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BILINGUAL ADULTS' LANGUAGE USE:  
A STUDY OF HIGH LEVEL SPANISH ENGLISH SPEAKERS

By  
Emma Sinkler

A capstone to be submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in ESL

Hamline University

St. Paul, Minnesota

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS	ii
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION	1
Background of the Researcher	2
Role of the Researcher	3
Guiding Questions	4
Summary	4
Chapter Overviews	5
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW	6
Bilingualism	7
Biculturalism	10
Description of Bilingual People	11
Switching languages	17
Attitudes towards language	19
The Gap	21
Research Questions	22
Summary	22
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY	24

Overview of the Chapter	25
Qualitative Research Paradigm	25
Data Collection	25
Participants	25
Setting	26
Demographic Interview	26
Questionnaire	26
Guided Journal	27
Procedure	27
Participants	27
Materials	28
Data Analysis	28
Verification of Data	29
Ethics	29
Summary	30
<b>CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS</b>	<b>31</b>
Sonia	32
Demographics	32
Initial Questionnaire	33
Journal Entries	33
Final Interview and Questionnaire	37

Eva	38
Demographics	38
Initial Questionnaire	39
Journal Entries	40
Final Interview and Questionnaire	43
Adriana	43
Demographics	43
Initial Questionnaire	44
Journal Entries	45
Final Interview and Questionnaire	48
Conclusion	50
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS	51
Major Findings	51
Limitations	56
Implications	57
Further Research	58
Conclusion	59
APPENDIX A	60
Demographic and Interview questions	61
APPENDIX B	62
Language Use Questionnaire	63

APPENDIX C	66
Guided Journal Entries	67
REFERENCES	68

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

In this paper I investigated how bilinguals in English and Spanish use their two languages. This includes when and where they choose to speak one or the other and what influences that choice. There are many factors that affect how a person chooses to communicate and for the purposes of this study, I looked at adults who have higher education and have developed academic language in both English and Spanish. The participants in this study are able to communicate well in both languages.

It is the goal of many people to become bilingual, and there is a lot we can learn from individuals who have achieved this skill. In investigating bilinguals' language use, we can find valuable information to help our current students. When we better understand bilingual language use at an advanced level, we can use that to find gaps in our students' language use. Once we understand the intended outcome, teachers and administrators can start to make goals and take steps to help our students become more fully bilingual.

Balanced bilinguals, defined as people with equal skills in two languages, have been studied in many different ways. Birdsong (2014) defines balanced bilingualism as having age appropriate language in two languages. When studying



children, as many studies do, it is easier to define what age appropriate language is, whereas with adults it is more difficult. In my research I investigated this topic. I investigated where potential imbalances lie in the proficiency of bilingual adults.

### Background of the Researcher

When I learned Spanish, I was always in a bilingual environment where most people spoke at least a little Spanish and English. Code switching and code mixing happened all the time. If there was a word I did not know in Spanish, my automatic reflex was to just say it in English. If there was a grammatical structure I didn't quite understand in Spanish, I would just say it the way I would in English. This was fine because everyone still understood me. When I got older and had experiences abroad where most people didn't speak English, it was a big challenge for me to speak Spanish only. This is what ultimately forced me to achieve a higher level of bilingualism in Spanish.

In the United States I have worked at bilingual and immersion schools where everyone speaks English and Spanish. Here again, there is a lot of mixing and switching between the two languages amongst the students and staff. I began to notice that in the bilingual staff born in other countries who seem to have advanced language skills in both languages, there were times when they would choose to speak one language rather than the other. I wondered why this was. I came to understand that they had an advanced education both in English and Spanish, and many had completed a teaching program of some kind here in the United States.

They spoke both languages with native speakers on a daily basis. I found myself wondering if they were embarrassed with their language skills. Did they really not know how to say something? Or was it more a matter of displaying their identity and culture?

Now as a teacher, I hear many languages in my classroom every day. I am glad to say that we are moving away from the English-only classroom, but how does code switching work when both languages are well developed? I know that code switching is a natural part of language acquisition, but how does it change once there is a high level of proficiency in both languages?

Current research indicates how and when bilingual adults switch languages between Spanish and English, but does not explore adults with a high level of proficiency in both languages. In my research I took this a step further and investigated a group of people who have more advanced language skills in both languages and more education than the groups previously studied.

### Role of the Researcher

In my experience working with many bilingual colleagues, I have access to several people who meet the qualifications to participate in this research. All of the participants are friends and former co-workers of mine. To investigate language use in bilingual adults I studied three participants who have a high school education in a Spanish-speaking country and a bachelor's or master's degree from a university in the United States. The participants had an interview with me to record their

educational, professional, linguistic and familial histories. The participants then wrote a set of guided journal entries about their reflections about their language usage. I conducted an analysis of the journal entries.

### Guiding Questions

My research investigates how a small group of bilingual adults, educated in both Spanish and English, use Spanish and English and their own perceptions of their language use. Pialorsi (1997) found that speakers' language ability can depend on function, context or his/her own perceptions. In the case of my participants, they have high abilities in both languages so I will explore how they use language when ability is not in question.

This research attempts to answer the following questions:

1. Which language functions does the speaker favor in one language or the other?
2. In which language context does the speaker favor one language or the other?
3. How do the speaker's perceptions about language affect how they choose which language to use?

### Summary

In this thesis, I studied bilingualism in adults who have advanced linguistic skills in Spanish as well as English. I studied the contexts in which they choose to use one or the other and where they perceive their language be stronger, especially

where English might be stronger than Spanish. This research led me to better understand how a person can acquire advanced linguistic skills in two languages and even then, where that person's skills might be balanced or imbalanced.

### Chapter Overviews

In chapter one, I introduced my research by stating the purpose, importance and need for this research. I introduced the framework of this study by examining my role as the researcher and my background as well as the guiding questions. In chapter two I review relevant research on bilingualism, characteristics of bilinguals, Spanglish, switching languages, and attitudes towards language use. In chapter three, I describe the methodology and tools I used in this study. In chapter four, I present the results of the data I collected. In chapter five, I discuss the major findings, limitations, and implications of the study and suggest future research.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

In order to investigate how bilinguals use English and Spanish or a combination of the two, it is first important to have a clear definition of bilingualism. Along with the definition, the qualities of bilingual people and their opinions of being bilingual are addressed. Since this paper is focused on Spanish/English bilinguals, it is essential to understand the ways it is possible to switch or mix the two languages. A section of this chapter is dedicated to Spanglish, its characteristics and different types of Spanglish. Finally, there is a review of research done about the contexts or environments where bilingual Spanish/English speakers change languages. Previous research has focused on working class immigrants or first generation Hispanic Americans in universities. Neither of these groups have advanced education, so there is a need for more research in this area. This research helped guide my investigation into which contexts and functions advanced bilinguals choose to use one language and not the other and how they perceive their own language use.

## Bilingualism

For this study, it is important to have clear definitions of what it means to be bilingual and possible levels of distinction. Peal and Lambert (1962) defined a balanced bilingual as a person who is equally skilled in two languages. This person has mastered both languages and has the potential to use both as a means of communication equally. Singer (1956) came to the conclusion that a person is unlikely to ever become truly equilingual, where two languages are used equally, but that one language will always be dominant. He argued that bilingualism is more on a continuum, with monolingualism, where a person only uses one language, and equilingualism on opposite extremes. Most people will fall somewhere in between, not fully equilingual. Peal and Lambert (1962) described a person who is not equilingual as a pseudo bilingual. A pseudo bilingual is a person who knows two languages, but one language dominates and the other language is not used as much in communication.

Researchers have studied various ways people can become bilingual. Albert and Obler (1978) as well as Peal and Lambert (1962) place great importance on the age of exposure on a person's ability to achieve balanced bilingualism. They all focused on a child's ability to use two languages equally from a young age. This was seen as a characteristic of a balanced bilingual. Albert and Olber (1978) argued that if a person learns two languages from a young age, the learner is more likely to create a compound system in his/her brain where there is only one center for language. Pialorsi (1997) takes this definition a step further, stating that a

compound bilingual learns both languages at the same time and in the same manner or context. Therefore, if a person learns the second language later in his/her life, that person is more likely to develop a co-ordinate system where each language functions separately (Albert and Olber, 1978).

