


4-2018

# Linguistic Interactions of Spanish Speaking Mexican American Families

Adelfio J. Garcia

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LINGUISTIC INTERACTIONS OF SPANISH SPEAKING MEXICAN AMERICAN  
FAMILIES

Adelfio J. Garcia

Reading and Language Doctoral Program

Submitted in partial fulfillment

Of the requirement of

Doctor of Education

National College of Education

National-Louis University

June 2018

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## Abstract

This study explored the bilingual linguistic interactions in Mexican families and their impact on children's language and literacy development. This qualitative study gathered data using different methods, namely, interviews, direct observations, participant observation, and physical artifacts to examine parents' perceptions of their own educational path in comparison to their children's educational path in an American school system, together with their daily linguistic interactions in various social contexts, and the features, themes and roles of linguistic interactions participants. Study results assisted in gaining deeper understanding of daily conversations happening in different social contexts and their impact on the language and literacy of children of the participating families. Implications are provided for researchers, classroom teachers, bilingual teachers, professional developers, and community agencies serving Latinx communities in the construction of curriculum and deepening their understandings of Latinx families. Additionally, implications for Latinx families' understanding of their own parenting are discussed.

## Acknowledgements

It is an honor to express my deepest appreciation to my dissertation chair and advisor, Dr. Sophie Degener, who guided, supported, and lifted me through this study. Her cultivating encouragement and relentless belief in my capabilities made this life-changing venture a reality. Also, I am beyond privileged to have the opportunity to learn, interact and consult with her during my doctoral studies. I would like to thank my dissertation committee members Dr. Donna Ogle, Dr. Terry Jo Smith, and Dr. Ruth Quiroa for their valuable time and meaningful insights that kept me reflecting and grounded through the writing of this dissertation. I am also grateful to Dr. Susan McMahon for her valuable and honest feedback during the doctoral program and mainly the brainstorming phase of this dissertation. I am thankful to Maura Bradshaw for her guidance in editing my work through this process. A special thanks to my close friend Dr. Debra Gurvitz for cheerleading the path of this doctoral program and dissertation study.

I also extend my infinite gratitude for the participating families whose contributions shaped the richness of this study. I am very appreciative of their generosity in opening the doors and hearts to make my study a learning experience. I would like to thank the friends of the participating families that were present during the capturing of data in several social contexts. I hope that the results and recommendations are of a value to their childrearing.

I would like to thank my family and friends who were there for me in many supportive ways. I am truly blessed to have been raised by proud Mexican parents who instilled their lifelong values in me and constantly believed that their children could accomplish their dreams. My deepest appreciation to my sisters Araceli, Angelica, and Elizabeth, and to my brothers Arturo, Moises and Edgar for their inspiration and unlimited encouragement. Without you and your unconditional love, I have not have become what I set out to be in my life.

Lastly, I dedicate this work to all the women that have shaped my life in one way or another. I learn so much about how valuable women are to our society, to our children, and to our future. The future of this world depends mostly on women who devote their lives to raise, inspire, guide, and shape children and the society at large.

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## Chapter One

### Introduction

My interest in exploring daily narratives in the ecology of Mexican American homes in urban areas of the United States evolved from my work as an educator. Throughout my professional career as an educator, I had the privilege of serving students of Mexican descent, and their families in different capacities. My first encounter was in a school district near a large urban region where children and families of different ethnicities resided. At this time, I had the opportunity to work in a large school district with a high percentage of English Language Learners (ELLs). There, my professional path led me to become an instructional leader of a school with a 96 % of ELLs all of Mexican descent. Both school systems in which I served as a teacher and instructional leader implemented reading basals and workbooks (English and Spanish), which were expected to be followed with fidelity. As I continued serving students in different capacities, I then secured an instructional leadership position, in which I learned that educators with strong connections to students and parents make the most impact on students' educational paths. Therefore, I became convinced that exploring the daily narratives of families and using them to inform curriculum and instruction would warrant success for children, and especially those of Mexican descent.

Through my tenure as an instructional leader, I was responsible for the education of children, and my commitment to offering a solid education was evident as soon as children entered the school building. At this time, it was my primary goal to foster a place where education is provided with devotion and attentiveness to every child's needs. In evaluating the necessary pillars of support for well-rounded education, I observed that parental knowledge and connections to the community at this particular school needed to be enhanced. Hence, by

connecting with families and community members, I learned that linking parents and the community to the school enhanced children's language abilities, in addition to their understanding of their culture and traditions, and that this in turn improved their school's instructional pedagogy. I decided to take advantage of parent knowledge and understanding to enhance my professional practice, building instructional capacity and impacting instructional changes. I drew from Alyssa McCabe and colleagues' seminal research (McCabe, Bailey, and Melzi, 2008) as well as that of Luis Moll and his peers (Moll, Amanti, Neff & Gonzales 1992; Moll, 1994) which focused on daily family and community life and how literacy develops in the homes of Mexican American families living in the United States.

Through this literature, I recognized how children develop narrative abilities in the context of conversations they have with significant others, particularly family members (Casper & Melzi, 2008). More importantly, I understood how parent-child conversations influence childhood language acquisition and literacy development, and how such dialog leads children to become socialized in the discourse patterns, beliefs, and values of the community in which they live (Casper & Melzi, 2008). I quickly sensed the disconnection between school's pedagogical philosophies and the literacies children learned at home. For instance, the basal literacy series in use at the time had limited to no stories that could serve as mirrors, reflecting the Mexican American children and their culture (Bishop, 1987). Also, the math series reflected a-one-size-fits all approach, and included themes that our students were unfamiliar with, such as games and activities related to European culture and tradition. Once I was cognizant of this disconnect, I began to contemplate how best to bridge the gap between school's pedagogies and the wealth of knowledge Mexican American children bring from home. I also began strengthening the parental

involvement that was already in place by instituting weekly parent meetings in which parents exhibited high levels of engagement in their children's educational paths.

Along my career path, I encountered numerous families of children from various language backgrounds, and especially those of Mexican descent, who have and continue to impact my instructional philosophy and pedagogy to the highest degree. As a result of my continuous instructional understanding of how to best deliver instruction to Mexican American children, I decided to look at the language development of these children by working closely with their families. At that time, I observed a reduced number of conversations in Mexican American families. I also noticed that their children exhibited conversation patterns that were parallel conversation to their parents'. Therefore, I saw the necessity of going into the homes of my students to observe these conversational patterns further. Sparks (2008) said that exploring narratives in Latinx families can be a means for understanding the language and narrative skills that their children take with them to preschool as they embark on the beginning of their formal educational experience. This is where I began to look for insight into improving the involvement between families and schools for my own educational practices.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Overall, interest in family narrative practices across cultures has increased in the last few decades, and studies from various disciplines have contributed to understanding of the multiple ways in which children across the world develop narrative skills (e.g. Fivush & Haden, 2003; Ochs & Capps, 2001). Despite this interest, scholars such as Eisenberg (1985), Schecter & Bayley (2002), and Torres (1997) have noted that few studies have investigated Latinx families' narrative interactions. This lack of data contrasts with the rising Latinx family demographics in the United States with 17.8% of the U.S. population being of Latinx descent, and 16.7 million

Latinx households in 2016 (U.S. Census Bureau 2017). According to the PEW Research Center (2014), of all Latinx adults in 2012 in the U.S. 49.8% were born in another country, down from a peak of 55% in 2007. Even though the number of foreign-born Latinx adults dropped, a trend that has continued with 34.2% foreign-born living in the country in 2016 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017), the number of U.S.-born Latinx children increased, and is currently almost a quarter, or 24.7%, of U.S. students in kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017). All of this represents a challenge for teachers who receive students whose dominant language is Spanish. Thus, my decision to focus on these children for this study emerges from a real need to provide educators with in-depth information about narrative development in bilingual Spanish speaking children.

There is far too little information about Latinx children's narrative development, despite the fact that research has identified narrative as a critical precursor to literacy development in English-speaking children (e.g. Scarborough, 2001; Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998; Tabors, Snow, & Dickinson, 2001). As mentioned previously, without this information, Latinx children are at a greater risk of having educators misunderstand their unique cultural and linguistic strengths that may be different from their monolingual peers. This is because educators are often unaware of linguistic and cultural aspects of Spanish-speaking Latinx students. Through this exploratory investigation, I began to rethink the instructional methodologies, curricula, and assessments of Latinx children and other linguistic minority children in my own professional practice. Once I acknowledged the existence of such cultural and linguistic differences of these students and their parents, I was motivated professionally to seek solutions to meet the needs of bilingual, Spanish-speaking children attending my school.



## **Literacy as a Social Practice**

Cloud, Genesee, and Hamayan (2009) defined that as ELLs develop proficiency in a new language, their literacy is defined as the ability to read and write fluently and accurately.

Thinking of reading and writing in this way brings to mind skills that are linked directly with written language – word decoding, punctuation, paraphrasing, and knowledge of text genres.

Similarly, Marie Clay (2015) stated that reading is a process by which children can extract a sequence of cues from printed texts and relate these, one to the other, so that they understand the overall message of the text. Both of these definitions address what children do within the walls of the school building under a teacher’s guidance. On the other hand, it is necessary to also form a definition derived from the social and ecological contexts within the family, in order to understand that language and literacy begin at home. Therefore, defining literacy from social theories provides a clearer view of this investigation of bilingual narrative development.

Barton and Hamilton (1998) defined literacy practices “the general cultural ways of utilizing written language which people draw upon in their lives” (p. 6). Hence, Zentella (2005) added that conceptions of literacy as social practice forge connections between reading and writing as well as the social structures in which they are embedded and which they help to shape. Ben-Yosef (2003) noted, “Literacy is about knowledge in general, knowledge that informs the ways in which we make meaning from texts and understand the world around us” (p. 81). Similarly, Cook (2005) identified several out-of-school literacy practices, such as children conversing in the back seat of a car; a child writing in a diary; or parents and their children exchanging ideas, all which facilitate development in reading, writing, and thinking. Considering this research and the support of literacy development in out-of-school contexts, the need for understanding cultural narratives becomes apparent, especially for fostering more comprehensive language education and narrative development in bilingual Spanish-speaking children.

Because language and literacy are not acquired apart from culture (Ochs, 1988), literacy is a cultural product embedded in an ideology that cannot be isolated and treated as neutral or merely technical (Street, 1984). Consequently, Zentella (2005) further exemplified literacy as dynamic, changing to reflect the influence of family; friendship; social and institutional networks; and the social, emotional, economic, and communicative needs of individuals. Historically, literacy has had a primary role in the transmission of morals, disciplines, and social values, and has been linked to social change and action (Graff, 1991). In school settings, a great emphasis has been placed on skills and abilities in learning to read and write in both the first and second languages and little attention to narratives. For example, print-based experiences and abilities, phonological awareness, complex language skills, and background and cultural knowledge are stressed as important (Cloud, Genesee, & Hamayan, 2009). Subsequently, children with strong home language experiences draw from them to facilitate their learning when they enter an academic setting. Thus, Cloud, Genesee, and Hamayan state that narrative is particularly important in the early language and literacy stages because children are familiar with narratives and can relate to them when they become engaged in literacy-based narratives.

However, in regard to Latinx parents' linguistic interactions, these narratives appear to be different from what Mexican children experience in classrooms across the United States. For example, Caspe and Melzi (2008) found that Latinx mothers often show a narrative scaffolding style that creates a sharper distance between the narrator (the expert) and the audience (the novice), such that the narrator has the luxury and freedom to create and weave a story in whatever ways she chooses and sees fit. Also, in personal narratives, mothers adopt the role of a participatory audience and the children take the role of the experts because they have the ownership of the experience. Eisenberg (2002) compared low-income and middle-class Mexican American mothers and found that participating mothers took a passive style by not asking questions directly, but rather provided scaffolding for children to narrate competently with others (family members or siblings), or allowed

children to feel their ownership of the experience to connect with them. In an earlier study, Eisenberg (1985) demonstrated that Mexican American mothers did not guide their children to produce temporally organized narratives, restructure their children's delivery, or engage in the retelling of experiences as much as European American mothers. Additionally, he found that the majority of participating Mexican American mothers in his 2002 study adopted a storytelling, or a story-building style where both were predictive of children's emergent literacy and language abilities (Casper & Melzi, 2008). As a result of using the storytelling or story-building styles, children are more likely to hear rich stories, without interruption, and in turn are exposed to decontextualized language and the phonological skills necessary for transitions to conventional literacy. Therefore, advocating for daily family discourse is pivotal and important to narrative development given that language development begins at a very early age through daily linguistic interactions between children and other family members. Despite the potential such interactions bring to the development of language and literacy for young children, a paucity of research exists which focuses on language practices in Mexican families. Thus, exploring bilingual Spanish linguistic interactions such families can bring awareness about the development of language and literacy of children of Mexican descent in the U.S.

### **Connecting Instructional Literacy with Daily Home Literacy Activities**

During my journey as a doctoral student, instructional leader, and teacher, I have grown increasingly interested in searching for a cultural connection between narrative development in the Spanish language and how this might promote literacy learning. As a result of my own professional experiences, I also noticed that the instructional materials available for children in schools did not meet the needs of all students, so that some may not reach their highest potential given what I believe to be the fact that these instructional materials were not relevant to their culture or language. For instance, the reading series in my school was published by a major book publisher and did include stories from children and families of different cultural and linguistic

backgrounds. But only one or two stories were written by Latin American or Latinx authors and reflected children of like background and regions. Although the stories and their illustrations depicted cultural and traditional aspects of Latinx families and children, such as “Day of the Dead” celebrations, these stories provided minimal explication of the differences that exists for such topics between Latin American countries. In the middle school curriculum, there was little to no mention of the contributions that Latinxs have made to the United States during the different milestones in this country’s evolution. Hence, in the third and fourth grades, when the curricular theme is of one large city in the Midwestern region of the U.S., the curriculum includes little mention of Latinx neighborhoods or their social and economic contributions to this city.

The components of the literacy program used at my school complied with all necessary elements required by the latest state educational guidelines, but still missed significant opportunities for cultural and linguistic connections with many of my students. I wondered if the existing gap in student performance would have been smaller if teachers were to opt for minor changes in the social context of the learning, which Moll and Diaz (1987) deemed to produce important changes in performance. Moreover, electing to enhance instructional materials by including stories and texts relevant to children’s culture and their daily lives would extend the insertion of community knowledge so as to validate student culture and traditions within current instructional practices. It appeared to me that applying daily home activities such as reading community newspapers, examining weekly flyers, and watching digital stories on social media would give students the opportunity to see themselves as part of their instructional materials and curriculum, and would enhance the very narratives that allow children to bring their culture and traditions into the classroom. Educators, administrators, and schools in general are faced with

tremendous amounts of federal, state and district-wide mandates, all of which serve as constraints that hinder the ability of teachers to incorporate their students' multifaceted cultures and linguistic knowledge into the school's predetermined curriculum. I realized then that a common vision involving children, parents, community, support staff and teachers must be established to bring about needed changes in the curriculum and meet the needs of all students, not only those of Mexican descent.

I was aware of these gaps, and my responsibilities and obligations as an elementary school principal compelled me to instructional foci on the literacy program. Thus, I employed Luis Moll and Stephen Diaz's (1987) ideas of utilizing participant's cultural resources (e.g. the students' and adult's bilingualism) to institute instructional change. In order to accomplish this goal, I started to influence instructional procedures to improve conditions for learning within my school. My main contention for making such changes is my belief that the strategic application of cultural resources in instruction is one important way of obtaining change in academic performance, and of demonstrating that there is nothing about any child's language, culture, or intellectual capacities that should handicap their schooling (Diaz, Moll and Mehan, 1987; Cole & Griffin, 1987).

### **Purpose of the Study**

I conducted an in-depth examination of two Mexican American families with elementary school age children living in a large urban city in the United States. Through this research study, I sought to understand the families' approaches to their daily narratives so as to increase my understanding of how to make informed instructional decisions that will impact the literacy instruction of all students and particularly students of Mexican American heritage, and the children of immigrant parents. The following questions guided this study:

1. What are the parents' memories of the daily linguistic interactions they engaged in during their own childhoods, with their families and in school when compared to their perceptions of their children's daily linguistic interactions at home and in school?
2. What are the daily linguistic interactions occurring in the social context of two bilingual (Spanish/English) families?
  - 2.A What are the features and emerging themes of these linguistic interactions across the families involved in the study?
  - 2.B What are the roles and linguistic patterns of the participating members in family interactions?

I selected families to participate in this research-study whom I became familiar with through interactions at the school where I used to be a principal, based on the camaraderie they expressed toward me, as well as their interest in participating in the study. These families are immigrants to this country and interact with each other because of the proximity of their residence. During the study, I interacted directly with these families in their homes and other social contexts in order to gain a palpable understanding of their daily narrative practices and language socialization inside and outside of their homes, while valuing their culture and traditions; in turn, I anticipate that my new understanding of Mexican American families would be shared with fellow educators to aid in developing relevant instructional changes and curricular adaptations to enhance the success of Mexican American children in large urban cities in the United States.

Gonzalez, Andrade, Civil, and Moll (2001) stated that classroom teachers can learn of their students and their daily life experiences and skills (referred to as funds of knowledge) through frequent visits to their students' households. From her ethnographic study with 10

Mexican American immigrant families, Valdes (1996) discussed the concept of respect in terms of educators showing an interest in the strength and richness of these families' cultural values, traditions, and practices. As these two studies pointed out, Mexican American children already have a wealth of knowledge that can facilitate literacy learning if used in literacy instruction every day. Since the current study involved a common culture, language, and life experience between Mexican American families and myself, the struggles of these families strongly vibrated at the core of my personal belief system. My voice, alongside those of the families serves as a narrator for this important investigation; for like these families, I, too, was raised in a traditional Mexican household with the Spanish language used as the basis for household discourse. Although I was raised in a different country, I humbly serve these Spanish-speaking parents who respectfully expressed their sincerest desire to participate in their children's academic path to improve their education and enrich their lives.

### **Key Terms Definitions**

- Ecological context is a term used in many disciplines and refers to the dynamic interplay of contexts and demands that constrain and define an entity.
- Funds of knowledge are the skills and knowledge that have been historically and culturally developed to enable an individual or household to function within a given culture.
- Culture is the way of life a particular people, the ordinary behavior and habits, their attitudes toward each other, and their moral and religious beliefs.
- Latinx is defined as a person of Latin American origin or descent (used as a gender-neutral or non-binary alternative to Latino or Latina)

- Hispanic /Latino based on US census bureau defines the ethnonym Hispanic or Latino to refer to “a person of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central America, or other Spanish culture or origin regardless of race” and states that Hispanics or Latinos can be of any race, any ancestry, any ethnicity.
- Mexican Americans are Americans of full or partial Mexican descent. Some members of the community prefer to call themselves Chicanos.
- Latin American is the relation to the American countries south of the U.S. where people speak Spanish and Portuguese.
- Code-Switching is defined by Myers-Scotton and Ury (1977) as the use of two or more linguistic varieties in the same conversation or interaction, in other words, it is either bilingual speakers’ or language learners’ cognitive linguistic abilities, or to describe classroom or learner practices involving the use of more than one language (e.g. Romaine 1989; Cenoz and Genesee 2001; Fotos 2001, inter alia).



## **Chapter Two: Literature Review**

Interest in family narrative practices across cultures has increased in the last few decades, and studies from various disciplines have contributed in the understanding of the multiple ways in which children across the world develop narrative skills (e.g. Fivush & Haden, 2003; Ochs & Capps, 2001). Despite this interest, however, few studies have investigated Latinx families' narrative interactions (e.g. Eisenberg, 1985; Schecter & Bayley, 2002; Torres, 1997). The purpose of this literature review is to explore the role of daily Bilingual English/Spanish language narrative practices in the stimulation of language development for children of Latinx families living in urban areas in the United States of America. This review reveals how parents and family members' Spanish language narrative practices can stimulate language development in these young children. According to Cristofaro and Tamis-LeMonda (2008) families interpret learning as the process of fostering and enriching children's culture and knowledge as they acquire literacy skills and are immersed in the new U.S. culture. However, the U.S. school system is characterized by activities that are aligned to values of the majority White family values. Understanding that immigrant families in the U.S. preserve their cultural values and educational experiences during daily rituals and routines at home and looking closely at family Bilingual English/Spanish language narrative practices and their impacts on the language development of Latinx children who learn to speak Spanish before English, it is inevitable to investigate narrative practices of immigrant families in the U.S.

Latinx family demographics in the United States have been increasing tremendously. In 2014 17.4% of the US population was of Latinx descent (U.S. Census Bureau 2014). According to the PEW Research Center (2014), of the number of Latinx adults in 2012, 49.8% were born in another country, down from a peak of 55% in 2007. Despite the decrease of Latinx immigrants,

the rapid growth in the number of Latinx births continues to remain steady today. In the coming years, young students from Latinx origin will populate U.S. classrooms in increasing numbers, bringing their distinct linguistic experiences with them. This represents a unique challenge for educators across the country, given that these populations of non-native English-speaking students enter primary classrooms with limited English language proficiencies. As a result of these demographic changes, the impact on the schools and the families across the U.S. is highly evident as children with limited narrative skills may lag in their literacy development.

Consequently, Children's communicative competence begins to develop very early in their lives, without explicit instruction from parents, and it is expected that narrative production and comprehension make up one domain of emergent literacy in which children exhibit strengths during the preschool years (Serpell, R., Baker, L., & Sonnenschein, S. 2005). Hart & Risley's (1995) study of American children's language acquisition skills found that American families from low socio-economic and professionally-educated backgrounds differ immensely in the amount of experiences with language and social interaction they regularly provide their children. In addition, differences in children's home-based experiences and language interactions are strongly linked to their language development. Hence, on page 2 of the Hart & Risley report, they convey their perspective on language practices of poor parents, and lead readers to recognize that parents transmit to their children a "culture of poverty" and deny children the cognitive and linguistic resources needed to succeed in school (Dudley-Marling & Lucas, 2009). Hart & Risley (1995) concluded that the linguistic deficiencies in children living in poverty are the cause of their academic failures, necessitating interventions that change the ways poor parents interact with their children. Although, Hart and Risley's findings are emblematic of a trend of educators, educational policy makers, and educational researchers to readily embrace a

deficit stance that pathologizes the language and culture of poor students and their families (Dudley-Marling, 2007; Foley, 1997). However, acknowledging the richness of the language and culture that all children bring to school (Dudley-Marling & Lucas, 2009), and the importance of learning and understanding the linguistic background and narrative practices of a child's family becomes evident in the context of the literacy development of children (Zentella, 2005).

In addition, children's narrative competence involves a set of related and independent skills, including vocabulary knowledge, mastery of the syntactic and morphological structures required to show temporal relationships among different events, audience awareness, and ability to understand and represent intentions of human agents in a story (Beck, 2008). Hence, stories are told in different ways for different purposes, and count as a "successful" narrative depending on the expectations of the audience and the conventions of the social context in which the narrator tells the story (Beck, 2008).

Grusec and Davidov (2008) state that the family is charged by society for being the center of child development in the early learning stages, with an emphasis on parent, sibling and family member daily narrative interactions all evidencing an impact of culture on literacy development. Therefore, social practices and language exchanges with other children, peer, and adults are as important as the socialization within the family unit. Families come in different shapes, sizes, and beliefs, and other considerations such as economic standing, parenting styles and lack of access to early childhood programs have all been explored as the causes of children's gaps in readiness for school (Phillips, Brooks-Gunn, Duncan, Klevanob & Crane, 1998; Snow, C. E., Burns, M. S., & Griffin, P., 1998). For the purpose of this literature review, I acknowledge those considerations and bodies of research, however, will primarily focus on the

daily home narrative practices and home activities of Latinx families, and how these impact bilingual (Spanish/English) children's language and literacy development.

To examine the research on bilingual family narrative practices and its influence on language and literacy development, this review of related literature is composed of the following sections: (a) Theoretical Framework, (b) Language and Literacy Development in Latinx Children, and (c) Bilingual (Spanish/English) narratives in the U.S.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework for this paper aligns with the work of McCabe, Bailey, and Melzi (2008) by integrating various components of sociocultural theories that have emerged in recent decades. These include (a) the sociocultural perspective (Brockmeier, 2001; Bruner, 2002, Nelson and Fivush, 2004) with its focus on cognitive development (Vygostky, 1978), and (b) an ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

**Sociocultural perspective.** Children's social interactions that occur in family settings are opportunities for sharing narratives and developing literacy competence. A narrative is generally understood as a genre of oral discourse, and its origins are found in the social interactions between children, mothers, fathers, and/or other relatives (Ochs & Capps 2001). Family interactions primarily foster narrative capabilities that impact language development and strengthen cultural ties. Across the first few years of life, infants develop reliable memory for routine events in their everyday lives (Nelson, K, & Fivush, R., 2004). Then, based on a Vygostkian (1978) perspective of cognitive developmental, parents' linguistic contributions scaffold their children's participation in conversations, allowing them to take part in interactions that are richer and more complex than those children could handle alone. Generally speaking, children become accustomed to family discourse, narrative and storytelling styles that instill in

them a discourse style similar to their parents (Casper & Melzi, 2008). As a result, children develop language patterns that resemble their parents, family, and community, and then narrative styles become part of the children's reading and writing learning patterns (Casper & Melzi, 2008).

Maccoby (2008), in a historical overview of socialization and research, stated that parents and other adults serve as teachers while the children are learners. Thus, young children need to learn table manners, how to dress themselves, habits of personal hygiene, proper ways to speak to older people, and myriad other things. In their studies of language socialization, Garret and Baquedano-López (2002) and Schieffelin and Ochs (1986a) found that as children become communicatively competent, they learn both the structure of their first language, as well as a set of conventions for language interaction embedded in, and reflective of the values, attitudes, and beliefs of their community. Thus, by the time children reach school age and enter preschool, they have already learned a set of narrative patterns from telling stories and narrating events to communicate their desires and needs to care-givers. Keeping in mind that children who have the opportunity to attend preschool have already learned family and social group language patterns, the next step in their language development is to use these learned narrative skills as a foundation for learning both reading and writing. One advantage to this knowledge is that, through their narratives, children may exhibit their own self-perceptions and self-advocacy for the group and family to which they belong. Garret and Baquedano-López (2002) and Schieffelin & Ochs (1986b) further explicated that children learn to recognize, negotiate, index, and co-construct diverse types of meaningful social contexts, making it possible for them to engage with others under an increasingly broad range of circumstances and to expand their social horizons by taking on new roles and statuses. Thus, one of these author's most significant contributions to language socialization research is the insight their work yielded into everyday life – the common ordinary

activities and interactions in which ordinary individuals participate (e.g. child-to-child, child-to-adults, and adults-to-adults) constitute the contexture of human socialization (Garret and Baquedano-López, 2002). The socialization of language includes interactions between individuals of all ages, but, for the purpose of this literature review, the focus will be on the social interactions of children and those adults with whom they maintain a strong emotional or social tie across a lifespan.

