How international graduate students whose first language is not English describe the impact of speaking with an accent in their learning

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HOW INTERNATIONAL GRADUATE STUDENTS WHOSE FIRST LANGUAGE IS NOT ENGLISH DESCRIBE THE IMPACT OF SPEAKING WITH AN ACCENT IN THEIR LEARNING

by

Guadalupe Bañuls

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctorate in Education

Saint Paul, Minnesota

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DEDICATION

TO ALL IMMIGRANTS

You left your home, your family, your country to pursue a better future.

The road is hard and sometimes you may feel defeated.

But keep going, the learning never ends, the beauty is in the journey,

and the biggest reward is a better you!
“Just because I talk with an accent
doesn't mean I think with an accent”

Alberto Aragon

A Walk in the Clouds

Motion Picture (1995)
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My first THANK YOU goes to my mother Scarlett who is always there, helping me to do and be better. My achievements are yours. Gracias querida madre.

I thank the memory of my father Cesar. I know you are proud of me.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

This chapter includes my journey to this research interest, the research questions, the significance of the research, the Boyer’s scholarships in this study, the theoretical foundation, the research design and rationale, and the limitations of the study.

Purpose of the Study

Every year thousands of international students come to the United States to study and a large part of them pursue graduate degrees. Many of those international graduate students have a language different from English as their first language. Although they are required to have a specific level of English proficiency to be admitted, they may still speak English incorrectly or with an accent.

Social interactions are fundamental for learning, so any factor that impacts it can also impact learning. Therefore, speaking English with an accent can be a barrier in communicating with others. Moreover, having students that speak with an accent creates assumptions and expectations that can interfere with social interaction in the classroom if taking into consideration that accent is considered as the highest predictor of ethnicity of others (Lippi-Green, 1997).

This study focused on this research question: How does speaking with an accent impact the learning of international graduate students whose first language is not English?
The study was conducted with a combination of qualitative methods, survey and interviews, with the purpose of gathering the experiences of those students. Qualitative research tools were selected to develop comprehensive understanding as well as incorporating multiple perspectives (Weiss, 1995).

This study is important because the U.S. is changing its ethnic and racial population in a trend that is predicted to grow (Thomson Reuter, 2012). That implies that the classroom of today and especially the classroom of tomorrow will be a combination of different cultural backgrounds, and educators need to be prepared to facilitate the learning of all students.

My Story

I was born in Venezuela. I came to the U.S. in 2002 to pursue a master’s degree and then a Doctorate in Education. My first language is Spanish, and according to U.S. ethnic and racial standards, I am Latina and I am white.

Professionally I have been teaching technology to adults for over 20 years, half of them in Spanish in my home country. When I came to the United States, I was already an accomplished professional used to teaching adults, creating educational materials, and managing large training projects and presenting them to high-profile audiences. The educational environment was not strange for me, and public speaking and writing were part of my job.

I came to the United States to improve my education. Deciding to move to a different country to study it is not an easy decision. I had to leave my home, my job, my family, my stability, and my culture to achieve advanced degrees which could mean
progress personally and professionally. Such challenges included learning a new reality and a new language.

Like most international students, my English proficiency was certified before being admitted to the academic program. However, that proficiency certification is not a guarantee of fluency or correct use of the English language. Moreover, it does not prevent me from speaking English with an accent, which I have.

After arriving on the Midwest, I noted that it was sometimes difficult for others to understand me when I was speaking in English, despite using the language correctly. That was very frustrating, but I understood it was part of the adjustment of living in a different country than my own.

Although English is my second language, and sometimes my accent is a barrier to communicating with others, I usually get my ideas across effectively in academic, professional, and social environments. That is corroborated by the fact that my work includes creating documentation for and training native English speakers. That would not be possible if communicating in English was a problem.

What really has impacted me was experiencing the change in attitude in others after listening to my accented English. I often see the reaction in other people’s faces when I speak with my noticeable accent; they crunch their faces like something is not clicking, something does not match. This has happened to me many times in the twelve years I have been living in the United States and in different situations and environments. I have had similar experiences with my classmates in graduate studies and with coworkers.
My professional journey has continued. I constantly interact with many persons, teaching them and supporting their learning needs, and I still experience the change in attitude in some when I speak. I have learned to understand it as a reaction to the unexpected accent. I presume it is because I do not fit the Latino stereotype of having darker skin or being not educated. I am white with European heritage; I do not look like a foreigner...until I speak.

I believe those situations are linked to my accent at first, but it goes beyond lost words, confused meanings, or mispronunciation of words. There are situations where there is an invisible barrier that impedes communication. There is an unspoken message sent across and perceptions change.

I have experienced the perception that I am less intelligent because I speak with an accent. I have experienced the assumption that my education is less valuable because I was born in a third-world country. I have being singled out because I am Latina and that implies some characteristics that I am not. I have had to wake up to the reality of being “othered” because of being “different,” and I am not alone on this.

In June 2013, a young boy named Sebastien De La Cruz sang the United States national anthem on national TV during the opening of game three of the NBA Finals. He was invited to sing as a proud son of San Antonio, Texas, in the game where the home team was playing the finals and after his successful participation in a singing television show. This young man is known as “el Mariachi de Oro,” which means The Golden Mariachi, and he wears the mariachi gown as his professional persona because he sings mariachi music. He was born in San Antonio and grew up in a family of Mexican
descent, filled with Mexican music, references, and values. His first language is English, he speaks with no accent. He sings songs in Spanish by memory because he does not speak it (Rodriguez, 2013).

In the current world where social media provides an easy and accessible outlet, comments from viewers quickly surfaced, surprising us all. Expressions like *What is an immigrant doing singing the U.S. national anthem and illegal go back to Mexico or 9 out of 10 that kid is illegal* (sic) appeared on twitter. People not only assumed he was an immigrant, they also assumed he was illegally in the United States because he was wearing a mariachi outfit. (Rodriguez, 2013)

One may think this happened because people were confused by his outfit or they did not know him. But something similar happened to famous singer Marc Anthony, born and raised in New York, when he sang in the televised MLB All-star game. Social media was again the vehicle for responses that questioned why Marc Anthony was singing God Bless America at the game. Derogatory expressions plagued social media: *welcome to America where God Bless America is sung at our national pastime by a Mexican, or Mexican singing God Bless America? and We do not have an American who can sing?* (Binder, 2013).

After watching those instances, many questions inundated me, making me think on my own experiences. What makes us react this way? How can we let assumptions obnubilate our thinking to that extreme? If this is happening to those who were born in the United States, what would happen if they were actually foreigners? Why are all those assumptions mostly bad? Are there good assumptions?
As an educator, I also thought of them in a classroom setting. I wondered how an educator would react if a similar situation happened in class, and if educators are equipped to deal with students who have different cultural backgrounds. I also wondered how can educators manage expectations and assumptions and still facilitate learning of all, especially with international students like me who may be mistreated because of being different.

The experience of being *othered* has transformed me into an observer of how differences and assumptions impact social interaction, especially in the classroom, and how that impacts learning. Moreover, as an educator, I wonder how aware educators are of their own assumptions and misconceptions when teaching students from different backgrounds.

I decided to study the experiences of international graduate students whose first language is not English, specifically investigating how they describe the impact of accent in their learning. I believe this study can provide the perspective of the learner to help educators understand better their needs in today’s diverse classrooms.

**Research Question**

The main goal of this research was to study the impact of accent on learning for adults in multicultural environments, focusing specifically on international graduate students whose first language is not English and have had professional experiences in the U.S. The primary research question of this study was: How do international graduate students whose first language is not English describe the impact of speaking with an accent in their learning in an academic environment? The secondary question was: How
do international graduate students whose first language is not English describe the impact of speaking with an accent in a professional environment?