Timing is a key factor in a person's ability to acquire balanced bilingual language skills (Albert and Obler, 1978; Birdsong, 2014; Peal and Lambert, 1962; Pialorsi, 1997; Soderman, 2010; Tsimpli, 2014). McLaughlin (1995) states that if a child is exposed to a language before age three, that child, with continued exposure to both languages, will develop both simultaneously. However, in another study, Soderman (2010) found that children under eighteen months of age display more language confusion in language immersion or dual language programs than children of older ages. According to her research, the best time for a child to start a language immersion program is between two and nine years old. In yet another study, Tsimpli (2014) looked at the age of acquisition for different linguistic features and compared bilingual and monolingual children. She found that the cut-off point for the acquisition of simultaneous bilingual language is at age four. After that age, there are differences in the acquisition of native-like language.

Dominance and proficiency in each language also factor into bilingualism. Albert and Olber (1978) reported bilinguals to be either balanced or dominant, based on the age of exposure to the second language and how the language was acquired. For example, if the language is acquired through formal schooling, the learner is more likely to develop dominant bilingualism, with the first language

being dominant. If both languages are learned naturally at home, then the speaker is more likely to develop balanced bilingualism.

Birdsong (2014) further describes dominance as a comparison of a person's native language to his/her second language. A speaker's dominance can change over time or depending on the context or domain. Birdsong also noted that dominance can be separated from proficiency. A speaker can be dominant in one language, even if there is not a high level of proficiency in that language. If the speaker is more proficient in one language, even if at a low level of proficiency, they would still be dominant in that language. The same is true for people who have high levels of proficiency.

Bilingualism can also be described in terms of function. A person might have different levels of bilingualism depending on where and for what purposes they use the language. For example, it is possible to have a higher proficiency in one language at home and the other at school, depending on what that person needs. Pialorsi (1997) makes another important point about the various definitions of bilingualism in that each definition "takes no account of individual cases of bilingualism which are rarely an either/or proposition" (p. 45).

Bilingual dominance can also change over time, and in some instances, the second language can become the more dominant language. Grosjean (2010) described these changes as the "wax and wane of languages" (p. 89). These changes are usually linked with life events, such as school, work, marriage or changes with other close family members. In his study of native French speakers in an English



immersion program, English replaces French as the dominant language sometime between the ages of 8 and 17, and again between 27 and 39 (Grosjean, 2010). In cases where the second language is dominant, there is usually some evidence of first language attrition.

For the purposes of this paper, balanced bilingualism is where the speaker is equally comfortable communicating in two languages in a variety of contexts, without regard for when and how the languages were learned. The participants in this study are proficient in English and Spanish, but their daily use of Spanish varies.

### Biculturalism

Biculturalism is defined as having the ability to “navigate between cultural contexts” because of a person’s knowledge and cultural exposure (Torres and Rollock, 2009, p. 42). Among bilingual Latinos, it is described as the ability to speak both Spanish and English proficiently as well as maintain both US mainstream culture and traditional Latino customs (Torres and Rollock, 2009; Dragojevic and Giles, 2014; Smokowski, Rose and Bacallao, 2008). A bicultural person must be able to take part in the daily activities in two cultures, adapt his/her behaviors, attitudes and beliefs to the culture as well as blend or combine aspects of the two cultures (Fielding and Harbon, 2013).

While there are pressures of living in a bicultural environment, like intergenerational conflicts, family obligations and societal pressures, there are many benefits (Romero and Roberts, 2003). Torres and Rollock (2009) found that

bicultural coping skills lead to higher self-esteem and are a crucial contributor in how Latinos feel about themselves.

### Description of Bilingual People

There are many reasons people have identified as their reason for becoming bilingual. Bilingualism typically comes from an environment where people from different cultures and languages have to interact, whether politically, socially or for trade. Usually when there are two language groups, the minority group has more motivation to learn the majority language, but the reverse does sometimes happen as well. In bicultural environments, it is more likely that bilingualism will develop where the two languages interact naturally (Cooper, 1997).

Research has clearly shown that bilingual people are no less intelligent than monolingual people and might possibly be more intelligent. Peal and Lambert (1962) compared bilinguals' and monolinguals' scores on verbal and nonverbal intelligence tests and found that bilinguals outscored monolinguals in every category. In their study, it was not clear whether intelligent people are more likely to become bilingual, or becoming bilingual made them more intelligent. Peal and Lambert (1962) surmised that learning two languages and the exposure to two different cultures gives children a "mental flexibility" that enables them to develop more diversified cognitive abilities (p. 22).

Learning more than one language allows students more flexibility. They learn early on that word choice and meaning can depend on different contexts (Soderman

2010). Students have to think about how they respond so that their audience understands the intended meaning of what they say. Barry McLaughlin (1995), in his research on second language acquisition in children, found that “younger children mix languages to resolve ambiguities and clarify statements” (p. 10). The ability to go back and forth between two languages and to explain themselves is quite an advanced linguistic skill for young children to have.

Research has also found that students in bilingual or immersion schools do just as well in English literacy tests as their peers in monolingual English schools (Reading, 2008, Bae, 2007). There were some differences in the studies as to proficiencies in the students’ minority languages, but in English, all of the students in the immersion schools or bilingual schools were at or above average level in reading and writing. Unlike what many people might assume, this indicates that learning another language simultaneously with English does not negatively impact the learner’s ability to acquire English.

In the United States, where the majority language is English, it is important to many bicultural people to maintain their minority language. Parents who are balanced bilinguals place greater importance in raising their children to be balanced bilinguals than do parents who are pseudo bilingual or monolingual (Lin, 1998). Both pseudo and balanced bilinguals stated that it is important to know two languages for family communication and ethnic identity. Balanced bilinguals value bilingualism for the cultural appreciation, professional options and linguistic advantages more than pseudo bilinguals (Lin, 1998).

This research further investigated the characteristics of bilingual adults. Previous research has found that there are many benefits to being bilingual and that children can become bilingual more easily than adults, but it fails to look closely at bilingual adults. The language habits of adults with advanced bilingual skills have not been studied in much depth. This research would be useful to understanding the strengths and potential weaknesses in advanced bilingual speakers' language use.

### Spanglish

Spanglish, unlike many other pidgins or contact languages, is not a lingua franca. It has developed into a linguistically recognized language variety. English monolinguals are unable to understand most of Spanglish. Spanglish really is only understood by English and Spanish speakers who are at least partially bilingual. It is also important to note that not all Spanglish speakers are fluent in Spanish or English (Rodriguez-Gonzalez and Parafita-Couto, 2012).

While Spanglish shares characteristics with African American Vernacular English (AAVE), there are some important differences. Both varieties are used to identify with a culture, and speakers of both might or might not have trouble speaking the standard variety of that language, English for AAVE and Spanish for Spanglish (Artze, 2001). Spanglish is also not specific to a class or social level, as AAVE can be. Spanglish is used by politicians and newscasters on television as well as at home and on the street, whereas AAVE is found more at home and in informal contexts (Artze 2001).

One of the most noticeable aspects of Spanglish to English speakers is code mixing or the borrowing of English words used in Spanish sentences. This happens because there might not be the same word in Spanish, the word is used in the cultural context of the United States, the word is compatible with Spanish phonology or the word is used in everyday life in English, like *lunch* or *break* (Ardila, 2005). Ardila (2005) makes the distinction between code switching and code mixing. Code switching is defined as when the speaker switches languages, then continues speaking in the other language. Code mixing is when the speaker alternates between both languages within the same sentence.

Ardila (2005) goes into detail about lexical-semantic aspects of Spanglish. There is hybrid Anglicization, where the word in Spanish might be similar to the word in English, but in Spanglish the word is a combination of the two. In the next examples, the English word being discussed will be in quotations and Spanish words will be in italics. First, bilingualism in Spanish is *bilingüismo*, and in Spanglish it is *bilingualism*, using the English spelling with Spanish pronunciation. There is also frequent use of literal translations from English to Spanish. Sometimes the definitions are close to the meaning in Spanish. For example, the word “library” is *biblioteca* in Spanish, but often *librería* is used in Spanglish. The word *librería* means “bookstore” in Spanish, which is similar to library, but not the same. There are other times where a literal translation is used but the meaning is not at all similar. For example the word “balance,” meaning equal or harmony, in Spanish is *equilibrio* but

in Spanglish it could be *balance*, pronounced “ba LAN se.” The word *balance* in Spanish means “balance” but in the context of a checkbook or finances.