Pertaining to Latin American and U.S. Latinx families, research from anthropology and cultural psychology suggests that individuals of Latinx American heritage often emphasize the group over individuals, maintaining values characterized by a deep sense of loyalty to the family (Suarez-Orozco & Pérez, 2002). Additionally, cultural beliefs are deeply rooted in mother-child interactions, as Latinx mothers attempt to establish supportive and warm-hearted relationships with their children. Moreover, Latinx mothers teach children their place in the family along with behavioral expectations while interacting with the rest of the family. In these family interactions, mothers and children exchange family and group values, standards, and customs (Maccoby, 2008). Mothers usually pass on knowledge regarding a child's function within the family and their own group, doing so in an adaptive way that is seen in a larger societal context. These sets of values, standards and customs are transmitted from one family to another and from mother to child – in other words, from generation to generation. Together, they can co-construct a new set of cultural functions that serve as models for future generations to come (Suarez-Orozco & Pérez, 2002).

Bodies of research that focus on the primacy of parents as agents of socialization, as well as specific situation socialization (Beaulieu and Bugental, 2008; Grusec and Davidov, 2008) argue that socialization occurs in different domains, each with its specific set of processes. Thus,

parents and children are part of an ecological system (Bronfenbrenner, 1986) that functions to protect offspring and ensure that they are able to deal with the demands of social life (Beaulieu and Bugental, 2008). Grusec and Davidov (2008) indicated that socialization involves the acceptance of values, standards, and customs of society as well as the ability to function in an adaptive way in the larger social context. There are other individuals such as relatives, teachers, peers and even broadcasting venues that function as agents of socialization as well. For example, extended family members like grandparents, aunts, uncles, and older siblings that also serve as mediators for cultural transmission through language during daily family activities. Valdes (1996) in her ethnographic study of ten families residing in the US border observed that extended family (relatedness) had a great influence on family members' and children's language and behavior socialization. For example, discussing acceptable behavior and health related topics or planning fun and entertainment events. Also, families are prone to lean on relatives and other members for the care of their young. Consequently, extended family members also play significant roles in the development of inter-dependence within family and family members. In social situations where Latinx children are being introduced to someone new for the first time, parents answer most inquires right away for their children (Valdez 1996). Practices such as these, which involve an emphasis on relatedness rather than independence, have an effect on children's language development, especially when children have to answer to someone outside their family circle. Understanding Latin cultural traditions, such as relationships between parents-children, siblings, relatives, and relatedness, must therefore be part of the teacher's presence in the classroom, as children may be unsure how to express their needs to adults in the school setting (Wishard-Guerra, 2008).

**Ecological systems theory.** The ecological system theory (Bronfenbrenner 1986) provided a useful framework for analyzing children's language and literacy development in the context of the family environment. Bronfenbrenner and Crouter (1983) investigated the structure of external systems that influence families, as well as their internal and external interactions with the group to which they belong, and their place of residence. They proposed a useful framework adapted from The Ecological Systems Theory, for ordering and analyzing studies bearing families as a context of human development. The ecological systems theory is based on the premise that family engagement occurs in many contexts – the home, school, and the community, this theory highlights the importance of the direct and indirect contexts in children development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1986a; Bronfenbrenner & Crouter, 1982). In a separate study, Bronfenbrenner (1986) proposed the three following environmental systems that can operate as sources of peripheral stimulus on the family: 1) the Mesosystem Model, 2) the Exosystem Model, and 3) the Chronosystem Model.

The Mesosystem Model is defined as the interactions or relationships between the microsystems in children's lives and the systems in which children and parents interact that are not interdependent on each other. The Exosystem Model is defined as the interactions or relationships between systems that may or may not directly affect the child or family. Finally, the Chronosystem Model is defined as interactions and relationships that influence changes and continuities in children or families over time.

Bronfenbrenner (1986) also presented the idea that external systems serve as agents of change, which makes it possible to reflect on the impact of these external systems and their repercussions on children's language development. Such systems can affect and/or stimulate activities and interactions, and even though adults are able to manage them, at least to a certain



extent, their impact on children may still be quite profound. For instance, partnerships built between parents (Microsystem) and teachers (Mesosystem) serve to increase linkages between a child's school and home academic expectations. Epstein's research on "Longitudinal Effects of Family-School-Person Interactions on Student Outcomes" (1983a, 1983b) established that family-home-school connections increase student achievement and communication. Epstein worked with a sample of 1000 students, examining the joint forces at home and school that impacted family processes and children's attitudes and that ultimately brought positive changes into classrooms. For example, children from a more connected home and classroom environment exhibited stronger communication, and greater initiative and independence after entering school (Epstein 1983a, 1983b). In her research of Latinx families and communities, Zentella (2005) concluded that to be successful, alliances between educators and Latinx families must be based on mutual respect for cultural differences, without exaggerating them to the point they obscure their shared humanity and dreams. Ultimately what matters for a child's literacy development is not the social class or ethnic group to which his or her parents belong, but those parents' particular socialization practices and the beliefs informing them (Snow, et al. 1991).

As the abovementioned research demonstrates, strong ties between schools and families are essential, as school activities are academically oriented, and family daily activities are socially oriented, with some mild application of what is learned in both contexts.

The family system, family processes and activities may also be impacted by external changes in employment type and location, and even by unemployment (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). In Latinx cultures, fathers are often seen as the source of financial support for the family and are considered to be the authority figures and decision-makers (Epstein 1983a, 1983b). Bronfenbrenner (1986) reviewed the influence of external environments on the functioning of

families as contexts for human development, including studies of European-American fathers from the 1930s to 1980s. He concluded that these fathers showed differences between men from various socio-economic classes. Although this study did not include Latinx father participants, there are similarities that appear to be prevalent in families across cultures, in this case Latinx cultures. For instance, Kohn (1969) demonstrated that working-class men whose jobs typically required compliance with authority tended to hold values that stressed obedience in their children; by contrast, middle-class men expected self-direction and independence. In the event that a father or male figure in the household becomes jobless, family dynamics shift to a dreary decrease of social and financial exchanges. This increases tensions and disagreements between adults in the family as well as with children. Similarly, fathers whose work and social demands consumed most of their time and energy impacted their family's ecology by feeling guilt, irritation and impatience when dealing with their children. On the other hand, studies on the impact of Latinx family involvement in their children's literacy journey indicate that parents positively affect their children in elementary school grades (Genisi, Stires, & Yung-Chung, 2001). Interestingly, Latinx fathers reported participating in early literacy practices with their young children. For example, fathers engaged in diverse reading materials and writing styles and engaged in these practices on a regular basis within and outside the home environment, Ortiz (2004) concluded that fathers play an essential role in bilingual children's ecological system.

### **Language and Literacy Development in Latinx Children in the U.S.**

Children in a literate society grow up with literacy as an integral part of their personal, familial, and social histories (Goodman, 1989). In today's information-based economy, the acquisition of strong language and literacy skills are essential for children to succeed (Snow &

Van Hemel, 2008). Therefore, in the next section of this paper I address language and literacy development of Latinx children living in the U.S.

**Language development.** Children learn to communicate with adults to make sense of the world, and as Clay (2015) stated, a child's first 'private' language model is the parent or caregiver. This is because their child's language growth in the first five years is entirely dependent on what people say, who they speak to, what topics they discuss, and in what dialect or language, as well as the manner they speak, whether gentle and explaining or authoritative and imperative (Clay, 2015). She further stated that teachers can enhance child's first language and would add a second language (English) to be used in some oral situations and to open the world of books.

Hoff, (2006) stated that "children acquire language under apparently widely differing circumstances (p.57)," noting further states that in some cultures, children are spoken to a great deal and in others, very little. She further noted that Western middle-class mothers energetically engage babies in interaction, provide exaggerated clues to segmentation, and follow the child's attention focus. In other cultures, in which infants are not directly addressed, they tend to be held in such a way that they can see adults talking and see what the adults are talking about (Lieven, 1994). Children growing up speaking a different language other than of the dominant culture in the larger community where they live, also experience another culture and celebrate different traditions, and so acquire knowledge that allows them to develop a linguistic foundation in their heritage language that transfers to literacy development once they enter school (Hoff, 2006).

Inevitably, Latinx children living in the U.S. are exposed to two languages. Chen and Mora-Flores (2006) suggested that the challenge arises when the words, sounds, and sentence

structures these children have acquired are not like the language of school, namely, English. This is explicated further by Cummins' Underlying Proficiency Model, which asserts that bilingual children's "experience with either language can promote development of the proficiency underlying both languages, given adequate motivation and exposure to both" (Cummins, 1981, p. 25). McSwan and Rolstad (2005) suggested that this model proposes bilingual children develop an underlying store of knowledge that they can access, regardless of the language in which it was acquired. So, if a child already learned to read in his or her primary language, they can utilize what is known about reading, the process and the skills, and apply it, to reading in English (Chen and Mora-Flores, 2006).

Hammer, Scarpino, & Davison (2011), in a two-year longitudinal study of eighty-six Head Start bilingual Puerto Rican preschoolers, examined precursors to literacy and language such as vocabulary development, oral comprehension, and phonology. They also examined home environments such as maternal language usage and home literacy environments that led to better reading outcomes. Their findings demonstrated positive growth in children's receptive language abilities in both Spanish and English, and later positively predicted English phonological awareness, English emergent literacy, and English and Spanish letter identification abilities. Hammer, Scarpino, & Davison (2011) results confirmed Cummins' Common Underlying Proficiency Model as children's dual language development contributed to their reading outcomes in both languages. In the same study, they also found similarities in terms of home environment goals. Their results showed that mothers' use of Spanish helped to support children's Spanish vocabulary development, and their use of English slowed Spanish vocabulary growth. Strikingly, Hammer, Scarpino, & Davison (2011) demonstrated that home language fosters relationships between parents and their children, and allows parents the opportunity to

provide well-formed, quality, language models, in addition to sharing their culture and language with their children.

Páez, Paratore-Bock, and Pizzo (2011) presented an analysis of research on young bilingual learners and their development of oral language skills in English Language Learners (ELLs), with special attention to Spanish-speaking children. The first overview of research presented by these researchers was done by Patton O. Tabors and Mariela Páez, (2003) titled “Early Childhood Study” (ECS). The ECS included longitudinal growth trajectories of 350 Spanish-speaking children residing in Massachusetts and Maryland, and a comparative sample of 152 Puerto Rican children in Puerto Rico. Their findings supported the implementation of a set of interventions created by the school and researchers to work with young Spanish- English bilingual students, with the results showing that children had limited proficiency in their oral language skills in both languages. Additionally, they found a significant relationship between Spanish-English skills, which when transferred into the classroom, manifested in a diversity of language skill qualities. In sum, this study revealed great variability in the language and literacy support available in the children’s home environments. Furthermore, the results identified variables in the home (relating to families’ socio-demographic background, and language and literacy support) that have an impact on student’s language and literacy skills.

The second overview of research cited by Páez, Paratore-Bock, and Pizzo (2011) was the “Kindergarten Language Study” (KLS). The KLS was a five-year longitudinal research project involved the design, implementation, and assessment of an intervention program to improve language skills of Spanish-English bilingual kindergarten students. This study sought to differ from previous work by Páez, Pizzo, & Bock (2009), focusing on vocabulary for ELLs that matches English language development in classrooms with Spanish language development at

home. The KLS study included 48 Spanish-speaking students and 12 parents participating as the family component. Based on their preliminary observations of the KLS study, Páez, Pizzo, & Bock reported the following findings: first, parents eagerly support the use of Spanish at home, a finding that poised the need to find resources for parents in Spanish. By promoting Spanish, parents felt comfortable drawing from their rich language knowledge to continue introducing complex and sophisticated language structures that are likely to transfer to and support children's English language learning. Second, preliminary evidence suggested that parents increased the frequency of parent-child shared reading following the multiple readings of the same book. Third, school staff and administrators demonstrated great enthusiasm and encouraged children to converse and share their home reading experiences through writing. In sum, Páez, Pizzo, & Bock's preliminary data indicated that supporting parents and children in the use of Spanish at home is an effective strategy for encouraging home-language practices that later connect to literacy development. Also, researchers called for additional research needed to understand better the potential of capitalizing on home and school connections for improving oral language skills and vocabulary development of young bilingual learners.

Another piece of research by Whitehurst and Lonigan (1998) aligned with interventions developed by a school focused on the combination of classroom and home factors. Their intervention study designed to increase the vocabulary skills of 3- and 4- year-old children, and parents and teachers were trained in Dialogic Reading, a method that poses open-ended questions and encourages child conversation during book reading. These researchers found that the intervention was most effective when both parents and teachers were trained together to carry out this method.

The research explicated above supports the language development of young Spanish-English Bilingual children living in the U.S. and presented promising examples of how intervention programs, designed by the schools, can capitalize on the capacity of families of Spanish-English bilingual learners. It presents a direction for schools to determine the type of interventions in which parents can engage to support their young learners to acquire language. Páez, Pizzo, & Bock (2009) advocated for a new model of comprehensive intervention programs that capitalize on all possible sources of instruction, including students' first language skills, language and literacy practices at home, and classroom teaching approaches that are beneficial for all students, but particularly useful for building the vocabulary skills of ELLs.

**Literacy development.** Literacy is seen as part of daily life in the ecology of a family, as parents, caregivers and relatives' daily processes and activities foster literacy development organically. Consequently, experiences that parents and caregivers perform on a daily basis create a literate environment in which children practice language and formulate their own literacies (Dorsey-Gaines and Taylor, 1988). Eccles (2008) indicated that these experiences also influence children's domain-specific ability; self-concepts and subjective task values which depend on the affective and motivational climate that is created by parents when the children are engaged with any particular experience. On the other hand, Eccles also specified that children can only learn about what they are exposed to. For instance, children are raised within the family ecology and it is particularly influential in the development of language and culture.

In a review of historical research from the 1800s to the middle of the last century, Teale & Sulzby (1986) revealed that oral language and literacy development that occurs prior to formal instruction in prekindergarten classrooms is especially important for children's literacy development. Also, Teale & Sulzby (1986) discussed the concept of reading readiness, which

some in the field of literacy consider as crucial period of preparation for formal instruction in the elementary school years. They concluded that concept is firmly entrenched as the dominant approach to beginning literacy instruction. Furthermore, Teale & Sulzby (1986) cast serious doubts on reading readiness beliefs that may limit a full demonstration of early childhood reading and writing. Hence, they both substantiated their decision to employ the term emergent literacy: a term that was first developed by Marie Clay (1966). Teale & Sulzby (1986) cited Marie Clay's (1966) doctoral dissertation, which defined emergent literacy as the way children to develop new ways of responding to reading and writing. Further, Clay noted that there are important continuities between what pre-reading behaviors children employ and those identified as reading readiness behaviors that occur when the child is able to read independently. In contrast, Goodman (1989) focused her attention on reading and writing, rather than behaviors associated with these activities, and provided a conceptual scheme for understanding the nature and process of literacy development in early childhood. Goodman (1967) found that even children who would be described as "at risk" in regard to becoming competent readers had knowledge about many aspects of reading: They knew how to handle books, understood the directionality of written language and the function of print in a book.

Contemporary research on literacy development has shown that many children have begun literacy learning before they enter school. Young children enter school with knowledge, experiences, and predispositions that can facilitate or hinder their entry into literacy. Moreover, differences in children's reading skills are established early and remain fairly stable over time (Butler, Marsh, Sheppard, & Sheppard, 1985). Furthermore, children who have difficulty in first grade are more likely to have more difficulty in other school domains later on, in addition to being more likely not to complete high school or pursue higher education beyond high school



(Alexander, Entwisle, & Horsey, 1997; Entwisle, Alexander, & Olson, 2005). Findings from studies such as these provide motivation for optimizing reading skills early in a child's life, because children at the early elementary levels seem particularly sensitive to environmental influences (Hart, Petrill, Thompson, Plomin, 2009; Landry, Smith, Swank, & Guttentag, 2008).

In a longitudinal study of 65 children of 3-7-year-old low income Mexican-heritage children and their mothers, Wishard-Guerra, (2008) highlighted that family daily processes and activities are precursors to literacy development in the native language (Spanish) and that they also transfer to a child's second language (English). Thus, the development of complex oral narrative skills is important for children's readiness for school and is an important precursor to the acquisition of literacy (Bishop & Edmundson, 1987; Imbens-Bailey & Snow, 1997; Snow, 1983). Wishard-Guerra (2008) stressed the critical importance of acquiring narrative skills for Spanish-speaking Latinx children who are at a higher risk for academic difficulties.

Comparatively, Cristofaro and Tamis-LeMonda (2008) emphasized children's language and cognitive development, noting that narratives serve as contexts for children to build oral-discourse skills. Particularly, narratives enable children to practice decontextualized language (or talk about objects and events removed from the present), which has been found to be important for later reading (Dickinson, 1991; Snow & Dickinson, 1990; Watson, 2002). For instance, children's own participation in their narratives was strongly related to their comprehension of an unfamiliar story and narrative competencies (Reese, 1995). The critical transition from contextualized to decontextualized language is thought to empower children in the acquisition of literacy abilities (Snow, 1983). For example, Reese (1995) studied 20 White, middle-class mothers sharing narratives and reading books with their children at 40, 46 and 58 months of age, finding that the mothers' decontextualized language positively predicted children's print skills at

70 months. Furthermore, Wishard-Guerra's (2008) results showed the way Mexican families think about language, the type of environment they create in their family, and the way they speak and interact with their children around language, all of which she noted have been found to make a difference in a child's narrative development. Specifically, she concluded that by providing rich language and literacy experiences early on, in the form of home-language practices, families shape child language and literacy development. Examples of this include home-language practices such as daily book-reading as part of the bedtime routine or regular participation on storytelling of their favorite books. Children whose practices more closely resemble those of the school community may experience less difficulty in literacy development than children with other kinds of home-language experiences (Wishard-Guerra, 2008).

Ultimately, children are surrounded by adults at all times, whether they are with their parents, grandparents, siblings, family relatives, and/or members of their cultural group. In the case of low socioeconomic status (SES) children, the intergenerational cycle of poverty is a self-perpetuating one, as low literacy skills are passed down from parent to child in a legacy of poverty. As Darling (1992) explained, "The seeds of school failure are planted in the home, and we cannot hope to uproot the problem by only working within the schools. We must approach it through the family" (p. 5). Thus, issues in early literacy development, which largely determine a child's future success in school, can be approached through the study of the ecology in families of Latinx descent living in low-income, urban areas in the United States of America.

### **Bilingual Family Narratives in the U.S.**

Children develop narrative abilities through the interactions they have with others on a daily basis. The conversations shared between caregivers and children during these interactions serve as a primary sociolinguistic context in which children gain mastery of the skills necessary

to produce and share a coherent story in later years (Melzi, 2008). The language used during these conversations both reflects cultural norms and serves to socialize children into culture-specific practices (Ochs & Capps, 2001; Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986). Despite the benefits and interest in family narrative practices, limited studies have investigated Latinx families' narrative interactions (Eisenberg, 1985; Schechter & Bailey, 2002; Torres, 1997). Certainly, daily home-based activities provide a strong foundation for language use and interaction with adults and young children. By recounting such experiences, children learn to tell tales that are valued by those among whom they live and grow (Miller, Potts, Fung, Hoogstra, & Mintz, 1990). This also allows them to recognize rhetorical patterns that occur regularly in the chatter they hear daily (Heath, 1986), and so they become skilled narrators of personal stories in ways that are recognizable to those with whom they talk (Hymes, 1972).

In a study of 37 low-income immigrant families from Latinx background residing in New York City, Cristofaro and Tamis-LeMonda (2008) examined mother-child and father-child narrative interactions of 37 children averaging 57 seven months. They focused on the following major themes: the importance of family, gender roles, and education achievements and academic success. They shared their findings in the form of lessons learned, with the first being the importance of family (*familismo*). An approximate 80 percent of the shared narratives were of selected family events that focused around relations with family members and involved emotional, social relational ties to discuss with their children. In choosing the narratives of the selected families, the researchers found that family roots (including members who live a distance away) were fundamental to building children's identities. The second lesson learned involved gender roles, as Cristofaro and Tamis-LeMonda noted that parent-child narratives provided a venue for parents to socialize their child's gender role. This was evident in both the activities

selected for discussion – being “action based” for boys versus quiet or “socially based” for girls. The third lesson learned involved parents expressing the value of education and the rewards that come with hard work. Parents talked about school experiences with their son and/or daughter indirectly, conveying important messages about school being essential for children’s social and academic development, and that being successful brings pride back to the family (Cristofaro and Tamis-LeMonda, 2008).

Cristofaro & Tamis-LeMonda (2008) summarized their research by stating “personal narratives are a vehicle for sharing cultural beliefs as well as practicing oral language skills that are important for children’s transition to formal schooling” (p. 84). Finally, these researchers concluded that the cultural lessons that Latinx mothers and fathers shared with their children during personal narratives offered them valuable opportunities to learn about their family and cultural heritage, personal identity, and the role of school relative to their community and larger society. They noted that given the rise of Latinx families in the U.S., teachers and practitioners must be sensitive to the needs of these families, and that parent reminiscing might be one way of understanding the cultural ideologies of ethnically diverse parents and children. Engaging parents in school may encourage parent-child narratives as part of children’s developing emergent literacy skills and as a way to promote social and cultural development (Gallimore & Goldenberg, 2001; Rueda, Monzo, Blacher, Shapiro, & Gonzalez, 2005).

In a similar longitudinal study, Wishard-Guerra (2008) examined the development of narrative interactions, from highly-scaffolded to relatively independent narrative productions, focusing on a group of 65 low-income Mexican-heritage children between the ages of 36 and 78 months old in the southwestern United States. Of the participating mothers, 93 percent spoke Spanish as their primary language and used it in the household and all participating children

spoke Spanish as the primary language use in the household. Articulated language practices were captured through ethnographic maternal interviews. Wishard-Guerra (2008) collected audio-recorded maternal interviews assembled from the Cultural Change Interview (Rosenblatt, Garza-Mourino, & Howes, 2004) at 36 months; the interview included questions related to mother's bilingualism, their personal goals, and family goals whether mothers see language as an important cultural value or vehicle for cultural maintenance in the family. The 36 and 54-month home visits included an audio-recorded and video-recording of mother-child interactions. During the 78-month home visit, participating mothers were again asked to share their values and beliefs around language, inside and outside of the home, for the mother, her children, and for her family. The 78-month home visit also included a sample of individual audio-recorded interviews with the mother and child. Wishard-Guerra (2008) based her questionnaire on ethnographic studies of recent Mexican American immigrants (Bayley & Schecter, 2003; Schecter & Bayley, 2002).

Wishard-Guerra (2008) found significant variations in children's individual narrative skill development and the everyday language practices of Mexican-heritage families. This finding supports language-socialization theories, suggesting that what parents believe and how they act about language practices makes an impact on the language development of their children. In addition, data from the 36-month narrative elements endorses early language practices as important indicators of later narrative development. Thus, families who focus on providing a literacy-rich environment early in their child's life appear to have set a foundation for the child to become a competent and independent narrator by the first grade (Wishard-Guerra, 2008).

In a different longitudinal study, Sparks (2008) explored the ways in which low-income Latinx mothers and their preschool children-reminisce about past events. Participants in the

study were families of Latinx origin with 4-year-old children and residing in the northeastern region of the U.S. After much deliberation of participant selection, 23 families were chosen because they fit the criteria of Latinx origin and should include in the study the person that spent the most time. Of the 23 participating families, 12 reported English being spoken at home, six English and Spanish, and five reported solely spoke Spanish. Participating families were told that they needed to feel comfortable talking and reading their child in English in order to participate. Specifically, Sparks investigated maternal elaboration as mothers pondered with their preschool children and looked at the possible links between parent elaboration and children's independent elaborations. This study found that children of Latinx heritage from low-income backgrounds do not enter formal schooling with a repertoire of narrative skills that are compatible with the expectations set by many preschool classrooms. Sparks also added that preschool classrooms should be a place where children learn to participate in a variety of experiences that will promote development of narrative skill. Other researchers have made similar observations in classrooms in which teachers are unable to make sense of stories told in culturally different discourse patterns, and thus judge a child's performance as incoherent or off topic (Michaels, 1981; Silva & McCabe, 1996). Sparks (2008) also found different variations of elaboration and narration styles in Latinx children, which informs how their rich linguistic heritage contributes to language learning and the acquisition of literacy. Consequently, all findings mentioned above support the study of daily linguistic interactions in families and especially those families of Mexican descent.

In 15-year ethnographic study of Mexican families in Chicago and their native villages in Michoacán Mexico, Marcia Farr (2006) studied the culturally embedded ways of using oral and written language within the framework of the ethnography of communication. She found that their communicative competence consisted of a repertoire of complex verbal styles that have

cultural and linguistic value in themselves and yet differ from the academic register of English favored in U.S. schools and universities. She further suggests that there is little understanding of the discourse styles that are natural and normal in White U.S. population for whom academic English is unfamiliar, such understanding provides a crucial foundation for improving language and literacy instruction to an increasingly Spanish speaking population. In order to address academic language, we should understand what students already know and bring from home. The discourse styles they have already learned through socialization in their homes and communities, and how these discourse styles, in both form and function, may complement or differ from those required for success in educational institutions.

Farr (2006) identified three significant ways of speaking among the families she studied for 15 years. These three suggestive ways of speaking among these families are *franqueza* (frankness, directness, or candor), *respeto* (respect), and *relajo* (a carnivalesque communicative event in which people “joke or fool around”). These three ways of speaking construct ranchero language (and other) ideologies, as well as identities. In the following lines, I provide a brief description of terms ranchero, *franqueza*, *respeto*, and *relajo* used interchangeably in the rest of the chapters.

Ranchero Mexicans generally are of individualist orientation, although they do so within the context of familism and networks based on reciprocity. Family and human relationships are of central importance of social life, individuality also is highly valued, both within and beyond the family. There are some differences between U.S. Anglo and Mexican ranchero individualism, the latter coexisting with an emphasis on familism. Ranchero values are pride, hard work, autonomy, living from the product of their work and being their own bosses, and individual efforts at entrepreneurship.

The verbal style of *franqueza* (frankness) indexes an egalitarian, individualist ideology, and the style presents a personhood that is straightforward, candid, and honest on the one hand, and self-assertive, tough, and proud on the other.

*Respeto* (respect) implies a hierarchical social order in which dominance and deference are expressed, in fact constructed, with specific linguistic devices, prototypically the informal and formal “you” pronouns *tú* and *usted*. *Respeto* is a gendered language ideology connects the familial with political, resting on “a core idea of restraint, a deference to order, place and legitimacy” (Stern, 1995, 213) and providing the community with a shared language for argument. *Respeto* heavily emphasizes norms of language use.

*Relajo* (joking or fooling around) is purely for diversion and fun, it challenges within the verbal play frame the existing social order. Encompasses fun and relaxation but also carnival-like inversion of normal discipline and order. *Relajo* around prompts the performance of oral narratives by participants who alternate between the roles of performer and audience.

Farr (2006, p. 267) closely examined how individual people narrate a story, for example, in addition to what they narrate, reveals a rich array of attitudes and beliefs that are communicated implicitly via such everyday linguistic devices as intonation patterns, pronoun choices, and reported speech.