**Significance of the Research Problem and the Research Questions**

The U.S. population is diverse and is predicted to grow in the future (Thomson Reuter, 2012). Therefore, it is important that educators learn the impact diversity has in their classroom. Although there are many studies about multicultural education, they are mostly focused on children and basic education. This study focused on educators of adult learners in multicultural educational environments.

It is also important for educators to understand the realities of an increasing population of international students in the U.S. It is the purpose of this study to learn from their experiences so educators of adult learners can understand students from diverse cultural background to improve and facilitate learning of all.

In this reality of increasingly diverse population, educators need to understand students from diverse cultural background to respond to their learning needs, integrating different viewpoints, and applying strategies to improve and facilitate learning of all.

Educators of adult learners are responsible for setting the tone in class. Therefore, they can be fundamental on teaching all students how to accept and work with persons from different backgrounds and cultures. Educators of adult learners can impact the lives of their students by teaching them how to learn from our differences.

Such impact can also go beyond the classroom by transforming students’ views and perspectives. Therefore, the role of educators play when teaching adult learners about diversity can be of central importance for society as well. Students who are
familiar with diverse populations will be better equipped to deal with differences outside the classroom. This impact may help us all to make an already diverse society in a learning opportunity to transform individuals and achieve a society where all can improve and strive.

**Boyer’s Scholarships**

Boyer (1990) was involved in reviewing the traditional debate of professors in higher education between teaching and researching. Boyer has influenced the meaning of scholarship from a limited hierarchy of functions to a “broader capacious meaning” of the academic work (p. 16). Boyer’s revisited scholarships include discovery, integration, application, and teaching.

The scholarship of discovery is represented by the research itself as researchers show commitment and contribution to the human knowledge using the freedom of inquiry and taking an investigation to wherever it may lead. Research contributes to the climate of higher ed institutions. The scholarship of integration, following and connected with the scholarship of discovery, gives meaning to isolated facts, making connections across disciplines, illuminating data in a revealing way. The scholarship of application is where the findings and analysis of the research can be applied to help individuals or solve consequential problems. The scholarship of teaching is where this knowledge is understood by sharing it with others. The scholarship of teaching happens when the knowledge is transformed and extended to others beyond the simple recitation of ideas.
This study manifests the scholarship of discovery by investigating what we do not know, expanding our knowledge about adult learning in multicultural settings. It also manifests the scholarship of integration by connecting apparently disconnected data from the foreign-born population of the U.S., the linguistic studies on accent, and the theories of adult education to understand adult multicultural learners.

This study’s intent was to provide a better understanding of adult multicultural learners which application can impact how we all face the challenges of a growing diverse classroom and society. The effort involved in this research will have no meaning if its findings were not shared with others, especially to current and future educators. Diversity is already a reality; there is a need to share any findings that can help us understand it better, manifesting the scholarship of teaching.

**Research Context**

The United States is changing its ethnic and racial distribution and this trend will continue in the future (Thomson Reuter, 2012). This shift in the ethnic distribution of the population includes those foreign born, where there is a remarkable grow in the recent years, especially for foreign born from Latin America and Asia (Grieco & Trevelan, 2010; Grieco, Acosta, De la Cruz, Gambino, Gryn, Larsen, & Trevelan, 2012)

In this diverse environment, differences impact almost anything you are involved with. Diversity impacts your neighborhood or your school and who you talk to in social gatherings. It impacts the customer you serve and the people you interact with (Banks, 2006; Banks & Banks, 2010).
But not everybody accepts this reality of a diverse population with a positive attitude. Cases where those who look different are othered and mistreated are often seen in the news. From the person that looks or sounds different to the one that looks familiar, but behaves in an unusual way, society is fast to point out differences rather than similarities (Goodenough, 1981; Kwon, 2009; Malone, Nelson, & Nelson, 2004).

Framing diversity in education, it impacts all levels, from early childhood programs to graduate school, making clear that today’s classrooms are likely a multicultural classrooms (Thomson Reuter, 2012).

Even though there is no consensus on what defines multicultural classrooms, there are many studies about diversity and multicultural education in basic school. However, there are not many studies focused on adults in diverse learning environments, even fewer focused on international students (Banks, 2006; Banks & Banks, 2004, 2010).

This sector of the student population in the United States is important because the number of international students is growing every year showing a record high in the 2012-2013 academic year with slightly over 800,000 international students in the United States, where 40% of them are international graduate students (Institute of International Education, 2012).

International students bring financial benefits to higher education organizations in the United States and also impact positively the areas where they live. According NAFSA, just in the 2013-2014 academic year international students contributed $26.8 billion to the U.S. economy, which was an increase of near 12% from the previous year
(NAFSA: The International Student Economic Value Tool, n.d.). They also state that the contribution of international students is not only of economic value, but also building bridges with other countries, and supporting innovation, programs and services for all students. In the classroom, international students bring different perspectives and experiences to classes, improving the learning experience of all students (Andrade & Evans, 2009; Malone, Nelson, & Nelson, 2004). Additionally, international graduate student are also adults learners with specific needs and characteristics (Mezirow, 1991) for whom learning can be a transformative experience (Merriam, 2001; Taylor, 2006, 2008).

On the other hand, learning happens in a social context where students exchange ideas and goals, discuss topics to expand their understanding, learn from each other as well as from professors (Kozulin, 2003; Merriam, 2001). Therefore international graduate students whose first language is not English or who have difficulties with their English proficiency may be finding their learning impacted because of their language barriers as well as their different cultural background (Kwon, 2009; Swaminathan, & Alfred, 2001).

If social interaction in the classroom happens mostly via verbal communication, then the way learners speak influences their learning experiences (Derwing & Munro, 2009). To begin with, if a student speaks with an accent it may be difficult for others to understand him or her (Lippi-Green, 1997).

But speaking with an accent reveals more than a different tone or mispronunciation. Speaking with an accent is often associated with specific cultural
values. Accent is believed to be the largest predictor of ethnicity (Atagi, 2003; Derwing & Munro, 2009; Lippi-Green, 1997).

We constantly make assumptions about others because of their preferences and the way they look, dress, talk, and laugh. When the speaker speaks with an accent, assumptions are extrapolated to an identity, linked to a specific culture and value system, therefore expectations associated with those assumptions can be more significant—beyond a matter of choice (Fought, 2006; Gumperz, 1982; Rakic, Steffens, & Mummendey, 2011).

The assumptions linked to spoken accent are far from trivial; they are linked to a perceived identity of the speaker, which can create a positive or a negative expectation. Therefore, communicating with a person is impacted by the expectation we have about that person (Fought, 2006, Goodenough, 1981, Gumperz, 1982, Rubin, 1992).

When we frame social interactions in a learning environment, assumptions and interactions between students impact their learning. Then, educators need to be competent in creating the proper learning environment so those assumptions and expectations do not become barriers for the learning. Even more, educators are also persons, and they make assumptions that create expectations exactly the same way (Nieto & Zoller Booth, 2010; Taylor, 1994).

In a world where diversity is the norm and not the exception, educators need to be aware of the impact that accent has in the social interaction of their students which eventually will affect their learning (Nieto & Zoller Booth, 2010). Moreover, educators need to be aware of their own predisposition toward that student that speaks with an
accent so it does not influence the learning experience of the students. Researching international graduate students and acknowledging the reality of today’s multicultural classrooms is an important step in understanding adult learners in multicultural environments.

**Research Design and Rationale**

This study used qualitative research methods because its goal was to gain understanding of the participants’ realities. Weiss (1995) described qualitative research as the tool to develop comprehensive understanding as well as incorporating multiple perspectives. More specifically, the study was conducted using a modified version of Seidman’s three-interview model for in-depth interviewing, using qualitative research methods in two phases (1991).