Ardila (2005) also describes grammar of Spanglish. Spanglish can take on the English preposition, as it would be directly translated. For example, in the phrase “depends on,” the preposition in Spanish is *de* but in Spanglish it could be *en*. *En* is typically translated as “on” in English, but in that particular phrase the correct Spanish translation uses the preposition *de*. English expressions are also directly translated in Spanglish, as with the verb “to give back.” In Spanish the verb is *devolver* but in Spanglish it can be *dar para atrás*. Number and gender are also represented differently in Spanish, but can take on the English characteristics in Spanglish. For example, “the data” in Spanish is *los datos*, a plural and masculine noun. In Spanglish, speakers might say *la data*, changing it to a singular feminine noun, more similar to the English form and emerging use of that word as a singular. It is important to note that these characteristics are just examples of what kind of changes are possible in Spanglish. Spanglish can vary regionally within the United States or by where the speakers come from.

Ardila (2005) identified three possible types of Spanglish. The first type is characterized by many English lexical items in their original form, like words for science and technology, high frequency words in English, English slang and words from American pop culture. Speakers of this first type of Spanglish are typically born in another country and come to the United States as young children. They act more as bilinguals but are English dominant because of their education in the United

States. The second type is where English words become more like Spanish words in their pronunciation or spelling, but are not exactly the same as English or Spanish. For example, in Spanish the word “yard” is translated as *patio* but a Spanglish speaker might say *yarda*. Type two speakers are typically native Spanish speakers but have lived in the United States for a long time. Pilarosi (1997) noticed that type two Spanglish speakers could begin to prefer speaking English to Spanish. When this happens they can lose fluency and use simplified grammar in Spanish, but still will not achieve native-like speech in English. The third type of Spanglish is where English and Spanish are more merged with a lot of English syntactic influence and literal translation of English loan phrases (Ardila 2005).

Puerto Rico provides an interesting type of Spanglish. Nash (1971) called it *Englañol*. This type of language uses mostly English words but mixed with the structural elements from Spanish. For example, in English adverbs come before the verb or after the direct object, and in Spanish verb modifiers come between verbs and their direct objects. An *Englañol* speaker might say, “This affects directly my work,” instead of, “This directly affects my work” (p.110) Also, when these speakers speak English, they will use false cognates or analogies from Spanish. For example, *note* in Spanish means grade and an *Englañol* speaker might say, “I got a good note on the test” (p.111). In this study, *Englañol* speakers are typically highly educated adults, whereas Spanglish speakers were found by Nash to be less educated and acted more like monolinguals. Nash provides one example of the wide variety of Spanglish and Spanglish speakers. In more recent studies, it has been found that

Spanglish speakers come from all educational and socioeconomic levels (Artze 2001, Ardila 2005).

In the present research, the participants are highly educated, and they have been living in the United States for many years. These two characteristics together have not been studied in previous research. Participants in this research have formal education in both languages, so they might not fit exactly in the three types described by Ardila. They also live in an English dominated culture, so they might not exhibit the same characteristics of *Englañol*. It is interesting to see how the participants in my study are similar to or different from the groups described in existing research.

#### Switching languages

As a person acquires a second language, it is normal for the learner to code switch, but bilingual people continue to code switch even when they have acquired both languages at a proficient level. Bilinguals often switch to accommodate monolinguals in conversation. When speaking in a group of bilinguals, a language switch can be used to symbolize that person's identification with two speech communities (Zentella, 2008).

There have been a few studies investigating the contexts in which speakers switch languages. Barkin (1976) listed five reasons or situations where a speaker would change language. It could depend on the topic. If some topics are generally



discussed in one language or if the topic is culturally specific to one language, speakers would choose to switch to that language in a conversation.

The relationship between the speakers can also make a difference in the language choice. If one language is typically used with family and another used at work, the speakers would follow that pattern. The point in the conversation could also affect the speaker's choice in language. If the conversation is initiated in one language, the participants could choose to stay in that language. The language choice can also be used as a stylistic device, for emphasis or with a language specific phrase or idiom (Barkin, 1976).

Valdés and Geoffrion-Vinci (1998) found different text types and registers where bilingual adults feel comfortable using one language over another. Low language register texts, like personal communications, popular magazine articles or novels have a reduced range of syntactic and lexical alternations. Most bilingual people in their study were able to use English and Spanish equally in these low register texts. High language register texts, like advanced college textbooks, scholarly articles, or legal documents have more embedded clauses, nominal arguments and grammatical morphology. Bilingual people usually have a language preference when it comes to high register texts (Valdés and Geoffrion-Vinci, 1998). None of the participants reported to be able to read high register texts equally well in both Spanish and English. Therefore, none of them were balanced bilinguals.

Both the Barkin and the Valdés and Geoffrion-Vinci studies looked at situations where bilingual adults code switch between English and Spanish, but neither study looked at adults with a formal education in both languages. Participants in Barkin's study were working class with varying degrees of education, but none with a college degree and none with any education in the United States. Valdés and Geoffrion-Vinci's participants were Mexican Americans, born in the United States and educated in English, but not Spanish. The participants were in a university program in Spanish, but Valdés and Geoffrion-Vinci found that they didn't have the academic or high register language skills to succeed in the Spanish program. They grew up speaking Spanish, but didn't have access to the language aspects of high register texts.

#### Attitudes towards language

Immigrants to the United States often have positive attitudes towards learning English. Dowling, Ellison and Leal (2012) found that 85% of Mexican immigrants to the United States reported that it would be hard to find a job in the United States without learning English, and 90% reported that Mexican immigrants who speak English have an easier time adapting here.

There are some immigrants who maintain negative attitudes about learning English. Learning English can have been forced upon some immigrants at the expense of their native language (Dowling, Ellison and Leal, 2012). Older members of the immigrant group were more likely to be born outside of the United States.

Younger members of the group were more likely to adapt to the new culture and language quickly. This sometimes caused tension with the parents or older members of the group (Dowling, Ellison and Leal, 2012; Smokowski, Rose and Bacallao, 2008). There are also memories and stories of people who are able to get by without learning English, especially in communities with a large group of the non-English language speakers (Dowling, Ellison and Leal, 2012).

As typical with all immigrant groups, the use of the language from their home country or heritage language decreases as younger generations adopt English as their preferred or only language. Maintaining the heritage language takes special focus and effort of the community and family. Negative attitudes can also be held towards bicultural people who do not speak the heritage language as well as the second language (English). For example, Mexican Americans whose dominant language has become English sometimes feel frustrated when Mexican immigrants expect them to speak Spanish, and they are ridiculed for speaking with an English accent (Dowling, Ellison and Leal, 2012).

There are some specific factors that reduce the shift toward English monolingualism, for example positive attitudes towards the home language, a high percentage of speakers born in the homeland, a steady influx of new immigrants and a strong sense of ethnic membership and cultural heritage pride (Garcia, 2003; Solé 1990, Urzúa and Gómez, 2008). Young bilinguals can see their language skills both positively and negatively. They feel pride in their home culture and special because of their language skills, but they also may feel uncomfortable when asked to

interpret for family members or as an outsider in their home country as well as in the United States (Fielding and Harbon, 2013).

While studying attitudes towards language use can be challenging, two studies developed questionnaires that helped inform my research of Spanish and English speakers. First, Ehala and Niglas (2006) studied language attitudes of secondary school students in Estonia. They asked questions about the use of English and Estonian in a variety of environments such as work, school, daily life and with their families. The study showed that Estonian was valued over English in every area and the participants were strongly interested in passing the language on to their children. Second, Coluzzi (2010) studied endangered languages in Borneo. He looked at two minority languages, Iban and Murut in comparison to the official language, Malay. The study showed that participants strongly valued speaking the heritage language with their families and even in school, but that Malay is important for a career. Coluzzi found that there is more Iban and Murut spoken today than ten years ago, but more of that language is mixed with Malay than before (2010). The methods developed in these two studies led me to develop the questionnaire I used in the research on Spanish and English speakers and their attitudes towards language use.

### The Gap

Previous research clearly establishes definitions for bilingualism, biculturalism and Spanglish. The previous studies investigating balanced

bilingualism have largely focused on balanced bilingual children and how they acquire two languages at the same time, but there is little research done with adults. Many of the definitions are based on having equal and age appropriate language development in two languages. It is arguably harder to have age appropriate bilingual skills as an adult than at an elementary level. This paper looks at cases where adults have developed advanced linguistic skills in two languages to see how they use their two languages.

### Research Questions

This research looks at adults with advanced bilingual skills and investigates the following questions:

1. Which language functions does the speaker favor in one language or the other?
2. In which language context does the speaker favor one language or the other?
3. How do the speaker's perceptions about language affect how they choose which language to use?

