained his perspective of how one gains insider status using the following metaphor: “It’s a circle from the beginning . . . you can’t jump in the circle.

Your kids will be in the circle, but you will always have different views from the circle.” From his answer, he is suggesting that the circle is something one is born into, and that certain arbitrary and intentional markers of ethnicity prevent insider status. Paralleling Omar’s metaphor, Amir answered by saying that there were times when he felt like an insider, for example, at law school, however, “When it comes to Canadian pop-culture, I’m a total outsider, assuming there is a Canadian pop-culture . . . I can’t sit there and talk about my Thanksgiving memories, you know what I mean.” Amir was referring to Canadian familial traditions and holidays that were not celebrated in Iran where his family resides. These were the instances when he did not feel like an insider. Coupled with the instances where he did feel like one, he relegated his status to in-between.

This question about participants’ status in relation to the dominant culture asks the interviewee to define their own connection between identity and nationality. Although they were asked about assimilation in the question prior to this one, no one mentioned it in their response despite obvious connections. Luciano, in justification of his assertion of himself as an insider, said, “Being an insider or outsider depends on how much you’re willing to go out and explore, expand and network, and I think I do a lot of that.” In analyzing the participants’ answers and the examples they gave to support them, it seems as though there is no real in-between status. Rather, there are, as Amir put it, contextual circumstances where one or the other, insider or outsider, is prominent. Simply by engaging in negotiating these two binaries, one becomes in-between. This, however, is not to suggest a blending: the process is much more complicated than that, consistent with

Homi Bhabha's (1994) third space theorizing. The spaces of cultural disparity that either include or exclude people are unknown because of their nuanced status. On cultural difference, Homi Bhabha (1994) states:

The question of cultural difference faces us with a disposition of knowledges or distribution of practices that exist beside each other, absents designating a form of social contradiction or antagonism that has to be negotiated rather than sublated. The difference between subjunctive sites and representations of social life have to be articulated without surmounting the incommensurable meanings and judgments that are produced within the process of transcultural negotiation. (p. 232)

Amir observes about his transcultural negotiation: "Maybe there are things that I don't like about the inside and don't relate to, not because I can't." He felt that if he wanted to, he could be on the inside; however, he does not want to. While respondents were ambivalent about being in-between, they eschewed insider status. Their self-identifications were clearly not tethered to insider status.

**Nationality.** Unanimously, when asked about their nationality, all twelve respondents exclusively answered with the country they were born in. This is even though many of the interviews were interposed with salient juxtapositions. At the same time, participants felt that going back to their country of birth was often awkward because they were told by others that they had changed or they themselves felt a need to make adjustments. When asked to substantiate why they chose one nationality over another they began to discuss what constitutes nationality in general. Most answers corresponded with place of birth, and where

one grew up. Few replies were premised on where someone feels the most connection with and why. Mostly, respondents felt national affiliation with the places they were born in despite the many inconsistencies that surfaced in subsequent responses.

Amir chose Iran and not Canada to represent his nationality, although he is a citizen of both countries. He said, "I don't know what entitles you to be Canadian? What is Canadian? I mean, if we thrive on the idea of multiculturalism, I don't know how much Canada has to add to that..." Abdullah observed: "As a foreigner you're always a bit outside, you stand out." Cesar's response to his Venezuelan nationality being more prominent was emphatic: "I am not American, period! I am an informed observer but I don't actively participate probably because of my own choosing. There are simply some things I don't like." Jonas, too, did not feel as though he would ever identify as an American: "Having a Green Card does not make me American. Even when I get my American passport, I'd still say I'm Swiss because that's where I was born and raised." Jonas is married to an American and lives and works exclusively in the United States. On paper, he is currently an American, yet it is a formal identity he has endured with reluctance. Similarly, Dong-ju, who has spent approximately ten years in the United States, said he was Korean but his home (and place of birth) was Greece. He responded by saying, "I never say I'm American because I don't feel one hundred percent American. You put me in a group of Greek people, with the exception that I look Asian, I fit right in. In Korea, I stick out like a sore thumb." Dong-ju has grown up tri-culturally. His rare situation offers him the luxury of nationality selection. The participants are a mixture of nationalities but as

Amir put it, “It is a matter of priority.” Often, those “priorities” can be ephemeral, depending on the context. Gabriela’s complex background yielded yet another perspective into how one prioritizes.

I say Peruvian, the thing gets complicated when people ask me where I’m from because then I’m like San Diego. I’m from California, I’m from Peru, I’m from Chile. Where am I from? But when people ask me my nationality I say Peruvian and I’m Italian too, my dad’s side.

Multiple cultures, nationalities and identities, in the case of the twelve interviewees, did not appear to be a point of contention since they all favored their country of birth as compared with their current country of residence. There are various reasons for this phenomenon, given that participants’ statuses in North America vary: one is an international student on a student visa, others are on work visas, have Green Cards or have dual citizenship. One is a diplomat. Despite these reasons and others, clearly, participants displayed affinity toward their country of birth. As former/current international students, some have evolved into having dual citizenship while others have Green Cards. This process is markedly different than that of refugees. Whereas the former is a product of choice, the latter is typically done out of necessity.

The three participants from Saudi Arabia all said that when asked their nationality by a stranger, they often lied and referenced a more liberal Arab country such as Lebanon or Turkey, because of the stigma associated with their country of origin. Omar recalled a fellow student asking him verbatim, “Are you rich?” He responded by saying that he was not. His classmate followed with, “Then how do



you have such a nice car, are you a drug dealer?” Omar, Medina and Abdullah spoke of events like 9/11 that left an indelible mark on people’s perception of their country, however false it may be. Medina used to always say she was from Lebanon but has since rescinded the practice. She now proudly says where she is from because she feels that it opens up intercultural dialogue and dispels myths:

Being from Saudi Arabia and being the person that I am, doing the things that I do, it creates some sort of awareness of what Saudi people can be like and who they can be, I decided to be like an ambassador for my country.

Admittedly, there are some traditions from Saudi Arabia that Medina has not fully maintained in the United States because she thought people would judge her or that she would feel awkward, such as praying five times per day, or wearing the hijab. Correspondingly, Daniela said that many of her friends lie about their nationality because they feel that generally Americans do not accept them. The two specific instances she mentioned were related by her friend from Israel, who felt comfortable in New York but not so when he would travel to different states and her friends from Russia, who perceived female Russians to be highly sexualized by North Americans. Ricardo also said that he generally identified himself as Brazilian, except when crossing the border from Canada to the United States, the only instance where he classified himself as a Canadian, so that he would not be hassled by customs officers. Again, the luxury of making context-specific choices plays an integral role in participants’ abilities to navigate elements of their national identity.