First, a survey was used to gather information and experiences from international graduate students whose first language is not English. A survey was selected as first method because they are useful to understand the characteristics of a group by gathering accurate data from a sample of a larger group. The survey was in English and targeted international graduate students who achieved advanced higher education degree and who had work experience in the U.S. The purpose of this phase was to get the main aspects of the impact accent may have in their experiences in both the academic and professional environments.

The second phase of this study used another qualitative tool: interviews. A group of international graduate students whose first language is Spanish were selected from the survey participants to be interviewed. The main purpose of this phase of the study was to
gather in depth insights of their experiences. Since the language used is critical for describing our experiences and insights, the interviews were in Spanish.

The interviews were selected for the second phase to gather “facts as a narration with words” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001, p. 598). Interviews were used to gain insights of the subject by understanding the experiences of the individuals because the observation of the respondents provides additional information when participants explain the rationale behind their responses (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001; Seidman, 1991).

The qualitative research tool of interviews were conducted face to face to allow the gathering of perceptions, experiences, and feelings of the persons interviewed. Language can be a barrier when research is conducted with ethnic minority populations. Translating research tool is not enough to conduct effective research in multicultural populations. Researchers must be aware of cultural traditions and traditional costumes to ask questions that promote accurate responses from the target population. This includes knowing enough of the language background and proficiency level of the individuals who are interviewed or that will translate interview for further data analysis (Banks & Banks, 2004; Padilla, 2004).

It is for that reason the interviews were conducted in Spanish, so respondents could feel comfortable explaining their experiences in their native language without the extra steps of translating and processing ideas, feelings, and insights.
Limitations of the Research

The first limitation of this research was the population that could participate. I contacted international graduate students who attended the same university I did and who already graduated. The contact information about those students was limited or outdated, so reaching them was challenging. This meant the study had a small sample of the international graduate student population in the U.S.

The participants of the interviews were limited to Spanish-speaking students. This limited the scope of this study by not including international graduate students who speak other languages.

Finally, the results of this study are helpful to educators. Therefore, a follow-up study would be recommended to include educators’ perspectives. The finding of both studies, with the experiences of students and educators, could be beneficial to broaden perspectives and develop best practices about teaching adults in multicultural environments.

Summary

Every year thousands of international students come to the United States to study. Many of them pursuing advanced degrees are adult who first language is not English therefore they most likely will speak English with an accent. Since social interactions are fundamental for learning then speaking English with an accent can be a barrier in communicating with others, therefore impacting their learning.

This study focused on how speaking with an accent impacts the learning of international graduate students whose first language is not English. The study was
conducted with a combination of qualitative methods, a survey and interviews, because its goal was to gain understanding of the participants’ realities. The study was conducted using a modified version of Seidman’s three-interview model for in-depth interviewing to gather the experiences of those students and the meaning they make of those experiences.

This study is important because the U.S. is changing its ethnic and racial population in a trend that is predicted to grow. Therefore, educators need to learn the impact diversity has in their classroom, specifically for educators of adult learners in multicultural educational environments about which there are not many studies.
CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

The main goal of this research was to study the impact of accent on learning for adults in multicultural environments, focusing specifically on international graduate students whose first language is not English and have had professional experiences in the U.S.

The primary research question of this study focused on how international graduate students whose first language is not English describe the impact of speaking with an accent in their learning in an academic environment. The secondary research question centered on whether the impact of speaking English with an accent is different in a professional environment.

This chapter provides background knowledge to support this research. The literature review identified what is already known about learning of adults in multicultural environments by searching relevant literature and summarizing it within the frame of this study.

The main topics to be discussed in this chapter are the multicultural reality of the United States; the population of international students in the U.S.; the relationship between language and identity; theories about accent and its impact on social interactions and learning; and how to teach international graduate students since they are adult learners. This chapter also presents the areas where there are unanswered questions and where more research is needed to make the case for this research and its importance for the field of education.
Multicultural United States

The United States was founded by Immigrants, and it always has been the land where people come from other countries looking for a better future. According to Grieco, et al. (2012), the U.S. Census Bureau data shows that immigrants to the United States used to come mostly from White European countries and to persons from Mexico and their descendants from the southern states that previously belonged to Mexico. The authors stated that although the percentage of foreign population in the United States has historically stayed around 15%, there is in noticeable increase in the foreign-born population in the United States in the last 50 years, growing from 9.6 million persons in 1960, representing 5% of the total population, to be 12.9 million persons in 2010, representing almost 13%. (Appendix A, Figure 1)

More specifically, reviewing the region of birth data shows the distribution of the foreign born population in the U.S. has changed in the last 50 years. According to Grieco et al. (2012), the U.S. Census Bureau data shows the foreign-born population of the United States has dramatically changed in the last 50 years shifting from an older predominantly European population to a younger, predominantly Latin American and Asian population. The same report states that during the 1960 to 2010 period, the number of foreign born from Latin America and Asia grew rapidly, while the number from Europe first declined then remained relatively stable (Grieco, et al., 2012).

In 1960, 75 percent of the foreign-born population was born in Europe. In 1980, 39 percent were born in Europe, while over half (52 percent) were born in Latin America or Asia. By 2010, more than 80 percent of the foreign-born population were
born in either Latin America or Asia, with over half (53 percent) from Latin America alone (Grieco et al., 2012). The distribution of the population is presented graphically in Figure 2 (Appendix A).

This shift in the immigrant population has impacted the racial and ethnic distribution of the U.S. population in the last 60 years in a trend that, according to the projections made by the U.S. Census Bureau, will continue in the future (Grieco et al., 2012). Thomson Reuters presents this data in graph predicting that Hispanics and Asians are growing dramatically over the next 50 years. Figure 3 (Appendix A) shows that non-whites will make almost 60% of the U.S. population by 2060, while White single-race non-Hispanics will be only 43% by 2060, with no one ethnic group being the majority (December 13, 2012).

The data is clear. There is definitely a change in what used to be a predominantly White population. That means that diversity is already a reality and it is here to stay and increase, making the United States a gathering of multiple cultures. This fits the concept of a multicultural society, where different groups share different socio-cultural heritages, similarities, and identities, beyond national and ethnic boundaries, as defined by Banks and Banks (2010).

**International Students in the United States**

The diverse picture of the U.S. population is a reality in education. Narrowing the focus on those foreign born who come to the U.S. to study, the data shows that the number of international students have been growing every year in the last 60 years, reaching a record high of over 800,000 international students in the 2012-2013 academic year.
year (ICEF Monitor, 2012; Institute of International Education, 2012). This data is represented in Figure 4 (Appendix A) created by the Institute of International Education and published in the *Cronkite News*. (Brown, 2012) Among those international students, over 40% are international graduate students, according to the Open Doors data represented in the Figure 5 infographic (Appendix A).

International students have increasingly gained importance to higher education because of the contributions they make financially and culturally. According to Kwon, international students bring a variety of cultures and perspectives that enrich the U.S. society (2009). Moreover, international students help educational institutions enrich the learning environments enabling American students to prepare to be global citizens by sharing with people from other countries (Andrade & Evans, 2009).

International students need help acclimating to life in America with its different academic and social cultures. Elements like communication skills, social interaction, educational system understanding, racial discrimination, time management, and legal regulations, among others, affect their learning experience and their academic success (Alazzi, 2006; Romano, 2000; Wan, 2001).

The adjustment of international students to a new reality varies because of their different nationalities, languages, cultures, and education background (Romano, 2000). Wan defined this as cultural dissonance, stating that it has implications on the international students’ adjustments and successful learning experiences since it affects their motivation to cope with language inefficiencies, academic issues, and social interactions (2001).
International students are required to have specific scores in a certified English proficiency test to be admitted to an academic program in the U.S. Still, students of non-English countries often experience difficulties in speaking and comprehending English (Castañeda, 2008; Charles & Steward, 1991). Based on my experience, the proficiency required by the academic program is useful for international students for academic purposes like writing papers or taking tests, but the academic English is not the same as the English used every day or in social interactions. If being a graduate student requires hard work, long hours of study and self-discipline, then international students have an extra challenge with the language to compete with classmates or those whose first language is English (Castañeda, 2008).