### Summary

This chapter discussed the literature and previous research regarding bilingual people and their language use. Bilingualism and biculturalism were defined. The characteristics of bilingual people, Spanglish, and switching languages were identified. Finally, attitudes towards learning English and maintaining the

home language were described. The following chapter describes the methodologies that were used to conduct this research in detail.

## CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This study is designed to explore how Spanish/English bilingual adults with education in both languages use and perceive each language. I investigated the following questions:

1. Which language functions does the speaker favor in one language or the other?
2. In which language context does the speaker favor one language or the other?
3. How do the speaker's perceptions about language affect how they choose which language to use?

In this study, participants were interviewed about their educational and linguistic history, took a survey on their perceptions of Spanish and English language and their own language use and finally participated in a guided journaling activity.

## Overview of the Chapter

This chapter presents the methodologies used for this study. First, the description of the research paradigm is given along with the specific method and rationale for it. Next, information about the participants and setting is provided. Then the methods for data collection and analysis are outlined. This is followed by a discussion of the ethics related to this research.

## Qualitative Research Paradigm

In order to best answer the research questions, qualitative research methods were used. The initial questionnaire included demographic qualitative data analysis, and the journal entries provided qualitative data (Dörnyei, 2007; Curry, Nembhard, and Bradley, 2009). Qualitative research fits the research questions in this investigation because it allows for the flexibility and varied responses that come from journaling (Dörnyei, 2007; Johnstone, 2000). In the journal entries, participants were encouraged to provide their own descriptions and interpretations of events and behaviors. The researcher provided the basic structure of the journal entries and survey, but the participants had the freedom to direct what they shared (Curry, Nembhard, and Bradley, 2009).

## Data Collection

### Participants

There were three participants in this study. The participants were all women over the age of twenty-five. They were born in a Spanish-speaking country and



completed at least a high school degree in that country. They went on in their education to complete either a bachelor's or master's degree in the United States and have lived in the United States for at least five years. They are also computer literate. I used pseudonyms to protect their anonymity and have agreed to share my completed thesis with them. All participants currently reside in the Twin Cities area in Minnesota. They represent a sample of convenience, as they are friends and colleagues of mine.

### Setting

The data were collected in an informal setting in a large Midwestern city. The initial questionnaire was done in a setting that was convenient for each participant. The journaling activities were done in private, wherever the participants chose to do so. I provided feedback and guidance through email for the convenience of the participants.

### Demographic Interview

The three participants met individually with me. This initial meeting lasted no longer than one hour and included a demographic interview and the questionnaire. The demographic interview questions are included in Appendix A. This provided the baseline data.

### Questionnaire

The language use questionnaire provided data on the participants' perceptions and attitudes towards each language. The questionnaire was repeated

again after the journal entries were completed. The questionnaire, attached in Appendix B, was guided by and adapted from Ehala and Niglas (2006) and Coluzzi (2010).

In this initial meeting, I also provided the guidelines for the guided journal activity and discussed any personal opinions or anecdotes that arose during the questionnaire. This interaction was recorded.

### Guided Journal

Each participant submitted three journal entries over the course of three weeks. Based on Dörnyei's (2007) suggestions, the guided journal entry form provided to the participants is included in Appendix C. In order to ensure quality entries, there were explicit instructions and the participants were contacted to give feedback if needed and friendly email reminders to complete the journals. If there were any gaps in the journal entries, questions were clarified during a meeting with the participants again at the end of the data collection.

## Procedure

### Participants

I met once with each participant to administer the demographic interview and initial questionnaire. Each participant completed three guided journal activities on their own time, one per week over three weeks. After the journal entries were completed, I met again with each participant and administered the questionnaire again.

## Materials

I used one interview sheet per participant. I administered the questionnaires per participant, one at the initial meeting and one for the final meeting. I gave each participant three copies of the guided journal forms as hard copies as well as digital files through emails. During the initial and final meetings, I recorded all the interactions with my laptop.

## Data Analysis

First, the questionnaire responses were analyzed to find which languages the participants reported using in which contexts and with whom. This allowed commonalities to be seen between the participants and generalizations to be made for each participant. Any additional information gathered from the initial meeting was transcribed and analyzed in the same way, looking for categories of situations or people with whom the participant chooses to speak in one language.

Second, after the three journal entries were collected, the entries were categorized by the purpose and person the situation described. I analyzed themes that arose between the journal entries and the initial questionnaire. Additional themes not covered in the questionnaire arose and were analyzed accordingly. I looked for commonalities between the participants and within each individual participant.

Finally, I met with the participants in person for a second time and administered the questionnaire a second time. Any changes in the responses

between the first and second questionnaires or other questions that arose were discussed at that time.

### Verification of Data

To ensure the validity of data, multiple data collection tools were used (Dörnyei, 2007). With the combination of data from the questionnaires and from the journal entries, I was able to see themes and draw conclusions about the participants' language use. I found where the themes from the questionnaire aligned with or diverged from the data gathered in the journal entries. This use of triangulation verified my data.

Close attention was paid to my own bias to be sure the data gathered in this research was valid. Charged language was avoided and neutral statements were used in my responses. I looked to find the participant's experiences while not letting my own influence our conversations or how I interpreted the data. A judgment free environment was created for the participants to share their experiences with me so that I could gather their true opinions and record of their language use.

### Ethics

In order to respect the confidentiality of the participants, this study employed the following safeguards:

1. The research objectives were shared with the participants.
2. Written permission was obtained from the participants.
3. Permission was granted by the Hamline Human Subjects board.

4. Interviews were transcribed verbatim on my laptop in a password protected file.
5. Journal entries were used exactly as they were written.
6. Participants remained anonymous.
7. Hard copies of the data were kept in a locked file cabinet, and digital files were password protected. The data were destroyed upon completion of this study.

### Summary

In this chapter I described the methods I used for this research. I described the research paradigm and its rationale. I gave information about the participants and setting. I outlined the procedures for data collection and analysis. Finally I discussed the validity and ethical issues related to this research. The next chapter presents the results of this study.

## CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

In order to learn about bilingual adults' language use and their perceptions about their language, three adult women completed an initial interview and questionnaire, a series of three journal entries and a final interview and questionnaire. Through the collection of these data, I looked to find the answers to the following questions:

1. Which language functions does the speaker favor in one language or the other?
2. In which language context does the speaker favor one language or the other?
3. How do the speaker's perceptions about language affect how they choose which language to use?

This chapter presents the results of the study. First, the demographic data for each participant and the results of the initial questionnaire are outlined. Next, the journal entries are analyzed. Finally, the results of the final questionnaire are discussed. The names of the participants were changed to protect their privacy.

## Sonia

### Demographics

The demographic interview and initial questionnaire were given on May 4, 2015. Sonia is twenty-seven years old. She was born in Mexico and moved to the United States with her family when she was eighteen years old. Sonia and her siblings stayed in the United States, but her parents returned to Mexico five years after they arrived. She first learned simple English words in English class in her school in Mexico, but she could not read or write with any fluency. Sonia spent one year learning English in community education classes in the United States. When Sonia moved to the United States, she knew that English was a necessity here and it was the most important thing for her.

Her family came to the United States to have a better life and for her education. When she was learning English she had a very supportive English teacher at the community education center who encouraged her to apply for scholarships and go to Gustavus Adolphus College. She went to Gustavus, where she continued to struggle, but earned a bachelor's degree and achieved an advanced level of English. While English is important for her career, she uses Spanish for almost everything else. She is currently a bilingual educational associate in Minneapolis. She lives with her parents, husband and two children, ages three and one and a half. Her parents moved from Mexico this year, and her husband was born in California but has Mexican heritage and is a native Spanish speaker.

### Initial Questionnaire

Sonia reported that ninety percent of her day is in Spanish. She speaks Spanish exclusively with her parents and family still in Mexico. She uses mostly Spanish with her siblings, friends, and husband, with whom she reports speaking Spanglish, where it is “basically Spanish but with English words thrown in or with English slang.” She uses mostly Spanish to read recreationally, watch TV, listen to the radio, email and text. She also uses mostly Spanish to express emotions, both positive and negative. She said, “The words have more meaning in Spanish. I feel like I can express myself better. The words just come out, but in English I have to think too much. The English words don’t come from my heart.”