**Imagined communities.** Many respondents stated that they had been exposed to North American culture prior to arriving, thus, did not experience severe

culture shock upon arrival. Though not directly asked, more than half of the participants volunteered that their familiarity with American popular culture came mostly in the form of movies and music videos. Benedict Anderson's (2006) coinage, *imagined communities*, refers predominantly to national contexts; still, the term can be applied to the affective influence movies have on their viewers. The "foreigner" is able to imagine "North American culture" to be a certain way based on Hollywood's portrayal, and adjust their behaviours to align with this imagined community's culture. These seemingly knowable dimensions provide an important element of acculturation. The viewer perceives their position in relation to North American culture, based on its depiction in popular culture. They presume that this knowledge warrants them sufficient familiarity to understand the culture; therefore they think it is their conscious choice, based on this knowledge, to ultimately be part of, or reject the New World culture. Application of Anderson's theory to this study connects to his original usage, as one never meets or knows everyone in the imagined community, in this case, culture, while there is the potential for developing a connection between would-be members. Although respondents eventually become participants in the imagined community, they first enter as voyeurs. This invisible or imagined line of demarcation causes them to feel disconnected from the dominant culture as they seek ways to reap its advantages.

## **Identity**

**The Venn-space.** The overlapping area in the middle of the Venn diagram in this study should not be confused with third space hybridity. Homi Bhabha (1994) warned that to assume the third space is an area where a simple blending of two

identities occurs would be incorrect. According to Bhabha, the third space is not representable. His third space is not what remains constant; on the contrary, it's what is changeable in time and space. This Venn diagram was intended to generate discussion about identity in a non-invasive, free-flowing way. It enabled the emergence of what Freire (1970) termed, *generative themes*. These generative themes are dynamically produced by the interview process because of the participants' abilities to interpret and reconfigure the Venn diagram anyway they want (p. 97). The Venn was labeled according to the country where the participants had spent their childhood and adolescent years on the far left pod and the country where they currently resided on the far right pod. Once these polarities had been established, respondents were asked to create the appropriate ratio of the circles that corresponded with their lived realities. The diagram's standard form was an equal division; both sides were the same size.

Five of the twelve respondents decided to leave the circles equal (fifty/fifty). The others who decided to change the ratio were asked to roughly quantify with a percentage the difference or to redraw the diagram as they saw fit. The remaining seven respondents added size to the side of the Venn diagram that represented where they had spent their childhood and adolescent years. These larger areas ranged in percentage from sixty to ninety percent. None of the participants added size to the side of the diagram which was labeled Toronto or New York, not even those who had spent the majority of their formative years in the English-speaking country where they currently reside. Although they had all attained their degrees and were presently working in the latter identity pod, none identified with it more.

The script, after a discussion about the size of the circles in the Venn, went as follows:

*...list some identity traits in each of the three circles . . . the first circle is to be filled with words that correspond solely with your (country where spent childhood and adolescent years identity), the middle area is for overlap or constants, and the last circle area is your (English speaking country of current residence identity) . . . Any words can be used, adjectives, verbs, nouns and so on. Attempt to use words in the first circle that no longer apply to you here, and in the circle where you currently reside, attempt to use words related to your identity that you previously didn't use or need.*

With little exception, the respondents used words related to family and tradition in the first circle, associated with their country of birth (or where they spent their childhood and adolescent years). Many used the words, *conservative* and *reputation* too, though not all. In the middle area of overlap, the participants always used personality traits such as *loyal*, *honest* and so forth. In the last circle, the one corresponding to their current English speaking country of residence, the answers varied in exact word choice, but mainly were related to being *open-minded* and *outgoing*. The other words used in greatest frequency were: *work*, *networking*, *social* and *friends*. The pattern appears to show that family and tradition are linked; however, they do not permeate borders on the Venn diagram as the participants' personality traits do (see Appendix C for Venn diagrams).

Their current identity, perhaps due to absence of family and tradition in their New World borders, yields seeming antonyms or, substitutions. *Family* is replaced

with *friends* and *networking*, similarly, *tradition* is replaced with *open-minded* and *outgoing*. Irrespective of those words, the essence of who they think they are, adjectives commonly associated with identity and character traits, were regularly found in the overlapping middle area. This would suggest that the core of their identity, which they described with mostly virtues, is unaffected by geographical coordinates. They may negotiate certain necessities, like social bonds or work-related networking, since they cannot rely on established family connections. Nonetheless, the external concessions they make do not change the core constitution of their character.

Noteworthy here, is how the absence of parents/family from their current country of residence allows the participants to keep that part of themselves intact. They are cognizant that they can always go back to that physical and mental place, which may contribute to strengthening their core identity. Schechter and Bayley (2003) illustrate, through various studies, the process of identity formation in relation to language socialization: “as a lifelong process in which those being socialized often, indeed normally, exhibit considerable agency” (p. 6). However, the ability to exert agency, these twelve participants notwithstanding, is not always present. Immigrants and refugees who move to a new country with their families do not necessarily have this same luxury of compartmentalization. Instead, their entire core shifts because they are not able to safeguard features of their cultural identity in their former country. This may be a key element of difference between the two populations.

Based on an icebreaking activity that Sandra Schecter (2013) described she used in her undergraduate classes, participants were requested to select five words they felt represented their core identity. They were to list their five words, in no particular order and with no constraints in terms of types of words chosen. The data were screened for words that contained markers of nationality, language and cultural connotations. Exactly half of participants chose words in these genres. The words chosen were as follows: Argentine, multicultural, Latin, Latin American, atheist, Iranian, Muslim, and Brazilian. Out of the sixty words that were generated collectively by participants, only nine, less than one sixth, had been chosen to explicitly link language, culture and identity in this question about identity.

**Cultural capital.** Ten of the twelve respondents completed at least one post-graduate degree in an American university, half of those at Ivy League schools or the Canadian equivalent. Those participants cited knowing the value of attending world-renowned institutions and working with professors at the top of their fields, from an early age. On this topic, Abdullah voiced a common apprehension among Saudis, that job opportunities were limited and as such, competition played an enormous role in finding meaningful careers. For this reason, being educated abroad offered many advantages to young professionals. Almost all participants went to private elementary and high schools in their country of birth. Of these schools, three participants attended American schools; and the others had more English instructional time than their peers in public schools. Also, with little exemption, their parents, either one or both, were highly educated and instilled in them the common definition of success (education, gainful employment, and so on).

Parts of the theoretical framework of this thesis referenced the models that Pierre Bourdieu (1973) created, and, in particular, his use of the terms *cultural capital* and *habitus*. Participants were not explicitly made aware of this facet of the study's design, yet alluded to it on numerous occasions. Daniela, in response to being asked about her awareness of her "accent," without being prompted, effectively summarized Bourdieu's theory:

I think a lot is family education, which part you're born in, your English will be different. The same goes for Spanish, where you're born, where you're educated, if you hang out with bourgeois kind of people, you know. I think it's a demographic thing; you can really tell where someone's from by their slang, by their accent.