According to Andrade and Evans (2009), mastering English is critical to the academic success and cultural adjustment of international students. The authors state that those whose first language is not English need to be able to analyze, express, and discuss their ideas clearly verbally and in writing. Additionally, they need to overcome the fear of speaking up because of their accent or language fluency in order to join discussions (Andrade & Evans, 2009). The mastering of English is crucial to succeed while studying in the U.S. (Malone, Nelson, & Nelson, 2004). Not being able to achieve this can make international student feel ignored and left out by their classmates and professors (Kwon, 2009).

**Language and Identity**

In addition to language being of primary importance, it deserves careful attention (Lippi-Green, 1997). According to Vygotsky’s social development theory, language is
more than a code for expressing ideas. Language is a tool and a psychological function; language is the medium we use to present and share our conceptualization of our world (Kozulin, 2003). Additionally, the use of language creates and identifies affiliation to specific social groups (Gumperz, 1982). That is explained in more detail by Goodenough who states that, a person most likely will identify as belonging to a group to which he or she is most similar with by the use of a language in which this person is highly competent (1981).

According to Fought (2006), when communicating in a social context a person combines internal and external factors defined by his or her ethnic identity. Internal factors include language, speech, fluency, and accent, among others. External factors include religion, ethnic ties, social class, and gender. Internal and external factors are combined when expressing an idea in a social context to transmit a meaning. This interaction is represented in Figure 6 (Appendix A).

This is what Lippi-Green defines as communicative competence as the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately with people from other language and cultural backgrounds (1997). At the same time, communicative competence is influenced by linguistic resources associated with the ethnic identity of the speaker. Those resources include linguistic features such as phonology, grammar, syntax, or lexicon; suprasegmental features like stress and intonation; the organization of the discourse (discourse features); linguistic resources associated with the ethnic group from which the person is descendent (heritage language); and the alternate use of different languages (code switching) (Fought, 2006). The mentioned linguistic resources are combined when
using language in a social context, defining the way we speak, as represented in Figure 7 (Appendix A).

Communication using language is not a one-way street. There is also a listener with his or her own identity and linguistic resources. The listener will filter a message received through that identity to understand a meaning that may or may not be what speaker intended (Fought, 2006).

According to Fought, the language perceived by the listener is classified using phenotypes that come with assumptions and expectations. Assumptions create good or bad expectations creating a barrier for an effective communication (2006). This is graphically explained in Figure 8 (Appendix A).

According to Fought (2006), there are different perceptions of speakers who speak with accent. The author states an example where a person who speaks English with a British accent may not be perceived the same way than a person who speaks English with a Spanish accent. The British-accented person will probably be perceived as educated or interesting, while the Spanish-accented person will be perceived as uneducated or illegal immigrant.

Therefore, there is a connection between perceived identity and effective communication. The perceived identity of the speaker is important in the case of international students because language is used to create identity and affiliations with social groups (Fought, 2006). Rakic, Steffens, and Mummendey compared accents versus appearance as indicators for ethnic categorization. They found accent was more
meaningful for ethnic categorization over appearance, even overlooking facial features that are typically associated with a culture (2011).

The relationship between language and identity is so important for persons with diverse backgrounds who most develop the ability to code switch, where different languages and values are used according to the environment on where they are. In the case of international students, they often have to choose between linguistic and cultural codes used in their native versus non-native groups when wanting to signal belonging (Lippi-Green, 1997).

**Accent**

According to Lippi-Green (1994), there is not an accurate definition of the word *accent*, and it can be only understood when there is something to compare it with. Derwing and Munro said, “the phenomenon that we call foreign accent is a complex aspect of language that affect speakers and listeners in both perception and production, and consequently, in social interaction“ (2005, p. 79).

Linguists also state that the ideas like Standard English or no accent are myths. Linguists differentiate L1 accent is that structural variation of a language, like the accent of a person from New York is different that the accents of a person from New Orleans. An L2 accent represents those that are not native speakers of English. Therefore, we all have accents (Lippi-Green, 1997).

Rakic, Steffens, and Mummmendey found evidence of the importance of accents in ethnic perceptions and social categorization made by listeners (2011). Ethnicity is one of the primary social categories along with gender and age, and it is strongly connected
to language. In the studies of Taylor, Aboud, and Bassili, accent was at the basis of participants’ choices when predicting ethnicity (1973).

The other important aspect of accents is discrimination. According to Fought (2006), people who speak a language in a non-native form are often discriminated because of they are perceived by others in stigmatized way that leads to prejudice. Previous studies have shown that people discriminate more based on accent that on looks (Derwing & Munro 2003; Lippi-Green, 1994). According to Williams and Hewett, perceptions about persons who speak with an accent are often associated with poor education, minority status, lower socioeconomic status, or lack of intelligence (1976). Specifically, Spanish speakers feel that discrimination towards them has more to do with language than with immigration status, skin color, or economic, according to studies made by Hakimzadeh and Cohn (2007) and Lippi-Green (1997).

The importance of discrimination due to accent is the consequence that perception has in further actions. Lippi-Green (1994) illustrates this with an example of accent discrimination in the workplace. The author describes an opportunity where good communication skills are necessary for a specific job. One person has all the other skills required; he also speaks with an accent. Lippi-Green explains that in many cases those reviewing the candidate will conclude that the applicant does not possess a basic skill necessary for the job. However, that may not be true (1997).

Lippi-Green (1997) reports cases of discrimination based on accent in legal procedures and court scenarios. I have seen it happening in classes where students will discriminate against other because of their accent. Discrimination is not the focus of this
study. However, it is an important aspect when thinking there may be consequences derived from the perception of persons who speak with an accent.

Social Interactions and Learning

Learning happens in a social context where students exchange ideas and goals, discuss topics to expand their understanding, learn from each other as well as from professors (Kozulin, 2003; Merriam, 2001). If social interaction in the classroom happens mostly via verbal communication, then the way learners speak influences their learning experiences (Derwing & Munro, 2009).

In every social interaction speakers create a shared social environment where learning happens, according to Vygotsky’s social development theory (Kozulin, 2003). When learners are in a learning environment that is not culturally challenging, they feel safe and comfortable. Social interaction happen easily, there are fewer conflicts due to lack of understand the meaning of ideas (Goodenough, 1981). However, when the environment is culturally different, social interactions can be more challenging.

People who speak with an accent will be identified in their social environments possibly impacting their interaction with others, as explained previously. The use of English as a secondary language is a factor that will impact the learning of international students, especially considering Lippi-Green’s statement that when people reject an accent they also reject the person speaking (1997). Therefore, international graduate students whose first language is not English, or who have difficulties with their English proficiency, may find their learning impacted because of their language barriers and their different cultural background (Kwon, 2009; Swaminathan & Alfred, 2001).
In one study referenced by Lippi-Green there were three different versions of a video of a student speaking: one child was European American, one was African American, and one was Mexican American. The videos were presented to a group of teachers. Regardless which child was seen in the video, the audio was the same recorded by child who spoke the so-called Standard English. The teachers rated the African and Mexican American children having a more significant non-standard voice (1997).

In a similar study from the opposite perspective, Lippi-Green (1997) reports a study by Rubin (1992) on which 62 undergraduate native English speaker students were asked to watch a video of two different instructors. Half of them watched a European American instructor and the other half watched an Asian American one. Again in this study, the audio accompanying the video was recorded by a native speaker of English with no marked regional accent. The students who watched the Asian woman were more likely to rate that instructor as having an Asian accent. More significantly and worrisome, the students who saw the picture of the Asian woman rated her lower on a comprehension test.