## **Summary**

Bilingual or English/Spanish narrative development is the common thread of this literature review. Together, narratives portray the precursor of language and literacy development of Latinx children (Bailey, A. L., 2008; McCabe, A., 2008, and Melzi, G. 2008). Despite identifying narrative development as a critical precursor to literacy development in English-speaking children, there is far too little information about how to properly foster these



narratives for bilingual Latinx students living in urban areas of the United States (Scarborough, 2001; Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998; Tabors, Snow, & Dickinson, 2001). However, the need to do so is clear, considering that narratives are considered a corner stone to academic success (Bailey, A. L., 2008; McCabe, A., 2008, and Melzi, G. 2008). Researchers in language socialization have conceptualized the process of language acquisition broadly and have tended to view language acquisition as a phenomenon of cognitive-linguistic and sociocultural factors (Gaskins, Miller, & Corsaro, 1992; Ochs, 1998; Ochs & Schieffelin, 1995; Rogoff, Mistry, Göncü, & Mosier, 1993; Schieffelin, & Ochs, 1986).

Most of the research on the social origins of children's narrative skills has focused on mother-child conversations (Melzi, 2008), finding that mothers usually pass on knowledge regarding a child's function within the family and their own group, doing so in an adaptive way that is seen within a larger societal context (Suarez-Orozco & Páez, 2002). The lack of research with other family members, such as fathers, gives an incomplete picture of family narrative practices (Melzi, 2008). A few studies with U.S. European American fathers' discourse have shown differences in the ways mothers and fathers engage their children as well as in the topics they choose to highlight during narrative conversations (Buckner & Fivush, 2000; Reese, Haden, & Fivush, 1996). Cristofaro & Tamis-LeMonda (2008) addressed the neglected contribution of fathers in children's narrative development, and their study results show both similarities and differences in the topics mothers and fathers choose to discuss with their preschool children. This draws attention to the role of narrative in child cultural socialization. Cristofaro and Tamis-LeMonda, (2008) concluded that the cultural lessons that Latinx mothers and fathers shared with their children during personal narratives offered them valuable opportunities to learn about their family and cultural heritage, personal identity, and the role of school relative to their community

and larger society. Taken together, results from Cristofaro and Tamis-LeMonda (2008) and Suarez-Orozco, & Páez, (2002) illustrated how culture-specific expectations about the importance of mother and father reminiscences are transmitted in the narratives shared by parents and children.

The contributions of Whisard-Guerra (2008) included the identification of early language scaffolding that mothers provide, which were also related to scaffolding to older children's stand-alone narratives. This work exemplifies the consequences of cultural differences in narrative structure as they apply to literacy acquisition. Hence, Whisard-Guerra highlighted the unique features of Spanish narrative structure to distinguish cultural differences between Latinx and various types of Anglo American storytelling as affirmed by Peterson and McCabe (2013). Furthermore, such findings on developmental sequence have proven useful to speech-language pathologists attempting to determine whether a child is progressing adequately in the oral language skills prerequisite for literacy acquisition (McCabe & Rollins, 1994; Tabors, Snow, Dickinson, 2001).

Diversity within each Latinx group is remarkable, and it is worthwhile to note the contrast between the different Latinx groups living in the U.S. Thus, their presence as an ethnic and linguistic group has a major impact on the context of language and literacy education in the U.S. (Beck, 2008). Teachers and school personnel are unable to change the demographic factors that contribute to income differences between Latinx families and White families. (Beck, 2008). However, when equipped with sufficient background, they can influence the degree to which Latinx children (like students from any nonmainstream cultures) are able to participate in authentic, intellectually engaging academic experiences, thus increasing the likelihood that they

will master the discourses of schooling (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992; Wong-Fillmore & Snow, 2000).

## **Chapter Three: Methodology**

This chapter identifies the research traditions and methodology assumptions that serve as the foundation of my research. The goal for this study was to immerse myself in the social context (home and community) and daily narratives of two Mexican families to understand their daily discourse practices and how they impact children's language and literacy development. By spending time in their homes and other social contexts of these two families, I sought to witness their daily language practices and gained a reflective understanding of how these might influence the instructional and pedagogical literacy philosophies and practices in their children's schools.

This research study was driven by the following question and sub-questions:

1. What are the parents' memories of the daily linguistic interactions they engaged in during their own childhoods, with their families and in school when compared to their perceptions of their children's daily linguistic interactions at home and in school?
2. What are the daily linguistic interactions occurring in the social context of two bilingual (Spanish/English) families?
  - 2.A What are the features and emerging themes of these linguistic interactions across the families involved in the study?
  - 2.B What are the roles and linguistic patterns of the participating members in family interactions?

### **Research Design**

In order to obtain an insightful understanding of the two Mexican families' daily language interactions practices, I utilized multi-case study, discourse analysis, and ethnographic traditions. Researchers engage in multi-case and ethnographic studies when they study a culture's relational practices, common values and beliefs, and shared experiences for the purpose

of helping insiders (cultural members) and outsiders (cultural strangers) better understand the culture (Maso, 2001). Ethnographers do this by becoming participant observers in the culture – that is, by taking field notes regarding cultural happenings as well as their part in the others’ engagement with these happenings (Geertz, 1973; Goodall, 2001). Discourse analysis ethnographies emphasize the study of others which is accomplished partly by attending to encounters between the narrator and members of the groups being studied (Tedlock, 1991), and the discourse often intersects with analysis of patterns and processes (Ellis & Bochner, 2011). I tackled my qualitative study using these three traditions, which allowed me to develop an in-depth understanding of the two families involved in this study.

### **Research Traditions**

As noted, I drew from these three different research traditions: multi-case study, discourse analysis, and some ethnography. Case-study relates to family daily lives; discourse analysis relates to the analysis of dialogue between two or more people; and ethnography relates to the interaction with families, their children and people of the same cultural group.

**Case study.** Case study research involves the study of a situation within a real-life, contemporary context or setting (Yin, 2009). Creswell (2013) defined case study research as a qualitative approach (methodology) that may be an object of study, as well as a product of the inquiry. He further includes that the researcher explores real-life, contemporary bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information (e.g. observations, interviews, audiovisual material, and documents and reports) (p.97). Creswell (2013) noted that the case study approach is familiar to social scientists because of its popularity in areas such as psychology, medicine, and political science. A case study is also a strategy for social inquiry and is preferred when the inquirer seeks answers to “how” or “why”

questions, as well as when s/he has little control over events being studied, when the object of study is a contemporary phenomenon in a real-life context, when boundaries between the phenomenon and the content are not clear, and when it is desirable to use multiple sources of evidence (Yin, 1989). Case studies often end with conclusions formed by the researcher about the overall meaning derived from the case(s). These are called “assertions” by Stake (1995) or building “patterns” or “explanations” by Yin (2009). This methodology supported my inquiry-research on real life daily family practices and their impact on literacy instruction.

**Discourse analysis.** Discourse analysis is the study of language in use (Gee, 2014). For the purpose of this research I chose to utilize discourse analysis rooted in the discipline of linguistics. I looked at the “content” of the language, the themes or issues discussed in a conversation. I also concentrated on “descriptive” and “critical” analysis. Descriptive discourse analysis describes how language works in order to understand it, and critical discourse analysis includes how the language works as well, but also offers deeper explanations regarding the larger context of the language in question.

Gee’s (2014) theory of language (discourse) has meaning only in and through social practices. In fact, in language, there are important connections among saying (informing), doing (action) and being (identity). For example, individuals use language socially, such as, in saying, language allows communication with others. In doing, language engages people in actions and activities, and in being, language allows people to take on different socially significant identities (parent, teacher, or everyday person). Therefore, language is a key way to communicate, a means by which people make or break their world, families, social contexts, and relationships with others. Thus, the discourse analysis method can do two things beyond description: a) illuminate and provide evidence for theory of the domain, a theory that helps to explain how and why

language works the way it does when it is put into action: and b) contribute, in terms of understanding and intervention, to important issues and problems in some areas that interest and motivates individuals as global citizens (Gee, 2014).

Gee posits that discourse analysis is “critical discourse analysis,” since language is political, and all language is part of the way we build and sustain our world, cultures, and institutions. Therefore, the participating Mexican American families’ discourse was an example of how language is part of building and sustaining a language despite a second language learning.

**Ethnography.** Creswell (2013) stated that the process of ethnography “involves extended observations of the group, most often through participant observation, in which the researcher is immersed in the day-to-day lives of the people and observes, interviews the group participants” (p. 92). Similarly, Wolcott (2008) stated that traditional ethnography presents careful detailed accounts of how (other) people live, organized and presented in terms of a set of generally agreed upon categories for describing cultural behavior. In studies informed by ethnographic traditions to better connect their students’ lives with school learning, Cummins (1989) suggested that by viewing students within the context of their homes and families, “It was possible to begin to understand their linguistic proficiency, their school performance, and their attitudes about learning and themselves” (p. 30). Comparably, De La Luz, Reyes, Laliberty, and Orbanosky (1993) employed ethnographic data collection methods such as observations, field notes, audiotapes, interviews, writing samples and videotapes to gain awareness of and sensitivity to the link between culture and language. Moll, Amanti, Neff and Gonzalez (1992) utilized ethnographic observations, open-ended interviews, life histories and case studies of household practices amongst Mexican communities in Tucson, Arizona to unearth “funds of

knowledge” (i.e. the array of cultural and intellectual resources in such homes) in an effort to promote connections between home and school. Finders (1992) suggested ethnographies could provide critical lenses through which teachers better realized their own underlying assumptions. She further defined ethnography as, “A richly textured description of community life that allows us to understand others in their own terms” (p. 60) and enable us to more vividly conceptualize the homes of students from diverse backgrounds.

I used a combination of realistic and critical ethnographies (Creswell, 2013) as an analytical approach to my data collection. Utilizing realistic ethnography, Van Maanen (1988) stated that the ethnographer is objective of the situation, producing participant’s views through the use of quotations and reporting how the culture is to be interpreted and presented. On the other hand, by employing a critical ethnography approach, Thomas (1993) stated that the researcher advocates for the emancipation of groups marginalized in society. Thus, I chose to inform this research with ethnographic traditions because of the potential for the recognized methodologies (interviews, observations, analysis of cultural themes, and interpretation) to help me better understand the day-to-day lives of a group of Mexican American families. Then, I connected the families’ cultural and linguistic understanding with the school’s curriculum so as to inform instructional literacy decisions and enhance the education of marginalized/minority students. Based on my findings, I used an advocate perspective in response to instructional and curricular needs. Ethnographies cannot solve all of the problems educators face; however, ethnographies aid in placing those problems (and in this case, the connection of language, culture, and literacy between schools and Mexican American families) into larger social/political/educational contexts (Finders, 1992).



The research traditions of case-study, discourse analysis, and ethnography allowed me to closely examine family daily narrative practices, as well as my roles as both instructional literacy leader and a teacher/researcher. The knowledge gained through this investigation may inform the instructional decisions and curricular choices that impact students and children of Mexican descent. Family voices, Mexican culture and traditions, identity and professional interests therefore were investigated through the daily practices of the three Mexican families.

### **Overview of the Study**

**Social context site.** This research was set in a community in a large urban area where the two Mexican American families live, interact, and thrive to make a better life for themselves and their children. They reside in a county of approximately 5,203,499 people (U.S. Census Bureau 2016); and in 2015, the U.S. Census bureau reported 25.2% people of Hispanic/Latino origin residing in this county, a slight 0.2% higher than in 2010. The county reported that 21.2% residents were foreign-born between 2011 and 2015. Contrastingly, in 2015, the three families' zip code contained 58,208 total residents, with 14,044 residents per square mile. In this community, 57.6% of the population was born in this state, 34.3% were foreign-born, and 35% lives below the poverty level. In terms of education, 47.2% of the residents attended school grades below high school, 20.1% hold a high school diploma or equivalent, 6.1% holds a bachelor's degree, and 27.2% of the residents (children) attend K-12 schools. Additionally, 18.2% of the residents reported not speaking English, or at all. These facts demonstrate the challenges that children, parents, and educators face in this community. It is essential to examine the pragmatics of language use in Spanish/English bilingual homes in order to identify and appreciate the syncretic, or merged, linguistic practices that result as very young children interact

with their immigrant parents and grandparents, as well as their siblings and cousins raised in the United States (Bhimji, 2005).

**Participants: purposeful sampling.** This research-study included Mexican American families with elementary and high school-age children, all of whom met the parameters of the research question and sub-questions as follows: The families had no intention of moving to a different neighborhood in the near future, nor did they expect any major changes in their lives such as switching jobs or having more children. The two families were highly involved in the school where their children attend, were present at all weekly parent meetings, and they volunteer their time at school-related activities such as preparing materials for teachers and school-wide events.

I came in constant contact with these two families while witnessing their involvement and conversations in the school's parent room. I wondered about the linguistic interactions they held with their children while they were at home and in other social contexts. I noticed that their children had a developed language ability when speaking and listening in social and academic settings. For instance, I witnessed a conversation of one of the focal parents with students during recess. Hence, the mother was explaining and demonstrating a game and song to students, which she used to sing and play when she was a child in her native Mexico. She captured the children's attention and they instantly engaged in the activity. Although the observed discourse was in Spanish, children showed interest right away. Later, I looked for the mother to inquire about her past school and recess memories. While listening to her story, the other mothers chimed in with their own memories as well. At the time, I knew that the wealth of knowledge parents bring to the school is hardly heard and entirely underutilized. I also noticed that the mother's Spanish discourse was filled with joy and enthusiasm as she shared memories that lightened up their day

and brought forth their hopes to incorporate such chants and games into the school's recess routines.

Though these families' daily discourse is in Spanish and they are acquiring English, I continued wondering how their children strengthened their Spanish language development, as well as how the Spanish language impacts their literacy development. This is but one example of the primacy of parents, the knowledge they possess, and the little attention educators often place on the resources of student's families, even though such these resources can motivate and engage children in the process of developing their ever-evolving language and literacy abilities. At times, parents are confronted with long work hours that may limit their daily linguistic interactions with their children. For example, one of the focal families is comprised of two parents, both of whom are hardworking individuals who are aware of the financial needs of a family of six. The father works at a mechanic shop between 8 and 12 hours daily, six days a week. Then he comes home late in the afternoon and many times he fixes cars in his garage. The mother is busy caring for the children, cooking, cleaning the house, and repairing small things around the house. Even though their time is limited for linguistic interactions, this family makes time to meet as a family, and ensure that quality time is spent together. Consequently, I felt that their linguistic interactions, knowledge, cultural values, and traditions were important to investigate in this study.

In sum, selecting two families that share the same characteristics (place of residence, living conditions, and cultural heritage) brought light to my research questions.

My research questions were centered on the day-to-day linguistic interactions and practices of the selected Mexican families. The data I collected through interviews, observations, field notes and my journal revealed answers to my research questions and uncovered themes that

will be discussed in detail in chapters four and five. In order for me to deeply understand the linguistic interactions, I used consistent interpretative frames across the conversations of these two Mexican American families. Thus, I understood how the two families and their conversations were alike and/or different. It was essential not to generalize because this small sample did not represent a culture or a single group, although, this small sample comprised these two families and their linguistic practices to answer my research questions in language and literacy development.

**Researcher's role.** My researcher's voice, values, assumptions, beliefs, and biases have been shaped through my own personal and professional experiences. I was the fourth child in a family of seven children from parents born in two different regions of rural Mexico. My parents attended primary school on a limited basis. My mother attended up to fourth grade in a single-room rural school where she learned basic reading, writing and math. She lived with relatives who did not attend school at all, and she was not encouraged to attend school daily. My father was transient through his childhood, delaying his enrollment in primary school until he turned nine years old. As a child, he was given several responsibilities at home, and scarcely attended school. Despite his limited attendance he learned basic reading, writing and math. Though, my parents had limited exposure to formal and consistent education and a lack of guidance from their own parents and relatives, they knew education was the key to succeeding in life. I received many life-long lessons from my parents that I practice daily, such as a strong determination to pursue my goals, passion for education, and a strong work ethic. Therefore, I clearly understand the power parents have when it comes to forming, shaping and guiding children in their personal and academic lives. As a researcher, I reflected on my own parents'

daily practices and advice and how those practices impacted me through my personal and professional life, making me an advocate for strengthening parental involvement in schools.

Once I received my bachelor's degree from the Instituto Politécnico Nacional (*National Polytechnic Institute*) in Mexico City, I decided to explore my professional horizons in different cities in Mexico and the United States. I settled in a large urban city in the Midwest in the early 90's with the goal of attaining English fluency and obtaining a master's degree in education. As I was completing my master's program, I became a bilingual (Spanish-English) teacher in a public elementary school. After 10 years of teaching (Spanish-English) in the bilingual classrooms, I worked several positions within the same school district, before I took a position as Instructional Leader in a neighborhood where the families participating in this study reside. I honorably learned from my parents and learned from these two families a collective sum of experiences that were worth studying and contributed to my study.

In sum, I clearly understood the immense challenge Latinx parents face in supporting their children's educational trajectories. I also cherished the opportunity for continued learning from my students' families of my students whose support and knowledge also contributed to attaining literacy. In addition, I am aware of the challenges children face when learning their first and second languages concurrently. In my own experience, learning English was quite a challenge because my social context was Spanish dominant, and the only chance I had to practice English was an hour a day for five days at the secondary school I attended. I also liked to listen to and write English songs to practice my listening and writing skills in English. Therefore, I understand that learning a second language, like the children and families in a Spanish dominant social context are doing, is as difficult as it was during my own personal language learning path. I sympathized with the immense challenge these Spanish dominant families and children living

in the U.S. face when acquiring and utilizing the English language, an important element in their future success in the United States (Fitzgerald, 1993). In their research on dual language programs for English Language Learners (ELLs), Estrada, Gomez, & Ruiz-Escalante (2009) reported, “ELLs need five to seven years to master English well enough to work as proficiently in English as they could in their native language” (p.56). Therefore, daily narrative practices in Mexican families are important to study because the crucial role they play on the development of Spanish and English language and later to literacy instruction.

From continuous conversations with Latinx parents and fellow instructional leaders, I have often heard the need for parental support. Unable to find an appropriate medium for interaction, parents and classroom teachers often feel “disconnected,” and thus unable to capitalize on each other’s cultural knowledge, skills and experiences as partners in facilitating student learning (Allen, 2008). Those who know how much Latinx parents want their children to succeed could mount a more convincing defense if they understood how different groups of Latinx view their role in the development of children’s oral and literate abilities, and how they go about implementing those views (Zentella, 2005).

Lyn Lofland’s (1993) studies of public space showed the observer in a familiar location, observing people like herself, and drawing on her own familiarity with the setting and behavior. By taking a “complete participant” role in my own research (Gold, 1958), I had the opportunity to be close to the scenes where all family members behave and conduct themselves in their natural culture-sharing social context. At times, I took on roles that ranged from an active participant (acting as a member of the family and not as researcher) to a passive one (listening and watching from the inside so as not to unnaturally alter the flow of the interactions) (Adler & Adler, 1998).

## **Data Collection: Methods and Procedures**

Yin (2009) recommended six ways to collect information: documents, archival records, interviews, direct observations, participant observation, and physical artifacts. In contrast, Creswell (2013) suggested four types of approaches to collect data: observations, interviews, documents, and audiovisual materials. I utilized elements of both Yin (2009) and Creswell (2013) in my own data collection, as I employed interviews, observations and field notes as primary data collections methods. Although interviews were the first data collection entry point, I also used observations, field notes, and a researcher's journal.

The data collection elements mentioned above, allowed me to understand how current culture and culture-sharing groups worked for these two families. Yin (2009) suggested that a multiple case-study design uses the logic of replication, in which the researcher replicates the procedures for each case and each case presents an unusual or unique situation (Stake, 1995). In utilizing multiple cases (three families), or multiple bounded systems, Creswell (2013) recommended purposeful sampling, in which researchers select cases that show different perspectives on the situation, problem, process, or event to portray. Thus, I sought to demonstrate the different perspectives of the two selected families, and their various educational experiences during childhood and with their own children. For instance, the two families discussed their perspective on the difference between meals offered in the U.S. schools and Mexican schools. This small instance exemplifies how these families presented their own perspective on aspect of their children's education. Hence, it was important to look closely at the variety of perspectives families have within the same ethnic group. I also considered multiple sources of information as Creswell (2013) suggested, as well as looked for replication as suggested by Stake (1995) so as to answer the research questions of this study.

**Interviews.** Interactive interviews provide an “in-depth and intimate understanding of people’s experiences with emotionally charged and sensitive topics” (Ellis, Kiesinger & Tillman-Healy, 1997, p.121). Such interviews are collaborative endeavors between researchers and participants and are research activities in which researchers and participants—one and the same—probe together through conversation into issues that transpire, in conversation, about particular topics (e.g. literacy). Interactive interviews usually consist of multiple interview sessions, and, unlike traditional one-on-one interviews with strangers, are situated within the context of emerging and well-established relationships among participants and interviewers (Adams & Cox, 2008). The emphasis in this study context was on what could be learned from interaction within the interview setting, as well as the stories that each person brought to the research encounter (Mey & Mruck, 2010).

**Field notes.** This ethnographic research included home visits to the two Mexican families in a two-month period during the summer months. I visited the Hernandez three times, the Gomez two times, and recorded 2-3 hours of audiotape both in their home and in other contexts. I documented each interview, conversation, and observation in audio format, together with observational field notes, and my own retrospective were included in my own reflective journal entries. Audio tapes were reviewed with participants of the selected sections along with the written documents for accuracy of ideas. The oral revision was conducted in Spanish with the participants and compared to the written document translated by researcher. All release forms (English/Spanish) are signed and secured and filed in an appendix to this document.

**Observations.** Observation is one of the key tools for collecting data in qualitative research (Creswell, 2013). It is the act of noting a phenomenon in the field, through the five senses of the observer, often with an instrument, and recording it for scientific purposes



(Angrosino, 2007). Understanding that observations are pivotal in this research, I planned to start the observation broadly and then concentrate more specifically on my research questions. For example, I greeted the family and all other individuals present within each context without an expectation (broad context), then I started to focus on my own research questions through detailed observation. Creswell (2013) distinguished four types of observations: 1) *complete participant observation*, in which the researcher is fully engaged with the people he or she is observing; 2) *participant as observer*, in which the researcher is participating in the activity at the site; 3) *non-participant/observer as participant*, in which the researcher is an outsider of the group under study, watching and taking field notes from a distance; and 4) *complete observer*, in which the researcher is neither seen nor noticed by the people under study. Understanding the challenge of this type of study and the nature of observing groups of people in their own social context, a combination of these four types of observation was used interchangeably. For instance, I was ready to pick up and be with the family as soon as they were willing to allow my presence, which occurred depending on each specific context or event and via their simple invitation or my own as appropriate.

**Researcher's journal.** After each interview, observation, or contact with each family, I wrote my reflection, so that my thoughts and views were part of the data. Reporting findings was important but bringing my own reflections into this study provided more thorough learning points, intuitions, and commentary regarding the information observed, such as the physical setting of the social context, activities, interactions and my own reactions. In order to get a global understanding, I was observing and taking notes to ensure I captured what was evident of the behaviors between linguistic interactions. Simultaneously, I reflected on my instructional

decisions that informed my teaching practices and how to best utilize what I was observing in these two families.

### **Data Analysis Procedures**

Throughout this research, I collected and reviewed qualitative data to determine adaptive changes to my course of action. I analyzed and compared initial and exit interviews, observations, field notes, and my researcher journal with the intention of complementing data collection procedures. I used this qualitative data to develop pedagogical attributes and practices in my instructional decisions.

In qualitative research, data analysis is not off-the-shelf; rather it is custom-built, revised, and “choreographed” (Creswell, 2013; Huberman & Miles, 1994). Creswell (2013) identified three analysis strategies that I followed; first, I created a file folder for each subject/family as my main data management system. I named (with a pseudonym) each file with the type of data and location of the family. Then, I familiarized myself with the data by reviewing all interviews, observations, and field notes multiple times. While listening, reading, and reviewing, I wrote key ideas, concepts, and emerging themes in my own personal notes. This structure allowed me to reflect on the major themes present in the data, from which I formed preliminary categories. Moreover, I also looked for evidence of multiple perspectives about each category (Stake, 1995). Lastly, I categorized the data into themes and wrote detailed descriptions about these themes. One example of a theme came from my own childhood recollections, which were spurred by my time spent with the families. I remember that Sunday brunch used to be family time, we gathered together as family to talk about our lives, health, education, and trips. We ensured that each one of us was allowed to participate and pick a theme to discuss during this time.

Thus, the classification of the data into themes was the first step in the process of coding. This was accomplished by an initial review of the data, during which I developed an initial list of codes, which I expanded as I proceeded so as to permit a list of categories of themes to develop. The concept of categories or themes was based on Creswell's definition of categories "themes in qualitative research (also called categories) are broad units of information that consist of several codes aggregated to form a common idea" (p.186). Lastly, I employed a "holistic analysis" of the case, in which I completed a thorough analysis of the descriptions, themes, interpretations, and implications that are explicated in the following chapters, so as to establish a deep understanding of each case (Creswell, 2013, p.100).

### **Standards of Validations and Trustworthiness**

I took several steps to ensure the validity and trustworthiness of this study. First, I utilized triangulation of the data to clarify meaning and establish the validity of my findings. Researchers make use of multiple sources, methods, investigators, and theories to provide corroborating evidence (Creswell, 2013; Ely et al., 1991; Erlandson et al., 1993; Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1988; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 1980, 1990). My study triangulated data from family interviews, observations, and reflective journal collected during the time frame discussed above.

In defining credibility in qualitative studies, Creswell (2013) cited Eisner (1991) to highlight that "we seek a confluence of evidence that breeds credibility, that allows us to feel confident about our observations, interpretations, and conclusions" (p.110). One way to achieve credibility in this current study was by utilizing member checks. According to Stake (1995), participants should "play a major role directing as well as acting in the case study" (p. 115). He further stated that participants should be asked to examine rough drafts of the researcher's work

and to provide alternative language, and “critical observations or interpretations” (Stake, 1995, p.115). I employed this strategy, and drafts were available to every participating family member to clarify and/or address any questions or concerns, which they took as a serious task. No adults were interested in reading English transcripts, nor in listening to any recordings. I held conversations in Spanish with the adults to clarify and expand on written notes. Most adults had a limited knowledge of English and relied on the explication provided by this writer in Spanish.

Utilizing rich and thick descriptions allowed my study to be transferable (Creswell, 2013; Earlandson et al., 1993; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1988) as, according to Stake (2010), “A description is rich if it provides abundant, interconnected details...” (p. 49). Creswell (2013) explains this further, noting that, “[a meticulous description] enables readers to transfer information to other settings and to determine whether the finding can be transferred” (p. 252). Therefore, I made every attempt to provide deep description throughout the following chapters so as to allowing the readers to determine if this case is similar or relevant to their own situation.

To prevent the presentation of information that might be inaccurate to the participating families’ expectations, I carefully reported my findings and conclusions according to the expectation of the participating family. I shared clear, and concrete expectations of data collection, analysis, and reporting process with the families, so that my presence during their family and community linguistic interactions would be enhanced, rather than serve as an interference. A semi-structured interview questionnaire was also developed to include non-intrusive questions and serve to guide the interview discussion (see Appendix B).

### **Time Frame for the Study**

Data collection for this study occurred during a period of three summer months. Recruiting participants took about two weeks; therefore, data collection began in June 2017.