Daniela understood how cultural capital affected one's life trajectory and could apply this understanding to language and the role it played in the complex interplay between language, culture and identity. Many of the participants were tacitly aware that elements of cultural capital separated them from the "average" American. They discussed this in terms of being well-travelled global people, polyglots, using more formal vocabulary than most and having motivation for, and achieving certain business aspirations atypically. Two of the females, Daniela and Gabriela, are entrepreneurs; both categorically affirmed that English was better for business. Cesar's comments coincided with their conviction. He associated success in commerce with English: "It puts you at a huge disadvantage if you're unable to read the Financial Times, the Economist and contracts in English." Basically, in his professional field of commerce, English is the only medium of communication.

Interestingly, two of the five words he used to describe his identity were *ambitious* and *strategic*, coinciding with his career, in addition to *Latin American*, corresponding to his nationality of choice. From Cesar's selections, it is clear that he is in charge of his identity, and that his choices are deliberate, based on his desired lifestyle. Many of the participants moved to North America based on the fragile economies of the countries where they were born, and knew that they had far greater learning and earning potential in North America. From their responses, it would appear that none of them felt forced to leave their country of birth, rather chose, among options, to move for a more prosperous future.

Both Medina and Omar were born in Saudi Arabia. They conveyed their desire to gain as much knowledge and experience in New York as possible. Eventually they want to return to Saudi Arabia and improve the quality of human rights of citizens there. Of the five words used to describe himself, Omar emphasized the term *influence* because he said that he wanted to donate money to charities and bring more equality to his country. He is employed at a globally reputed non-governmental organization whose mission it is to improve human rights around the world. The learning acquired through this organization has given him the motivation and ability to contribute to similar efforts in Saudi Arabia.

Correspondingly, Medina wants to learn what the latest studies show is required of facilities to best meet the needs of learners with autism and to contribute to research in this field, ultimately opening her own center for children with autism in Saudi Arabia. She said that although she loved New York and could continue to live there forever, her country needed her more, so her temporary residence was to



serve a greater purpose. Participants are astutely aware of their privileged position as global citizens, and have not taken the opportunities they have been privileged to acquire lightly.

**Neither here nor there.** Participants acknowledged sentiments, voiced by their family and peers, implying that they had changed since leaving their country of birth. Several narratives from participants suggested these subtle transformations when they returned to visit their country of birth. An illustration of this was that Amir believed that his prioritizing Iranian nationality over Canadian was based on a sense of feeling at home: “The reason why I say Iranian is because I never really felt that Canada is my home the way that I felt Iran was my home.” Yet, Amir had spent the greater part of his adult life in Canada. Moreover, he avowed that he now found it difficult to interact with his peers in Iran on many levels because his English proficiency had surmounted his knowledge of Farsi. When language becomes the vehicle for expression of thought, this creates a divide from those who communicate their thinking in different languages.

In the same vein as Amir, Luciano acknowledged that, “I’m not really an Argentine, Argentine kind of guy.” To illustrate the idea that he differed from the typical Argentinian in certain ways, he recounted an incident where he went for coffee with his friend while visiting Argentina and left his iPhone on the table when he got up to use the facilities. His friend was shocked and warned him to take the device with him because it would surely be stolen. His friend had reminded him of the link between place and context-specific actions. This is what prompted Luciano to observe that, “Language and economic reality are tied.” Through reminiscence, he

may have felt that his nationality remained Argentine; however, his recent experience did not necessarily substantiate the contemporary Argentine zeitgeist that he now participated in as a guest.

Dong-ju recollected the multiple physical, social and mental adjustments that were required of him when he visited Greece. He observed that these modifications took time and until they surfaced, found those closest to him saying things like, “Wow, you’ve changed, you’re so American now.” These types of comments exasperated him because he felt he was constantly acclimatizing himself to his environment and what he did never seemed to be enough. He went on to say that assimilation was done out of necessity and that he believed it was part of human nature, “a survival skill.” Likewise, Daniela who lives between Spain and the United States equally, maintained that often her division of time between the two countries can get very confusing: “When I return to Spain sometimes I write to my Spanish friends in English and they think I’m doing it to be snobbish.” She referred to certain phrases in Spanish that her friends used to chastise her for blurring the two linguistic systems. Ricardo said he would be called a “gringo” if he were to abandon his broken Spanish for English when in communication with his Latin American colleagues. It would appear that individuals from non-English-speaking countries wanted to maintain their authenticity and felt resentment toward processes of Americanization.

However, the fact remained that participants, after having spent so many years abroad, are changed. Often, they feel these transformations have improved their quality of life, as will be discussed later. However, the people whom they leave

behind may not necessarily agree with this assessment of the effects of these transformations. This creates a contradiction because participants leave their countries of birth to enhance their lives; nonetheless, the benefits of improvements that they acknowledge are not always seen as relevant in their country of origin.

**Assimilation.** “Nobody actually belongs. It’s a mix of everything.” Daniela’s feelings toward the city of New York could easily apply to Toronto for international people. Correspondingly, assimilation becomes more accessible if “nobody belongs.” According to participants, the word itself, *assimilation*, regularly generates visceral reactions. Amir resisted using the word entirely; his preference was to discuss *integration*. Jose, too, believed that assimilation as an end goal was not necessary, rather a process occurring naturally when someone lives somewhere long enough, consistent with Amir’s alternate terminology. The preponderance of participants disagreed with them. They were cognizant of the changes they had made and would continue to make, and felt that these changes were “necessary” for survival rather than optional. According to Gabriela, “I think it’s necessary, once you choose to live somewhere. I kind of feel like you have to do a little bit in order to succeed in that place. It’s really hard to succeed when you keep the culture of a different place.” Ricardo’s answer was similar, although qualified by mention of Canada’s multiculturalism. “It’s very necessary to adapt, but in Canada there’s this concept of multiculturalism and I see a lot of people from different countries that keep a lot of their habits or cultural aspects which is very interesting. I think overall people need to try to make an effort to adapt.” In his answers, Dong-ju stated that he considered assimilation to be in human nature; still, he had to make an effort to branch out and

diversify his social network when he moved to attend university in Boston from Athens. "Boston is a melting pot, cliquy people hang out with their own ethnicity. What the hell is the point? Make yourself uncomfortable and meet other cultures. I resented the fact that Koreans hung out with only Koreans." Dong-ju went on to say that he purposely avoided the Korean groups in and outside of class because he felt that having travelled so far, academics was not the only learning he had intended to broaden, although he did not eschew Greek classmates. Conversely, Jose said that he had a lot of friends from Argentina and South America whom he probably would not be friends with if it were not for the Spanish language that they shared. Nonetheless, their points fit in with Ricardo's remarks indicating that a strong resistance to assimilation ultimately could stunt broader development.