A follow-up study by Atagi (2003), U.S. undergraduate students were asked to rank how accented some international graduate students’ instructors were by listening to a recording made by monolingual native speakers of English. Atagi gave the instructors fake foreign identity: one was French Canadian, one was Korean, and one was Mexican. Only two of the twenty test subjects did not hear an accent for any of the speakers. The instructor identified as French-Canadian received the most native-like ranking, while the Korean was slightly higher ranked over the Mexican. Fought (2006) stated that a hearer
is more likely to perceive an accent where none is present when the speaker is perceived to be ethnically different.

Lippi-Green (1997) believes that Rubin’s study indicates that “whether or not an instructor actually does need further training in English may be irrelevant if racial and ethnic cues are more important than degree of accentedness” (p. 95). Her explanation is that “the instructor’s perceived accent generates a negative expectation in students, then there is a communicative breakdown that impact in a poor classroom experience” (p. 95). The same conclusion could be applied when talking about classmates and how effectively they communicate with peers who speak with an accent or who are perceived as ethnically different.

Fought (2006) believes that studies like those cited are evidence that the mind can create accents where none exist, a phenomenon she calls accent hallucination, comes about because the expectations about language and ethnicity can override the actual speech in the minds of the hearers.

I believe those studies are very revealing, and they may explain that invisible barrier mentioned in chapter one, beyond speaking with an accent, which can definitely impact how students are categorized by classmates and educators.

**Adult Learners**

International graduate students are adult learners; consequently, they cannot be categorized as one group with the same characteristics or needs because they have different cultural backgrounds, beliefs, and systems of values (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2012). Therefore, their educators cannot use the same strategies, practices and
foundational concepts as teaching youth or children (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2012).

Knowles, the father of Andragogy, states that adults have a need to know the reason for learning, are self-directed, can set their own goals, and organize their own learning around their present life needs (Merriam, 2001). The assumption is that adults have an individual orientation, are self-motivated and are characterized by self-directness.

According to Knowles (1984), the guiding principles of adult learning are: the need to know what, why, and how they will learn something; they are responsible for their own learning; they have prior experiences, resources, and mental models; they are ready to learn what they need related to their real-life situations to move from one developmental stage to the next; they are problem-centered learners in the context of being applicable to real-life situations; and they are motivated to learn by internal pressures and personal payoffs.

The importance of Knowles’s model is for educators to use it as a guideline, a system of elements, that can be adopted as a whole or in parts when teaching adults. It is not meant to be a doctrine to be applied totally and without modifications. Moreover, Knowles, Holton, and Swanson (2012) developed an enhanced conceptual a framework that can be applied across multiple disciplines of adult learning practice. This model is represented in Figure 9 (Appendix A) where the core adult learning principles are displayed within concentric rings of goals and purposes, and individual and situational differences.
This is relevant for the framework of this study because those teaching international graduate students need to understand the principles of adult learning. The andragogy practice model is useful to help students learn, understanding that the learner-teacher relationship is different that when teaching younger students. Not being aware of or able to use these resource can result in a disengaged participant who will attend classes without learning or learners who will learn only what they find useful and relevant.

**Teaching International Graduate Students**

When the adult learners are also international students, the classroom is a multicultural learning environment. Connerley and Pedersen stated the importance of awareness by educators to be prepared to deal with the tension, challenges and difficulties of teaching in multicultural environments (2005).

Although there are many definitions of multicultural education and there is no consensus on approaches in this field, there is a high level of consensus on its goal. Banks states that the goal of multicultural education is to reform the schools and other educational institutions so that students from diverse racial, ethnic, and social class groups will experience an educational equality where educators use techniques and methods that facilitate the academic achievement of student from diverse racial, ethnic, and social-class groups. (2006, p. 3)

Spitzberg (1989) in Taylor (1998) explained the multicultural learning scenario from the perspective of interpersonal communication theories where a foreign student or
in his definition *the stranger* and the individual from the host culture communicate to evolve the way they perceived each other. This changed or revised interpretation of our cultural ways is often “the result of our efforts to understand a different culture that contradicts our own previously accepted presuppositions” (Mezirow, 1991, p. 168). Then learners move through a disorienting dilemma through personal reflection and planned action to a final stage at which the learner takes on new meaning and perspectives, or a new framework for making sense of experiences. This is what Mezirow defines as transformative learning.

Understanding this is an always-changing cultural reference must be recognized by educators in order to serve their students. I would argue that educators also have to be aware of their own assumptions and preconceived ideas when teaching multicultural students because “culture can encourage or discourage transformative thought” (Mezirow, 1991, p. 3).

**Summary**

This chapter presents the main theoretical concepts framing this study. This chapter also presents the areas where there are unanswered questions and more research is needed in order to make the case for this research and its importance for the field of education.

There is an undeniable multicultural reality of the United States that will be growing in the years to come. Additionally, the number of international students has been growing every year in the last 60 years. These international students have increasingly gain importance to higher education because of the contributions they make
financially and culturally. They also bring their culture and their beliefs. Those whose first language is not English may find it challenging to analyze, express, and discuss their ideas clearly verbally and in writing, affecting their academic performance.

But communication is not a one-way street and the listener may filter a message received through that identity to understand a meaning that may or may not be what speaker intended due to phenotypes that come with assumptions and expectations. Previous studies have shown that people discriminate more based on accent that on looks.

Different authors and researchers believe that people who speak with an accent will be identified in their social environments, possibly impacting their interaction with others, and therefore impacting their learning. It seems clear that learners in learning environments that are not culturally challenging, social interaction happens easily, while social interactions can be more challenging when the environments are culturally different. Since learning happens via social interactions, then earning may be impacted when learners speak English with an accent. Additionally, international graduate students are adult learners who are different from other learners. Therefore, educators cannot use all the same strategies used when teaching youth or children.

This is relevant for the framework of this study because when the adult learners are also international students, the classroom is a multicultural learning environment. Educators need to be aware and prepared to deal with the challenges and difficulties of teaching in multicultural environments.
The next chapter presents the research design and the methodology used to respond the research questions of this study and how the data was collected, presented and analyzed.
CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

The focus of this study was understanding how speaking with an accent impacts the learning of international graduate students whose first language is not English. This chapter presents a rationale for the research; describes the research design, ethical considerations, the research design used for the study, and data collection and analysis processes.

Research Rationale

The primary research question of this study was: How do international graduate students whose first language is not English describe the impact of speaking with an accent on their learning in an academic environment? The secondary question was: How do international graduate students whose first language is not English describe the impact of speaking with an accent in a professional environment?

My interest was not just gathering data about international students who speak with an accent, but also understanding their experiences and how the participants made meaning of those experiences. Therefore, the study was conducted combining two qualitative methods, survey and interviews.

The combination of different research tools are stated by McMillan and Schumacher when explaining that complementary mixed methods of research can be used to “elaborate, enhance, illustrate, and clarify the results of one method with that of another method” (2001, p. 542). The authors explain that surveys are useful to understand the characteristics of a group by collecting accurate data from a sample of a
larger group, while interviews are useful to gain insights of the subjects by understanding their experiences.

**Research Design**

The selection of research tools were guided by Strauss and Corbin’s (1998) recommendation that the choice of the type of data to use should be made based on which one has “the greatest potential to capture the types of information desired” (p. 204). I determined surveys and interviews would provide the best data from a group of international graduate students.

Evaluating different interview protocols and theories, I determined that I could organize the application of both research tools following Seidman’s model of three stages for in-depth interviewing (1991). The purpose of Seidman’s in-depth interviewing “is not to get answers to questions, nor to test hypotheses, and not to evaluate as the term is normally used” (p. 9), but rather “understanding the lived experiences of other people and the meaning they make of that experience” (p. 9). This approach was exactly what I was trying to achieve, gather information and added understanding about the meaning of the participants’ experiences. Therefore the study was conducted combining a survey and interview, using a modified version of the Seidman’s (1991) three-stage interview model.