During the following two months, I conducted interviews, made observations and took field notes. I immediately transcribed and analyzed initial interviews and retrospective journal entries. Continuous observations and informal interviews occurred for two months (July and August 2017). Finally, in August 2017, I conducted the last interview and observation to conclude the study. This study was primarily directed in Spanish, however, there were instances where English and Spanish were used simultaneously during linguistic interactions especially by teenagers and children.

## **Chapter Four: Presentation of Findings**

This chapter presents findings from the analysis of the data collected over a period of three months. During this time frame, I was able to use several sources of information including semi-structured interviews, observations, field notes, and my own journaling. Data sources showed a detailed and in-depth understanding of how these families' daily bilingual linguistic interactions impact their own and their children's language development. Although the majority of the linguistic interactions were predominantly in Spanish, some family members spoke one or two words in English during the interactions. In other cases, preteens, teens, and children were switching between Spanish and English, but their linguistic interactions were mostly in Spanish. The first part of this chapter begins with a general narrative of each case-study, first with a portrait of the community, followed by description of the families involved, and the different social contexts in which their daily linguistic interactions took place. Next, I bring highlight memories from parents of their own childhood academic and social linguistic interactions. Then, I answer each research question supported with data, including themes and patterns that emerged during my research. Last, I summarize the data findings in order to provide its interpretation in the last chapter.

### **Portrait of the Community**

The community in which this study takes place is in a large urban area of the Midwestern United States of America. The zip code is enclaved between major expressways, public transportation, and a major international airport. The community is fortunate to sustain a large industrial area and both large and small stores that offer employment opportunities to many members of the community. The main street is composed of small grocery stores, hair salons, banks, restaurants and fast food restaurants that help the community stay vibrant. There is a

large shopping mall located on the west side of the community where three large chain stores and smaller businesses bring the community plenty of shopping options. On weekends, a major flea market draws a large number of families from across the large urban area to shop, eat, visit and enjoy a variety of items for sale.

Six elementary schools of P-8 grades, with an enrollment that fluctuates between 500 – 1100 students in each, offer programs with different focuses such as Fine Arts, Reading and Writing, Math and Science, Bilingual Programs (Spanish-English), and World Language (Chinese). A newly built high school opened its doors to the community in close proximity, where a large number of residents and major elementary schools are located. It is the hope of the residents that this high school continues providing educational opportunities for children in the neighborhood. The community worked diligently with community-based organization, religious groups, city council members, and school district officials to enact a state of the art High School. The community was promised that all elementary graduates would automatically attend this high school; however, upon completion of this state-of-the-art building, school officials unilaterally decided that all new students must pass entrance exam to be admitted.

There are only a small number of residents in this community who hold a high school diploma or equivalent. Most residents have attended elementary school for a short time. In addition to the low academic attainment, most residents speak a language other than English. The majority of families are recent arrivals to this country; therefore, their limitations on the English language, and in knowing the American system, combined with a lack of documentation, results in struggles with employment, education, and language, as well as in finding jobs that offer sufficient earnings to support their families. Many of the residents are first generation immigrants to the United States, therefore they work long hours to ensure that they provide basic

needs to their children and families. The participating families of this study reside near each other and interact on a daily basis for various social and relational matters. The families have ample opportunities for linguistic interactions in different social contexts such as grocery shopping, banking, walking around the mall, and going to and from school.

The focal neighborhood has high crime rates, and there are families living in fear, while others only come out during the daytime. Yet, they still continue their daily lives despite the difficulties and ailments of a large urban area. Their interactions primarily occur in their native language (Spanish), and daily linguistic interactions mainly tend to take place through face-to-face conversations, in small groups while walking in the neighborhood, during phone conversations, and oral interactions while sitting on the front porches of their homes.

### **Portrait of the Families**

The Mexican American families in this study are immigrants to this country and their children were born in the U.S. They arrived in this country for the main reason of reuniting with family members and for better employment opportunities. Although these two families share the same characteristics, each one has had different experiences. In order to understand the context of linguistic utterances patterns, a description of each family is as follows:

The Hernandez Family is composed of Juan (father), Mariana (mother), and the children in chronological order; Samantha (oldest daughter), Alexandra (daughter), Brandon (son), and Wendy (daughter) all pseudonyms. Juan is a strong, quiet, and confident man born in Michoacán, the eldest in a family of four brothers. He attended school in rural Michoacán up to first year of “La Secundaria” (seventh grade in U.S. schooling). He prides himself on knowing mechanics because of his tenacity to learn this by helping in his uncle’s mechanic shop since the age of 11.



Mariana is a self-starter, a confident and determined woman raised by her grandparents in rural Michoacán. She completed sixth grade (Elementary school in Mexico) but she is aware that her academic foundation is not strong enough to help her children once they attend third grade and up. She knows that her basic mathematical skills are also narrow, and she loves her phone because it has a calculator at her fingertips. Mariana is a homemaker and devotes her time to volunteer at the school where all her children attend. She is always surrounded by her female friends and reciprocates their friendship and support. The four children were born in the U.S. and have attended the same neighborhood elementary school since Pre-kindergarten, at the time of the study, they were enrolled in the bilingual program and received instruction in their native language (Spanish), and in English as a Second Language. The family proudly lives in a two-story house with a large side lot where their children can enjoy the weather during the summer months.

The Gomez Family is composed of Humberto (father), Alejandra (mother), Roberto (son), and Viridiana (daughter). Humberto is a short, vibrant, and dynamic man who traded the farmlands of Michoacán for a job as a semi-truck mechanic. He moved up to a supervisory position at his job because of his tenacity, determination, and assertiveness on the job. In addition to his highly demanding job, he volunteers as a soccer coach for young children during his free time and he enjoys helping his children get into sports to stay away from the streets. Humberto shared that he attended “la secundaria/middle school and freshman year of High School.” The Telesecundaria program was created by the Mexican government to deliver “secundaria/middle school” education to students living in remote areas of the country. In the case of Humberto, the tele-secundaria was the only option available at the time. In spite of attending la secundaria via television, he prides himself on its completion. He mentioned that he

tried to attend school here in the U.S., but because of his work schedule and demands, his English courses were cut short.

Alejandra, an assertive, empathetic, and caring woman who learned at a very young age that life can be difficult without an education. Yet she has, in spite of her limited academic skills, developed a business selling live plant decorations for all types of events. She was able to build her own website with the help of her son. Alejandra was unable to go to school and repeated first grade several times. She remembered that her parents did not push her to continue going to school, and she mentioned that she attended first grade for five consecutive years. Her father told her that she was hard headed, and it would be better if she would stop going to school altogether. Since she did not receive support and was constantly being told that she would not continue school, Alejandra's older sister, who was living in Mexico City at the time, picked her up and took her to her house where she lived and took care for her sister's children. She did not like the situation in the last and used her limited literacy and mathematical skills to help her land a job in the restaurant business. She continued working, caring for her sister's children, her own parents, and her own children. Years later and after many stumbles in Mexico City, Alejandra arrived in a large Midwestern city with the hopes of making a better life for herself and support the children she left behind. Upon arrival, she met and married Humberto and gave birth to their two children Roberto and Viridiana. She cherished memories of her childhood, teenage years, and young adulthood that taught her to be a strong advocate for education given her own academic limitations. Further details about these two families are provided in Table 4.1 below,

Table 4.1

*Participant Demographic Information*

<b>Hernández Family</b>	<b>Gomez Family</b>
<p><u>Parents</u>                      Mariana: Mother, Age 29, Homemaker                      Juan: Father, age 36, mechanic                      Both born in Michoacán, Mexico                      Native language: Spanish                      English: Limited                      12 years residing in the U.S.</p> <p><u>Children</u>                      Samantha: Female, age 10, fourth grade                      Alexandra: Female, age 8, third grade                      Brandon: Male, age 5, preschool                      Wendy: Female, age 2                      All born in the United States                      Spanish: Native language                      English: Some                      Attending the same public elementary school</p>	<p><u>Parents</u>                      Alejandra: Mother, age 56, Homemaker                      Humberto: Father, age 40, mechanic                      Both born in Michoacán, Mexico                      Native language: Spanish                      English: Alejandra Limited, Humberto Early proficient                      20 years residing in the U.S.</p> <p><u>Children</u>                      Roberto: Male, age 18, Senior in high school                      Viridiana: Female, age 11, fifth grade</p> <p>All born in the United States                      Spanish: Native language                      English: Occasional use, but not at home                      Attending public schools (elementary and a selective charter high school outside the area)</p>

I learned that each family has a story to tell, a set of different circumstances, a different upbringing, and a relentless love for their children, but most importantly a strong desire and aspiration for their children to succeed in the U.S.

**Overview of Data Collection Settings**

In order to collect data to answer my research questions, I used interviews as the first data collection entry point; I also used observations in different social contexts such as birthday parties, back yard gatherings, quinceañera celebrations, and religious services. To have a clearer understanding of where data collection occurred, I briefly describe each social gathering.

**Birthday parties.** I attended two birthday parties that took place in the homes of each one of the families. The first birthday party happened at the home of the Hernandez family. Brandon had a belated celebration where family members and close friends and their children attended in the back yard of their two-story home. The second birthday party took place at the Gomez family house. Humberto and the two children planned the celebration for Alejandra by assigning each relative and neighbor a dish and item to bring to help with the celebration.

**Back yard gatherings.** I attended three back yard gatherings, two of which occurred at the spur of the moment in the Hernandez family back yard. The first gathering took place because Juan's brother's car was being fixed and the second occurred as an excuse during the collection of twigs that were chopped from the large maple tree in the back yard. The third back yard gathering took place at the Gomez's house when Alejandra felt like cooking outside because of the high summer temperature on that day. The whole family and a couple of neighbors were present during the early evening hours.

**Quinceañera ceremonies and celebrations.** This traditional celebration is customary in the Latinx cultures, and is the day that families introduce a teenage girl into the society. The first quinceañera celebration was in honor of Alejandra's nephew's daughter. The Hernandez family and other families I knew from school were present celebrating with the family. The second quinceañera took place a month after the first one in late August. This quinceañera was the daughter of a close friend of the Mariana Hernandez and Alejandra Gomez, and the other women that form close-knit relationship in the community.

**Religious services.** Holding religious services for a quinceañera is a tradition in the Latinx cultures, which involves a large gathering of teenage girls named damas and teenage boys named chambelanes. The quinceañera celebration follows a traditional format in which the

damas and chambelanes receive the quinceañera at the entrance of the church and/or hall, followed by families and invitees. Both families followed this tradition by holding services for each of their daughters. These two religious events were held a few hours before the celebration and took place at the same Catholic church on different days and times. The attendance was minimal, approximately 30 people at each ceremony—just enough people to share the joy of togetherness and celebrate this rite of passage to become a woman under God and in the community. After the religious ceremony, families generally hold a celebration involving food, drinks, music, and dancing, with the first dance of the evening being that of the quinceañera and her father, followed by a formal pre-rehearsed formal dance called Vals, and an upbeat song/dance of her choice. Both families' celebratory parties were held at a hall during the evening. I attended both quinceañera services and celebrations as a friend, participant, observer, and researcher.

**Interviews.** The purpose of the interviews was to gain knowledge of each family in three different areas: the family background, the type of linguistic interactions to which they were accustomed, and their perceptions of their own educational experiences in their native country versus the educational experiences of their children in the U.S.

In addition to the social settings described above, field notes and my own journaling were used. Through these data sources, I gained an in-depth understanding of how these families' daily bilingual linguistic interactions impact their own language development.

### **Presentation of Findings**

**Parental memories and perceptions.** The importance of learning and understanding the linguistic background and narrative practices of a child's family becomes evident in the context of their literacy development of children (Zentella, 2005). To answer the questions guiding this

study and gain a better understanding of the linguistic backgrounds and narrative practices of the focal families in this study, each question was answered by weaving together data collected from interviews and observations in different social events. The first research question was, ***“What are the parents’ memories of the daily linguistic interactions they engaged in during their own childhoods, with their families and in school when compared to their perceptions of their children’s daily linguistic interactions at home and in school?”***

The Hernandez and Gomez families both expressed that growing up in a different country and experiencing a different educational system presented a few challenges. Primarily, they conveyed the difference in trying to raise their children with the same values and beliefs as they held. For instance, Mariana mentioned that she felt free and happy while going to school because she was able to play with friends during recess without thinking of anything bad. She did not have any worries about school, nor any pressure from friends because life was simple and did not present challenges of any sort. However, in the United States, she is constantly thinking of her children and the type of life they will live. She worries because there are many demands on children to learn to read and write faster than she when she went to school. Mariana’s oldest daughter, Samantha told her of the pressure she has from her peers about being highly competitive in being popular, even in the fourth grade. Juan shared that his educational experiences resembled those of Mariana, and that he also enjoyed sharing time with friends and had few worries of being in a neighborhood infested with gangs and violence. He did not have any pressures from any of his friends to show off his latest toys or electronic devices, unlike the way he perceived children in the U.S. are getting accustomed to.

Humberto shared that his memories about school in his native Mexico were difficult. Being a highly active person, he was reprimanded for his hyperactivity during classes, but his

teachers ensured that he learned to read and write despite his inabilities to stay put. During secundaria/middle school years, he had fond memories, largely due to a female teacher who took the time to teach him agriculture and showed him the strength of his hyperactivity. Although, he wasn't able to reciprocate her good intentions at the time, he remembers crying and thanking her for what she had done for him during the secundaria/middle school graduation. He attributes his hyperactivity to his need to belong to the group of friends he had at the time, and he mentioned that those friends were looking for ways to cut classes, and he was taken along. After graduation, he moved to the United States and started working, and still holds the determination of that female teacher in high regard. Alejandra had little to share about her schooling because she only attended school sporadically. She recalled well when her father stated "*si no te gusta la escuela no pierdas tu tiempo*" (if you don't like school don't waste your time).

On the other hand, the Hernandez and Gomez children have shared with their parents the academic demands they face on a daily basis at school. For example, the Gomez and Hernandez parents noted that their children have many assignments to complete for homework, including daily reading, and that they have little time to play or be on a device surfing the Internet. Both mothers volunteer at the school their children attend, and assist in the cutting, pasting, decorating, and preparing for assemblies, and sometimes they even help during recess. They observed indirectly how teachers deliver instruction while they pass out papers to take home or decorate bulletin boards. Mariana stated that she had no idea how much work is involved in setting up a classroom. She observed her daughter's teacher working with a small group, and watched children exhibiting little motivation. The teacher had to be resourceful using different strategies to engage children in the lesson. She thought that it was hard for her to see some children exhibiting little motivation but reflected that it was the parents' responsibility to ensure

children are sent to school ready to learn. Additionally, children experience in an American educational system, bring home a great deal of information, which parents have to read and sometimes respond to in writing, however, their limited English language writing skills prevent them from responding, and instead they go directly to the teacher during dismissal time to respond orally. Mariana mentioned that children are faced with many instructional demands, which is very different from when she grew up in Mexico. She also noted that besides volunteering at the school, she has to play teacher in the afternoon helping her children to complete all assigned homework. Unlike Alejandra's experience with her children, she felt that her limited academic skills prevented her from effectively helping her children with their homework and has to resort to a supervisory mode as they completed their assigned homework. Alejandra sits next to her children everyday while they complete their homework and signs off on the assignments. During this hour or more of time, she witnesses the several pieces of homework they must complete, and perceives that this time spent with her children is a productive way to ensure their children are prepared for life in the U.S.

In sum, the memories and perceptions of the participating parents exemplify a different educational experience than they perceive their children to be experiencing in the U.S. school system. However, both families wish to raise their children in a different way from what they experienced and are supportive of their children's educational paths. The families are keenly aware that the American school system is not as strict in terms of discipline as the Mexican school system they experienced while growing up, but they are hopeful that their children receive a good education and surpass their own educational experiences.

**Linguistic interactions in social contexts.** The second research question is "*What are the daily linguistic interactions occurring in the social context of two bilingual*



*(Spanish/English) families?”* Interacting with these two families prior to beginning the study was part of my interest as an educator. As stated in Chapter One, I met and interacted with these two Mexican American families through my employment at the school their children attended. Several linguistic interactions occurred in and out of the school that allowed me to increase my understanding of these families, and I was also fortunate to learn about their cultures, traditions, and especially their knowledge around specific celebrations, food, routines, family gatherings, and especially their beliefs and sentiments for their own families.

The variety of linguistic experiences in different social contexts such as birthday parties, back yard gatherings, quinceañera celebrations, and religious services conveyed conversational points that served as a springboard to examine this research question. For example, on different occasions, conversations during these events focused on an individual’s own health and employment; while at other times, families asked for support about how to educate their children and offered strategies that worked for their own family. In learning more about the focal families, it was interesting to observe that each family had different stories to contribute and gladly opened their doors and hearts to learn and share with each other, while also providing context that can contribute to the field of language and literacy development. Daily conversations in the form of oral narratives are important to the field of oracy, listening and speaking, as a precursor to literacy development.

In all, the collected data showed meaningful points of connection between research sub-questions 2 A and 2 B, so that collapsing them together in this discussion provides a clearer picture of the research findings. To recap, these sub-questions include: *What are the features and emerging themes of these linguistic interactions across the families involved in the study?* and *What are the roles and linguistic patterns of the participating members in family interactions?*

In the following lines, I provide samples of data that included the features of the linguistic interactions across the participating families, woven with samples from the collected data that support the emergence of themes, and the roles and patterns of the linguistic interactions of these two families engaged in daily.

Most educators understand that any one language is composed of regional variations, or dialects, marked by pronunciation, and vocabulary, and intra-language, or dialect variations that are also related to social contexts (Purcell-Gates, 2005). Given my interactions with the Gomez and Hernandez families in different social contexts, I am able to discuss the forms of language I encountered when attending celebrations, family gatherings, *telenovela* (soap-operas) viewings, and one-on-one conversations. The identifying linguistic features I noted during these social situated activities include phonology (the sounds of words and sentences), word choice (lexicon), syntax (sentence structure), and topics/themes (typical to these families).

The Gomez and Hernandez families share a variety of commonalities, such as their length of residence in the United States, regional birthplace in Mexico, current living proximity in the U.S. These commonalities seem to be a factor in the way these families strive to make a life inclusive of each other. For instance, since they live within walking distance, it is easy for them to assist one another picking their children up for school. Marcia Farr (2006) in her 15-year ethnographic study of Latinx Language and Literacy in Chicago found that Mexican Americans in an urban, Midwestern region are predominantly from the Western states of Mexico such as Michoacán, Jalisco, and Guanajuato and that Mexican Americans born in these places now residing in the U.S. possess a unique *ranchero* identity. She described this identity as specifically related to individuals from Michoacán, and notes that they have a sense of progress, appreciate working with their hands, and maintain individualistic identities while also caring for family

unity. Farr also indicates that people living in these Mexican states are known to be distinct subgroup within the larger category of rural Mexican *campesinos* (peasants).

Farr identified three cultural styles of speaking that also characterize these Mexican American Michoacán families, including a *Franqueza*(frankness), *Respeto*(respect), and *Relajo*(joking or teasing). Given that the focal families in this study share the same regional birth place of the Mexican state of Michoacán, their distinct phonological style and intonation when speaking are evident during their daily linguistic discourse. For example, during Alejandra’s birthday celebration in the Gomez family’s backyard in late July, their children and close friends assembled the celebration by collectively distributing the items purchased for the birthday menu. The Hernandez family was in attendance, as well as friends also from the same town in Michoacán. The following conversation exemplifies all of Farr’s language features which are highlighted with bold font. The code W1 (Woman 1) and W2 (Woman 2) are used to designate two women, also originally from Michoacán, who were present at the house during my visit.

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| 1. RT: ¡Buenas tardes a todos!   | 1. RT: Good afternoon everyone!  |
| 2. All: Buenas tardes, pase aquí, <b>mi</b> re   | 2. All: Good afternoon, please come in, look   |
| 3. Alejandra: ¡Ay me agarró! Aquí mire, limpiando los que traigo en la frente (nopales)                            | 3. Alejandra: Hey, you caught me! Look, cleaning what I have on my forehead (Cactus)                 |
| 4. Alejandra: Pase, siéntese... ¡ay! Ahí   | 4. Alejandra: Come in, sit down! There!  |
| 5. W1: ¿Que <b>quere</b> tomar? ¿Una Soda <b>a</b> ? ¿Agua?  | 5. W1: What would you like to drink? A soda? Water?  |
| 6. Agustín: ¡Denle una <b>cerveza</b> !  | 6. Agustín: Give him a beer!   |
| 7. RT: ¡Una soda!  | 7. RT: A soda!   |
| 8. W1: ¿De cual <b>gusta</b> <b>usted</b> ?  | 8. W1: Which one you’d like?   |
| 9. RT: ¡de la que sea! ¡Ahorita no, Al rato la cerveza   | 9. RT: Any kind! Not now, later I will take the beer!  |
| 10. W1: ¿ha estado bien? ¿Como le ha ido? Pues nosotros aquí, ya ve, trabajando y batallando con los niños, ya ve, | 10. W1: Have you been okay? How’s it going? We are here, you see, working and with the kids, you see |
| 11. W2: ¿muy bien gracias, como salieron los niños en la escuela?  | 11. W2: I’m good thanks, how did the kids do at school?  |
| 12. W1: bien, muy bien, puras As y Bs.   | 12. W1: Good, very good, only As and Bs.   |

The Spanish vowels in bold signify the phonological stress family members and invitees, all from same town in Michoacán, denoted when offering greetings and a drink to visitors. On line three, Alejandra stressed the vowel “i” on the word “aqui” and the rest of the attendees at the party showed the same phonological accent common in their hometown of Michoacán, Mexico. Alejandra moved to Mexico City at the age of 13 and lost part of her old town phonological accent. However, when she is with family and friends from this same region, her phonological accent becomes evident. On line five, a woman (W1) offered a soda to the guests, and a series of simple, one-to-three word basic questions were asked. On line eight, W1 again asked the question about soda, but this time using four words. As she completed pouring the soda and handed it out, she proceeded to go back to her seat next to second woman (W2), also from the same town. In lines 10, 11, and 12, these two women appeared to be having a conversation and enjoying an ice-cold drink while watching their children play. I captured their questions and answers in this short conversation, revealing that most fall in the three-five word pattern. Analyzing the syntax of these two women highlighted the basic, simple words used to communicate and express their thoughts. For example, line 10 revealed that W1 asked an initial question which was immediately followed by a second question. Then immediately followed these two questions, added statement explaining the wellbeing of herself and her children. W2 responded to both questions with a three-word answer, and quickly asked a seven-word question that required a lengthy answer. However, W1 chose to answer her with simple two-three-word sentences following the same word choice and syntax pattern. This linguistic interaction between these two women in a relaxed social context exemplifies a typical discourse of two adults who share commonalities, such as place of birth, language, and social network of friends. Even though these two women share these commonalities, it may appear that their social linguistic

interactions might bring deeper conversations with long, and detailed sentences. Instead, these women displayed their identity as *rancheros*, one this is visible in their linguistic interactions and underlying, invisible beliefs in individualism and privacy that is supported by Marcia Farr's (2006) ethnographic studies with transnational Mexican American families.

The predominance of the linguistic features in the Gomez and Hernandez families' speech patterns in social contexts was noticeable during this study. The Spanish language phonology and syntax used by these families are unique to Michoacán and surrounding states in Mexico. The discourse is marked by their pronunciation and word choice in linguistic interaction which is maintained and strengthened in two ways: 1) These families are in constant interaction with other families from their home town in Mexico, and 2) they continue to travel back and forth to visit extended family in Mexico. As a consequence of interacting frequently with their own families in Mexico in Spanish, their oral language continues strengthening. Consequently, their children learn through their unique language style their culture and traditions. Children continue their parents' daily practices using their unique intonation of the Spanish language.

I also captured another vivid example of the unique phonological style of these two families and their relatives during a quinceañera celebration and a religious service. All participating families attended the religious ceremony, together with its celebratory party a few hours after. In these two different social settings, the speech of the participating families, and their invitees displayed a unique phonological and conversational style. It was evident that some of the attendees, including children, also used these linguistic features. For example, children playing together mostly used three-five word sentences and single words as they teased and laughed at each other. Like their parents, the end vowels in Spanish words were stressed, despite the fact that the nature of this particular social setting did not allow them to hold a longer

conversation about their toys. Other attendees included preteens and teenagers, who held conversations including code-switching, and some intonation, similar to their parents. However, code-switching occurred in almost all of their utterances; whereas their parents' intonation pattern was not as pronounced as that evidenced in the younger children. The following data examples serve to provide detailed examples of the utterances in the dialogue of children and teens during the quinceañera celebrations and religious services.

#### During Religious Service

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Brandon: ¿Por que te vas pa'ya? <u>Mira</u> yo tengo un carrito.</li> <li>2. Child 1: ¿Me lo prest<u>as</u>? ¿Vamos a jugar? ¿A ver quien gana?</li> <li>3. Mariana: Pirico (pseudonym for Brandon) ¡Shhh! ¡callate! ¡Te va a regañar el padre!</li> <li>4. Brandon: ¡Nooo!</li> <li>5. Child 1: ¿Vamos a jugar?</li> <li>6. Mariana: ¡Ya te dije! ¡Me las vas a pagar!</li> </ol> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Brandon: Why are you going over there? Look, I have a toy car.</li> <li>2. Child 1: Can I borrow it? Let's play? Let's see who can win?</li> <li>3. Mariana: Pirico (pseudonym for Brandon) Shhh! Be quiet! He (the priest) will reprimand you!</li> <li>4. Brandon: Nooo!</li> <li>5. Child 1: Let's play?</li> <li>6. Mariana: I told you already! I'm gonna make you pay!</li> </ol> |
|--|---|

#### During the Quinceañera Celebration Following the Ceremony

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Teen 1: ¡Gimme that phone! (¿Dame ese telefon<u>o</u>?) ¿Qué estas leyend<u>o</u>?</li> <li>2. Teen 2: Estoy leyend<u>o</u> lo que paso ayer en la novel<u>a</u>, ¡se quedó bien chid<u>o</u>!</li> <li>3. Teen 1: Yes, it did! Le dije a mi Mom pero, no me la dej<u>ó</u> ver, ¡She was mad because ¡I didn't limpie la cocin<u>a</u>!</li> <li>4. Teen 2: ¡You know there is an app! ¡En ese app, tu puedes ver past episodes!</li> <li>5. Teen 1: ¿Es gratis? ¡Porque no tengo money pa'bajarla!</li> <li>6. Teen 2: ¡Me gusta el vestido de Ana! ¡Esta bien padre! ¡Se ve bien! ¿Cuanto le costaria y donde lo compr<u>o</u>?</li> </ol> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Teen 1: Give me that phone! What are you reading?</li> <li>2. Teen 2: I'm reading what happened at the telenovela yesterday, the end was nice!</li> <li>3. Teen 1: Yes, it did! I asked my mom, but, she didn't allow me to watch it, She was mad because I didn't clean the kitchen!</li> <li>4. Teen 2: You know there is an app! In that app, you can watch past episodes!</li> <li>5. Teen 1: Is it free? Because I don't have money to download it!</li> <li>6. Teen 2: I like Ana's dress! It is so cool! She looks great! How much did</li> </ol> |
|---|--|

7. Teen 1: ¡Se ve como la de la telenovela, la villana que es bien mala con esta, esta, Rosa Maria, ¡la Buena!
8. Teen 2: Si! Te acuerdas del episodio en que ella estaba en el party de su prima y se encontró a ese muchacho bien guapo!

she pay? (for it) and where did she buy it?