According to these twelve participants, it is important to embrace diversity, which can be done while still maintaining and often improving their unique identity. The key here is that participants chose the rules of engagement themselves, and that this agency has been a key part of their success. As Jonas put it, "I definitely gotta live by the rules, social expectations, if I can feel comfortable with that. I try to adapt fast, I try to fit in fast." Jonas knows that to sustain gainful employment he must observe the limits, but only those he is comfortable with. He understands that he has choices, and he makes these consciously to serve his goals in life. What appears to be happening is that participants avoid taking cultural differences personally, as a direct attack on their identity. Instead, they are able to compartmentalize and tailor their interactions, a practice that is predominant, judging from the most repeated phrase in the transcripts- "it depends."

**Culture clash.** The participants have had more exposure to internationality than the general populace; thus, culture clash was not as fundamental to their hybridity as initially assumed by the researcher. In fact, they found culture clash to be interesting, an opportunity for growth, and did not deem the differences they observed as detrimental to their development. Amir said that rather than a clash, which was too harsh, he viewed incongruences as phenomena he could not “reconcile” with his own culture. Luciano captured the overall sentiment of many participants’ answers to the question when he said, “I think culture clash is a quintessential characteristic of a globalized world . . . I like it . . . it’s important to the formation of knowledge and learning.” Even though some participants cited phenomena that, as Amir rephrased it, could not be reconciled with their own culture, those did not appear to faze them or interfere with their progress. Cesar noticed that people in America “did not smile the way they did in Venezuela” and he characterized this as “coldness!” This notion carried to Omar’s acuity that in Saudi Arabia people made friends with one another simply for companionship, whereas he found that Americans did so to get something out of someone else; hence, his preference to associate himself with non-native speakers of English in his spare time. Daniela noticed this too, that North American people were more aggressive and self-serving, but she did not mind because when she returned to Barcelona those skills were useful for her business. They would give her an edge over other Spaniards. Of this experience Daniela said, “It’s good to be more of a hustler in life, especially in these days . . . so I think it’s not that I lose my identity, I improve it.” Dong-ju, Jose, Cesar and Ricardo found American/Canadian culture to be more

formal, and that deadlines were more rigid than in their countries of origin. Dinner was eaten earlier, and timelines were generally fixed. Cesar was not upset about these changes:

I live here and I like it. And now I'm on time whereas before I was never on time. I am more concise, I speak less. I am not as verbose as I would have been in Spanish had I stayed in Venezuela my whole life.

Dong-ju said that he learned these differences quickly for survival and "not make a fool of myself." Dong-ju was very frank about the difficulties he faced adjusting to American culture. He was emphatic in his response when asked if he experienced culture shock.

It happens all the time, all the time! A lot of internal conflicts that kind of loom in your head, a lot of frustration, it's not easy. So this is where it comes down to the individual to take these difficulties or challenges and embrace them. Use it to your advantage.

Dong-ju articulated a common thread- that he and the others eschew conflict by manipulating situations, by being open to new experiences and recognizing that if one saw them as opportunities, then they could be controlled, not controlling.

**Speaking volumes.** There were two occasions when participants compared an English text to the translation in another language, and came up with opposite conclusions. Jonas spent time as a dive instructor in Thailand. While there he had access to the dive manuals in several languages for the multi-lingual tourists. He compared the English and German versions of the manual. Jonas said that the German version was one-third of the size of the English manual. Of this observation

he supposed, “English has so many more words you can express yourself with, so I make use of that, I take advantage of that.” Jonas had decided that English provided him with a larger vocabulary, consequently, greater prospects to communicate. In direct contrast to Jonas’ experience was a Brazilian joke recalled by Ricardo about the Bible being just one volume in English, two volumes in Portuguese and three in Spanish. He used this anecdote to illustrate his point that, “English is very precise, very concise . . . I think this has to do a lot with the way you think. So English speakers are typically more straightforward, more objective than Latin in general.” Still, both participants acknowledged English’s ability to transform their communication to beneficial effects. Jonas saw it as fortuitous that he now had more tools with which to articulate his thoughts. Ricardo saw it as an opportunity to be more concise, an asset in his workplace that allowed him to focus on efficiency in business interactions. They both perceived this newfound hybridity as an instrument that they were in control of, and since it was seen to bring about improvements in their abilities, they embraced these changes.

## Chapter Five

### Discussion and Conclusions

#### Summary of Research Findings

**The ubiquity of English.** ESL teachers instill the concept of an English proper into their learners. Through instruction, learners believe that with practice and maintenance of proper grammar, native-like fluency is attainable, if not preferable. Associating native speakers with an English proper creates a rigid binary that has the potential to *otherize* those who are not native-speakers of English. The majority of respondents said that grammar was tethered to native speaker status. Respondents rated their own English proficiency highly; yet, they did not consider themselves native speakers of English, despite some having been educated in English-only contexts their entire lives. If participants believe that grammar is the marker of English proper, and that their grammar is above average, then why is the gate to native speaker status still closed to these people?

Canagarajah's (2007) characterization of the English used internationally, lingua franca English, has not yet trickled down into mainstream classrooms. Instead, many schools function within a paradoxical system; English communication is concurrently a pathway and a gate. It is essential that teachers of English as a second language begin to interrogate the native/non-native speaker dichotomy by openly discussing the fallacy of such a concept with learners. A major paradigm shift is required to bring LFE to the teaching and learning forefront. The goal of learners and teachers of ESL should not be native-like fluency; rather it should be effective communication in LFE.



Participants thought that English was the most practical and widely spoken language in the world, concluding that it was the pinnacle of a linguistic hierarchy they were certain existed. Few participants made tacit references to the enormous power that the English language has had over their lives; it appears to be unquestionably ubiquitous. Perhaps, like whiteness for race, English is unmarked.

The English language has the potential to be so pervasive that learners cannot separate themselves from the language. Instead of their initial perception of the English language as a tool for their discretionary use, they ultimately become a tool in its proliferation. With the attainment of higher education in English, learners' thoughts become bound to the language and implicit practices contained within its frames of reference. Furthermore, subsequent to many years of academic study in English, participants may have difficulties expressing academic thoughts in their first language at the same level that they can in English. Indeed, some responses indicated participants' detachment from their previous linguistic realities in that they could no longer engage important concepts in their lives (e.g., democracy) in their first language. Their thoughts, especially academic identifications, are no longer at par in their first language. These disparities create discord. Respondents' motivation to move to an English-speaking country for improvement in education and employment is not necessarily seen as progressive within the spaces they formerly occupied.

**Identity as liminal.** The aforementioned language imbalance ultimately renders participants neither wholly part of either culture; rather, their identities are hybridized. This hybridized third space is wrought with internal and external

conflict. While the conditions that cause and, conversely, can prevent first language atrophy are a subject unto themselves, this study demonstrates clearly that learners fundamentally change once they exceed a certain threshold in an English-only environment. Participants acclimatized themselves because they felt that they needed to, in order to survive and ultimately thrive. However, access to the new English-centered society remained elusive to them. If and when respondents returned to their country of birth, many would become alienated for having developed in a way that is different than those who did not leave. Once again, belonging, for international people, is ephemeral. Still, these twelve participants' identities appear to be strong enough to withstand external variability.