**Seidman’s Three-stage Model**

Seidman’s research model combines a three-stage-interviews structure to deepen the understanding of the subject. Seidman's three-stage model is an implementation of the in-depth phenomenological interviewing protocol designed by Dolbeare and Schuman (as cited in Seidman, 1991) where a series of three interviews are conducted to
“allows the interviewer and participant to plumb the experience and to place it in
context” (p. 17). Seidman explains that the goal is “to have the participant reconstruct
his or her experiences within the topic under study” while focusing on the meaning they
make of those experiences through reflection (1991, p. 15). This approach is effective in
enriching the participants’ meaning of a particular experience.

In Seidman’s model, the first-stage interview is focused on the life history. The
first interview aims to acquire a picture of the background and life history of each
participant to serve as an introduction to orient the researcher to each respondent. The
second-stage interview is designed to gather specific experiences of the participants, to
concentrate on the concrete details in the topic area of the study. The third-stage
interview is focused on the meaning of the participant's experiences through reflection,
requiring that the participants “look at how the factors in their lives interacted to bring
them to their present situation” (Seidman, 1991, p. 18).

My modification of Seidman’s model consisted on using a combination of surveys
and interviews to cover the three stages as represented in Figure 10 (Appendix A).

First, an online survey was used to ask participants basic data and their story
relevant to their experiences as international graduate students who speak English with
an accent. The instrument had close-ended questions about their history covering the
first stage of Seidman’s model. The survey also had some open-ended questions about
their experiences, partially covering stage 2 of the three-stage model. There were no
questions about the meaning of their experiences or reflections about them.
For the interviews, a group of survey participants whose first language was Spanish and who were willing to be interviewed were selected. These interviews focused on more detailed experiences and the meaning that participants made of those experiences, covering the rest of stage 2 and all of stage 3 in Seidman’s model.

Additionally, Seidman’s model emphasized first the need for the interviews to happen consecutively in a short period of time. The author recommends three to seven days. Second, the interviews should consist primarily of open-ended questions to establish “the territory to be explored while allowing the participant to take any direction he or she wants” (Seidman, 1991, p. 84).

Following Seidman’s model characteristics, the survey and the interviews happened within 5 to 7 days to keep participants focused on the study and promote reflection time between the two parts of the study, and the interview included open-ended questions to allow participants take any path they wanted...

**The Survey**

A survey was selected for the first part of the study, based on Fink (2006) and McMillan and Schumacher (2001). Its purpose was to gather data from a sample of a larger group and also to detect patterns that could lead the next part of the study.

McMillan and Schumacher stated that surveys are tools to gather accurate data from a sample of a larger group in specific situations, which are useful to understand the characteristics of that group. Additionally, the authors explain that “categories and patterns emerge from the data rather than being imposed on data prior to data collection” (2001, p. 462). While Fink (2006) defines surveys as tools to collect information used to
“describe, compare, or explain individuals and societal knowledge, feeling, values, preferences, and behavior” (p. 1).

The survey was conducted in English using Google Forms as the electronic survey tool. The survey was sent to 36 former international graduate students who have achieved advanced degrees in the same higher education institution I graduated from, which had a tradition of high enrollment of international students. The survey was also posted in my social media pages asking former classmates to share it with other potential participants.

The online survey began with the statement of consent, which participants needed to agree with in order to process to the questions (Appendix C). The survey included questions about the background and history of the participants as well as questions about their experience as international graduate students whose first language is not English (Appendix C). Following Seidman's model, questions about the experiences of the participants were open-ended to encourage participants to “reconstruct his or her experiences within the topic under study” (Seidman, 1991, p. 15).

The Interviews

The second phase of this study was the interviews. The main purpose of this phase of the study was to gather in-depth insights of the experiences of the participants and their meaning. Interviews have been widely used in researching in the social sciences. This qualitative method “assumes multiple realities are constructed through individual and collective perceptions or views of the same situation” (McMillan & Schumacher 2001, p. 15). The authors state that “qualitative researchers build a
complex, holistic picture with detailed descriptions of informant’s perspectives” (2001, p. 35). This qualitative research tool offered a unique opportunity to listen to the voices of the international students who came the U.S. to pursue advanced degrees. This was important for this study because although the process to be admitted into a higher education institution is basically the same across the United States, international students may experience it differently depending on their own realities and perceptions according to their experiences.

The interviews began with sending the consent letter to the interviewees (Appendix D). All who agreed to participate signed the Participant Copy of the Consent Signature Sheet (Appendix D). The researcher followed the Interviewer Protocol where comments and observations were registered (Appendix D). The interview had 16 questions in addition to the initial identification of age, country of origin and first language (Appendix D).

There were five participants in the interviews. Their first language was Spanish. They were selected from those who completed the survey and were willing to participate in an interview. Three interviews were face-to-face and two interviews were via video conference because the participants lived in Canada. It was important to use video conference for the online interviews to allow gathering perceptions, experiences, and feelings of the persons interviewed. This part was fundamental when doing interviews because the observation of the interviewee provided additional information when they explain the rationale behind their responses (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001; Seidman, 1991).
Participants of this study had different cultural backgrounds, so it was important to design the research tools to encourage their participation and understanding. According to Banks and Banks (2004) and Padilla (2004), research conducted with minority and multicultural populations presents some challenges related to cultural background and language.

Banks and Banks (2004) and Padilla (2004) also state that language can be a barrier. This includes knowing enough of the language background and proficiency level of the individuals who are interviewed and translating research tools and responses are not enough to conduct effective research in multicultural populations. Moreover, authors believed that the researchers must be aware of cultural traditions and traditional customs to ask questions that promote accurate responses from the target population.

For these reasons I selected participants whose first language was Spanish to be interviewed. I am an international student whose first language is Spanish. My cultural background is different from the majority population in the U.S. I felt equipped to conduct this research because of being aware of cultural traditions and customs of Hispanic respondents. Therefore, the interviewees were all Hispanics whose first language was Spanish, and so the interviews were conducted in Spanish. This helped respondents feel comfortable to describe their experiences in their native language and facilitate the connection with interviewees and provide enough cultural background to share ideas, thoughts, and perceptions. “People’s behavior becomes meaningful and understandable when placed in the context of their lives and the lives of those around them” (Seidman, 1991, p. 17).
The participants of this study were former international graduate students from a Midwestern university. By inviting alumni to participate in this study, I assumed they have already finished their studies and have had time to reflect on their experiences as international graduate students.

The methodology was designed for the survey to reach a large population of international graduate student, considering a historic enrollment of 90 to 100 new international graduate students per year for the last ten years in the higher education institution I graduated from. But I could not reach the large population I was planning for due to impediments to access contact information of potential participants.

I contacted the school with largest graduate programs, the office of international students, and the office of alumni initiatives in the targeted University to reach the largest population of participants and obtain a convenience sample for the survey, as defined by McMillan and Schumacher (2001). This accessibility and convenience was expected to make data gathering relatively easy, as described by Fink (2006). Those offices did not provide any data of former international students or support to send the survey to the targeted population of this study. However, having attended graduate programs in the same university, I had access to contact information of international students’ alumni via alumni association and social groups.

**Ethical Considerations**

Following Hamline University School of Education guidelines and approval by its Human Subject Committee, participation in this study is voluntary and strictly confidential.
The survey was conducted anonymously and online. It took approximately 25 minutes to complete it, and participants were allowed to stop at any time. Responses to this survey will be kept for one year and were securely and electronically stored in a dedicated computer drive to facilitate further data analysis. Only those participants who wanted to be interviewed were asked to provide their contact information.

Similarly, no information gathered during the interviews was shared with third parties. Any reference about the participants’ responses is presented using pseudonyms. Interviewees were allowed to stop at any time of the survey or the interview if they felt uncomfortable or needed to pause. The interviews were audio-recorded to facilitate note taking and further data analysis. After the data was collected and transcriptions were made, the recordings were then destroyed.