7. Teen 1: It looks like the one from the telenovela, the villain, she is so bad to um, um, Rosa Maria, the good one!
8. Teen 2: Yes! Do you remember the episode in which she was at the party with her cousin and met this very cute guy!

The unique linguistic style of these families and the group they belong to signify an understanding of the phonological enunciation children use while speaking in their native language and learning a second language. The word choices these families and adults made display a simple non-elaborated style to describe objects and events. The length of sentences was short and simple, including mostly three-five words in sentences and questions. It is worth noting that teens and preteens used longer sentence structures and questions. Even though, the social contexts were fast and loud in tone, this particular group managed to hold linguistic interactions that were not of the same length of their parents and community. Thus, these linguistic features may not be present when having one-on-one conversations with children and other adults in different private settings such as living rooms, kitchens, or other private places.

#### **Features, themes, roles, and patterns.**

The next section of this chapter addresses themes that were salient during in the different settings of this study. Mariana commented “*Cuando nos juntamos todos, algunas veces es pa’ celebrar y otras veces es pa’ hablar de las cosas que han pasado*” (When we get together, sometimes we celebrate and other times we talk about things that happened) in reference to their joy of getting together as family.

Families gathered for different purposes, and during the summer months, the Hernandez and Gomez families found many excuses to celebrate. In the United States, summer months are

short and bring lots of good weather. Mexican American families, like many other families in the U.S. take advantage of the beautiful weather and find plenty of time to enjoy together. For example, the Hernandez family loves to grill almost every weekend. They are fortunate to own a two-story building with a side lot where there is enough space for their children to play and run freely. The large lot also provides a place to meet with relatives and friends to enjoy good conversations and times.

While accompanying the Hernandez and Gomez families in different social settings, the following conversational themes emerged; employment, health, and education. Although these themes were most salient, there were other themes that stood out such as family concerns, telenovelas, friendship, memories, and romantic relationships.

The Gomez family shared the following story with a family friend after a social gathering. Alejandra (A) and another woman named Cecilia (C) were conversing about the change in leadership at the Gomez's place of employment:

#### Back Yard Gathering

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| 1 A. Y me dijo que si me quería ir con él   | 1 A. He asked me if I wanted to follow him   |
| 2 C. ¿Después de que te cerró el puesto, te pidió eso? Jajajaja<br>¿Y que le dijiste? ¿Y? ¿Qué? ¿Sí?                                      | 2 C. after he closed your position, he asked you that? Ha, ha, ha, ha.<br>What did you say? And? What? Yes?                      |
| 3 A. Le dije “No, a ver cómo te va, y dijo, a ver cómo te va, pero, ya sabes las cosas como van, y lo que haces aquí lo vas a hacer allá. | 3 A. I said, No, let's see how it goes for you, he said, but, you know how things are, what you do here you will do there too    |
| 4 C. !A ha!   | 4 C. Aha!  |
| 5 A. Usted que cree que lo voy a tener confianza después de que me cerró el puesto, NO, y dijo que se iba a llevar a varios, y mire...    | 5 A. You think I will trust him after he closed my position, NO, he said that he was going to take other people too, and you see |

This brief conversation portrayed an example of dialog around employment, a salient theme that these families brought to light in different social contexts. A close analysis of this



discourse example revealed that these two parents knew the situation that Alejandra had been involved in for the last few weeks. For example, Alejandra started the conversation stating what happened in her place of employment when her boss conversed with her, as follows: she started the conversation “Y me dijo que...” (line 1) and ends with “él” assuming that her boss was a male and moved to another place of employment. Cecilia appeared to know exactly the development of the situation of what Alejandra was going through. Hence, it seemed that both women talked about this situation regularly. By limiting the explication of the topic in short sentences, the listener seemed to know exactly where they left off the last time they both conversed about the same topic. This was particularly exemplified when Cecilia stated “después de que me cerró...” (line 2), as this comment ensured that they both mutually understand the same topic and situation that Alejandra experienced at her place of employment.

What was hidden, on underlying in the conversation were expressions of franqueza (frankness), at the level of respeto (respect), and of relajo (joking), which they both demonstrated while conversing. Utilizing Farr’s framework of reference, I noticed that Alejandra spoke in a frank tone to show the seriousness of the offer her boss made of a position at a new location (line 5). Cecilia showed respect in this decision by commenting, “What did you say?” (line 2). Then she showed humor while speaking and laughing during the conversation, introducing joking as a way of keeping conversation alive and engaging. Joking while speaking with each other is shown as a trait that these families displayed during their daily conversations in multiple social contexts.

The theme of health was also common theme is the study as I listened to many discussions of health throughout the data collection process. I included one excerpt below that exemplifies one such routine discourse from both of the family homes. The following conversation occurred during a social gathering at the Gomez’s family home that included

various relatives, friends and neighbors. Alejandra (A) began the conversation by sharing an update of her health status with Cecilia (C). The two had known each other for about ten years and had not seen each other for a couple of weeks. Therefore, the conversation appeared to be a topic that has continued each time they see each other. It was evident from their body language, nodding heads, and facial gestures that both women wanted to converse about the topic, and included a third woman, Gloria (G), who was sitting next to them and into the conversation right away as follows:

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <p>1 G. Y, yo, pues, me dijo el doctor que es la única así, que tenía sospechas, que es la de la matriz, y pues me están aconsejando que fuera a las terapias,</p>   | <p>1 G. And, I, then, the doctor said that it is the only one like that, he had suspicion, that it is the womb, and I've been advised to go to therapy</p>  |
| <p>2 A. Yo una vez estaba escuchando en la radio, que una señora el otra vez que le salieron cuatro tumores, y que parecía que estaba embarazada, en la matriz, los tumores estaban alrededor de la matriz y no se le veía la matriz</p>                                   | <p>2 A. Once I was listening to the radio, there was a woman who had four tumors before, and they made her look that she was pregnant, in the womb, the tumors were around the womb and the womb was hard to see</p>  |
| <p>3 G. Le digo que yo creo que ese es el problema y, y porque.... Hay días que no puedo ni.... y no sé si sea de la matriz o de otro lado. ¿No sé si deba o no?</p>   | <p>3 G. I told you I think that was the problem and, and because... There are days I can't ... and I don't know if that is the womb or something else. I don't know what that is, should I or no</p>  |
| <p>4 A. Pues, todo depende de la persona, ¡verda! Todo depende de la persona, pues a unas les dan.... un medicamento y lo tienes que tomar, y así lo tienen controlado, pregunte, y yo también con Viridiana estoy esperando a que vaya a un especialista del corazón.</p> | <p>4 A. It all depends on the person, right! It all depends on the person, then some of them get some ... a medication that you have to take, and it is how it is controlled, ask, and Viridiana and I are waiting for her to go to a heart specialist.</p> |

As noted above, the three women in the conversation have a close relationship with one another, particularly the two that participated in the study. In many of the linguistic discourses I was part of, I noticed that they greeted each other in an amicable manner, leading me to understand that their friendship is strong and genuine. Although two of the women were in their

early fifties and the other was in her mid-thirties, they seem to trust, guide, and support one another in every difficult point in their lives. The conversation started by Gloria provided to Alejandra an update of what the doctor suggested she should do regarding her medical problems. It seemed that both Cecilia and Alejandra already knew about Gloria's medical problems, and that these three women shared many of their health, employment, and education problems with one another. In this particular conversation, it was apparent that the three women had talked about their problems before. I also noticed that by having each other for support and encouragement during difficult situations, seemed to result in the development of a close relationship while living in a different country so far away from their dear relatives and families.

In line two, Alejandra offered a comment about something related that she heard on the radio, although the information shared was in general terms. It appeared that Gloria, too, had heard this information and knew that there were resources available for her. In line three, Gloria listened to Alejandra's comment, but wanted to elaborate more on her symptoms and keeping the conversation focused on her. At the end of the conversation, Gloria asked, "should I or no?" Here it seemed that she was waiting for a validation and encouragement from her friends, but instead she received another comment that represented "*respeto*" for her decision. This unspoken action by these three women (respecting and talking frankly) exemplifies two aspects of Farr's framework. Alejandra mentioned in her final comment that each body is different, and then immediately introduced a new topic, an illness that her daughter Viridiana has been experiencing lately. After, this introduction, Alejandra dominated the conversation by narrating her daughter's health problems. This is another example of an individualistic identity (Farr, 2006) that was been prevalent, and reflected the women's *rancheros/campesinos* identity. Alejandra

displayed an individualistic identity as well as an understanding that family, or *familia* is just as highly important, since they consider each other part of their extended family in the U.S.

In Cecilia's narration, I observed several dialogues that offered examples of distinct phonology, word choice, and syntax. For instance, the stress on certain vowels when speaking, her word choices particular to the group, and short sentences. In addition to those features, the narration style started with the end of the story in mind. Alejandra stated that she was waiting for her daughter's heart specialist appointment. The enunciation of the statement was made with a clear emphasis for her daughter, and Alejandra denoted that has been suffering her daughter's ups and downs for the last five years. She conveyed a strong family unity as she portrayed being the sole responsible individual of her daughter's wellbeing. She wanted to make sure that she was seen as a good mother following expectations to care for her children and family in general. I realized at this time, that these women uttered their narratives in a suspenseful tone, starting with a simple sentence to capture the attention of their conversational partners. The other two women then waited for further elaboration from Alejandra. The lines do not do justice to the emotions, body language, and mannerisms witnessed during this narration. It is important to realize that children witnessed the narration of these women conveying a sense of caring for loved ones and family members. By witnessing the created environment rich in language and adding unspoken language features such as emotions, body language, and mannerisms, children experience rich language and literacy experiences early on in their lives. This narration was filled with emotion that portrayed a sentiment of caring, compassion, and ultimately camaraderie between these three women.

Alejandra continued narrating the story; she explicated in full detail what her daughter Viridiana experienced during the summer months.

1 A. ...por que la cosa ya se la habían sacado, era nada más la sonda que ya estaba ahí, y ahora nada más estamos esperando que le hagan otro, ultrasonido, porque le habían dicho que otra pierna y este especialista le dijo que no, y entonces aquel le había visto mal, el reporte, puesto que se la había venido la de-sa y no se la había venido, y que no estaba bien, so, ahora estamos yendo para que le hagan otro ultrasonido para que le hagan para ver como esta todo y luego, le ven el corazón le ven. Porque su corazón estaba muy alto, su corazón, y le dijeron que está sangrando una de las válvulas, y este, hay que ver el especialista para ver qué es lo que van a hacer. Y dice Viridiana porque yo, si yo no tomo, no fumo, no hago nada, pos ora si a darle vuelo.

2 C & G Jajajajajaja

3 A. Pues siiiii, no tomo ni fumo y todo se nos vino encima, tal vez por tanta agua que tomas se te hicieron las piedras

1 A. ...because the thing was already taken out, it was that surgeon's probe that was there, and now we are waiting for a new ultrasound, because she was told that it was the other leg and that specialist told her that it wasn't it, that the report was seen wrong, the report wasn't good and that-thing was coming out, and it was no good, so, now we are going to get the other ultrasound to see how everything is and think what can be done, then, the heart can be seen and can be seen. Because the heart was too high, her heart, and they were told that it was bleeding in the valves, and this, to see the specialist to see what he is going to do. Viridiana says why me, if I don't drink, don't smoke and don't do anything, then I have to do some of that and put up with this.

2 C & G Ha, ha.

3 A. Then yeahhh! I don't drink, don't smoke and everything is happening to me at once, maybe because I drink too much water I had kidney stones.

Looking closely at this linguistic discourse, Alejandra used elaborated sentences that ranged from six to fifteen words. She chose words related to human physiology in simple sentences for the other women to understand and follow her narrative. Also, I noticed that her words were simplified by describing medical procedures and utensils in non-elaborated terms and sentences. For instance, in the middle of line one she struggled to find the name of surgical probe and named it "de-sa, that-thing." In the same lengthy line one, she also discussed that the heart was too high and one of the heart valves was bleeding. In line two, Cecilia and Gloria laughed at the final comment Alejandra made about what her daughter had said. The comment

was made in a joking tone and full of the dramatic emphasis of a person who has chosen a healthy lifestyle while still being ill with all of sorts of maladies.

**Gender dialogues.** The next section will address linguistic interactions that mostly males had in different social interactions. Also, other important data pieces that support findings of sub-questions 2A and 2B.

In the neighborhood in which the Gomez and Hernandez families live, families get together to talk, celebrate, cook, and enjoy and accompany each other. I observed several examples where adults got together along with their children. Usually mothers were the parent that had their children with them most of the time. Thus, I observed that fathers conversed with other fathers or grown males in different social contexts without children present. Their conversations mostly started with simple general questions regarding employment. For instance, at a Gomez gathering, Humberto arrived late, bringing a small box containing Mexican sausages purchased at a well-known establishment near their house. He placed the box next to the grill and proceeded to greet Juan. Humberto immediately asked Juan, “¿Como va la chamba?” (“How’s work going?”). Juan replied using a single word “Bien” (“Good.”). Juan then offered Humberto a summer drink and they simply stood together for a few minutes in silence, enjoying their drink. Later, Humberto started a conversation about the Mexican sausage, noting “Man, mi amigo me dio el chorizo bien barato.” (“Man, my friend got me the sausage so cheap.”). Juan replied, “Que bien.” (“That’s good.”). This small interaction between these two fathers exemplifies the type of situational conversations that happen during social events between men who are fathers and demonstrates a discourse that is both short and direct. The two men continued talking about the challenges at their places of employment, “Luego no pude arreglarlo

[el carro].” (“Then, I couldn’t fix the car”). Sentences like this show simple word choice and the short sentence type of communication between male adults in this community.

Another evening at a Hernandez family gathering, I observed Juan interacting with his brother Julio. Julio who had recently shared with Juan that he had purchased a brakes kit off the Internet, and that he wanted Juan to help him change the brakes on his car. Juan spent a few minutes examining the brake kit and immediately ripped open the box and assembled the pieces without saying a word. Julio just stood there wordless, waiting for Juan to say something. The two men exchanged utterances of two or three words such as “ese es” (“is that”) and, “se ve bien” (“it looks good”). Once Juan tried to complete the job, both men sat at the table and waited for Mariana to heat a meal for them, sitting quietly without vocal exchanges for ten minutes. After a while, Julio thanked Juan for his help and both men started to enjoy a new summer drink.

In the examples provided in the other sections, I observed mostly females conversing. The communication between females within the community appeared to be more interactive, in-depth, and frequent than the conversations males hold during the same events, although, there were instances where males appeared to also have lengthy conversations when the theme of discussion pertains more to their own interests and knowledge.

During the interview with the Gomez family, as Alejandra opened the front door and walked me to the kitchen, I greeted everyone by hand, as is customary in our culture. I proceeded to strike a conversation with Humberto, but he beat me and said, “¡Usted es el mentado Sr. Garcia, mucho gusto!” (“You are Mr. Garcia, nice to meet you!”). His unique high voice pitch was surprising as Alejandra mentioned, “¡Siempre dicen que su voz es incomparable!” (His voice pitch is incomparable!). I noticed right away the phonetic pitch typical from Michoacán, as well as the authoritarian identity of being the man of the house. Roberto said, “Nice to meet

you,” and Viridiana said, “Me voy a ver la telenovela.” (“I’m going to watch my Mexican Soap-opera.”). The two children quickly left the kitchen, Roberto to his room in the basement and Viridiana to the living room to continue watching TV. Alejandra commented that Viridiana loves telenovelas and wouldn’t miss any episodes of her favorite ones. She then added that when she is unable to watch the telenovelas with her daughter, she relies on Viridiana’s narration of full episodes. She remarked that she jokes that her daughter should memorize what she learns in school as well as she memorizes all telenovela episodes. The girl’s petition for her parents to join exemplifies this preteen girl’s love for the telenovelas: “Mama, hurry! It is almost eight o’clock! Papá, tú también!” (“Papá, you too!”). Viridiana then started narrating in full detail what happened at the conclusion of yesterday’s episode in complete sentences. Leaving no details out, her story included the names of the protagonists and other characters, as well as the setting and plot. Viridiana’s keen eye and ear to telenovela story construction was clearly evident in this summarization of the conclusion of the previous day’s episode. She took the opportunity to engage in conversation, and in so doing, during, demonstrated her knowledge of the telenovela by narrating interactions, actions and predictions of future episodes in full detail.

Another interesting piece of data I noticed during my visits to both families was, that in both homes, the presence of weekly flyers was common. Mothers and children piled the weekly flyers and advertisements in the living room or the kitchen. Though, the presence of these type of print literature falls into the category of the phrasal/causal level, they appear to be easy read with engaging pictures, but mothers seem to browse when time is appropriate to sit, rest, and take a deep breath. I noticed that parents searched the flyers for specials through the printed images and paid little attention to print on the type of flyers they examined. I noticed the low



browsing frequency, and perhaps they only use of this type of print was for the purpose of determining where to grocery shop or learn what was on sale close to home.

Though I captured many adult conversations during my data collection period, I rarely observed child conversations. Children seem to learn that at family gatherings, when adults visit homes, church, and other social contexts, they are expected to play with other children. They learn that the communication with their mothers, fathers, and other adults should be limited to ask for permission, fulfill a need, or be held. Consequently, children's communication is limited to their play-activities. This observation of children having limited conversation is supported by Valdes' (1995) research that children learn their place in the family as adults dominate the conversation, leaving children to entertain themselves on their own. Children were not seen as conversational partners, therefore their narratives were limited to their same-age peers.

In sum, the unique linguistic style of these families and the group they belong signified an understanding of the phonological enunciation children used while speaking in their native language and learning a second language. The word choices these families and adults made display a simple non-elaborated style to describe objects and events. The length of sentences was short and simple, including mostly three-five words in sentences and questions. These linguistic features were present when having on one-on-one conversations with children and adults in different private settings. By looking closely at the explication of different situations the women discussed in their discourse sample, their struggle of describing events in simple sentences was noticeable, as was the challenge of including facts or naming objects of daily use. The data showed evidence of a narration style using simple words and sentences to convey information of events that encompass daily life. Utilizing Farr's framework and understanding the identity of these families and group, it was evident that culture, traditions and language use

are highly involved in the adults' daily lives, meaning that their children also inherit these characteristics.

A salient theme during data analysis is about women and their interdependent friendship with each other. Data collected from observing social gatherings showed women creating space for themselves to converse with other women. They spent time in their homes or other women's homes, generally using social gatherings as a continuation of conversations about friendship and strengthening their interdependence with each other. In contrast, men congregated in a different space where gender division is highly evident. They conversed about their employment, tools, cars, and jokes. If women gathered together, chatting apart from men, the men sometimes joined the talk or just respected the conversations and did not join in. Therefore, language is social action, actively constructing and reconstructing social relations and cultural ideologies between women and men Farr (2006). Gender is a theme woven throughout. Although, gender was not a primary focus of this study, its presence throughout the analysis evidences its importance as an ongoing theme of change in this community.

Overall, adults in these families conversed solely between adults. Mostly adults generated conversation with other adults about the situation they were engaged in. During various social settings, I observed that females joined other females for conversation partners, and on the other hand, males looked for other males with whom to converse. Children learned at a very early age that they should limit their conversations with adults during social gatherings.

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter presented the findings of the study that examined how daily discourse practices in Mexican American families impacts children's language and literacy development. I closely examined the linguistic interactions with the Hernandez and Gomez families during their

daily activities. I witnessed various levels of complexity in their linguistic interactions. The variations of elaboration in their linguistic interactions were according to the theme, topic, and conversational partners. There were times when the two families interacted together, and others when each family interacted with other members of their group of close friends. When I analyzed my multiple sources of data, I revealed the following findings:

- length of utterances, phonological and syntactic relevance,
- gender differences in child-rearing practices,
- digital stories in language development.

In the final chapter, I present a discussion of the findings, implications and conclusions from the study; I also include a discussion of the findings related to the associated literature and propose recommendations for future research.

## **Chapter Five: Discussion of the Findings, Implications, and Reflections**

### **Revisiting the Purpose of the Study**

Although social practices appear to be common in families from all cultural and linguistic backgrounds, linguistic interactions are strongly linked to language development (Hart & Risley, 1995). Therefore, interactions and social practices with children are as important as the socialization between adults and within the family as a unit. They vary based on considerations such as the family size, beliefs, economic standing, and parental styles. In Chapter One, I discussed the importance of family as the center of learning a language and how familial interactions allow parents and adults to pass on traditions to their children. I attempted to raise awareness and make a case for recognizing home linguistic interactions as the foundation for language and literacy development in bilingual Spanish-English speaking children of Mexican descent. In this chapter, I revisit my main idea, as introduced in Chapter One, that linguistic interactions occurring at home and in social contexts propel childhood language development. Also, these contacts transmit culture and traditions, as well as shape identities. For instance, my observational data revealed that children in these families are expected to interact mostly with other children in highly unstructured play; this cultural tradition is expected of children of different ages. In my data, I observed children interacting with other same-age children, teenagers on their mobile device or interacting with same gender peers. By observing and participating with the aforementioned families in different social contexts such as backyard gatherings, family and neighborhood celebrations, church visits, and living room and kitchen conversations, I collected observational data that demonstrated how their linguistic interactions occurred in different social contexts, and how these affect their children's narrative information.

Throughout the study, I also reexamined my own professional and personal experiences as a literacy leader, as a child growing up in a traditional Mexican household, and as an adult English learner, which made me deeply aware of the language demands children are required to have to successfully meet learning standards in American schools, as well as the language abilities that they also need in social settings. I am cognizant that children from immigrant families encounter social and educational experiences different from those of their parents. My research also reaffirmed these patterns. Therefore, English learners, Mexican American children in this case, should have constant discourse with adults, siblings, and same-age peers to enhance their language abilities, strengthen their culture and traditions and positively impact their literacy development.

In the first chapter of this dissertation I referenced the concepts of linguistic interactions and narrative abilities, and how they influence children's language abilities in addition to the sustaining their culture and traditions, together with the overall improvement of instructional pedagogy. I will now review the primacy of parents' linguistic knowledge and experiences, and the implications in their children's future educational paths.

First, I examine my collected data to answer question one of this study to reveal what I have learned: *What are the parents' memories of the daily linguistic interactions they engaged in during their own childhoods, with their families and in school when compared to their perceptions of their children's daily linguistic interactions at home and in school?* Here I will explore parents' memories and perceptions of their own educational experiences in comparison to their children's American educational experiences, together with the implications this can have for educators. Second, I share conclusions and educational implications regarding question two: *What are the daily linguistic interactions occurring in the social context of two bilingual*

*(Spanish/English) families?* Third, by weaving together the findings of data gathered throughout the social events I attended, I will answer sub-questions 2A and 2B: *What are the features and emerging themes of these linguistic interactions across the families involved in the study?* and *What are the roles and linguistic patterns of the participating members in family interactions?* Finally, I will discuss the implications of this investigation for instruction, as well as my study's limitations, and recommendations for future practice and research.

### **Conclusion and Implications for Practice**

**Parental memories and perceptions.** In response to question one regarding the focal parents' memories of their own linguistic interactions, data analysis suggest that they engaged in different experiences during their own childhoods than those they are currently experiencing with their families and in school. At the same time, the participating families shared several similar perceptions regarding their children's educational experiences in the U.S. The Hernandez's family statement summarizes this experience: "The American system is full of rules and regulations that limits the parents from implementing their values and traditions parents experienced when growing up in their native Mexico." Although this statement exemplifies the sentiment of only one family, both of the families seemed to share the same perception of the American educational system in comparison to their own educational experiences in a rural area in their native country. Such perception reveals their thinking about the sophistication of an educational system in a highly-industrialized country they view as governed by rules, regulations, and procedures. In this setting, the parents' knowledge is seldom considered in the school curriculum because it is established by the State and district board of education guidelines and based on state and national learning standards which claim to include a wide range of literature and themes that represent multicultural ethnic groups. Consequently, including parental

participation in the acquisition of curricula, addendums, and supplementing curricula is distinct from inviting parents to participate and voice their opinions, and far less likely to occur. As a result, schools are left with limited revamping options to their curricula and also fail to include children and family knowledge, which perpetuates the abyss between families and school.

These families feel a U.S. educational system expects their children to achieve at a much faster pace than what they were expected to in Mexico. For example, the Hernandez family shared that their children are required to read, write, do addition, and know subtraction by the end of kindergarten. For the most part, these two families perceived the U.S. educational system as intensely faster-paced than what they experienced in Mexico. However, they hope that a demanding curriculum can guarantee success for their children despite their circumstances. They trust the U.S. school system because it is all they have available, and they hope their children take advantage and surpass the parents' academic achievement from school in their native Mexico. Thus, they ensure that their family has their basic needs covered, and their love for their children is evident, as is their hope that by supporting them in their academic educational path will result in success in the U.S.

Prior to this study my professional practice was ingrained in the "All American" way. In the American educational system, schools expect families to read books to their children every day. Families should allocate time for children to do homework and parents should help them complete it. Also, families should encourage participation in instructional and non-instructional after-school activities. The U.S. educational system sets expectations for families to comply regardless of their circumstances. In the case of the families in this study, their educational background limits their ability to comply with such educational system expectations. In contrast, Guadalupe Valdes (1996) found in her ethnographic studies of families that Mexican American

families, whose members were educated beyond high school in Mexico and in the U.S., who were familiar with how schools work in both countries, and who saw their role as complementing the teacher's in developing children's academic abilities tend to embrace the benefits of engaging in activities that foster language and literacy development in children. Teachers in Valdes' study (1996) tried their best to implement what the school recommended for them to teach, but appeared to be unsuccessful, as administrators and school personnel equally looked for the best curriculum, strategy and even boxed-program to ensure children met U.S. standard criteria. However, based on the findings of this study, I suggest that a family's knowledge about school practices, linguistic practices, and culture must be considered in curriculum development, and that it should be based on an understanding, appreciation, and respect of family internal dynamics, values and beliefs. In other words, parents should not be coerced into believing that in order to rear successful children, according to U.S. standards, they must give up their childrearing and linguistic practices, and adapt to the "American way" as the only way to succeed.

What I seldom considered in the past was what children brought with them, the skills they had learned at home and in other social contexts, what the families of my students considered to be their roles in schools, and their perception of education, limitations, expectations, and values. I learned through the participating families that the parents' lives require a tremendous amount of energy just to survive, and that their perception of participation in their children's education is focused on raising their children to be good and well-behaved citizens. Hence, parents believe that the role of the teacher is to teach school related content, to prepare their children to successfully graduate, find better employment, and to be able to support themselves. The parents' view of their role in supporting teachers academically may not be as



strong, due to their academic limitations given they did not have the opportunity to attain high levels of formal schooling and so have few notions of what schools expect of them and their children. Yet, overall these parents value education and collectively know that academic preparation will lead their children to a better life and status in a society, one very different from what they have experienced when they attended school.