Sonia uses more English than Spanish at the school she works. Most people at her school do not speak Spanish, but she often speaks Spanish with students or families. Her workplace is also where she writes in English. She uses English more than Spanish for professional or academic writing, but it is always associated with her work. The other context where she uses English more than Spanish is in public offices or for official documents. Recently, her parents have become citizens, and it was a challenge for Sonia to help them with all the documents as their interpreter and translator.

### Journal Entries

In the first journal entry, Sonia describes going to the park with her son and daughter. Her daughter, who is three years old, is very talkative and always asks



other children at the park if they want to play. Sonia and her family live in a neighborhood with many other Latino families, but there are a few English-speaking families as well. On the day Sonia described in her journal, there were about ten children at the park and four adults watching them. Sonia recognized a few of them as residents of the neighborhood, but had never spoken to any of them before. Sonia's daughter approached one Latino boy and asked him to play by saying, "*a jugar?*" [let's play](Note: All translations are mine)(journal entry, May 7, 2015). Sonia went to talk with the woman who was with that boy and started a conversation with her in Spanish. They talked about their children, their ages, how they were playing and their behavior. The woman and her son said goodbye and left shortly after. Sonia's daughter went on to ask another girl to play by saying, "wanna play?" (journal entry, May 7, 2015). Sonia and the woman who was with that child started talking, similarly to how Sonia had talked with the other woman before, but this time in English. This time the girl and woman were white and appeared to be English speakers, so Sonia and her daughter chose to use English.

The interaction "felt natural" to Sonia and it was only after that she thought it was interesting how her daughter made a choice to use English or Spanish based on the appearance of these two children, and Sonia then followed her choice when speaking to the adults (journal entry, May 7, 2015). Sonia could not decide if she chose to speak Spanish because her daughter did, or if she decided on her own.

In her second entry Sonia described a text message conversation with her husband (journal entry, May 13, 2015). They were texting to make plans for the

night. Sonia had to stay late at work and her mom had an appointment. Sonia was asking her husband what time he was going to be home so he could take care of their kids. The conversation went as follows (journal entry, May 13, 2015).

Sonia: *q hora sales* [what time do you leave]

Husband: 6

Sonia: *la cita de mi mama es a las 7* [my mom's appointment is at 7]

Husband: i can b home by then

Sonia: can you make dinner?

Husband: sure

In the fourth line of this conversation Sonia's husband writes in English and Sonia continues the conversation in English, even though she started it in Spanish. She reports this as feeling natural. She "didn't think twice before writing in English" (journal entry, May 13, 2015). What made her pause later was remembering that in her questionnaire she reported that she texted all in Spanish, but this was evidence that she texts in English sometimes. Upon further reflection, she reported that this happens frequently with her husband. They text both in English and Spanish. Sonia reports that she "hardly ever initiates conversations in English, but will respond in English if he or another friend does" (journal entry, May 13, 2015). Her choice is based on other people's choices. She suspects that since her husband uses English more than she does, English might be faster to text for him. Texting in English is not difficult for Sonia and feels very natural. She chooses to just continue with the language of the conversation. She felt that to continue in Spanish, after her husband

had switched to English would seem stubborn or like she was annoyed with him. Her choice in this case was made to be agreeable and stay with the flow of the conversation.

Sonia's final journal reflects on a more conscious decision she made about the language development for her children (journal entry, May 18, 2015). Her children stay with her parents during the day. Her parents have very limited English and interact with the children all day in Spanish. Sonia and her husband also speak to the children mostly, if not all, in Spanish. Sonia reports that it is more important for them now to interact with their family in Spanish and that the kids will have plenty of opportunities to learn English later when they get to school and make more friends outside of their family and neighborhood group. Recently Sonia has been thinking about sending her three-year-old daughter to preschool and is worried about her being academically ready. She decided to download a reading app for the kids to play with while she is at work. She thinks it will be helpful for the kids to have a little more exposure to English, especially in reading.

She was a little conflicted with this decision because she felt like it might "look disrespectful to [her] parents in the childcare they are giving" (journal entry, May 18, 2015). Sonia truly values passing on the Spanish language to her children, but also knows that English skills are important to be successful in school or in their future careers. She wants to start incorporating English more in their home lives, but in a limited way. Sonia's parents read books to the children in Spanish and now they can listen to books in English on their iPad.

### Final Interview and Questionnaire

The final interview and questionnaire were given on May 22, 2015. Sonia responded similarly to the questions on the questionnaire, with changes in only two areas. In the end, she reported that she used more Spanish than English in text messages, where at the beginning she said mostly Spanish. She said this change was mostly due to the realization that she sometimes texts with her husband in English. She did not realize that she was doing this until this study asked her to look closer at her language usage. When she texts, Sonia said she usually chooses the language “without any thought.” Her exchanges are short and the response time is fast. She reads and responds in whatever language the previous message was.

Her response to what language she speaks with her husband also changed. At first she reported using mostly Spanish, and in the final questionnaire she reported using more Spanish than English. Here she was a little conflicted whether to choose mostly Spanish. She still feels that she speaks mostly Spanish, but now she realizes that she uses English with her husband more than she thought she did at the beginning of this study. She rationalizes that because her husband was born here, he uses more English. Sonia reported that she will “just continue the exchange in the language” in which it was started. Her husband will sometimes watch TV in English and if they talk about what is on, they will speak some English.

Finally, she did not change her answer to the question about which language she uses with her children, but she has been contemplating what will be best for her children’s language development. She continues to use mostly Spanish with them,

but is concerned for their English language development when they get to school. She does not want them to be at any disadvantage. Her plan for now is to start with reading books and maybe playing some games in English so they can develop some English and be ready for preschool.

Eva

### Demographics

The demographic interview and initial questionnaire were given on April 29, 2015. Eva is twenty-eight years old and works for an insurance company. She came from a small town in Peru when she was twenty-two years old. She first started learning English in Peru as a child at her church. There were often volunteers from the United States or Europe and she always wanted to talk with them. Eva took a few informal English classes, but most of her language development came from conversations with the volunteers or through movies, TV and music in English. When she came to the United States, Eva took English classes at an Adult Basic Education school for a few weeks before going to Normandale Community College and then she continued on to Metropolitan State University, where she earned a Bachelor's degree.

Learning English was always important to Eva. She saw it as a way to get ahead in Peru, and when she moved to the United States, it was necessary for her education and career. It is also necessary because Eva's husband does not speak Spanish. He was once a volunteer at Eva's church in Peru. She reported that the

most helpful thing for her in learning English was to “put Spanish away.” When the relationship with her now husband got serious, Eva switched her phone to English, watched TV exclusively in English and went out of her way to speak in English with people who did not speak Spanish.

Eva feels it is very important to maintain her Spanish language to talk with her family in Peru, and to pass it on to her children. She also thinks it is hard to do that now since she reported that her “whole life is in English.” Her life here in the United States is very different from what it was in Peru, and she learned all those new experiences in English. All of her education and everything she learned for her job were in English. The only time she speaks Spanish is with her family and friends in Peru and occasionally at work. This might change soon because she just had her first child four months ago, and she wants to pass on her language and culture to her daughter.

### Initial Questionnaire

Eva reported using mostly English for reading, TV, movies, current events, work, official documents, with neighbors, and with her husband. Family is the one area where Eva uses both languages. With her family and friends in Peru she uses exclusively Spanish, and with her family in the United States she uses exclusively English. On the questionnaire she answered that she uses Spanish and English equally with her family, but with different people. The language Eva chooses for email and texting depends on with whom she is talking. She uses email, Skype, text

messages and Facebook a lot to keep in touch with people in Peru. Eva also made an interesting distinction on which languages she uses for emotions. She reported that for positive emotions, like love or surprise she uses more Spanish than English, but for negative emotions she uses more English than Spanish.

### Journal Entries

In Eva's first journal entry, she wrote about an interaction between her mom, her husband and her (journal entry, May 5, 2015). Eva's mom had come to stay with her and her husband for three months after Eva's baby was born. Eva and her husband are very thankful for the help, but there are aspects of the situation that are challenging. Eva's mom does not speak any English and understands a little but not much. Eva has to translate much of what her mom says for her husband, and she gets tired.

One afternoon, Eva had just woken up from a nap and found her mom and husband trying to talk. Her husband, having been married to Eva for six years and made several trips to Peru, knows a little basic Spanish. Eva's mom, having been in the United States for a few weeks, has acquired some basic words in English. Eva's mom was trying to tell Eva's husband that she had just fed the baby, and the baby would probably need a new diaper in a few minutes. Eva's husband did not understand and thought that the baby needed a new diaper and needed to be fed at that moment. Eva had to step in and straighten the situation out, speaking English with her husband and Spanish with her mom (journal entry, May 5, 2015).