**Data Processing and Analysis**

The answers to the closed-ended questions of the survey were counted and charts were created to represent them graphically (Appendix A, Figures). The responses to open-ended questions were gathered in tables, some of them comparing more than one at the time to find correlations (Appendix B, Tables).

These responses were also analyzed by frequency of words using word cloud diagrams (Appendix A, Figures). Then the responses were analyzed to understand relationships among answers, as Fink explains (2006), and to identify patterns among categories (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001).

The recording of the interviews in Spanish were transcribed and translated to English by a fully bilingual undergraduate senior student. To reassure accuracy, the
transcripts in English were then reviewed by me while listening to the original recordings of the interviews to validate that terms and ideas were translated and transcribed correctly. Since the interviewees were born in Venezuela like me, I paid especial attention to idioms, and expression that could be characteristics to that origin be translated accurately. Since the interviewees and I attended the same programs and school, I also validated terms that could be specific to that environment. This first review of the transcripts also allowed me to start identifying main ideas and some basic patterns.

Then the transcripts were reviewed again line by line. Words were analyzed by carefully looking for common words and expressions that could be relevant to this study. Some of those ideas were relevant because they were often repeated by the same interviewee or by many of them. Some ideas were relevant because they resonated with concept and ideas I reviewed when preparing this study. Other ideas were relevance because of being totally different or surprising. This identification of relevant concepts is what Weiss defined as coding (1995).

Those relevant ideas were collected and organized into categories to be interpreted and analyzed to find patterns to give meaning to the data and help with its interpretation (Fink, 2006; McMillan & Schumacher, 2001).

One more analysis of the transcripts was made by creating word cloud diagrams and text analysis tool to detect frequency of words and expressions. But they did not provide relevant information because the interviewees used a vast variety of terms to
transmit the similar ideas. Therefore this analysis was discarded to use the coding and categorizations previously mentioned.

Finally the responses to the interview were compared to similar questions asked in the survey to detect if there were similarities between the interviewee experiences and those in the sample of the survey respondents.

**Limitations of the Study**

The first limitation of this research was the participants. Because I was targeting international graduate students who attended the same university I had, they may have had experiences similar to mine. If the scope was expanded to include other educational institutions, the survey and interview data could have been different.

The second limitation was the contact information was sometimes limited or updated. I contacted the offices in the university who tracked international graduate alumni, but all efforts were unsuccessful in getting contact information of a larger group of former students. Therefore, I used contact information of former classmates and their peers which was sometimes outdated. With better and more accurate contact information of potential participants, the sample of the international graduate student could have been larger and maybe more representative.

The third limitation was limiting the interview participants to Spanish-speaking survey takers. This limited the scope of this study by not including international graduate students who speak other languages.

The fourth limitation was that participants all attended the same school and programs as I did. The possibility of knowing me might have affected their responses on
the data collection tools. This could be a limitation for some of the participants who could feel more or less comfortable when answering questions, sharing ideas, or reflecting on their experiences with me.

The fifth limitation is not including the educators’ perspectives in this study. A follow-up study would be recommended including the experiences of students and educators, could be beneficial to broaden perspectives and develop best practices about teaching adults in multicultural environments.

Summary

The primary research question of this study focused on how international graduate students whose first language is not English described the impact of speaking with an accent on their learning in an academic environment. The secondary question centered on how international graduate students whose first language is not English described the impact of speaking with an accent in a professional environment. The main interest was understanding the experiences international students who speak English with an accent and how the participants made meaning of those experiences. Therefore, the study was conducted using a modified version of Seidman’s (1991) three-interview model for in-depth interviewing consisting on using a combination of surveys and interviews to cover the three stages.

First, a survey was used to gather information and experiences to understand the characteristics of a group. Then a group of the survey respondents whose first language was Spanish was interviewed to gather in-depth insights of their experiences. Since the language used is critical for describing our experiences and insights, especially when
research is conducted with ethnic minority populations, the interviews were conducted in Spanish.

The results were gathered using tables, charts, and word clouds. Answered were compared among tools and participants to find correlations and relevant terms and ideas. Relevant ideas were interpreted and analyzed to find patterns to give meaning to the data and help with its interpretation.
CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

The focus of this study was understanding how speaking with an accent impacts the learning of international graduate students whose first language is not English. This chapter presents the results of the study. The study was conducted combining a survey and interviews, using a modified version of the Seidman’s (1991) in-depth interview model.

As explained in the previous chapter, Seidman’s research model combines a three-stage-interviews structure to deepen the understanding of the subject. This in-depth interview protocol consisted of three interviews, which “allows the interviewer and participant to plumb the experience and to place it in context” (Seidman, 1991, p. 17). Seidman explains that the goal is “to have the participant reconstruct his or her experiences within the topic under study” (1991, p. 15) focusing on the meaning they make of those experiences through reflection.

I modified Seidman’s model by using a combination of surveys and interviews, instead of three consecutive interviews, where the survey gathered information of the participants and their experiences as international graduate students who first language is not English. Later, five survey participants were interviewed to go deeper in their experiences and the meaning they made of those experiences.

The Survey

A survey was selected as to understand the characteristics of a group by gathering accurate data from a sample of a larger group. The survey was in English and
targeted international graduate students who achieved advanced higher education degree and who had work experience in the U.S. The purpose of this phase was to get the main aspects of the impact accent may have in their experiences in both the academic and professional environments.

The survey was sent via email to 36 former international students from the graduate programs of the school of business at a Midwest university. The survey was also shared via social media, using Facebook, where I keep in contact with former classmates. Some of them also shared the survey with other classmates. Twenty-three persons responded the survey.

The results of the survey are presented next, question by question. The results are also represented using charts (Appendix A) and tables (Appendix B) to facilitate their interpretation.

Question 1: Agreement to the Terms of the Study

The first question of the survey was if they agreed with the term of the study. All participants agreed.

Questions 2 and 3: Gender and Age

The respondents were a balanced group of participants in terms of gender and age. Question 2 asked the participants’ gender. 43.4% of the participants were women and 39.1% men while 17% did not respond this question (Appendix A, Figure 11).

Questions 3 asked their current age. All participants were older than 30 years old, with 34.8% between 30 and 39, and 43.5% between 40 and 49 years old, and 21.7% were older than 50 years old (Appendix A, Figure 12).
Question 4: Country of Origin

The majority of the seventeen participants (71.9%) were from Venezuela. There were two participants from Colombia, one from Mexico, one from Rumania, and two who did not respond (Appendix A, Figure 17 and 18). The predominance of Venezuelans in this study is probably due to using my personal contacts to send the survey to potential participants. That limited the recipients of the survey to those who were somehow connected to me or were part groups that I was part of.

Question 5: First Language

When asked about first language, 95.7% of the respondents spoke Spanish as primary language. Only one participant has Romanian as first language (Appendix A, Figure 19). These answers are consistent with responses to the previous question.

Question 6: Do you speak English fluently?

All participants speak English fluently. Nineteen speak English all the time (82.6%) and four speak it most times (17.4%) (Appendix A, Figure 20).

Question 7: You have been an international graduate student in the United States, right?

All the respondents were international graduate students in the United States, which was the targeted group of this study (Appendix A, Figure 13).

Question 8: How old were you when you came to live in the U.S.?

When asked about their age when coming to live in the U.S., the majority of the participants were younger than 30 years old. Sixteen participants were between 20 and 29 years old (69.6%). Five were between 30 and 39 years old (21.7%), and 2 were 40
years old or older (8.7%) (Appendix A, Figure 14). This corresponds with adults learners, which was the target of this study,

Comparing their age at arrival with their current age, an average of 10 years has passed since they came to the U.S. (Appendix A, Figure 15). This indicates that enough time has passed since they came to live in the U.S. giving them the opportunity to reflect on their life experiences.