Considering data collected on the perceptions of these families in light of my own professional experience, I suggest that families and educators strengthen their communication with an intentional focus on language development. For example, I suggest that in order to learn more about student's families, teachers can have their students interview parents and relatives to acquire information about their personal childhood stories while attending school. Also, students can be assigned to write about their own thoughts and opinions of the oral stories parents and relatives share from their childhoods. In addition, teachers can elicit parents or community members to serve as story tellers, when appropriate, as part of language arts instruction. Furthermore, afterschool activities can be organized which shift the focus away from commercial curriculums or known authors to make space for parents, families and community members to share their academic, cultural traditions, and personal experiences in order to elevate the value of their culture, language, and traditions for their children.

**Linguistic interactions.** In response to question two, *What are the daily linguistic interactions occurring in the social context of two bilingual (Spanish/English) families?* this study sought to heighten understanding of the linguistic interactions occurring within the social contexts of Mexican American families living in a large urban area of the Midwestern region of the United States. These two families arrived in the U.S. more than ten years ago to the United States in hopes of joining their family already here and finding a better life for themselves and

their children. Over the course of the study, the participating families engaged in several social endeavors that provided numerous opportunities to witness their linguistic interactions. Many of these linguistic exchanges were centered on adults engaging with other adults in situations in which they held conversations about different topics and which seldom engaged with children. However, I did observe adults, mostly mothers, engaging in linguistic interactions with children. Here the adults most often directed or commanded behavioral expectations for children during social family events. Grusec and Davidov (2008) argued that social practices and language exchanges with children are as important as the socialization within the family unit. It is the family that is charged by society for being the center of child development in the early learning stages, with an emphasis on parent, sibling and family members' daily narrative interactions all evincing an impact on literacy development. Although, the interactions I observed in this study minimally showed children narratives, those that I did see revealed that they mostly approached parents in three-five-word sentences strictly to fulfill a need such as attain a drink, rest, or simply being held.

The social practices I observed involved large amounts of linguistic exchanges between adults in Mexican American, and are supported by anthropological and psychological research, namely cultural values, identity development, and an emphasis on group over individuals, are as important as maintaining a deep sense of loyalty to the family (Suarez-Orozco & Páez, 2002). However, my data also suggest that limited parental linguistic exchanges with children may negatively affect their children's language abilities and literacy development in general so that it may be different from what schools expect. For instance, research has found that limiting children to participate actively or be listeners to conversations may delay their language development and consequently, their literacy development. Serpell, R., Baker, L., &

Sonnenschein, S. (2005) found that children's communicative competence begins developing very early in their lives, without explicit instruction from parents, and narrative production and comprehension may be compromised when reduced linguistic exchanges are present in family daily activities. Equally important, these scholars above have argued that communicative competence and narrative development in Latinx children are necessary in the pursuit of academic success and maintaining a positive ethnic identity (Serpell, R., Baker, L., & Sonnenschein, S., 2005).

The statistics presented in Chapter One demonstrate that the overwhelming number of English learners coming into U.S. classrooms continues increasing year after year. These students start school with a wide range of literacy abilities and language levels. Given this demographic data and the findings of this study, it is imperative that educators increase their knowledge of the cultural variation in discourse styles of students and their families from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds as well as the implications these may have for stigmatizing or rejecting their discourse competence. For example, Flores-Gonzalez (2003) stated that the reason many minority students do not succeed in school is not because of a cultural disposition toward failure, but rather because schools marginalize students who do not adopt mainstream ways of speaking, thinking, and acting. Hence, when educators are equipped with background knowledge about their students' home life, community dynamics, cultural background, traditions and ethnic identities, they can influence the academic achievement of Latinx children. Therefore, educators can incorporate that knowledge in their school curriculum and turn the home family experiences and language into the basis for authentic, intellectually engaging academic experiences, thus increasing the likelihood that Latinx students will master the discourses of schooling (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992; Wong-Fillmore & Snow,

2000). In addition to increasing educators' knowledge of their students during their socialization in the ecology of the family, my research also demonstrated a need to deepen the understanding of the narratives children learned and developed at home. Although my data showed reduced numbers of narratives children enunciated, their exploration may bring light to the area of oracy. As a consequence, I am suggesting the following ideas for school and home. First, at school educators can explore children's narratives in English learners to look for a variety of foundational literacy skills that are necessary to succeed academically. Also, educators can explore the use of digital stories such as the telenovelas, short series of celebrities and impactful stories that dominate Spanish television broadcast or any social media venue to support narrative development in children. For example, in Viridiana's explication of a telenovela episode (see Chapter Four), many literary elements were present, such as story structure, character and their feelings and descriptions, setting and problem to be solved. Hence, Viridiana provides a thorough conceptual knowledge of literary elements present in fiction and historical-fiction novels at school settings. Second, at home, families can utilize casual texts such as weekly flyers, community newspapers, and any type of literature delivered at home to inform of sales, events, and announcements. Also, families can elicit language interactions between parents and children and other adults at home using these types of casual texts. Plus, during family time, families can share personal stories, family adventures, memoirs of their past school experiences, and their own personal opinions of their favorite digital stories. For example, during the quinceañera celebration (described in Chapter Four), teenagers converse about their favorite telenovelas, highlighting character traits, settings, and protagonists and their roles within the digital story. It is important to note that the interest in digital stories among teenagers is not limited to telenovelas but also includes other stories found in social media as well. Hence, the breadth of

Latinx children's vocabulary as well as their comprehension and production of complex language used to explain, analyze, critique, and narrate, may be compromised if they experience a limited exposure to language interactions in the growing years (Cloud, Genesee, & Hamayan, 2009).

**Linguistic features, themes, roles, and patterns.** I collapsed research sub-questions 2A and 2B into one question because my data showed that the answers were deeply interconnected. *What are the features and emerging themes of these linguistic interactions across the families involved in the study?* and *What are the roles and linguistic patterns of the participating members in family interactions?* During the time I spent with families, all participants exhibited their normal voice such as their pitch, tenor, tone, conversation style, and unique linguistic identity that was representative of their regional birthplace, Michoacán, Mexico. Many of the linguistic features I observed were present across all social settings in which these families engaged. In order to delve into these phonological stressors and salient themes, I utilized Marcia Farr's (2006) framework as a point of reference. Her ethnolinguistic work of 15 years in a transnational community of Mexican families living in the Midwest whose village of origin was Michoacán, Mexico found three cultural styles of speaking that characterized these families. The three identified cultural styles are *Franqueza*, *Respeto*, and *Relajo*, and the families involved in this study demonstrated all three cultural communicative styles throughout the observations and in varying social contexts. For example, the Hernandez family held a barbeque during a warm summer night, at which the entire family, one female friend with her two young children, and Juan's two younger brothers were present. The phonological stressors on the last vowels of the last word in their sentences was highly evident, as were short sentences that included three–eight words, and simple word choices to identify, co-construct, and to indicate their participation in a

*relajo* type of conversation. It is worth noting that social media and digital stories were not present during the time Farr's ethnolinguistic research took place. Television and other media venues were not mentioned in her work. As a Mexican male raised in a traditional Mexican household, my experience was that television time was limited to the end of the day when we would decompress as a family after a long day's work. No other type of media was available when I was growing up. Compared to the time of her study and the time of my upbringing, in today's world, the two focal families and the majority of families in their neighborhood follow the same TV watching patterns during their down time. In addition, the families in my study have access to portable devices and access to social media that did not exist during Farr's study or my own upbringing. Farr's work showed families communicating in short sentences, completing forms, and attending to medical visits, and I, too, saw this type of communication. However, I also observed longer linguistic interactions on the theme of health, telenovelas, and digital stories. The two focal families and their children are accustomed to their devices and social media as part of their lives. Thus, the two focal families exhibited those linguistic patterns during their daily conversation, but because of the faster accessibility to digital media, teens, preteens, and children are mesmerized by digital stories and images which become the focus of conversations when socializing. As a consequence, the two focal families, their children, and the adults in their social network share stories and communicate using social media as part of their daily lives. The vivid conversations were filled with plenty of joy, and as result, children were acculturated into the family discourse, narrative and storytelling styles that did and would instill in them a discourse style similar to that of their parents (Casper & Melzi, 2008). In the linguistic exchanges between adults, I observed *respeto* for one another's opinions. They also displayed in their opinions a tone that exemplifies *franqueza* and directness toward the topics and themes they

were conversing. Children played with other children, and communication between children and adults was limited mostly to fulfilling a need or for adults to present a command to their children. In some instances, while parents were holding their children, the children listened to the adult conversations in silence. They knew that they should limit their participation during adult conversations, but their ears remained alert most of the time, giving them the opportunity to silently witness adult conversations, discourse style, narratives, and storytelling styles.

As a teacher-researcher, I situated myself in two different thinking patterns; the first thinking pattern was about being the outsider observing families from a researcher point of view. This role permitted me to objectively observe linguistic patterns, family dynamics, and interaction in various social events. In this way I was able to collect data and present it in an objective manner. The second thinking pattern was about being an insider, a member of the group, part of the family, an individual who speaks, acts, and thinks like the focal families. I grew up in a traditional Mexican household and this role allowed me to understand cultural and traditional aspects of the ways families conduct their daily lives. I was also able to make sense of their linguistic patterns and their ways of interacting linguistically and behaviorally. In sum, situating myself in both roles allowed me to understand linguistic socialization, enunciation, patterns, and tones in all social situations.

One example of the unique phonological style of these two families and their relatives occurred during a quinceañera celebration and its religious service, which aligns with findings of Garret and Baquedano-Lopez (2002) and of Schieffelin and Ochs (1986a). Their results, and mine, indicate that children become communicatively competent and learn the structure of their first language as its language interaction conventions are embedded in, and reflective of the values, attitudes and beliefs of their community. As the pieces of data in Chapter Four suggest,

adults used elaborative language related to health, telenovelas, and during the quinceañera teenagers' conversation. Participating in the above two social events, I noticed how adult-adult interactions continued to be highly evident, whereas there were more limited interactions between adults and children. During the religious service, I noticed that children, for the most part, learn to mimic their parents' behavior and quietly sat for long periods of time. Also, the example of the two children talking during the religious service in Chapter four is salient despite the behavior mimicking and parental advice to children to be quiet during the service. Children may sit quietly for a long period of time, but their attention span is relatively short. On the other hand, adults communicated with children through short simple sentences, facial or body gestures, or one-word commands. This finding is consistent with the research examining language socialization in children. For instance, Garret and Baquedano-Lopez (2002) and Schieffelin & Ochs (1986a) explicated how children learn to recognize, negotiate, index, and co-construct diverse types of meaningful social contexts, making it possible for them to engage with others under an increasingly broad range of circumstances, and to expand their social horizons by taking on new roles and statuses. The socialization of language relates to the relationship children develop with adults in their life, first with parents and later with teachers and their peers. Therefore, learning how language is used and especially communicated in the student's families is important. My observations showed that while preteens and teens conversed about telenovelas during the quinceañera celebration, they displayed a more elaborate language when communicating with one another about themes in which they were interested. Hence these linguistic utterances were longer than teens typically use when they converse socially.

When thinking of a family as a unit, we usually think that families are composed of two parents and children. However, all families vary in sizes, and the Mexican American families in



this study are no exception. Consequently, families are convinced that socialization involves everyone in the household. Though these two Mexican American families fall in the norm of two parents and children, the frequent interactions with other relatives and members of the same cultural-linguistic group was highly evident. Though the families participating in my research-study exhibited high adult-centered interactions, they, nonetheless, they have a strong belief that children have something to say and it is worth adult's attention. For example, on several occasions I observed mothers stop their conversations with other female friends to listen what their children had to say, but most utterances were meaningless to the adult conversations occurring at the time. Cain, Eaton, Baker-Ward, & Yen (2005) stated that experimental research has shown that children assigned to highly elaborative adults produce narratives containing more features of conventional narrative discourse than those who interacting with adults in low-elaborative conditions. In other words, children need frequent opportunities to interact with parents and adults, so they develop complex linguistic constructions, utilizing the components of language to compose utterances and (longer) sentences that are meaningful to them and others. Given frequent opportunities, children test the rules of the language, learn to expand their word choices, and utter complex sentences under the guidance of an adult (Clay, 2015).

In this study, I observed home practical activities that aided in the expansion of children's language, and which potentially served as opportunities to encourage adult-child linguistic interactions for these Latinx children. For instance, mothers used casual texts, digital stories, and social media stories as conversation starters to expand language development in children of all ages. Likewise, Suarez-Orozco & Páez (2002) stated that cultural beliefs are deeply rooted in mother-child interactions, as mothers attempt to establish supportive and warm-hearted relationships with their children. For instance, during the barbeque gathering at the Hernandez

home, a bonfire was lit for everyone to sit around it and converse; however, children were discouraged from participating because of their parents' fear of accidents with the fire. The short verbal interactions I observed with their children carried a tone of risk and jeopardy due to the fire, as well as of parental protection for their own children's wellbeing. In this family interaction, mothers-child exchanges were mainly about family and group values, standards, and customs, consistent with the research of Maccoby (2008).

In each of these social contexts, in which the gathered, there were many direct and indirect verbal interactions, with each being unique to the group of people and the interconnection of the families with life inside and outside their home. For example, the social contexts I which I observed the families, namely, church services, quinceañeras, barbeques, and birthday parties, all influenced the themes and topics of conversations the participants exchanged. Many salient themes were captured; however, the three reoccurring ones were employment, health and education. In Chapter Four, I addressed each theme in detail and provided examples that explicated adult verbal interactions with other adults and with children. Here I explore the importance of highlighting direct and indirect verbal exchanges in different social contexts, as this differentiation serves to illustrate the contribution of the Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1986a; Bronfenbrenner & Crouter, 1982) to the findings of this study as well as the implications for children's language development instruction.

The Ecological System Theory subsystems are interconnected, and both directly and indirectly influence family interactions inside and outside of the home. For example, this occurs at the Microsystem level, which represents the immediate contexts in which adults nurture the children, as well as the Mesosystem level, which represents the actual interactions and relationships between and among individuals and contexts. In this study, Mesosystem

conversations were minimal between parents and children while being well-defined between parents and other adults in the neighborhood, school, and community institutions. At the Exosystem level, which represents the indirect and external dynamics that influence family and children, I identified various influential factors such as parents' workplaces, the presence of extended family members in the home, the presence of health and social service agencies, and the textual communications that exist between commercial entities in the community and families. Examples related to the Exosystem level, were provided in Chapter Four, and included lengthy conversations that revealed salient themes of importance. For example, during the Gomez family interview, I observed that both children left the kitchen when the adults started to converse about the long hours at work with hectic work schedules. In fact, the major Exosystem themes addressed during the interview included employment and education, and Humberto decided that his children should not hear their parents' employment concerns. Therefore, the Gomez parents signaled their children to go and engage in different activities in other rooms in the house. This child rearing practice in the participating families is supported by the ethnographic work of Guadalupe Valdes' (1996) ethnographic work with Mexican American families, where she found that while children are considered important, they were not the focus of most of the family energy. I learned that the Gomez's conversation primarily focused on attending to adult needs, and that children have learned that they should engage in activities that require less parent supervision.

These adult conversations evidenced that when adults in the family get together, they seldom engage children. First, the themes they discussed pertain to experiences that only adults live and have knowledge of. Second, the family has a primary goal to succeed as a unit, and children are seen to contribute to this goal by functioning well within the system as a whole,

neither disrupting its balance nor causing the family to devote its energy to nonessential concerns (Valdes, 1996). Children's disengagement, as expected by parents during conversations with other adults, limits the socialization of language between adults and children. Consequently, adults do not see children as conversational partners, and they become merely incidental listeners if they are in close proximity to where the language exchanges take place. Unfortunately, preventing children from participating in quality adult conversations and language exchanges may have significant influences on children's language and literacy development. For instance, I frequently observed the availability of texts in the home such as the weekly flyers and advertisements that the family received at home, which listed the many kinds of grocery and service specials offered by local businesses. I noticed that parents did model the search for specials by examining images, but that they paid little attention to the print in the type of texts. I also noticed that mothers did not elicit or utter any linguistic interaction with children when examining these materials. I also noticed that mothers glanced at the weekly flyers with low frequency, and perhaps they only used this type of print for the purpose of determining where to grocery shop or to learn what was on sale close to home. By living and participating in an environment in which others use print for various purposes, children infer the semiotic and functional nature of written language (Purcell-Gates, 1996).

Given that they have limited numbers, or even no challenging texts in their homes, the Hernandez and Gomez children may perceive that such books are present solely in academic settings. Hence, Hoff (2006) found that "children acquire language under widely different circumstances," noting further that in some cultures, children are spoken to a great deal and in others very little. In this study, the spoken part of the conversation is switched to the listening part during which children are exposed to the conversations in which adults engage, including

vocabulary related to their employment and health concerns. Under these circumstances, children incidentally acquire and store language that can aid in their literacy development.

In summary, research demonstrates that environments are important sources of social, cognitive, and emotional development for all children. The benefits of enriching home environments are especially powerful for children who live in highly disadvantaged circumstances (Duncan, Ludwig, & Magnuson, 2007; Heckman, 2006; Magnuson & Shager, 2010; Chatman-Nelson, Kreider, Lopez, & Weiss, 2014). The Hernandez and Gomez families live in circumstances that are unequal to middle class children in the same Midwestern urban region of the U.S. My data validates what researchers have been stating for years; these two families thrive in a neighborhood filled with all ailments of a disadvantaged large urban area, and in spite of those circumstances, they want their children to succeed in life. Their expectations for their children and for themselves are palpable in all social contexts. The Hernandez and Gomez families have faith that studies such as this one will provide them with guidance to rear their children to succeed in the American educational system.

### **Implications to Consider**

This study uncovered the power of parental (especially mothers) linguistic engagement in the early years of a child's life. Even though my data showed reduced number of interactions between mothers and children, in these families and in my own experience, mothers are the child's first models of language. The inspiring findings awaken mothers' power to guide children's linguistic futures. The findings may be inspiring for parents and educational leaders (teachers, support staff, and administrators), particularly with regard to bridging the community and parents with school curriculum and instructional decisions. For educators, knowing about the students, their families, and the community in which they work are essential elements that help

paint a complete picture of the student and the type of curriculum and instruction needed to ensure the success of each student. The next section summarizes the implications for each stakeholder.

**Parents.** Parents in this study, as well as those I have been in contact with during my professional career, are aware of the power they have to influence their child's learning. They understand that earning an academic education is essential in the United States or in any other country. However, the same parents are unaware of how daily home-based linguistic and non-linguistic routines may have significant impacts on their child's learning and educational success. Realizing how to invigorate daily linguistic routines, activities and practices would add to existing understandings about language and literacy development. Marie Clay (2015) suggested spending time in genuine daily conversations such as encouraging children to converse while changing clothes, shopping at a supermarket, and walking to and from school.

During the data collection period of this study, participating parents and other parents at social gatherings expressed interest in learning more about ways to engage their children in learning, but with the mindset of a "school-like style." For instance, the Gomez family is accustomed to watching telenovelas (soap operas) together at night. The dynamics during telenovela time include family conversations about their day, such as that provided in chapter four in which Viridiana narrated in full detail what happened at the conclusion of the previous day's episode. She continued narrating in full sentences, leaving no details out, and including the names of the protagonists and other characters, and citing the setting and plot. Viridiana's keen eye and ear to telenovela construction was clearly evident in her narration, and she had an opportunity to engage in a conversation in which she demonstrated her knowledge of the telenovela by narrating interactions, actions and predictions of future episodes in full detail.

Viridiana's narrative presents similar patterns of the findings of Perfetti, Landi, & Oakhill (2005), who theorized that sensitivity to story structure and narrative coherence may be strongly implicated in comprehension development. I also see an opportunity for parents to increase their children's skills and abilities by engaging them in a complete linguistic interaction in a familiar setting. Based on the a Vygostkian (1978) perspective of cognitive development, parents' linguistic contributions (questions, assertions, and validations) scaffold their children's participation resulting in richer and more complex conversations than children can have alone.

In addition to the ability to engage in verbal narrative practices, parents also have the opportunity to participate in other literacy practices with their children. In terms of the type of print I found (weekly flyers) in the homes of the participating families, these fall into the category of the phrasal/clausal level. Given that having limited number or no challenging texts at home, of the Hernandez and Gomez children may perceived by their children that challenging texts are only present in academic settings. Another key point is that adults, in this case mostly mothers, can connect from physical print to contextualized discourse by engaging children in reading and writing experiences in the home. Further, by using decontextualized discourse experiences, children infer the significance of particular print artifacts, and the overall impact of reading various written print in their immediate environment. Though it is the adults who model the use of environmental print found in the homes, adults should also engage children in frequent conversations to demonstrate the application and importance of reading and writing. For example, adults are able to initiate conversations with their children using weekly circulars that are common in their neighborhood. As previously noted, neighborhood stores use these circulars to announce weekly specials in all departments of the stores. Adults can compare the prices at different stores and find ways to save money, select types of fruits and vegetables that are in

season, and invite children to develop a grocery list. For advanced readers and writers, adults can select challenging digital stories such as telenovelas or social media stories that are apt for audiences and express their opinions about protagonists, settings, and literary elements that certainly can allow their children to practice school-like narratives that express opinions, compare/contrast plots, author's point of view, and sources of information.

**Educational leaders.** Understanding the diversity of each Latinx group and its remarkable influence in today's classrooms, together with the presence of linguistic and culturally diverse children is a worthwhile phenomenon to appreciate, and from which to learn. Teachers and school personnel are unable to change statistics, but they are able to make instructional decisions that impact the success of their students. Hence, instructional decisions based on a deeper knowledge of the students sitting in their classrooms or attending schools have the potential to make daily instruction interesting by including elements found in the student's culturally and linguistically diverse families. Research recognizes that children from culturally diverse and low-income homes enter school with varied experiences with language and literacy – many of them incongruent with the school literacy practices they will come to partake in on a daily basis (Compton-Lilly, 2003; McCarthy, 1997; Purcell-Gates, 1995; Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1998). Therefore, understanding the phonology, word choice, syntax, and salient themes across these families is essential. I saw this first-hand as I observed the participating families. For example, their unique phonological use of language, word choice, and sentence structures are quite evident on a daily basis. With this in mind, understanding their patterns of language development relative to their cultural beliefs and practices is an essential task for teachers to be able to develop reasonable expectations of children's narrative interactions in the classroom and to design effective, familiar learning environments for them (Whishard-Guerra, 2009). Once



educators understand children's language patterns, cultural beliefs, and family practices, they can design activities and learning environments that are familiar to children. It is evident that children have developed language from which we can draw. Since telenovelas and digital stories are grabbing children's attention, it is worth using these strengths to further develop their language.

Educational settings are not only places for instruction but are also sites for language socialization. Children interact with each other through the use of language, gestures, and behaviors mostly learned from social contexts. The type of narratives they regularly hear in classrooms serve as vehicles for contributing their ideas, meeting their needs, and sharing their cultural and behavioral beliefs. Cristofaro and Tamis-LeMonda (2009) concluded that schools can promote parent-child storytelling as part of preparing children for entry to kindergarten, and such strategies have been found to be effective for children and families from other cultural backgrounds (e.g. Peterson et al, 1999). These same authors further incorporated the sharing of personal stories during story-telling into their curricular practices. Through my professional career I have used personal storytelling techniques with my students and have also encouraged parents to participate in storytelling practices during family nights at the school. During those events, I noticed how mothers participated as the main protagonists wearing costumes to fully illustrate the part of the story they were about to tell. Teachers and children watched with awe as they held the attention of children for long periods of time, followed by a long question and answer session. These programs may encourage parent-child narratives as part of children's developing emergent literacy skills and as a way to promote social and cultural development (e.g. Gallimore & Goldenberg, 2001; Rueda, Monzo, Blacher, Shapiro, & Gonzalez, 2005).

Marie Clay (2015) stated that it is the teacher's job to open up multiple opportunities for children with or without special dialects to use their own speech habits in order to continue developing their language capacity and skills. For example, the teacher should try to add to children's speech or dialect the standard Spanish/English to be used in some oral situations, and to open the world of books to them. She also suggests that classroom experiences may compensate for limited language learning opportunities, and that teachers must go beyond the usual bounds of spontaneous learning in a free play group situation.

One advantage for educators who wish to learn about the socialization of language is that, through social interactions outside the school setting, children learn behaviors that are acceptable to their family and to the group to which they belong. This can afford educators opportunities to know how their students socialize with other children, and how they learn behaviors that are carried into the classroom daily activities. Consequently, educators can be informed about how to design activities that would incorporate these behaviors and introduce them/accept them in academic settings. This observation aligns with the results found by Suarez-Orozco & Pérez (2002), in which Latinx mothers taught their children their place in the family, along with behavioral expectations as they interacted with the rest of the family. Similarly, through their narratives, children exhibit their own identity, self-perception, and self-advocacy. For this reason, when children enter school with less language development than their mainstream counterparts (e.g. vocabulary), language acquisition becomes a dual battle for educators. Marie Clay (2015) offered the following suggestions to assist teachers: (a) make opportunities for children to have one-on-one conversations with adults, (b) increase the child's opportunities to talk in general, (c) create opportunities for conversations about the things the child is involved with, and (d) model academic talking in small group sessions of three or four children. Lastly,

Clay suggested continuing to read to children from interesting story books so as to tune their ear to literary language and also to simplify the material the child is expected to read.

As an instructional leader, I was constantly searching for packaged programs to serve my parents, though, in my continual search, I found that most programs focused on providing information about nutrition, discipline, and activities that promoted early learning, which had little to do with the type of families I was serving. I utilized a couple of those programs but achieved very little success. Parents took all the information I gave them and tucked it in a bag where it stayed until they discarded it. As previously mentioned in Chapter One, through closely engaging with parents during conversations in social contexts, my eyes and ears were opened widely and witnessed the amount of knowledge families hold inside, as well as how critical it is to take the opportunity to use that knowledge to inform curriculum development. The socialization of language has a greater potential to engage parents and related adults with children in meaningful conversations. Sarah W. Beck (2009) determined that such findings are unsurprising given the range of skills that contribute to narrative performance. As an example, Viridiana and the Hernandez's young children need to be able to construct a complete and coherent story. In their research of 37 low-income immigrant families from Latinx backgrounds in New York, Cristofaro and Tamis-LeMonda (2009) concluded that parent forums (workshops) include these principles. First, they encourage daily conversations that serve as a vehicle for sharing cultural beliefs as well as practicing oral language skills that are important for children transitioning to formal schooling. Second, they promote parent-child oral storytelling as part of children's preparedness for entering kindergarten. Third, through parent workshops, families can learn about how daily conversations and oral storytelling practices play an important role in their children's overall development. Overall, the selected activities and programs may encourage

parent-child narratives as part of children's developing emergent literacy skills and as a way to promote social and cultural development (e.g., Gallimore & Goldenberg, 2001; Rueda, Monzo, Blacher, Shapiro, & Gonzalez, 2005).