It was “not a serious problem and it was easily fixed, but it made [Eva] feel very frustrated” (journal entry, May 5, 2015). Her husband has long wanted to learn Spanish and maybe take some classes, but has not found the time. Before Eva had her child, she did not think it was important for her husband to speak Spanish, but now it is growing in importance. Her husband needs her to be able to communicate with her family. Eva did not have a choice of what language to use; she had to translate in order to make things work with her mom.

In the second journal entry Eva wrote about learning a new process at her work. She sells insurance for a small company. Since she has had the baby, she has been working a little from home. She is happy to have this opportunity, but it makes it challenging because she is not in the office for meetings to learn any new processes and policies. There was one day where the company was adopting a new policy and she had to go through existing accounts to check if they might be eligible for this new adaptation. Since she was working from home, the only way she could learn what to do was to read the official documents and email her supervisor if she had any questions. Her supervisor, in an attempt to help, had a Spanish translation of the documents ready for her to read as well. While she was trying to understand what to do, Eva took a look at both the English and Spanish instructions. She decided that she preferred the English version. She felt that “the English was easier to get through than the Spanish” (journal entry, May 12, 2015). Everything she knew about insurance and her accounts was in English. The software they use is in English, and she does not even know many of the words used in this software in Spanish. She



only occasionally used Spanish to speak with Latino customers. Trying to learn something “new in Spanish felt awkward and hard” to Eva (journal entry, May 12, 2015).

This experience made Eva feel like she was losing some of her linguistic abilities in Spanish. Eva is proud of her heritage and wants to continue to use Spanish with her family, especially with her daughter. This choice to use English instead of Spanish in her work made her feel like she was “better in English than in Spanish” (journal entry, May 12, 2015). She could more easily learn new information in English and it made her feel a little guilty, like she was “turning away from [her] family and culture” (journal entry, May 12, 2015). This experience made Eva want to read and write more in Spanish so that she will be better able to teach her daughter.

The third journal entry was about a time Eva went to a restaurant with her husband, and their waiter was a Spanish speaker and Eva chose to speak with him in English. The waiter had a Spanish accent and struggled to say some words in English when he was telling them about the menu. Eva and her husband both ordered in English, as they normally would with any other waiter (journal entry, May 19, 2015).

Eva reflected that she could have spoken Spanish to help him out, but she did not think that would be a real help to him. She remembered when she was learning English and she did everything she could to put everything in English. She often found herself frustrated with bilingual people who would speak Spanish with her

just to help her out. Eva believes that being forced to speak the new language is the best way to learn. She knew the waiter was struggling, but he was doing a fine job. In the end, Eva and her husband were well taken care of at the restaurant and the waiter had another opportunity to practice English.

### Final Interview and Questionnaire

The final interview and questionnaire were given on May 26, 2015. Eva did not change any of her questionnaire answers from the initial interview. Now that she has a daughter, she is finding it more important to maintain a high level of Spanish language so that she can pass it on. She said, "it will be hard, since [her] life is in English now." It is "easier and faster" to speak English with her husband, and she is worried that their house will become an English-only house and her daughter will not learn Spanish well enough to talk with her grandparents or cousins in Peru.

Adriana

### Demographics

The demographic interview and initial questionnaire were given on May 2, 2015. Adriana is thirty-two years old and works as an English as a second language teacher. She came from Colombia to the United States when she was twenty-three years old. She started learning English when she was in elementary school in her school's English as a foreign language class. She always enjoyed English and said it was "fun and easy." It was more important to learn to be a better reader and writer once she came to the United States, but when Adriana came to the country she

reported that she felt “comfortable to speak and understand almost anything in English.” Her English classes in school as well as watching American TV and movies helped develop her oral and listening comprehension skills in Colombia. She earned her undergraduate degree from the Universidad Nacional de Colombia in bioengineering and went on to get a Master’s degree in Education from St. Thomas in St. Paul.

Adriana is married to a native English speaker who does not speak Spanish. Together they have a three-year-old son. It is important to Adriana to maintain her Spanish skills, but she reported that “it is not something that [she thinks] about very much.” She speaks Spanish with her family and friends in Colombia and tries to visit as much as she can, which has been less since she had her son. Adriana works in a bilingual school so almost all of her co-workers are bilingual. She also has many friends who are from different Spanish-speaking countries and has many opportunities to maintain her Spanish skills.

#### Initial Questionnaire

Adriana uses only English with her husband, neighbors and for official documents. She uses more English than Spanish for watching TV and movies, professional or academic communication and learning about current events. At work she uses English and Spanish equally throughout the day. She also uses both English and Spanish for recreational reading. Adriana’s language use with her family is split between her family in the United States and from Colombia. She uses English

with her husband's family, but Spanish with her family from Colombia. Two of her siblings live in Colombia, one lives in Spain and another in Mexico. She communicates with her siblings through emails, text, Skype and phone calls, all in Spanish. Her parents live in Colombia and only speak Spanish so that is the only language they use for email, Skype or phone calls. Adriana speaks equally in English and Spanish, but prefers to listen to music strictly in Spanish since that is the style she listened to growing up.

### Journal Entries

Adriana's first journal entry describes an interaction with a co-worker at her school. This co-worker is a native English speaker but speaks Spanish very well. Adriana and her co-worker have known each other for a few years and had spoken mostly in English until this year when the co-worker told Adriana that she wanted to practice speaking Spanish. Since then, Adriana has tried to speak mostly in Spanish with this person. On the day of the journal entry the co-worker came to Adriana with questions about a student being evaluated for special education services. The co-worker initiated the conversation in Spanish and asked three or four questions that Adriana responded to in Spanish. Adriana could see her co-worker taking notes and "got the sense that she was having a hard time" in Spanish (journal entry, May 6, 2015). Adriana switched to responding to the questions in English and her co-worker then continued the conversation in English.

Adriana made the choice to use English to make her co-worker “feel more comfortable” and to “move the conversation along more quickly” (journal entry, May 6, 2015). At school, Adriana does not have much time and was “getting a little impatient” with her co-worker (journal entry, May 6, 2015). When reflecting on the exchange later, Adriana “felt bad” that she didn’t let her co-worker work through the questions in Spanish because “struggling with the language is how you get better” (journal entry, May 6, 2015). Adriana also chose to switch to English because she thought her co-worker might better understand the conversation in English. It was important to record all the information accurately and Adriana “would rather have [her] words recorded not translated and recorded” (journal entry, May 6, 2015). She reported “sometimes things get lost in translation, especially when someone is still learning the language” (journal entry, May 6, 2015). Again, she “felt bad” that she didn’t trust her co-worker to translate everything correctly, but “accuracy was more important than anyone’s feelings, and she didn’t seem to mind speaking English for the rest of the conversation” (journal entry, May 6, 2015).

Adriana’s second journal entry described another conversation at her workplace. She had been called to the office to discuss a specific student, a native Spanish-speaking boy. Everyone at the school has varying levels of bilingualism, and in this group there was a mix of native English speakers and native Spanish speakers. When Adriana walked into the office the conversation had already started and they were speaking in English. She was not sure who started the conversation

or if there was any reason they were speaking in English (journal entry, May 14, 2015).

There had been an incident of this student bullying a few other students and one teacher was making a document to record everything that was said. Adriana had seen some of this behavior on the playground and in the lunchroom, since the boy was not in her class normally. Adriana reported what she heard, which was the student calling a few others “guy” which could be used to mean ‘dude’ or ‘friend’ but can also be used negatively and is not appropriate for school (journal entry, May 14, 2015). Adriana and the other teachers in this meeting were “careful to use the exact words that came from the student, but include English to describe the meaning” (journal entry, May 14, 2015). Adriana felt the need to use English here because using the word “guy” can mean different things, but “here he was using it to hurt others. Adults use the word all the time to say ‘hey’ or what’s up’ but he was not using it like that” (journal entry, May 14, 2015). Also, it was important to use English for the formal documentation, since it might go to other people who may or may not speak Spanish.

Adriana’s final journal entry describes her language at home. She has a two-year-old son at home. She speaks with her son almost exclusively in Spanish, but her husband speaks only in English and her son goes to an English-speaking daycare. Since the start of this research, Adriana has realized that she speaks English more with her son than she first thought. She saw that she used “some words in English that her son knows easily to make some situations go faster” (journal entry, May 20,

2015). For example Adriana said “*Quieres macaroni and cheese para almorzar?*” (*do you want macaroni and cheese for lunch*) (personal communication, May 20, 2015).