The Venn diagram utilized in this study showed that the participants had a solid understanding of their core values, which remained unchanged. Upon moving, respondents' social bonds transformed due to distance from familial connections into more friends-based networks. In addition, the Venn diagram showed that their previously traditional mindset became more liberal (see Appendix C). These changes were as a result of new experiences and a multicultural society. Respondents had to expand their knowledge and beliefs in order to acculturate to the new place they were living in and the culture they associated with the language they had now adopted as their primary language. At the same time, participants' responses indicated that they were able to compartmentalize and safeguard elements of core identity that facilitated conscious choices in third space negotiations. More time with these participants would be required to understand

how exactly they made decisions about which aspects of their identities they wish to retain as core and which were open to mutate.

None of the participants added size to the circle on the Venn diagram that corresponded with Toronto or New York. This means that half, or less than half, of respondents' identities was in these cities; the remainder was in their country of birth. Obviously, one's country of birth holds special significance for their understandings of themselves.

According to participants, assimilation was seen as *integration* and culture clash was viewed as *irreconcilable differences*. Neither practice was seen as unilaterally negative. Rather, participants saw these processes as instruments to opening doors that could be used at their discretion and to their advantage. In viewing third space negotiations as opportunities for growth, development, and diversification, participants were keen to engage, instead of resisting, the flow of their lives in English. Had they perceived these processes as infringements to their fundamental beliefs and identities, they may have been resistant. Resistance would have likely yielded less than favorable results in academia and employment. The elements of choice and agency appear to be essential in the building and maintenance of a core identity, while navigating new cultural and linguistic territory.

It can be concluded that the demarcation between a native speaker and a non-native speaker of English extends beyond an audible dialect. Culturally, participants preferred the company of non-native speakers of English, many of whom were not linguistically similar to themselves. Languages and cultures are

deeply connected. Still, many of those on the periphery of the English language are able to relate to one another, just not always to native speakers of English. This would indicate that global awareness and transnationalism are not only competencies essential to those who migrate to English speaking cosmopolitan cities. Transnationalism is necessary for the general population as well, enabling the promotion of equity and achievement in all areas.

Another clear finding is that participants' extensive travel and exposure to diverse cultural situations have helped them to develop the ability to read nuanced cultural behaviors and adjust themselves accordingly.

Although none of the participants identified themselves to be outsiders of the dominant culture, only two tentatively labeled themselves insiders. The other ten, even those who are citizens of Canada or the United States, did not classify themselves as insiders, even though, according to their responses, they had insider knowledge. They seemed to have an aversion to pinning down their status in this manner, preferring to remain in-between. Their hybridity may inhibit pure insider status but it is not what puts them in an in-between state. Participants' concept of belonging is complex; however, it is clear that they see themselves as the purveyors of the parameters of their inclusion. According to their elicitations, aside from lacking birthright, there were times when they did not want to be part of the dominant culture so that they could preserve their own unique cultural identities. They did not equate being an insider with a need to assimilate; instead, they saw the two as separate entities. Notably, they do not feel socially errant, nor that the insider gate is closed off to them; they believe it is a revolving door, one they can walk in

and out of by free will. This provision is elemental to discerning how participants can compartmentalize their identity components, to maintain a balance that they are satisfied is authentic. In this manner, international students exert agency and ownership over their nationality; their status is not prescribed *to* them. Thinking that they are not insiders because of a choice they made is qualitatively different from being excluded, especially as concerns the formation and development of a core identity.

**Identity as a vehicle for self-advancement.** Functionally, participants' engagements with identity marked behaviours were in English. This was in stark contrast to their preference of identification with the language from their country of birth. Respondents seemed unaware that their perceptions of themselves and their real-time engagements did not necessarily coincide.

Language and nationality are connected. Yet, participants evince affinity solely to their country of birth. Why are these connections not negotiated similarly once English becomes their main language of communication? Participants' self-identification with nationality and language, regardless of dual citizenship among other factors, remains with their country of birth. Functionally, the English language manifests in identity marked instances, but respondents' perceptions are incongruent with their real lives. Participants did not differentiate their affinity to a language from the reality of how and when they used the language. Perhaps it was intentional, or conceivably, they are not cognizant of this imbalance between real-time language and identity.

By virtue of participants' knowledge about the culture system in which they currently find themselves, they are able to adjust in order to succeed. The participants who initially lied about where they were from to avoid racism, ultimately preferred to engage in cultural dialogue over the practice of avoidance. As awkward and difficult as it may be to engage in intercultural communication, these were not opportunities that participants abjured, rather they embraced them. Respondents have come to understand that in areas of divergence exists opportunity for growth. It is these conflicted third spaces where real hybridity is born; and understandings of how things that are separate occur more readily in a third realm.

### **Implications for Pedagogic Practice**

Deriving the implications of my study's findings for pedagogic practice with respect to immigrant and refugee demographics has been more complex than anticipated, in large part because there exists a discrepancy of power allocations between these two groups and the international students I worked with in this study.

Notwithstanding, when considering Lev Vygotsky's (1978) *zone of proximal development* in relation to agency, teachers can accommodate some of the provisions for cultural capital for their learners by enlisting classroom practices that cultivate agency. In their book, *Multilingual Education in Practice: Using Diversity as a Resource*, Sandra R. Schecter and Jim Cummins (2003) illustrate some practices that enable negotiations of connections between language, culture and identity to learners' advantage. These practices allow ELL students a voice in producing their

classroom cultures, and in converting these spaces into ones where the omnipresence of English is not taken for granted.

Expanding the corpus of English teaching practices beyond the native/non-native speaker dichotomy to foster third space identity requires privileging praxes of equity from the start of novice teachers' professional careers. Naomi Norquay and Marian Robertson-Baghel (2011) conducted a longitudinal study querying new teachers' inclusion of equity in their teaching practice after having learned about such practices in their pre-service faculty of education programs. The researchers found a direct link between what the teachers had learned in their courses and how that knowledge penetrated their pedagogical actions. Summarizing the link between the transfer of equitable practices in teacher education and teaching, they conclude by asserting that:

It was their responses in the everyday work of teaching, informed by their new and evolving pedagogy, rather than ministry mandated policy that shaped their actions. This research reinforces the position that teachers need to, and are able to, see teaching as a pedagogical activity rather than teaching as curriculum delivery. We need to teach teacher candidates to recognize when they are summoned by others to advocate. We need to give them permission to choose to advocate and to be cognizant of the standpoint from which they do so. We recognize the importance of exploring the intricacies of building professional relationships as well as networking and community building skills, so that as beginning teachers they can form alliances that will make their advocacy endeavours less risky and more effective. (p. 80)

## **Theoretical Implications**

Interestingly, participants in my study appeared to adhere to the third category of relationship between identity, culture and language identified by Schechter (in press) as falling within a “participatory/relational” perspective. They were motivated to articulate their own personal identities and to situate these in the activities they carried out and the persons they carried them out in the presence of. In chameleonic fashion, they constantly reconfigured themselves depending on their environments, using the elasticity of the relationship between language, culture and identity and language choice itself to inscribe and re-inscribe their hybridized identities. This theoretical finding underscores the crucial role of agency in determining the relationships among these concepts for those who have choice or, more importantly, have the perception of having choice.