### **Reflections of the Researcher**

Thinking back on the moments in which family gatherings at the Hernandez and the Gomez home became part of my repertoire of summer activities during this study, I realized the importance of strengthening families as well as respecting their culture, language, and traditions. These families uncovered many of my own experiences as a Mexican individual living and thriving in the American society, but most importantly it is those experiences that continue to shape who I am and what I can become. I grew up in a traditional Mexican household in Mexico City, a different social environment than that of the adults in what these families experienced; however, culture, traditions, and ways of living were similar to what I experienced under the care of my parents. In fact, my parents have similar stories and experiences as those shared by the families in this study. Therefore, it is essential for me to understand the similarities and differences we have, given that I am a member of a Mexican family and as an educator, researcher, and a Mexican-origin male. My views on educating Mexican American children in the U.S. society have evolved since the beginning of my career as an educator. I share some of those views modestly, as I will outline here, and present my views as wonderings that are based on my own personal and professional background and in consideration of my learning from the families in this study. In this way, I extrapolate the implications in light of my own experiences of educating children of Mexican descent and how these may impact language and literacy instruction.

**Educational implications.** First, I address educational implications based on the uncovered resemblances between the families, my own family as a child, my educational path, my personal views, my professional experiences, and the findings from data analysis. My first set of wonderings is about the length of utterances that were observed during the different social contexts. I noticed short statements in conversations between adult females and males that included limited elaboration when describing ideas, opinions or simply narrating past events. Likewise, children also used same short statements and commands when speaking with other children and adults. Even though we, including myself, speak in short sentences in conversations during social events, these can be taken as *informational linguistic transactions* of these daily life events. For instance, the Hernandez and Gomez gatherings brought back memories of my childhood with my family on Sundays. It was customary at the Garcia household to reunite the entire family for brunch and we all helped preparing a large meal for about ten plus adults. During this time, we all gathered together to converse about the week's events and plan ahead for the upcoming week. Our conversations exhibited short utterances describing fun and serious facts in a *relajo*, teasing and joking way that stirred laughter and resulted in good times and the joy of being a large family. Although these short utterances, or *informal linguistic transactions*, may be seen as quick sentences to make a point and prevent from boring our audience, I wonder if they helped my literacy development. I wonder if children witnessing adults, and at times teachers, utter short sentences in which they view human communication in short utterances, may cause the children to wonder. In other words, this is the way to communicate and transmit culture, traditions. If this is the case, I wonder when children are introduced into the academic world with longer and complex sentences, rigorous learning tasks, and challenging texts that are linguistically different than what they hear daily. I wonder if family utterances may hinder

children's readiness to engage in complex discussions in classrooms. At the same time, I wonder if our daily linguistic practices at school can be a combination of short and complex sentences that mimic the language of books and family linguistic practices.

In my professional experience, I use strategies with my students to mimic the language of books and expand their linguistic repertoire. For instance, during my read aloud with kindergarten students, first I frontload a set of five preselected words from the text, then I go over the words and apply them in a variety of examples and in contexts that students are familiar with. Second, I pose a thinking question (why or how) for students to focus on during the read aloud. Finally, after the read aloud, I give a wait time (count up to ten) for students to gather their thoughts and think deeply on the posed question posed before introducing a language stem (such as "en mi opinión") for students to follow when answering the thinking question. In using this combination of strategies in this order, I have noticed that the language stems helped students gather their thoughts and organize them in a format that is similar to the language of books. Students transfer the language stems to our guided reading instructional time where they read independently, digging deeper into the text, and the spontaneously applying these language stems resulting longer and complex sentences.

Second, I found strength in the vivid conversations around digital texts of the teenagers and children in this study. To illustrate this point, I witnessed female teenagers conversing about topics of their interest, such as digital stories posted on their social media venues, as well as the telenovelas they followed. I noticed the length of utterances they used was elaborated and complex, and included the story structure, plot, and most of the literary elements. This made me wonder if stories found in various social media venues can be utilized in late elementary grades and/or middle school to show students that the language of complex texts in classrooms have

similarities in the language used to discuss digital stories. Speculating on the significance of the elaborated talk in conversations between teenagers and some young children, I wonder if educators might dig deeper into student knowledge and allow them to compare digital stories posted in social media and telenovelas or other visual media (e.g. movies, sitcoms, etc.) to academic books and challenging content area books. I wonder if this would enable students to express comparisons, connections, opinions, describe protagonists, synthesize episodes, visualize their favorite scenes, and even write their own similar stories. I wonder if such instruction would result in higher student engagement, given that it validated the culture(s) and language usage of student's homes, and if it would ultimately increase their motivation to pursue higher-level studies. For instance, stories found in academic books often have similar literary structures and elements to stories posted in various social media venues and telenovelas. Children and teenagers are highly interested in conversing about stories they like and are familiar with, stories they have read in social media, or viewed on popular television in both English and Spanish. Moreover, if educators use these stories, it would make sense that students would be more likely to engage in stories and assignments as they would be pertinent to their prior knowledge and linguistic practices. I wonder if educators perceive that the inclusion of such digital stories and telenovelas as a way of respecting and validating their student's culture, attitudes, language, linguistic practices, and ultimately their identity as citizens of this country.

My third deliberation is about parent and educator talk, given that I observed mothers use different tones when talking to adults, as opposed to children and other members of the group. These conversations conveyed caring, supportive and emotional tones, although, they appeared vibrant and colorful while the parties shared about different topics. Thus, I am curious about the use of mothers who are educators, and their dialogue style(s) when delivering instruction. More

specifically, I am curious to know if classroom environments that are set up to be conducive to learning through the purposeful employment of high levels of structure may end up limiting this caring, supportive linguistic tone. Additionally, I want to know if curricular demands, the number of children in a classroom, teacher personality, and pedagogical philosophy, as well as school building or administrator expectations may compel educators to maintain a rigid academic structure. In other words, rigid classroom structures imposed by teachers or educational systems impact the linguistic tone of literacy instruction, and thus, the development of linguistic repertoires for bilingual Mexican American students such as those of the families in this study.

It would seem that a mother-like dialogue or tone can be used in a more intimate form such as when conferencing with students during Writing and Reading Workshop or in Guided Reading activities. Hence, teachers could utilize what I observed with the participating mothers during conferencing with students: a caring and supportive tone in an intimate setting where the adult and child(ren) can interact, and the students can receive guidance, support, and scaffolding. The use of a caring and supportive tone during instructional delivery may bring students' emotional barriers down, increase their confidence, resulting in additional responses to challenging questions that ignites dialogue, a much needed linguistic practice for recent arrivals who may still be in the silent period of new language acquisition or just beginning to provide simple answers to classrooms inquiries. As a result of this study, I have consciously attempted to use a softer tone with my kindergarten and first grade students, one that is both caring and supportive, when introducing new concepts. This simple adjustment to my delivery of instruction has shown success in engaging students in lessons. I also normally use the common word "mijo/mija" (short for my dear son/my dear daughter), a term that conjures and conveys caring and love for one's offspring and even other young people one cares for. I have now started to use



this word to bring students' attention to new learning or to reinforce skills/strategies they already know. Once I hold student's attention in this way, I switch to a more business-like, academic, or inquisitive tone to continue the lesson. I have found that my students tend to accept such quick tone switches with ease. Of course, I am not sure if this might be due to being a male, but it would not seem that outcomes would be any different from female teachers who might choose to employ these tones interchangeably. Thus, I am now more conscious of the language of love, emotion, and care in my daily instruction while also juggling intonation according to the learning task, situation and objective of the lesson. I now embed the linguistic cues, gestures, and body postures that I learned from interacting with their families in this study and my own family as a child in order to establish an academic structure that better incorporates a loving and caring tone.

My fourth area of curiosity is related to gender discourse, and particularly about male linguistic interactions. During this study, I observed limited male discourse and linguistic interactions. Rather, I noticed that men primarily interacted with other males in larger group settings, or with females (especially in the homes) and seldom engaged in discussions with children. As indicated here, I observed that males gathered with other males in one place during some social contexts and females gathered with other females in another part of the room or house, while children just wandered around everywhere with limited structure and supervision. The few linguistic interactions I witnessed of males led me to wonder about their discourse. I remember my own father used the same linguistic and social practices as the participating fathers in the study. I noticed that the males, just like my own father, expected the mothers to care for the children in all aspects of their development, and in all social contexts. I grew up in a traditional Mexican household where my father saw his role as being charged to support the family, to care for the family business, and to safeguard the wellbeing of the whole family. He

was the authority figure and decision maker, and he did not engage in daily chores with children, including homework assistance or educational guidance or decisions. His expectations were the same as the fathers in this study and expected them to achieve a better life than his own.

Considering my male figure schema and my observational data, I wonder how Mexican American fathers impact the styles of childrearing practices of their sons and daughters, and if this portion of society in the U.S. has evolved in regard to the way it views family roles, traditions, and culture, or if it is still moving at a more traditional pace. My limited observations show reduced linguistic interactions between males and females, and between men and both male and female children. However, I still wonder about the actual and potential impact of father's linguistic interactions with their children during home-based academic activities such as homework and book reading. For example, modeling to children the way one can shop for tools and house cleaning items by looking at the different weekly flyers received or having them look these items up online to compare prices and uses, can turn into an opportunity for linguistic interactions in which children see their fathers as conversational partners and mentors. As an educator of Mexican descent and the researcher in this study, I now feel that my role is to show and model for my male counterparts (fathers) that the knowledge they have can be shared when raising their children. It may be that my wondering about fathers could also be considered an area of opportunity for educators. In other words, that teachers could elect to learn more of their students' family daily activities and demonstrate to fathers how their knowledge is important to include in their daily life activities through linguistic interactions with their children, which will then enhance the linguistic narratives in children.

In sum, I have described the wonderings I had as researcher, educator, and Mexican American male during the collection of data for this study. I shared memories of my own

childhood that included instances in which I wondered about language practices, family dynamics, linguistic exchanges, personal interactions, and primarily, my own upbringing in comparison to the families I observed and participated with during data collection. I also shared personal and professional practices I began to employ as a result of this study which have helped me instruct students who look, act, speak, and learn like me. I also described practices that I learned from my own mother, the mothers at the school, and the participating mothers, that have contributed to my knowledge about using cultural and linguistic practices that have shown success in my students.

### **Limitations of the Study**

This research study occurred during summer months, a time when the participating families enjoyed the benefits of a warm weather that allows for plenty of outdoor activities, away from the confines of their own living rooms and kitchens. During the summer, families are less focused on academics, and more focused on socialization, using language that revolves around unstructured activities that embrace the wellbeing of the family and their community. The social network that these families have developed over time also extended their packed schedules to include more structured social gatherings such as birthday parties, religious ceremonies and celebrations like quinceañeras, and weddings, and other spontaneous gatherings. Thus, the timing of the study (summer) may have determined and/or limited the types of social events and linguistic exchanges I was able to observe. In other words, a longer period of time that included the academic school year with the various types of family events that occur in the fall, winter, and spring, would have allowed for participation in, and observations of different kinds of linguistic interactional data in relationship to the study questions. I wonder if my observation data would have been different if family daily activities could have also included linguistic

interactions and routines after school and before going to bed (e.g. homework, cooking, watching TV, just relaxing time).

Another limitation included challenges in scheduling due to unexpected family events, which prevented or delayed some of the study interviews and observation appointments. However, the families were highly accommodating and embraced my presence at their numerous social events. In qualitative research, such challenges can generally be expected and I do believe that the purpose and goals of this study were accomplished, given that I was able to observe meaningful and abundant amounts of discourse captured during numerous social contexts.

Finally, it may be that my presence during family events hindered their conversations in regard to tones, elaboration, and even topics discussed. I am certain that being a male also influenced linguistic dynamics. Even though I knew the participating families well prior to the study, it may be that they opted for more formal linguistic tones in my presence, and that their behaviors and demeanors may have been toned down or different.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

The results of this study shed light on the following recommendations for future research on Mexican American families' daily linguistic interactions and their impact on children's language and literacy development.

First, I recommend the need for studies over a longer period of time as noted in the study limitations above, including observing the linguistic interactions during telenovela, movie, and digital story time. This would allow for participant observations of family discourse in living rooms and kitchens during the school months of the year and would include a focus on parent-parent and parent-visitors, parent-child(ren), and sibling-sibling linguistic interactions before, during, and after watching their favorite telenovelas, movies and digital media programs. This

type of research would add clarity and depth to the findings of this study in terms of the types of sentence complexity evidenced in explanation of television programs with episodic details, as well as the co-construction of events or characterization of protagonists.

Second, I recommend studies that specifically focus on fathers, particularly their linguistic interactions with their sons and daughters, any visible and/or invisible (non-verbal interactions) evidenced in linguistic patterns used to children in Mexican American families today, and an examination of the differences in rearing Mexican American boys and girls at different stages of language and literacy development.

Third, I recommend a study of how curricular choices might be revamped so as to include relevant linguistic resources available in the community, such as storytellers from children's native countries. This could include schools that begin working with schools' stakeholders, families, teachers, administrators and in some cases students to better include the oral stories and other forms of family funds of knowledge in school events (e.g. family nights, career day, father/daughter or mother/son dance, etc.).

Overall, this study presented meaningful and valuable findings about the daily linguistic interactions within the two focal families and their social networks. The above recommendations for future research are a small sample of what types of studies would be helpful in revealing additional insights into what Mexican American communities offer in regards to rich linguistic resources, all of which teachers and instructional leaders can experience, learn from, and tap into for future, culturally and linguistically responsive instruction.

### **Concluding Reflection**

Selecting, participating, and observing the linguistic interactions of the two focal families as they cared for the well-being of their children at home and at school has been a labor of

appreciation and self-awareness for both the participants, and for my own of family. I am highly appreciative of these families, and especially all the mothers (my own included), given all the contributions and support they showed as I completed this work. I am forever indebted to the mothers who allowed me to be part of the educational formation of their children, and for deepening my knowledge about child rearing in a Mexican American home while they were experiencing a different language, society, and country. I did not have the fortune of growing up in a society like that of the U.S. which affords families to be able to dually navigate two cultures, learning two languages, and even being educated in a totally different language and educational system. However, acquiring English as a second language as an adult has opened the doors to a different set of cultural and linguistic experiences in a new society.

Completing this advanced degree was never in my wildest dreams, until I took a leadership position where I lived the possibilities of giving recent immigrant children of Mexican origin the opportunity to reach their potential in this United States. Engaging in the completion of this work was also possible due to the support, guidance, and dedication of the professors and advisors who teamed together to ensure that my vision and goals of this study were accomplished. During the process, I grew as a learner, as an educator, as an instructional leader, as a friend, and as a person. I am cognizant that the opportunities to investigate theoretical and practical reading and learning experiences afforded the enhancement of my knowledge to become a more knowledgeable educator.

This study provided a wealth of new information that helped me deepen my understanding of how Mexican American families, especially mothers, know about, do, and think about rearing children within their family boundaries in the most critical years of children's lives. For me, it is an encouraging affirmation that brought light to the power mothers and adults

have on a daily basis to encourage and stimulate language in children. The work that teachers expect parents do with their children before, during, and after school hours is overwhelmingly limited due to families' in and out-of-home demands. Despite what can sometimes be limited language and literacy exposure that students may have at home, administrators should design and implement curriculums that better fit the needs of the children and that are based on their linguistic and cultural strengths. In addition, educators should strive to deliver children with the best education they can, and realize that such important work cannot happen solely inside the school. Rather, administrators and teachers must work together *with* families, and include their knowledge and strengths, including linguistic strengths, into the curriculums and daily instructional activities, practices, and routines. The findings and results of this research-study can ultimately help strengthen Mexican American communities, families, students, educators, and administrators.

Finally, I was able to appreciate families at a deeper level, including my own. After the study, the participating families, they expressed excitement and enthusiastically remembered their experiences during the times we spent together, during my observations, and they were happy to strengthen their ties with school personnel that care for the well-being of their children and all the children in their community. The following lyrics represent what I have uncovered in the process of this study:

*...some things*

*we will own forever - -*

*the memory of the just,*

*the remembrance of a good act,*

*the good remembrance*

*of someone fair ...*

*this will never be*

*taken from us ...*

*this we will never give away.*

*Inspired by a Mexican Nahuátl Indian Song*

I certainly believe that all families have a wealth of knowledge and it is up to us to uncover that knowledge to help facilitate language and literacy development in all children.



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## APENDIX A

### Consent Forms

#### Consent Form

Dear Parent:

You have been invited to take part in a research-study to explore daily discourse in Mexican families and its impact on language and literacy development. This research-study project will be conducted by Adelfio J. Garcia, doctoral candidate of the Reading and Language Doctoral Program at National Louis University.

If you agree to be in this research-study, you will be asked to do the following:

1. Agree to participate in a face to face initial and final interview that will last approximately 60 – 90 minutes each, I will ask questions about your background, family dynamics, and family educational ideology.
2. Three observations conducted at home, or other social context such as parks, church, grocery store, etc. The duration of each observation will be approximately 60 minutes in length. I also will engage in the conversation by asking questions too.

Participation in this research-study will take approximate 10 hours over a three-month period. There are no known risks associated with your participation in this research-study beyond those of everyday life. Although, you will receive no direct financial benefits, this research-study will help us understand the processes of daily life family linguistic interaction in children’s language and literacy development.

Participation in this research-study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate or withdraw at any time without penalty. Confidentiality of your research-study records will be strictly maintained by using false names at any presentations or publications based on the study as well as any documentation collected during the course of the research-study. Any information that may further identify you, such as address or place of employment, will be altered. Your interviews and observations will be audio-taped. You may review these tapes and request that all or any portions of the tapes be destroyed. Any notes I take will be secured, either in a locked cabinet (for hand-written notes) or on a password protected computer (for typed notes) for up to 5 years after the completion of this study, at which time I will shred all tapes, transcripts, and notes.

I have explained this research-study to you and answered your initial questions. If you have additional questions or wish to report a research-related problem you may contact me at 773-392-1525, by e-mail at [agarcia4@my.nl.edu](mailto:agarcia4@my.nl.edu), you may also contact Sophie Degener at [Sophie.Degener@nl.edu](mailto:Sophie.Degener@nl.edu). For questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the National Louis University’s Institutional Research Review Board: Shaunti Knauth; email: [shaunti.knauth@nl.edu](mailto:shaunti.knauth@nl.edu); phone: 312-261-3526; NLU’s IRRB is located at National Louis University, 122 South Michigan Avenue, Chicago, IL.

Thank you for your consideration.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant’s Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Researcher’s Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## Consent Form Spanish

Estimado Padre:

Usted ha sido invitado para tomar parte en este estudio-investigativo que explora las conversaciones en familias mexicanas y su impacto en el desarrollo de habla y lectura. Este estudio-investigativo será conducido por Adelfio J. García, candidato de doctorado del programa de Lectura e Idiomas en la National Louis University.

Si está de acuerdo en su participación de este estudio-investigativo, se le pedirá lo siguiente:

1. Estar de acuerdo en la participación de cara-a-cara en una entrevista inicial y final que durara de 60 a 90 minutos cada una, se le preguntara información de usted, la dinámica familiar y de sus ideas sobre la educación.
2. Participación en tres observaciones en su hogar u otro lugar social como son parques, iglesias, tiendas, etc. La duración de cada observación será de aproximadamente 60 minutos. Durante las observaciones podría hacer preguntas a su hijo/a también.

La participación en este estudio-investigativo le tomara aproximadamente 10 horas en un periodo de tres meses. No hay ningún riesgo asociado con su participación en este estudio-investigativo más allá de la vida diaria. Sin embargo, usted no recibirá ningún beneficio financiero, este estudio-investigativo ayudará a entender los procesos de las interacciones lingüísticas en familias y el impacto en el desarrollo lingüístico y de lectura de los niños

Su participación en este estudio-investigativo es voluntario. Puede usted rehusar su participación o salir en cualquier momento sin ninguna dificultad. La confidencialidad de todos los datos sobre este estudio será estrictamente mantenida ya que usaremos nombres falsos en cualquier presentación o publicación basada en este estudio, así como la documentación obtenida durante el curso de este estudio-investigativo. Cualquier información que pueda identificar a usted y su familia, como su domicilio o lugar de trabajo, será alterado. Las entrevistas y observaciones serán grabadas en un sistema auditivo digital. Usted podrá revisar todas las grabaciones y requerir que se destruyan porciones o todas en general. Cualquier nota estará segura, ya sea en un gabinete con llave (para notas escritas a mano) o con una clave protegida en una computadora (para notas escritas a máquina) por 5 años después de haber completado este estudio, en el cual, destruiré todos los dispositivos digitales, transcripciones, y notas.

Se le ha explicado este estudio-investigativo y respondido cualquier pregunta inicial. Si usted tiene preguntas adicionales o le gustaría reportar cualquier problema me puede contactar at 773-392-1525, o por correo electrónico a [agarcia4@my.nl.edu](mailto:agarcia4@my.nl.edu), también podría contactar a Sophie Degener al [Sophie.Degener@nl.edu](mailto:Sophie.Degener@nl.edu). Para cualquier pregunta sobre sus derechos como participante de este estudio-investigativo, puede contactar a National Louis University Institutional Research Review Board (IRRB); Shaunti Knauth; correo electrónico [shaunti.knauth@nl.edu](mailto:shaunti.knauth@nl.edu); teléfono; 312-261-3526. Las oficinas del IRRB están localizadas en la National Louis University, 122 South Michigan Avenue, Chicago, IL.

Gracias por su consideración.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Firma del Participante

\_\_\_\_\_  
Fecha

\_\_\_\_\_  
Firma del Investigador

\_\_\_\_\_  
Firma

## Parental informed consent letter for child's participation

Dear Parent:

Your child has been invited to take part in a research-study to explore daily discourse in Mexican families and its impact on language and literacy development. This research-study project will be conducted by Adelfio J. Garcia, doctoral candidate of the Reading and Language Doctoral Program at National Louis University.

If you agree to give permission for your children to be in this research-study, his/her voice will be part of the conversations/observations I will be doing of your linguistic interactions with other adults or your child or children. These observations will be audio-taped, and as the researcher, I may ask your child/ren a question to engage in a short conversation.

Participation in this research-study will take approximate 10 hours in a three-month period for the adults and children if present and recorded. There are no known risks associated with the participation in this research-study beyond those of everyday life. Although, your child/ren will receive no direct financial benefits, this research-study help us understand the processes of daily life family linguistic interaction in children's language and literacy development.

Participation in this research-study is voluntary. You and/or your child may refuse to participate or withdraw at any time without penalty. If you and/or your child decide not to participate or to be withdrawn from the research-study, there will be no penalty at all. Confidentiality of your child's research-study records will be strictly maintained by using false names at any presentations or publications based on the study as well as any documentation collected during the course of the research-study. If your child's voice during the observations is recorded in the audio-tape. You may review these tapes and request that all or any portions of the tapes be destroyed. Any notes I take will be secured, either in a locked cabinet (for hand-written notes) or on a password protected computer (for typed notes) for up to 5 years after the completion of this study, at which time, I will shred all tapes, transcripts, and notes.

I have explained this research-study to you and answered your initial questions. If you have additional questions or wish to report a research-related problem you may contact me at 773-392-1525, by e-mail at [agarcia4@my.nl.edu](mailto:agarcia4@my.nl.edu), you may also contact Sophie Degener at [Sophie.Degener@nl.edu](mailto:Sophie.Degener@nl.edu). For questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the National Louis University's Institutional Research Review Board (IRRB): Shaunti Knauth; email: [shaunti.knauth@nl.edu](mailto:shaunti.knauth@nl.edu); phone: 312-261-3526; NLU's IRRB is located at National Louis University, 122 South Michigan Avenue, Chicago, IL.

### Agreement to Participate

I, \_\_\_\_\_ give permission for my child \_\_\_\_\_ in the study

\_\_\_\_\_  
Parent's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## Carta de consentimiento de padres de participación de niño/a

Estimado Padre:

Su hijo/a ha sido invitado para tomar parte en este estudio-investigativo que explora las conversaciones en familias mexicanas y su impacto en el desarrollo de habla y lectura. Este estudio-investigativo será conducido por Adelfio J. García, candidato de doctorado del programa de Lectura e Idiomas en la National Louis University.

Si está de acuerdo en la participación de su hijo/hija en este estudio-investigativo, se le pedirá que su hijo/a sea parte de las observaciones que conduciré sobre las interacciones lingüísticas diarias. Estas observaciones serán grabadas digitalmente y como investigador podría, en algunas ocasiones, preguntar o mantener una corta conversación con su hijo/a.

La participación de sus hijos le tomara aproximadamente 10 horas en un periodo de tres meses. No hay ningún riesgo asociado con su participación en este estudio-investigativo más allá de la vida diaria. Sin embargo, su hijo/a no recibirá ningún beneficio financiero, este estudio-investigativo ayudará a entender los procesos de las interacciones lingüísticas en familias y el impacto en el desarrollo lingüístico y de lectura de los niños

Su participación en este estudio-investigativo es voluntario. Su hijo/a puede rehusar su participación o salir en cualquier momento sin ninguna dificultad. Si su hijo decide no participar o salir del estudio-investigativo no habrá ninguna penalidad. La confidencialidad de todos los datos sobre este estudio será estrictamente mantenida ya que usaremos nombres falsos en cualquier presentación o publicación basada en este estudio, así como la documentación obtenida durante el curso de este estudio-investigativo. Las entrevistas y observaciones serán grabadas en un sistema auditivo digital. Usted podrá revisar todas las grabaciones y requerir que se destruyan porciones o todas en general. Cualquier nota será guardada en un gabinete con llave (para notas escritas a mano) o tendrán una clave de seguridad para la computadora (para notas escritas a máquina) por 5 años después de haber terminado este estudio, en el cual destruiré todas las cintas digitales, transcripciones, y notas.

Se le ha explicado este estudio-investigativo y respondido cualquier pregunta. Si usted tiene preguntas adicionales o le gustaría reportar cualquier problema me puede contactar at 773-392-1525, o por correo electrónico a [agarci4@my.nl.edu](mailto:agarci4@my.nl.edu) usted podría contactar a Sophie Degener al [Sophie.Degener@nl.edu](mailto:Sophie.Degener@nl.edu). Para cualquier pregunta sobre sus derechos como participante de este estudio-investigativo, puede contactar a National Louis University Institutional Research Review Board (IRRB); Shaunti Knauth; correo electrónico [shaunti.knauth@nl.edu](mailto:shaunti.knauth@nl.edu); teléfono; 312-261-3526; Las oficinas del IRRB están localizadas en la National Louis University, 122 South Michigan Avenue, Chicago, IL.

### Consentimiento de Participación

Yo, \_\_\_\_\_ doy permiso a mi hijo/a \_\_\_\_\_  
en el estudio.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Firma del padre/madre

\_\_\_\_\_  
Fecha

## Assent Form

Dear Child participant,

I would like to ask your permission to be part of this research-study. I am Adelfio J. Garcia, a doctoral candidate of the Reading and Language Doctoral Program at National Louis University. I am exploring daily discourse in Mexican families and its impact on language and literacy development.

If you agree to give permission, your voice will be part of the conversations/observations I will be doing of your family's linguistic interactions with your parents, other adults, and/or siblings in your home. The observations will be audio-taped, and as the researcher, I may ask you a question to engage you in the conversation.

Participation in this research-study will take approximately 10 hours in a three-month period for the adults and you if you are present or participate in the observations. There are no risks associated in this research-study beyond those of everyday life. There are no financial benefits at all. This research-study help us understand the processes of daily life family linguistic interactions in your language and literacy development.