It would have been “easy to say ‘*macarrones con queso*’ but he knows the words *macaroni and cheese* and saying it in Spanish would take a minute or two longer and “when you are dealing with a hungry two-year-old time is everything” (personal communication, May 20, 2015). Adriana found herself using other English words like “apple sauce,” “hotdog,” “bottle” and “nap” instead of the Spanish words “*salsa de manzana,*” “*salchicha,*” “*biberón*” and “*siesta*” (journal entry, May 20, 2015).

Adriana reported that this realization made her feel lazy and that she was doing a poor job teaching her son Spanish (journal entry, May 20, 2015). She had always wanted to teach her son “perfect Spanish” but as time goes on she sees that “nothing is perfect, even teaching my son my language” (journal entry, May 20, 2015). As he grows up and “is exposed to more and more English, at school, on TV and music than he will in Spanish. His languages are going to develop at different rates” (journal entry, May 20, 2015). Adriana hopes that “he will at least be able to talk with his grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins in Spanish, but it is going to be hard. Even now, English seems like the easier option” (journal entry, May 20, 2015).

### Final Interview and Questionnaire

The final interview and questionnaire were given on May 23, 2015. Adriana answered all the questionnaire questions the same way as she did during the initial interview. The only question that she had to re-think was what language she uses

with her son. Initially she said mostly Spanish, and she kept that answer, but now sees that she uses English with her son as well. Also in the initial interview she said that it was very important to maintain her Spanish and pass it along to her son. In the interview she states that she knew it would be hard to teach her son Spanish but she said she “thought the challenge would come a little further down the road, like when he went to school and made more friends that didn’t speak Spanish.” Even now, Adriana is choosing to speak English with her son because it is easier and faster. As he grows up, it will be more challenging to teach him and maintain his Spanish language skills. In a few years Adriana’s son will go to kindergarten, and Adriana and her husband will have to decide what kind of school they want. They have not decided yet, but a bilingual or a Spanish immersion would be a good option.

In the final interview Adriana also reflected on her language use at work. She reported:

It is fun to be a part of a community where you are free with language. It doesn’t matter who you are talking with or about what. You know you can use English or Spanish. Then it just becomes about words, like you can say ‘hi’ or ‘hello’ or ‘*hola*.’ It doesn’t matter. They are all just words.

When questioned further about this idea she explained how there are some subtle differences that guide her language choices at work. For example in her first journal entry, she had always spoken in English with her co-worker until her coworker asked her to speak in Spanish to help her learn. She said:



I start in English, then as time goes on and you build a relationship, then you can start to speak Spanish. For some people it is very quick and others it can take a while. The Latinas at school, we are a very close group. Once we know you a little and we know you are a Spanish speaker we move to Spanish quickly. With English speakers it can take a little longer... maybe because of cultural differences. Even though you can come from many different Latin American countries, there is something we all have in common. When we speak Spanish together it is like recognizing that connection.

### Conclusion

In this chapter I presented the results of my data collection. First I discussed the demographic information for each of the three participants. I followed this with the results of the initial interview and questionnaire. Then, I presented the data collected from the three journal entries from each participant. Finally, I reported the results of the final interview and questionnaire for each participant. In Chapter Five I will discuss my major findings, their implications and suggestions for further research.

## CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS

In this study I investigated the following questions:

1. Which language functions does the speaker favor in one language or the other?
2. In which language context does the speaker favor one language or the other?
3. How do the speaker's perceptions about language affect how they choose which language to use?

Other issues emerged during the course of the interviews and journals. This chapter will address the major findings, limitations, implications and suggestions for further research.

### Major Findings

While all the participants fit the criteria to participate in this study, in that all are at least twenty-five years old, they have at least a high school degree from a Spanish-speaking country, a bachelor's degree or master's degree from the United States and have lived in the United States at least five years, they were different in a few important ways. Adriana's and Eva's husbands are native English-speakers

whereas Sonia's husband is a native Spanish-speaker. This changes the language of their home lives significantly in that Sonia speaks much more Spanish on a daily basis than Adriana and Eva do. Eva works with an insurance agency where she hardly speaks any Spanish, while Adriana and Sonia are required to speak Spanish for their jobs. Because of these different situations, Eva has less opportunity to speak Spanish than Adriana and Sonia. Adriana and Sonia both use their bilingual skills at their jobs, but Adriana is a language teacher so she comes to this study with a linguistic background.

These differences are shown in the length of the journal entries and the insight into their language use. As a bilingual language teacher, Adriana has studied language use and was able to delve deeper into her own language use than Eva and Sonia. That said, all the women wrote in their journals that they noticed things about their language use that they would not have had they not been participating in this study.

All three participants mentioned their children in their journal entries. They all place great importance on their children being bilingual and maintaining their Spanish so that they can speak to their families outside of the United States. Sonia's case was a little different because her parents live with her and her husband is a native Spanish speaker. Eva's and Adriana's family all live outside of the United States and their husbands do not speak Spanish. One of Sonia's journal entries focused on her worry about her children learning English so they will not be behind when they go to school. Adriana also worried about what would happen when her

son went to school, but for a very different reason. Adriana's son is less immersed in Spanish than Sonia's son is. Adriana is worried that her teaching her son alone will not be enough to make her son fluent in Spanish. These women are rightly concerned about their children's language, based on research on the subject. Soderman (2010) reported that it is critical to be exposed to a second language before the age of eighteen months. Other researchers found that children around three or four years old can still develop two languages at the same time with continuous exposure (Tsimpli, 2014; McLaughlin, 1995). The participants in my study all have young children and they still have the potential to develop English and Spanish simultaneously. At this point the women here are thinking carefully about their children's language development and this is nothing but a benefit for the children.

Adriana's language with her son provided an example of Spanglish. In her journal entry from May 20, 2015 she described using English words with her son to make conversations easier or faster. She was worried that she was not teaching her son "perfect Spanish," and in fact she is exposing him to Spanglish. Ardila (2005) describes this type of Spanglish where high frequency words are used in English in while the rest of the sentence is in Spanish. That research found that this type of Spanglish speakers are bilingual, but dominant in English because of their education in the United States. Sonia was also worried about her children's English abilities when they go to school. Ardila's (2005) research points out that even children born in Spanish speaking countries who move to the United States at a young age can

grow up to be bilingual but English dominant because of their education in English. Eva and Adriana in the study were concerned about their children's language development when they went to school and developed more English abilities.

Sonia's household is the only one in this study where everyone is a native Spanish speaker. This makes it natural that her worry is more on learning English than maintaining Spanish. Adriana and Eva are both in relationships where their husband is a monolingual English speaker. Adriana expressed concern for her son to learn Spanish well enough to communicate with her family in Colombia, and Eva had frustration with interpreting for her mother and husband.

Their workplaces were another area where two out of three participants described a time when they had to choose between languages. Eva made an interesting choice to learn a new process in English rather than in Spanish when she had the option. For her, work is strictly in English, but the other two participants have bilingual workplaces. Eva described how when she learned English, she had to "put Spanish away" and now years later she uses the same strategy to learn new things at work (demographic interview, April 29, 2015). Even when she was offered reading material in her native language, she chose English. Adriana, on the other hand, comfortably uses both English and Spanish in her workplace because all of her workmates are bilingual at least to some degree. She describes going between languages as very easy, because "they are all just words" (final interview, May 23, 2015).

Eva and Adriana also both made language choices to help someone. In Eva's case she chose to use English with another Spanish speaker at a restaurant in order to help him learn English. Adriana chose to switch to English with a co-worker, even though the co-worker had requested that they speak Spanish most of the time, to make the conversation go more quickly and make sure her co-worker understood the work issue well. They both made a choice to help someone, but one chose to help the person learn and the other chose to make the conversation easier in a specific situation. It is interesting that both participants felt like they were helping their conversation partners, but in different ways.

All three participants mentioned ways when their choice of language depended on the language initiated by their conversation partners. In Eva's case, it was her work. At work she uses mostly English, and that is the language she chooses to continue in. Adriana also described this effect at work. She reported that most relationships started out in English, but if the person was a native Spanish speaker they would switch to Spanish once they got to know each other a little more. English speakers would continue to converse with Adriana in English unless there was a conscious effort on both sides. Sonia had interesting experiences with this process with her husband and daughter. Sonia described times when her daughter initiated a conversation with a child in either English or Spanish and Sonia continued in that same language when she went to talk with that child's family.