## **Limitations and Future Research**

With regard to the study’s limitations: In terms of gender distribution, there were more males than females, which limits the gender balance, and may have skewed the study’s findings. Also, because of the limited scope of the study, there was a circumscribed number of countries where the participants were from.

The participants were not all citizens of either Canada or the United States. Their statuses ranged from citizens, Green Card holders, work visas, international student visas and one diplomat. These disparities may have impacted their perceptions of belonging and national affinity.

The questions required participants to be metacognitive about their actions in real-time, which may have yielded inaccuracies because they were reliant on



memory. A more reliable method to elicit data regarding language choice in identity marked situations would have been participant observation. In further research, a combination of both would generate more comprehensive findings. As well, observations in the form of a reflective journal about life in the third space, documenting the interplay of language and culture, could yield greater understanding.

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## Appendix A

### Interview Protocol

1. Name
2. Age
3. Place of birth
4. Language(s) spoken (indicate proficiency)
5. Place(s) of education and language of education (ratio if in more than one language) How did you feel about learning English as a child? Do you still feel this way?
6. Parent(s)' highest level of educational attainment  
(Can you tell me about your parent(s)' education and career(s))
7. Language(s) spoken in the home growing up
8. Could you describe your motivation to study and/or work in an English speaking country? (corresponding age of move)
9. (If at all) How often do you go back to your "home" country (duration of stay)?
10. What language do you function in when interacting with popular culture and social media? Is this intentional or situational?
11. Do you travel? If so can you describe the language(s) that you most often communicate in when you're in a non-English speaking country?
12. When people ask you your nationality what do you say? Why do you say this one and not the other one? What factors/criteria do you consider when ascribing (assigning) a nationality to yourself or others?

13. Do you have a language that you feel is more closely tied to your identity? If so, what is it and why?
14. What are your thoughts on a *native speaker* of English? Do you believe there is an “appropriate” way to speak English? Why or why not?
15. Would you say that you are a native speaker of English? How would you qualify your level of English (*from 10 = perfect to 1 = I don't speak English at all*) where would you rate your level of fluency on a scale of 1-10?
16. Do you perceive yourself to have an “accent” in English, how about \_\_\_\_\_ (other language(s) spoken) Do you think others perceive you as having an “accent?” How do you know?
17. Do you feel affinity (you like hearing it more) toward native speakers of English?
18. Are your friends/colleagues/ people you interact with mostly native speakers of English? Do you think your friends' English status in relation to yours is coincidental? Purposeful?
19. What language do you use to express \_\_\_\_\_ in? <emotions, private matters, anger, counting, directions, work related> (tone, hand gestures, duration)
20. (If any) can you describe your experiences with conflicting cultural and/or linguistic practices? Have there been areas of clash or incongruence (difference)? (culture shock)
21. What are your thoughts on the concept of cultural (linguistic) assimilation?
22. (If any at all) do you think there is a linguistic hierarchy (unequal power relations) between languages? Could you explain this?

23. (In the U.S. or Canada) would you consider yourself to be an insider?

Outsider? Or somewhere in-between? Explain your classification of your perceived place in society in relation to dominant Canadian/U.S. culture.

## Section 2: Unstructured drawing, writing (identity)

5 words that describe you:

Please select only 5 words to describe yourself (can you tell me about your choices?

What kinds of words made the short list? Can you tell me about what words didn't make it on the list and why?).

Venn Diagram:

You may feel that you do not identify with the circles being divided in this way; if so, tell me and we can change their sizes. Perhaps the diagram does not represent you at all. Please don't comply with my diagram division if you do not feel like it's accurate for you, feel free to draw your own, change it in any way, or ignore it entirely.

Three concentric circles are all evenly sized at the top of the page. If these circles were to represent you, can you imagine that the one to the left is your identity in \_\_\_\_\_ language (corresponding with the city/country you grew up in), the one in the middle is your hybrid self and the one on the right represents your English (city/country currently living in) identity.

Would you say the size of the circles (an equal division) is accurate for you? If not, and you believe they should be different sizes, tell me how they can be resized to reflect accuracy for you (what side should be bigger, what should be smaller?).



List some identity traits in each of the three circles . . . the first circle is to be filled with words that correspond solely with your (country/city/language where spent childhood and adolescent years identity), the middle area is for overlap or constants, your hybrid self, and the last circle area is your (English speaking country of current residence identity) . . . Any words can be used, adjectives, verbs, nouns and so on. Attempt to use words in the first circle that no longer apply to you here, and in the circle where you currently reside, attempt to use words related to your identity that you previously didn't use or need.

VENN DIAGRAM ( )

## Appendix B

### Informed Consent Form

**Study Name:** The native speaker as an othering construct: Negotiating a hybrid, third space identity within a binary framework

**Researcher:** Maria Merecoulias, Graduate Student, Faculty of Education, York University

***Purpose of the research:***

This research is being undertaken for the completion of a master's thesis. The purpose of this study is to examine the experiences of individuals who are born outside of the English speaking country which they currently reside in. Specifically, I am interested in examining these people's perceptions of themselves in relation to the English language and their views on native speakers. Secondly, I wish to explore their understanding of their negotiation of Homi Bhabha's theoretical third space within these experiences.

***What you will be asked to do in the research:***

The interview will consist of approximately 25 questions regarding your experiences and perceptions of the English language and if/how they have shaped your identity. There will also be an interactive graphic organizer that you will be verbally guided through. The estimated time that will be needed to complete this interview will be approximately thirty minutes to an hour. After the interview is conducted, the data generated will then be analyzed and reported as a research study for a master's thesis.

***Risks and discomforts:***

There are no directly foreseeable risks to you as a result of your participation in this research.

***Benefits of the research and benefits to you:***

The benefits of participating in this research study will allow for further understanding into the concept of the native speaker, its effects on non-native speakers and the negotiation of their identities in an English speaking environment. Enabling a greater understanding, through different perspectives, of the complex relationship between language and identity.