Your participation in this research-study is voluntary. You can refuse to participate or withdraw at any time without penalty. You may review tapes and request that all or any portions of the tapes be destroyed. Any notes I take will be secured, either in a locked cabinet (for hand-written notes) or on a password protected computer (for typed notes) for up to 5 years after the completion of this study, at which time, I will shred all tapes, transcripts and notes.

I have explained this research-study to you and answered your initial questions. If you have additional questions or wish to report a research-related problem you may contact me at 773-392-1525, by e-mail at [agarcia4@my.nl.edu](mailto:agarcia4@my.nl.edu), you may also contact Sophie Degener at [Sophie.Degener@nl.edu](mailto:Sophie.Degener@nl.edu). For questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the National Louis University's Institutional Research Review Board (IRRB): Shaunti Knauth; email: [shaunti.knauth@nl.edu](mailto:shaunti.knauth@nl.edu); phone: 312-261-3526; NLU's IRRB is located at National Louis University, 122 South Michigan Avenue, Chicago, IL.

### Agreement to Assent

I, \_\_\_\_\_ give permission to use my voice/participation in this research-study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Child's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date



## Assent Form Spanish

Estimado menor de edad,

Me gustaría tener tu permiso de ser parte de esta estudio-investigativo. Me llamo Adelfio J. García, candidato de doctorado del programa de Lectura e Idiomas en la National Louis University. Estoy explorando las conversaciones diarias en familias mexicanas y el impacto en desarrollo de lenguaje y lectura.

Si otorgas el permiso, tu voz será parte de las conversaciones/observaciones que presenciare de las interacciones diarias entre tus padres, otros adultos, y tus hermanos/as en tu hogar. Las observaciones serán grabadas digitalmente en un casete, y yo como investigador, podría involucrarte en la conversación/observación.

La participación en este estudio-investigativo tomara aproximadamente 10 horas en un periodo de tres meses para los adultos y si estas presente y participas en las observaciones. No existe ningún tipo de riesgo asociado con este estudio-investigativo más allá de la vida diaria. No hay ningún beneficio tampoco. Este estudio-investigativo ayudara a entender los procesos diarios de la vida diaria de las interacciones lingüísticas en niños como tú.

La participación en este estudio-investigativo es voluntaria. Puedes reusar a participar o no participar sin multa alguna. Podrías revisar todas las grabaciones y requerir que todo o las porciones donde estés grabado/a sean destruidas. Cualquier note estará seguro en un gabinete con llave (para notas escritas a mano) o con contraseña de protección para la computadora (para notas escritas a máquina) por 5 anos después de que el estudio termino, en este tiempo, todas las grabaciones, transcripciones y notas serán destruidas.

He explicado este estudio-investigativo y respondido cualquier pregunta inicial. Si tienes preguntas adicionales o te gustaría reportar cualquier problema puedes contactar al 773-392-1525, o por correo electrónico a [agarcia4@my.nl.edu](mailto:agarcia4@my.nl.edu), también podrías contactar a Sophie Degener al [Sophie.Degener@nl.edu](mailto:Sophie.Degener@nl.edu). Para cualquier pregunta sobre tus derechos como participante de este estudio-investigativo, puedes contactar a National Louis University Institutional Research Review Board (IRRB); Shaunti Knauth; correo electrónico [shaunti.knauth@nl.edu](mailto:shaunti.knauth@nl.edu); teléfono; 312-261-3526. Las oficinas del IRRB están localizadas en la National Louis University, 122 South Michigan Avenue, Chicago, IL.

### Consentimiento Por Participar

Yo, \_\_\_\_\_ doy permiso que se use mi voz en este estudio-investigativo.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Firma del Niño/a

\_\_\_\_\_  
Fecha

## **APENDIX B**

### **Interview Protocol**

#### SEMI – STRUCTURED PARENT INTERVIEW

##### Initial Home Interview

##### **Family Background**

1. Where were you born?
2. Where were your children born?
3. Who lives at home?
4. What is/are the language/s spoken at home most of the time?
5. What is your level of education?
6. What do you do?
7. How many years have you been living in the U.S.?

##### **Family Dynamics**

###### Past

1. Tell me about your typical day when you were a child back in Mexico
2. Tell me about your typical weekend or holiday when you were a child
3. What type of stories were told when you were a child by your parents, siblings, neighbors, friends, and/or relatives?
4. What was the nature of conversations with your siblings or friends as you walked to/from school to home?

###### Present

1. Tell me about your typical day at home when your children are present.

2. Tell me about your typical weekend or holiday at home.
3. What type of conversations you or other adults/relatives have as family including or not including children?
4. What type of conversations do your children have between other siblings or same age friends, cousins, etc.?
5. What type of conversations you have when you and your child/ren walk to school or other community places?

### **Family Academic Perceptions**

#### Past

1. Tell me about your school experiences as a child
2. What memories do you have regarding conversations when you were in school?
3. What type of stories were told by teachers when you were in school?
4. What conversations did you have with your teacher, classmates and school personnel?

#### Present

1. In your eyes, how do your school experiences compare to your child/ren in this country?
2. What do you think of the type of conversations/stories you hear from your children that are attending a U.S. school?
3. How similar or different do you see your school experience to your children's in terms of narratives/talk/conversation?
4. What are the surprises you experienced with school in the U.S.?
5. Do you think of allowing children to converse in school may help their academic growth?

The following questions may be asked at the FINAL interview depending on findings and observations throughout the data collection process.

1. If you have a chance to change what they teach in schools, what would that be and why?
2. How far would you like your child/ren to attend school?
3. What type of job would you like your child/ren to have?
4. What would you like schools in the U.S. provide to your child/ren?

## APENDIX C

### Audio Recordings Transcripts

#### BBQ at the Gomez, Alejandra's B-Day Five hours recording time

##### Conversation captured at arrival time!

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| 13. RT: ¡Buenas tardes a todos!  | 13. RT: Good afternoon everyone!   |
| 14. All: Buenas tardes, pase aquí, mire  | 14. All: Good afternoon, please come in, look  |
| 15. Alejandra: ¡Ay me agarró! Aquí mire, limpiando los que traigo en la frente (nopales)                           | 15. Alejandra: Hey, you caught me! Look, cleaning what I have on my forehead (Cactus)                |
| 16. Alejandra: Pase, siéntese... ¡ay! Ahí  | 16. Alejandra: Come in, sit down! There!   |
| 17. W1: ¿Que quiere tomar? ¿Una Soda? ¿Agua?   | 17. W1: What would you like to drink? A soda? Water?   |
| 18. Agustín: ¡Denle una cerveza!   | 18. Agustin: Give him a beer!  |
| 19. RT: ¡Una soda!   | 19. RT: A soda!  |
| 20. W1: ¿De cual gusta usted?  | 20. W1: Which one you'd like?  |
| 21. RT: ¡de la que sea! ¡Ahorita no, Al rato la cerveza  | 21. RT: Any kind! Not now, later I will take the beer!   |
| 22. W1: ¿ha estado bien? ¿Como le ha ido? Pues nosotros aquí, ya ve, trabajando y batallando con los niños, ya ve, | 22. W1: Have you been okay? How's it going? We are here, you see, working and with the kids, you see |
| 23. W2: ¿muy bien gracias, como salieron los niños en la escuela?  | 23. W2: I'm good thanks, how did the kids do at school?  |
| 24. W1: bien, muy bien, puras As y Bs.   | 24. W1: Good, very good, only As and Bs  |
| 25. RT: ¿Que me dicen de la escuela de los niños?  | 25. RT: What can you tell about your child school?   |
| 26. W1 & W2: Ay maestro, que le podemos decir, ¡todo igual!  | 26. W1 & W2: Um teacher, what we can say, everything the same!                                       |
| 27. RT: ¿Que es todo igual?  | 27. RT: What is everything the same?   |
| 28. W1: ¡Usted sabe, lo mismo de siempre!  | 28. W1: You know, as always, the same!   |
| 29. W2: Nada, ¡todo como siempre!  | 29. W2: Nothing, everything the same!  |
| 30. RT: ¿Ustedes son de el mismo lugar que Alejandra?  | 30. RT: Are you from the same town where Alejandra is from?  |
| 31. W1: ¡Yo soy de cerquita!   | 31. W1: I'm from a closer town!  |
| 32. W2: ¡Yo también!   | 32. W2: Me too!  |
| 33. W3: ¡Vénganse a comer! Ya esta todo listo.   | 33. W3: Come to eat! Everything is ready!  |
| 34. RT: Gracias, ¡vamos a comer!   | 34. RT: Thanks, let's eat!   |
| 35. RT: Esta carne esta bien suave y bien sabrosa y con esta salsita tan rica, ¡sabe mas rica!                     | 35. RT: This meat is tender and is delicious plus if I put some tasty salsa, it may taste delicious! |

36. W1 & W2: ¡Si verdad! Es arrachera

36. W1 & W2: Yes! Is skirt steak

### Three hours later

- A. RT No las había saludado por que estaba ocupado con las otras señoras. ¿Como han estado?
- B. W1, W2, & W3 Muy bien gracias! Mire venga siéntese con nosotras.
- C. RT Gracias por invitarme.

- A. RT, I have not greeted you because I was busy with the other ladies. How have you been?
- B. W1, W2, & W3 Very good thanks! Look sit with us.
- C. RT Thanks for inviting me.

1 W3 Y, yo, pues, me dijo el doctor que es la única así, que tenía sospechas, que es la de la matriz, y pues me están aconsejando que fuera a las terapias

1 W3 And, I, then, the doctor said that it is the only one like that, he had suspicion, that it is the womb, and I've been advised to go to the therapies

2 W1 yo una vez estaba escuchando en la radio, que una señora el otra vez que le salieron cuatro tumores, y que parecía que estaba embarazada, en la matriz, los tumores estaban alrededor de la matriz y no se le veía la matriz

2 W1 Once I was listening to the radio, that a lady, the other time, that she had four tumors, and they made her look that she was pregnant, in the womb, the tumors were around the womb and the womb was hard to see

3 W3 le digo que yo creo que ese es el problema y, y por que.... Hay días que no puedo ni.... y no sé si sea de la matriz o de otro lado. No sé si deba o no

3 W3 I told you I think that was the problem and, and because... There are days I can't ... and I don't know if that is the womb or something else. I don't know what that is, should I or no

4 W1 pues todo depende de la persona, verda! Todo depende de la persona, pues a unas les dan.... Un medicamento y lo tienes que tomar, y así lo tienen controlado, pregunte, Y yo también con Ruby estoy esperando a que vaya a un especialista del Corazón

4 W1 then, all depends on the person, right! It all depends on the person, then some of them get some ... a medication then you have to take it, and it is how is controlled, ask, and I, too with Ruby, am waiting for her to go to a heart specialist

5 W2 Oh si

5 W2 Oh yes

6 W1 porque ahora que la operaron una y dos veces en un día

6 W1 because, now that she got operated on once and twice a day

7 W1 Uh

7 W1 Uh

8 W1 Por que le pusieron la sonda, una sonda como del riñón hacia abajo, y estaba así, pero....

8 W1 they inserted a surgeon's probe, the probe was directed down next to the kidney, and it was like this, but...

9 W3 pero por dentro

9 W3 but it was inside

- 10 W1 No la aguanto, y se la tuvieron que sacar ese mismo, y luego a la semana se la tuvieron que metieron y luego se la volvieron a poner.... porque se le estaba regresando la orina pa'tras y se le podía a ir a....
- 10 W1 couldn't take it, and they have to take it out the same day, then in a week they inserted it again.... Because she could not control her urine, it was going back and could ...
- 11 W2 Infectar
- 11 W2 infect
- 12 W1 a ha, infectar y luego y se la tuvieron que poner, y (pause) luego... la operaron a la siguiente, como a los cuatro días la operaron, y luego le sacaron eso, la sonda, y le pusieron otra y Ruby no la aguantaba, sentía como si fuera a tener un bebe o como si se le fuera a salir algo, y con el dolor y el dolor. Y luego se le ....
- 12 W1 m yeah, infect and then they have to put it in again, and (pause) theeeen... they operated on her next, like the next four days she got operated, then they took out again, the surgeon's probe, then they put another one and Ruby could not take it, she felt that she was having a baby or something was about to come out and the pain and pain, then.
- 13 W3 se le podía salir
- 13 W3 it could come out
- 14 W1 y entonces, este, el doctor le dio una cita pa'dentro de diez días porque si no, se iba ir de vacaciones y esta con el dolor que no se lo aguantaba y llorando, y después, una señora, una enfermera, que estaba ahí, dijo, oh no, vamos a ir con el doctor para ver si la puede pasar porque especialmente con este dolor, porque si no se te ve te molesta más y nada más se la sacaron y ya
- 14 W1 and then, the, the doctor gave her an appointment in then days because, if not, he was going on vacation and she had lot of pain, she could not take it and was crying, then, an old lady, a nurse, was there, and said, oh no, let's go to see the doctor to see if he can do something because of this pain, because if he does not see you that is bothering .. you, they are not going to do anything
- 15 W2 Se le paso el dolor
- 15 W2 then the pain went away
- 16 W1 por que la cosa ya se la habían sacado, era nada más la sonda que ya estaba ahí, y ahora nada más estamos esperando que le hagan otro, ultrasonido, porque le habían dicho que otra pierna y este especialista le dijo que no, y entonces aquel le había visto mal, el reporte, puesto que se la había venido la de-sa y no se la había venido, y que no estaba bien, so, ahora estamos yendo para que le hagan otro ultrasonido para que le hagan para ver como esta todo y luego, le ven el Corazón le ven. Porque su Corazón estaba muy alto, su Corazón, y le dijeron que está sangrando una de las válvulas, y este,
- 16 W1 because the thing was already taken out, it was that surgeon's probe that was there, and now we are waiting for a new ultrasound, because she was told that it was the other leg and that specialist told her that it wasn't it, that the report was seen wrong, the report wasn't good and that thing was coming out, and it was no good, so, now we are going to get the other ultrasound to see how everything is and think what can be done, then, the heart can be seen and can be seen. Because the heart was too high, her heart, and was told that it was bleeding in the valves, and this, to see the

hay que ver el especialista para ver qué es lo que van a hacer. Y dice Ruby porque yo, si yo no tomo, no fumo, no hago nada, pos ora si a darle vuelo.

17 W2 & W3, jajajajajaja

18 W1 Pues siiiii, no tomo ni fumo y todo se nos vino encima, tal vez por tanta agua que tomas se te hicieron las piedras

19 W2 no se las pudieron deshacer con láser? ¿pues cómo eran? Se la pueden romper

20 W1 si con láser, pero tienen que esperar, por que.... no se.... asegurarse donde va la piedra estuviera abierto peor, so es que le pusieron la sonda para que se abriera y se fuera por ahí, porque estaba muy grande, dijeron que las más grandes son de tres, y la de ella era ocho

21 W2 AHHHH

22 W1 Estaba bien grande, y le dijo ella ahora al doctor ahora que fue, que le cambiara la sonda, y espera que le ayudara y siempre le habían dicho que detenía líquidos en los riñones y que porque so le daban los Dolores. Y le dice el doctor, la única razón por la que puedes retener es porque tenía la piedra, y desde hace cinco años ya tenía esa piedra ahí

23 W2 Y no le dijeron no

24 W1 No, y desde hace cinco años empezó con ese dolor y ya traía la piedra ahí

25 W2 Y no le dijeron nada

26 W1 No

27 W2 Uhmm

specialist to see what he is going to do. Ruby says why me, if I don't drink, don't smoke and don't do anything, then I have to do some of that and put up with this

17 W2 & W3 he he

18 W1 then yeahhh! I don't drink, don't smoke and everything is happening to me at once, maybe because I drink too much water I had kidney stones.

19 W2 why not dissolve them with laser? How big were they? Can they break dissolve them?

20 W1 yes with laser, but they have to wait, because... don't know... to be sure where the stone is and could be worse if it was open, so when they inserted that surgeon's probe it was to get out through there, but it was too big, they said that the biggest are the size of three and she had an eight

21 W2 Ohhhh!

22 W1 it was too big, and she told the doctor now that she went, to change the surgeon's probe, and wait until it would go out and she was always told that she retained liquids in the kidney and that is why she had pain. And the doctor said, the only reason why she retained liquids because of the kidney stone and it is being five years since

23 W2 And they said no

24 W1 No, five years ago she started with that pain and had the stone there

25 W2 And she was told nothing

26 W1 No

27 W2 Uhmmm

## 20 minutes later



1 A. ...por que la cosa ya se la habían sacado, era nada más la sonda que ya estaba ahí, y ahora nada más estamos esperando que le hagan otro, ultrasonido, porque le habían dicho que otra pierna y este especialista le dijo que no, y entonces aquel le había visto mal, el reporte, puesto que se la había venido la de-sa y no se la había venido, y que no estaba bien, so, ahora estamos yendo para que le hagan otro ultrasonido para que le hagan para ver como esta todo y luego, le ven el corazón le ven. Porque su corazón estaba muy alto, su corazón, y le dijeron que está sangrando una de las válvulas, y este, hay que ver el especialista para ver qué es lo que van a hacer. Y dice Viridiana porque yo, si yo no tomo, no fumo, no hago nada, pos ora si a darle vuelo.

2 C & G Jajajajajaja

3 A. Pues siiiii, no tomo ni fumo y todo se nos vino encima, tal vez por tanta agua que tomas se te hicieron las piedras

1 A. ...because the thing was already taken out, it was that surgeon's probe that was there, and now we are waiting for a new ultrasound, because she was told that it was the other leg and that specialist told her that it wasn't it, that the report was seen wrong, the report wasn't good and that-thing was coming out, and it was no good, so, now we are going to get the other ultrasound to see how everything is and think what can be done, then, the heart can be seen and can be seen. Because the heart was too high, her heart, and they were told that it was bleeding in the valves, and this, to see the specialist to see what he is going to do. Viridiana says why me, if I don't drink, don't smoke and don't do anything, then I have to do some of that and put up with this.

2 C & G Ha, ha.

3 A. Then yeahhh! I don't drink, don't smoke and everything is happening to me at once, maybe because I drink too much water I had kidney stones.

## Backyard Gathering

- i.RT. Buenas tardes a todos! ¡Que bonito día hizo hoy! ¿Que me cuentan?
- ii.A & C. ¡Aquí nada mas platicando! Estamos hablando del trabajo.
- iii.RT. Muy bien, como le va en el trabajo?
- iv.C. Estamos hablando de lo que le paso a A. en el trabajo, problemas como siempre, usted sabe.
- v.RT Ya entiendo!
- 1 A. Y me dijo que si me quería ir con él
- 2 C. ¿Después de que te cerró el puesto, te pidió eso? Jajajaja  
¿Y que le dijiste? ¿Y? ¿Qué? ¿Sí?
- 3 A. Le dije “No, a ver cómo te va, y dijo, a ver cómo te va, pero, ya sabes las cosas como van, y lo que haces aquí lo vas a hacer allá.
- 4 C. ¡A ha!
- 5 A. Usted que cree que lo voy a tener confianza después de que me cerró el puesto, NO, y dijo que se iba a llevar a varios, y mire...
- i. C. No te preocupes, todo va a estar bien, verdad que si RT?
- ii.RT. Yo creo que todo va a ir bien, y las cosas pasan por algo, así que no hay que preocuparse de nada y tener mucha fe, y que todo va a salir bien.
- iii.A. Eso espero.
- iv. A. Vamos a echarnos un trago, Salud!
- v.Todos. ¡Salud!
- i. Good afternoon everybody! It was a beautiful day today! What are you conversing about?
- ii. A & C. We are here just talking! We are talking about work.
- iii. RT. Good, how’s work?
- iv. C. We are talking about what happened to A. at work, always problems, you know.
- v. RT. I understand!
- 1 A. He asked me if I wanted to follow him
- 2 C. after he closed your position, he asked you that? Ha, ha, ha, ha.  
What did you say? And? What? Yes?
- 3 A. I said, No, let’s see how it goes for you, he said, but, you know how things are, what you do here you will do there too
- 4 C. Aha!
- 5 A. You think I will trust him after he closed my position, NO, he said that he was going to take other people too, and you see
- i. C. Do not worry, everything will be okay, right RT?
- ii. RT. I think everything will be all right, and things happened for a reason, so there is nothing to worry about, just have faith, and everything will be good.
- iii. A. I hope.
- iv. A. Let’s have a drink, cheers!
- v. All. Cheers!

## Quinceañera Celebrations

- i. RT. Como han estado? ¡No las he visto en mucho tiempo! Ya están bien grandes los muchachos.
  - ii. W1. Si ya están grandes, y ya sabe con sus cosas como siempre.
  - iii. RT. A que cosas se refiere?
  - iv. W1. No nada en especial, solo con la escuela y el trabajo.
  - v. RT. Ya están grandes y se andan con los amigos por todos lados, a veces ya ni dicen donde andan verdad?
  - vi. W1. Pues si ya ve, con esos celulares que se no sabe ni que hablan. Mírelos nada con esos aparatos.
- i. RT. How have you been? I have not seen you in a long time! Your kids are grown.
  - ii. W1. Yes, they are grown, and you know with their stuff as always.
  - iii. RT. What do you mean?
  - iv. W1. No, nothing special, just school and work.
  - v. RT. They are grown and are always with their friends everywhere, sometimes they don't say where they are right?
  - vi. W1. Yes you know, and those cellular are hooked to them that we don't know who they talk to. Look at them with those things.

### Attention turned to teen's conversation.

- 9. Teen 1: ¡Gimme that phone! (¿Dame ese teléfono?) ¿Qué estas leyendo?
  - 10. Teen 2: Estoy leyendo lo que paso ayer en la novela, ¡se quedó bien chido!
  - 11. Teen 1: Yes, it did! Le dije a mi Mom pero, no me la dejó ver, ¡She was mad because ¡I didn't limpie la cocina!
  - 12. Teen 2: ¡You know there is an app! ¡En ese app, tu puedes ver past episodes!
  - 13. Teen 1: ¿Es gratis? ¡Porque no tengo money pa'bajarla!
  - 14. Teen 2: ¡Me gusta el vestido de Ana! ¡Esta bien padre! ¡Se ve bien! ¿Cuanto le costaria y donde lo compro?
- 9. Teen 1: Give me that phone! What are you reading?
  - 10. Teen 2: I'm reading what happened at the telenovela yesterday, the end was nice!
  - 11. Teen 1: Yes, it did! I asked my mom, but, she didn't allow me to watch it, she was mad because I didn't clean the kitchen!
  - 12. Teen 2: You know there is an app! In that app, you can watch past episodes!
  - 13. Teen 1: Is it free? Because I don't have money to download it!
  - 14. Teen 2: I like Ana's dress! It is so cool! She looks great! How much did she pay? (for it) and where did she buy it?

15. Teen 1: ¡Se ve como la de la telenovelaa, la villana que es bien mala con esta, esta, Rosa María, ¡la Buena!
16. Teen 2: Si! ¡Te acuerdas del episodio en que ella estaba en el party de su prima y se encontró a ese muchacho bien guapo!

15. Teen 1: It looks like the one from the telenovela, the villain, she is so bad to um, um, Rosa Maria, the good one!
16. Teen 2: Yes! Do you remember the episode in which she was at the party with her cousin and met this very cute guy!

## Religious Service

### During Religious Service

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| i. RT. Hola a todos, llegue bien tarde             | i. RT. Hi everyone, I am so late!                 |
| ii. M. Que Bueno que vino, ya va a empezar la misa | ii. M. Glad you are here, mass is about to start. |

### 20 minutes passed during mass

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| 7. Brandon: ¿Por que te vas pa'ya? <u>Mira</u> yo tengo un carrito.                    | 7. Brandon: Why are you going over there? Look, I have a toy car.                              |
| 8. Child 1: ¿Me lo prest <u>as</u> ? ¿Vamos a jugar? ¿A ver quien gana?                | 8. Child 1: Can I borrow it? Let's play? Let's see who can win?                                |
| 9. Mariana: Pirico (pseudonym for Brandon) ¡Shhh! ¡callate! ¡Te va a regañar el padre! | 9. Mariana: Pirico (pseudonym for Brandon) Shhh! Be quiet! He (the priest) will reprimand you! |
| 10. Brandon: ¡Nooo!  | 10. Brandon: Nooo!   |
| 11. Child 1: ¿Vamos a jugar?   | 11. Child 1: Let's play?   |
| 12. Mariana: ¡Ya te dije! ¡Me las vas a pagar!   | 12. Mariana: I told you already! I'm gonna make you pay!                                       |

**No elaborate conversations could be captured during mass or followed after mass, most invitees left church right away.**

## APENDIX D

### Researcher's Journal Sample

1:30 PM

It was 12 noon on Sunday when I got the confirmation from the first family to interview, the confirmation caught me by surprise as we had scheduled the interview for a different time and day. The family decided that it was better to hold the first meeting today Sunday at a convenient time because the whole family was going to be available to be interviewed.

I freaked out after the confirmation that I was so short on time to be prepared. This rushed situation made me realized that I needed to be ready for anything at any time and place. I looked for the semi-structured interview and tried to copy it on a piece of paper, since I have no printer and it would be so rushed to go to Kinkos, make copies and then be ready for the interview. No consent has been printed and other type of documentations still in the process of being approved. OMG!

Too many thoughts came to my mind that I calmed myself by stating that this family is just like any other family. So, I thought of what I should bring for the family, my mother always taught me that anytime I get invited to a home I should not arrive empty handed. I had seen a truck by my house that was selling mangoes, what a delicious gift for the family and children. I stopped to pick up one for the family to be interviewed and another one for the second family tomorrow. I was so happy of thinking of all the things I learned from mother and are customary to Mexican culture.

Upon my arrival, mother with three children were picking up garbage from the side empty lot, mom was asking her children to help to pick up all the garbage as the place needed to look decent. I witnessed children with a plastic bag collecting empty water bottles, soda cans, remains of a piñata and half of the box of a large cake. We greeted each other, the children who

I know, greeted me with such enthusiasm, two who have seen me before were surprised to see me in their house, the other two young children continued playing with each other. Father was standing by where the garage used to be looking at his truck. He immediately came to greet me and welcomed me in the family. Mother went to get a table to sit outside to enjoy the nice breeze and a beautiful weather. I explained again what the research purpose and the goals to be accomplished by the end of the study. They were highly interested and listened to the entire presentation. Then, they asked if this would help them to be a better family. My response to their question was that we will discuss all observations during the last meeting in August and together we can decide best ways to approach situations.

During the interview, I felt like I was conversing about events that happened in the past with some of my relatives. An important aspect during the interview, I noticed that the oldest child (female) was present listening to the conversation all the time, she would not leave the table to play with her brother or sisters. She would sit quietly and intervene with one or two word comments related to the conversation. I wonder how much she was capturing and learning from her sole presence during the conversation. I would like to interview her and ask her to narrate what she heard and contrast her narrative skills to her parents'. She appeared interested in the conversation, the parents did not try to exclude her or discourage her comments at all, on the contrary, they were encouraging and listening to her comments and build from them by validating her point, probing with facial expressions or sounds of support. The other children were around, the second oldest (female) was sitting engaged in her father's phone.