Even though there were significant differences between the participants, there were themes that arose. All the participants discussed family and children.

They made language decisions regarding how to develop the language of their children, and had to make choices about what language to use with their spouses and parents. They also made decisions about which language to use in the workplace, where two chose to use English instead of Spanish. Finally, they described situations where they chose to continue in the same language that the conversation or relationship started.

### Limitations

The small scope of this study was a limitation to making any generalizations about bilingual adults. Family dynamics, educational backgrounds and work requirements are just a few variables that affect a person's language use on a daily basis. I interviewed three people to look at how they personally used language, and their own perceptions of their language use. The experiences of these three individuals may not be transferrable and cannot account for all experiences of other bilingual adults who come from similar backgrounds and live in the United States.

The study was also limited in the way the journal entries were open ended. The participants were on their own to write in as much detail as they wanted. This provided for some entries that were rich with data, and others that were less detailed. The final interview provided an opportunity for me to ask more questions and get additional information. Thus, the study was limited by the varying lengths of the journal entries.

## Implications

One implication coming out of this study is that teachers and administrators have to be mindful in how they make their language choices. There might be instances where choosing to use only English or only Spanish with a family could be helpful or hurtful. Having documents and announcements in both English and another language could provide families a learning opportunity to read and listen to both languages. Providing information in only their native language does not provide the families with a chance to learn, whereas providing them with information only in English will exclude many families from participating in their child's education.

Teachers can also encourage bilingual development in their classes. In an ESL class, a student's homework could be to go home and discuss a concept with a family member so the student can teach the family English and also learn more of their native language. It could also be included in a sharing time in class, where students can write or say the same words and phrases but in their home languages. Personally, as a teacher this is what I find most important, finding ways to value bilingual development and a connection with students' families.

This research also can be used to help teachers have discussions with students and their families who are bilingual. They can talk about when students can choose to use English or the minority language. This type of open discussion with the whole class can help students make choices and become more aware of



their bilingual abilities. It can also help them feel comfortable with the choices they make in particular situations, similarly to the participants in this study.

Although there were limitations to this study, the data provide implications that will help bilingual people and families maintain and develop their languages. Further research can be done to investigate this population.

#### Further Research

Since the subject group was only three participants, the study could be expanded in the number of participants and more limited in their demographics. It would be interesting to limit a study to bilingual adults in relationships with monolingual English speakers, those that work in bilingual environments, or who all came to the United States at the same time. If the parameters of the study were more limited and the number of cases were greater, there would be more opportunities to make generalizations. Language tests could be administered to determine the proficiency of the participants and allow for more comparisons.

This study also brought up issues regarding raising a child to be bilingual. The participants in the study are bilingual, and they all worry about their children's language development. It would be interesting to follow up with this group in a few years and investigate how their language use has changed, especially within their families, as their children get older.

## Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to investigate how bilingual adults proficient in both English and Spanish choose which language to use in different contexts, functions and how their perceptions affected that choice. My research provided a small look into the language use of three adults although it was limited and deserves further exploration. Overall, their choices were based on what was easier and better understood for themselves and their conversation partners. They also made choices to maintain their Spanish language skills and pass them on to their children. It is important to keep these choices in mind when we, as teachers, try to promote bilingualism in our students and speak with their families.

## APPENDIX A

### Demographic and Interview questions

## Demographic and Interview questions

How old were you when you came to the United States?

Where did you first learn English?

What is your highest level of education?

Where did you obtain your education?

How important was it to learn English?

What helped you most to learn English?

How important is it for you to maintain your Spanish?

How do you maintain your Spanish?

Do you have children? If yes, how many, and what ages?

Are you married? If yes, what is your husband's native language?

## APPENDIX B

### Language Use Questionnaire

## Language Use Questionnaire

Which languages do you use for recreational reading?

Mostly Spanish	More Spanish than English	Both English and Spanish equally	More English than Spanish	Mostly English
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In which language do you view tv or movies?

Mostly Spanish	More Spanish than English	Both English and Spanish equally	More English than Spanish	Mostly English
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Which languages do you use for current events?

Mostly Spanish	More Spanish than English	Both English and Spanish equally	More English than Spanish	Mostly English
----------------	---------------------------	----------------------------------	---------------------------	----------------

Which languages do you use for email and texting?

Mostly Spanish	More Spanish than English	Both English and Spanish equally	More English than Spanish	Mostly English
----------------	---------------------------	----------------------------------	---------------------------	----------------

Which languages do you use for expressing emotions (anger, love, surprise, etc.)?

Mostly Spanish	More Spanish than English	Both English and Spanish equally	More English than Spanish	Mostly English
----------------	---------------------------	----------------------------------	---------------------------	----------------

Which languages do you use within the family?

Mostly Spanish	More Spanish than English	Both English and Spanish equally	More English than Spanish	Mostly English
----------------	---------------------------	----------------------------------	---------------------------	----------------

Which languages do/did you use with your grandparents?

Mostly Spanish	More Spanish than English	Both English and Spanish equally	More English than Spanish	Mostly English
----------------	---------------------------	----------------------------------	---------------------------	----------------

Which languages do/did you use with your parents?

Mostly Spanish	More Spanish than English	Both English and Spanish equally	More English than Spanish	Mostly English
----------------	---------------------------	----------------------------------	---------------------------	----------------

Which languages do you use with your siblings?

Mostly Spanish	More Spanish than English	Both English and Spanish equally	More English than Spanish	Mostly English
----------------	---------------------------	----------------------------------	---------------------------	----------------

Which languages do you use with your husband/boyfriend?

Mostly Spanish	More Spanish than English	Both English and Spanish equally	More English than Spanish	Mostly English
----------------	---------------------------	----------------------------------	---------------------------	----------------

Which languages do you use with your children?

Mostly Spanish	More Spanish than English	Both English and Spanish equally	More English than Spanish	Mostly English
----------------	---------------------------	----------------------------------	---------------------------	----------------

Which languages do you use with your friends?

Mostly Spanish	More Spanish than English	Both English and Spanish equally	More English than Spanish	Mostly English
----------------	---------------------------	----------------------------------	---------------------------	----------------

Which languages do you normally use with your neighbors?

Mostly Spanish	More Spanish than English	Both English and Spanish equally	More English than Spanish	Mostly English
----------------	---------------------------	----------------------------------	---------------------------	----------------

Which languages do you normally use in public offices or for official documents?

Mostly Spanish	More Spanish than English	Both English and Spanish equally	More English than Spanish	Mostly English
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Which languages do you normally use with your workmates?

Mostly Spanish	More Spanish than English	Both English and Spanish equally	More English than Spanish	Mostly English
----------------	---------------------------	----------------------------------	---------------------------	----------------

Which languages do you normally use with your superiors at work?

Mostly Spanish	More Spanish than English	Both English and Spanish equally	More English than Spanish	Mostly English
----------------	---------------------------	----------------------------------	---------------------------	----------------

Which languages do you normally use with your subordinates at work?

Mostly Spanish	More Spanish than English	Both English and Spanish equally	More English than Spanish	Mostly English
----------------	---------------------------	----------------------------------	---------------------------	----------------

Which language do you prefer to read in?

Mostly Spanish	More Spanish than English	Both English and Spanish equally	More English than Spanish	Mostly English
----------------	---------------------------	----------------------------------	---------------------------	----------------

Which language do you prefer to write personal communication in?

Mostly Spanish	More Spanish than English	Both English and Spanish equally	More English than Spanish	Mostly English
----------------	---------------------------	----------------------------------	---------------------------	----------------

Which language do you prefer to write professional or academic communication in?

Mostly Spanish	More Spanish than English	Both English and Spanish equally	More English than Spanish	Mostly English
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Which language do you prefer to speak in?

Mostly Spanish	More Spanish than English	Both English and Spanish equally	More English than Spanish	Mostly English
----------------	---------------------------	----------------------------------	---------------------------	----------------

Which language do you prefer to listen to?

Mostly Spanish	More Spanish than English	Both English and Spanish equally	More English than Spanish	Mostly English
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## APPENDIX C

### Guided Journal Entries

## Guided Journal Entries

Instructions: Spend about twenty minutes answering each question in as much detail as you can. Once you have completed an entry, email it to [esinkler@gmail.com](mailto:esinkler@gmail.com).

Report a recent time when you had to make a decision about using English or Spanish.

What motivated that decision? Who were you communicating with and for what purpose?

What were your personal feelings about the exchange?

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