***Voluntary participation and withdrawal from the study:***

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You have the right to withdraw, not answer questions and terminate participation at any time without prejudice. Upon withdrawal from the study, all associated data collected will be immediately destroyed whenever possible. Your decision not to volunteer will not influence the nature of the ongoing relationship you may have with the researcher or the nature of your relationship with York University either now, nor in the future.

**Confidentiality:**

All information you supply will be held in confidence and your name will not appear in any report or publication of the research. I will use pseudonyms to refer to you and any persons to whom you may refer. The only place that your name will be written down is here on this consent form. This form will be kept in a secure area in a locked filing cabinet along with the other data collected, that only I will have access to the key. The data from this interview will be stored for up to ten years, as it maybe used for a PhD dissertation in the future. Confidentiality will be maintained to the fullest extent possible by law. At the end of the retention period, data will be shredded and deleted.

**Questions about the research:**

If you have any questions about the research or your role in this study please contact me or my professor using the contact information provided below. If you have any ethical concerns regarding the research or about your rights as a participant in the study, please contact the Sr. Manager & Policy Advisor for the Office of Research Ethics, 5<sup>th</sup> Floor, Kaneff Tower, York University, telephone: 416-736-5914 or [acollins@yorku.ca](mailto:acollins@yorku.ca)

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This research has been reviewed and approved for compliance to research ethics protocols by the Human Participants Review Subcommittee (HPRC) of York University. If you have any ethical concerns regarding the research or about your rights as a participant in the study, please contact the *Graduate Program in Education* at the following telephone number: 416-736-5018 or *the Manager, Office of Research Ethics York University, 309 York Lanes, 416-736-5914.*

**Legal rights and signatures:**

I \_\_\_\_\_ consent to participation in *The native speaker as an othering construct: Negotiating a hybrid, third space identity within a binary framework* conducted by Maria Merecoulias. I have understood the nature of this project and wish to participate. I am not waiving any of my legal rights by signing his form. My signature below indicates my consent.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_  
Participant

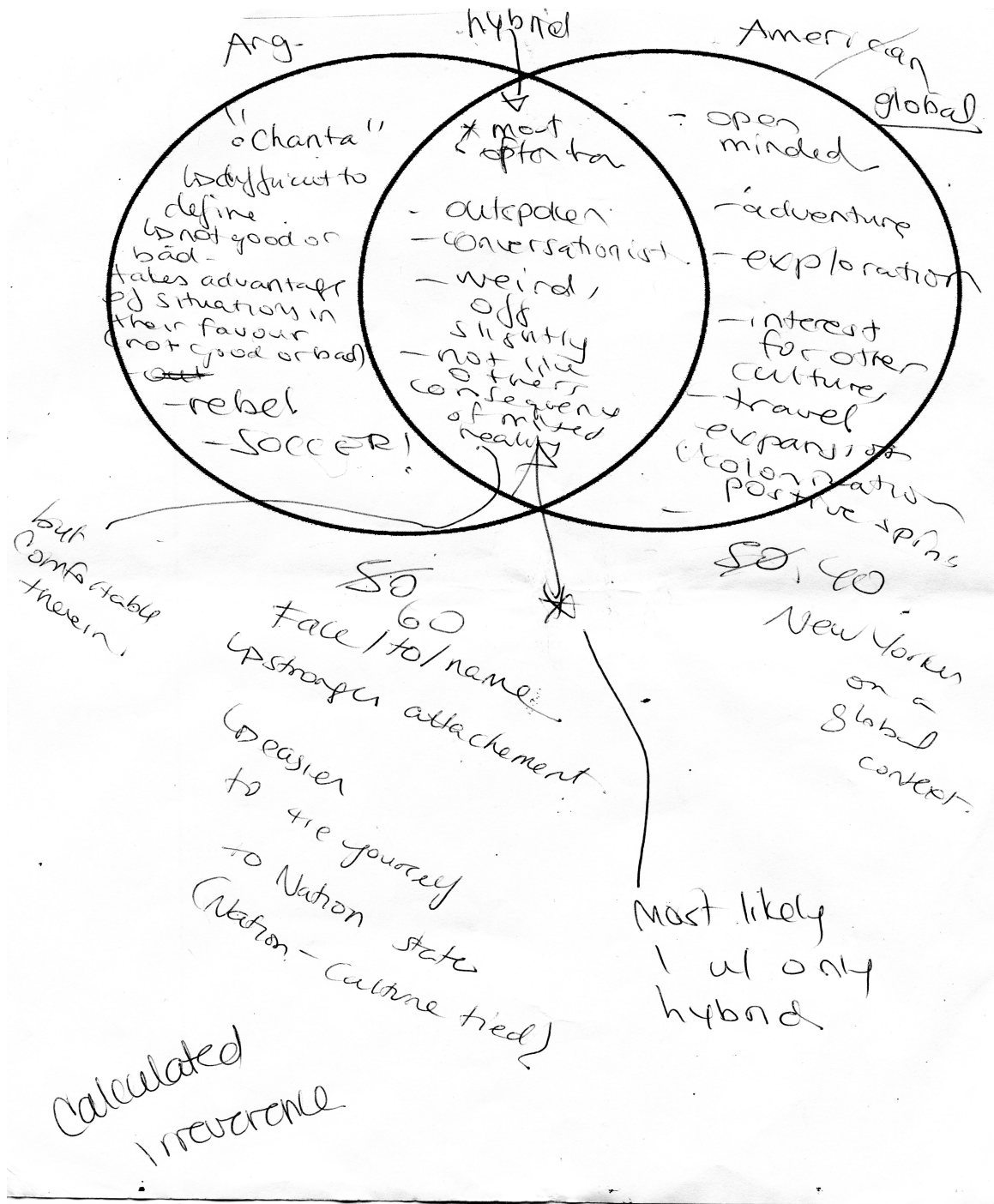
Date \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_  
Principal Investigator

Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix C

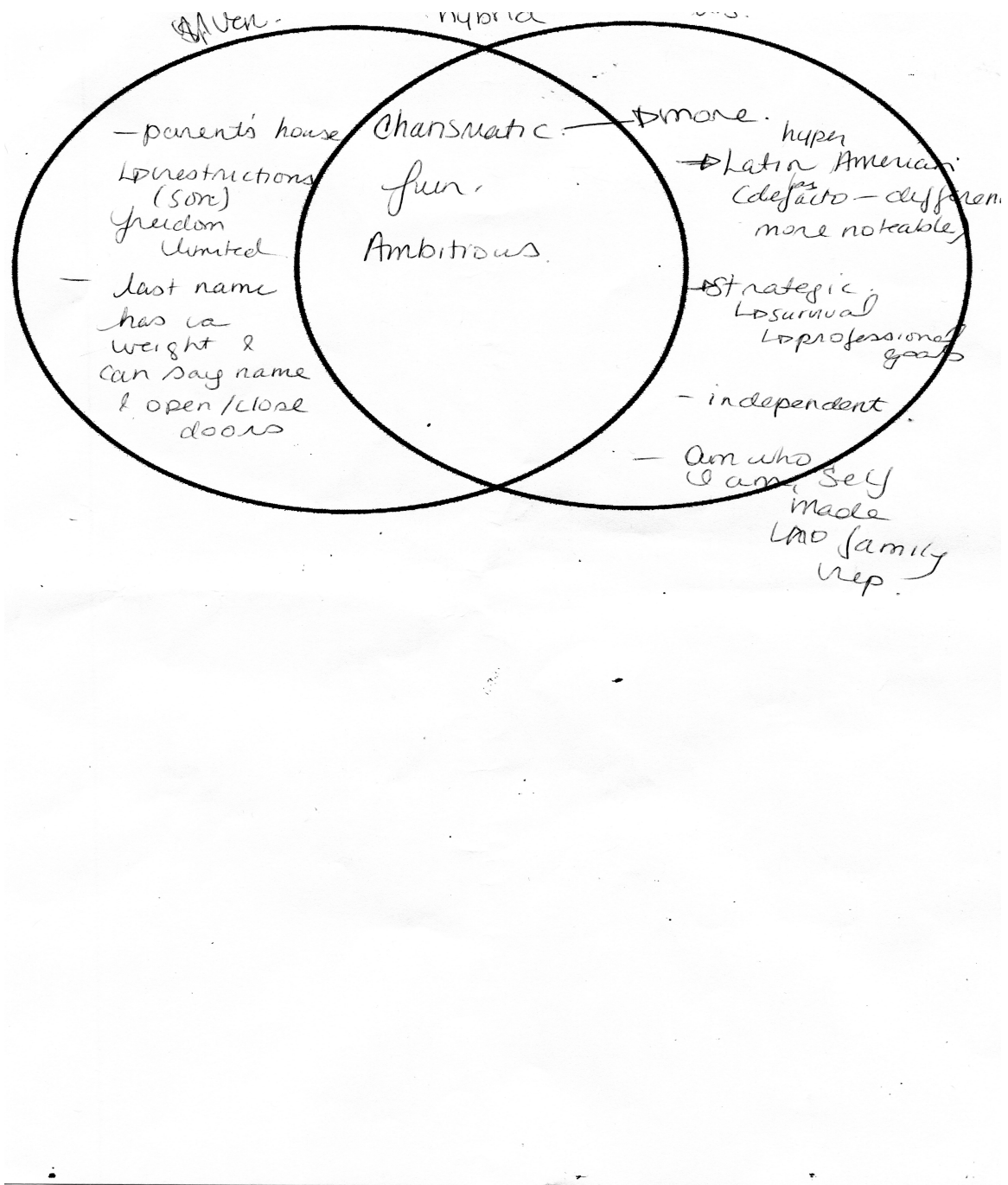
## Venn Diagram Samples



Luciano's Venn Diagram

## Appendix C

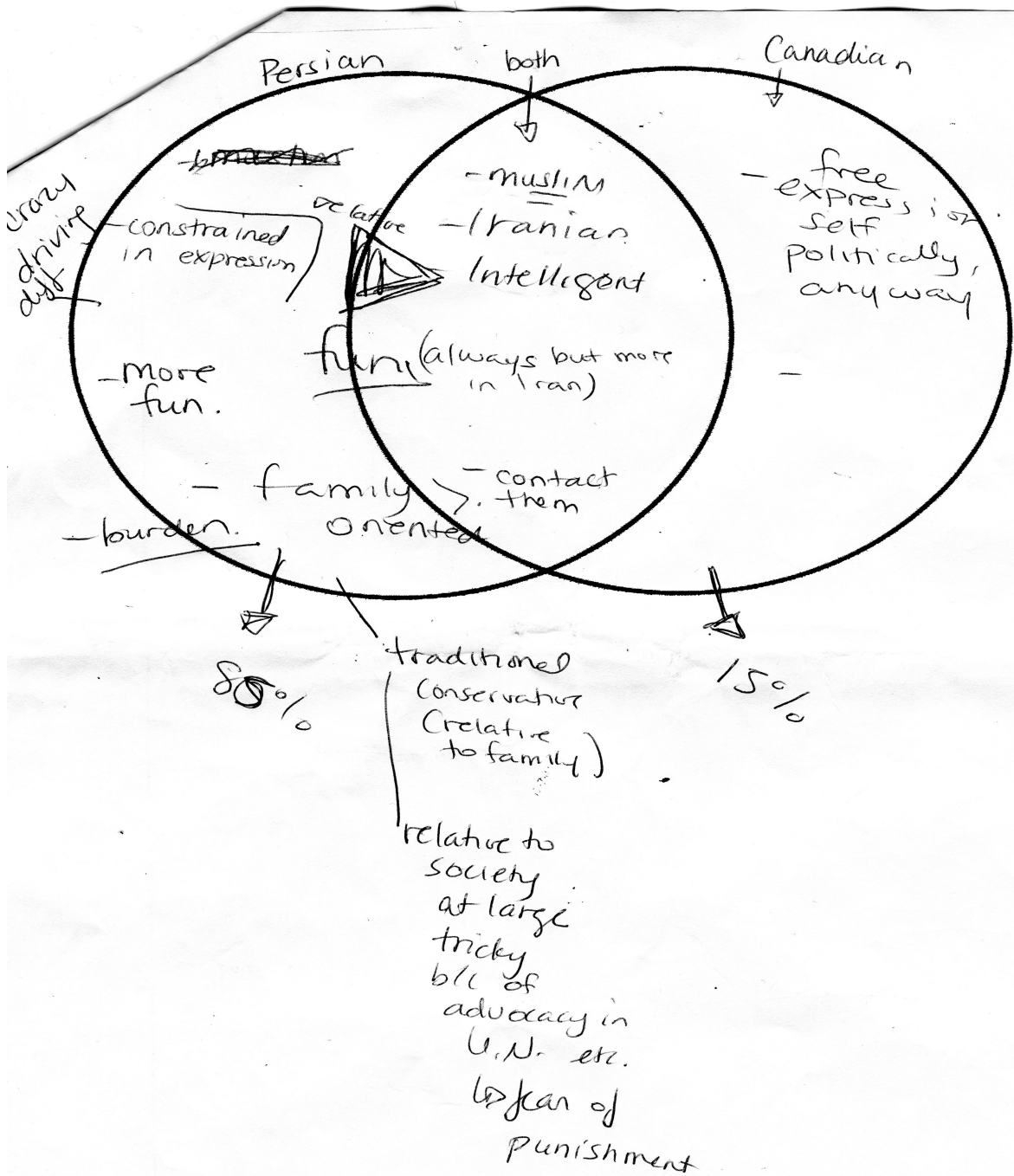
## Venn Diagram Samples



Cesar's Venn Diagram

## Appendix C

## Venn Diagram Samples



Amir's Venn Diagram