**Question 9: How many years did you live in the United States?**

The previous observation was corroborated by question 9 that asked the participants how long they had lived in the U.S. (Appendix A, Figure 16). More than half of the respondents lived in the U.S. for 10 years or more (52.2%), and the next largest group (34.8%) had lived in the country between 5 to 10 years. This means that the majority of the group had a considerable time, enough to have experienced the life and culture of the United States as well as using the English language.

**Question 10: How often do you interact with others in English?**

The previous statement was corroborated when asked participants how often they interacted with others in English. The majority of participants (21 participants, 91.3%) interacted with other all the time, while 8.7% only interacted sometimes (Appendix A, Figure 21).

**Question 11: Do you think you speak English with an accent?**

As previously established, English was not the first language of the participants of this study. Moreover, all of them recognized they speak English with an accent (Appendix A, Figure 24).
Question 12: Do you think that speaking English with an accent impacted your life in the U.S.?

The majority of participants (78.3%) believe that speaking English with an accent has impacted their life in the U.S. (Appendix A, Figure 27).

Question 13: Could you please expand your previous answer?

When asked to expand on their responses, most participants mentioned having difficulties to communicate and get messages across, needing to repeat phrases or do extra efforts to be understood. Some participants felt insecure when speaking English with an accent while others mentioned being perceived as not educated because of their accent. Some touched on the expectations and attitude of the listeners was important too (Appendix B, Table 2).

Some participants saw this impact as positive and others saw it as negative. Even those who said that speaking English with an accent did not impact their life in the U.S. (question 12), said that speaking slowly helped them be understood and they had to work hard on improving phonetics and English skills (Appendix B, Table 3).

The responses of participants to question 13 represented in a word cloud shows that the most prominent words, besides people and accent, were understand and understanding (Appendix A, Figure 28). This corroborates what was stated before that accent did affect their understanding with others.

Question 14: Did you take a test or course to certify your English proficiency before being admitted to a higher ed institution in the United States?
All but one of the participants (95.7%) had to approve an English proficiency test to be admitted to their programs as students (Appendix A, Figure 23). This means participants could speak and understand English well enough.

**Question 15: How do you think your English proficiency was when you first came to the U.S.?**

The majority of participants have either a basic (34.8%) or good enough (56.5%) English proficiency when they first came to the U.S. Only one participant manifested having an advanced proficiency level (Appendix A, Figure 22). This corresponds to question 14 which stated they had to take and approve an English proficiency test to be admitted to the academic institution.

**Question 16: Has that changed since then? Please explain.**

Responses to question 16, represented in a word cloud diagram, corroborated that respondents believed their English proficiency has improved since their arrival (Appendix A, Figure 24). This makes sense since most of them lived in the U.S. between 5 and 10 years (question 9). Most common responses mentioned improving grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation, continuous learning and practicing, and frequent interaction with others. Some also feel more confident now when speaking English (Appendix B, Table 1).

Participants also expressed having more interaction with others was a determined factor in improving their language skills. This corresponds with the responses to question 10 mentioned before about the frequency in which participants interacted with others in English most or all the time.
Question 17: Have you ever been told that you speak English with an accent?

In question 17, all but one participant said that they have been told they speak English with an accent (Appendix A, Figure 26).

Question 18: How do you think your learning was influenced by the fact that English is not your first language? Please explain.

Participants were asked about the impact that English not being their first language had in their learning. When representing their responses in a word cloud being harder, needing an extra effort, needing more time appeared as relevant terms (Appendix A, Figure 32)

Most participants believed it was harder to understand concept and ideas, extra efforts were needed for both written assignments and presentations to avoid misunderstandings and responding to academic requirements demanded more time and dedication. Lack of self-confidence was present, especially at the beginning. A few respondents did not find it was a factor affecting their learning. Others stated the impact was not negative but rather a challenge and a motivation to learn more and perform better (Appendix B, Table 7).

Question 19: How do you think that speaking with an accent impacted your social interaction in class? Please share an example.

Narrowing the focus to social interactions in the classroom, the most common terms in its word cloud representation were English, class, speak, think, people, students, and interaction. However, that did not provide identifiable relevant ideas (Appendix A, Figure 29).
When reviewing the responses in details, participants were divided. Half of them expressed having few interactions because feeling embarrassed, uncomfortable, or intimidated because of the possibility of mispronouncing or being misunderstood. Some manifested it was hard to “sound smart” or felt their credibility was questioned. The other half mentioned not having problems when interacting in class, but they also mentioned being in classes with diverse students, and that international students used to be and work together while being more distant from American students (Appendix B, Table 4).

**Question 20: Was this different when socially interacting in other environments?**

When asked if interactions in other environments were different than those in the classroom, responses show a relevant yes (Appendix A, Figure 30).

Some respondents referred to professional or business environments being more tolerant or accustomed to people speaking English with an accent due to having diverse workforces. Others said the English used in class was more complicated, making interactions easier in non-academic environments. Some talked about informal environments were more open minded, more relaxed or putting less pressure to perform, although not knowing colloquial expressions could sometimes difficult conversations. A few said it was not different. Some said others recognized that speaking with an accent meant speaking more than one language and that was appreciated by them. (Appendix B, Table 5).

**Question 21: Do you think that is related to your accented English? or to something else?**
When asked if participants believed the difference was due to speaking English with an accent, the response was clear: Accent was the main factor (Appendix A, Figure 31). Accent was the main factor impacting interactions because it affected communicating but it also manifested differences: different language, different pronunciation, different culture (Appendix B, Table 6).

The Interviewees

Tony is a 58 years old male born in Venezuela. He came to the U.S. when he was 45 years old to pursue a Master’s degree in Management. He lived in the U.S. for 10 years before moving to Canada where he has lived for 3 years. Tony’s first language is Spanish, and he said he spoke English all the time except when communicating with friends and family members who only speak Spanish. When he lived in the U.S., he worked at a place where he had to interact in Spanish with customers. Most of his co-workers spoke both Spanish and English, but all interaction with them and his supervisors were in English. That changed after moving to Canada where he spoke English most of the time. He said he did not speak Spanish too often since living in Canada because there were not many persons who spoke the language.

Maria is a 39 years old woman from Venezuela. She came to the U.S. when she was 25 years old. She later started the Master in Nonprofit Management program and began working at a place where she spoke both English and Spanish all the time. She said she spoke both languages in all environments, including at home. She has been living in the U.S. for 13 years.
Josefina is a 35 years old woman from Venezuela. She came to the U.S. 5 years ago to pursue a master’s degree in Business Administration. Her first language is Spanish. She mostly speaks English in all environments including at home because her husband does not speak Spanish. She only speaks Spanish with a few friends and family members who do not speak English. Before coming as graduate student, she came to U.S. twice to study English for a few months.

José is a 42 years old man born in Venezuela. He came to the U.S. to pursue a Master of Arts in Management when he was 28 years old. He later achieved a Masters in Nonprofit Administration. He has lived in the U.S. for 13 years. His first language is Spanish, and he spoke English in all environments except with few friends and family members who only speak Spanish.

Sofía is a 36 years old Venezuelan woman who came to the U.S. when she was 25 years old. She came as an international student to pursue a Master of Arts in Management and a Master in Business Administration. She was living in Canada at the time of the interview. She moved there after living in the U.S. for 10 years. Her first language is Spanish, which she spoke with friends and family, and it is also the only language used at home. She mentioned speaking English in all her interactions outside the house: at work, in the social gatherings, with friends, when doing transactions or paperwork in public offices.

**Interview Analysis**

The goal of the interviews was to gather the experiences of international graduate students whose first language is not English, and the meanings they make of their
experiences, specifically about the impact that speaking English with an accent had in their social interactions inside and outside the classroom. The interviews were done in Spanish. As explained in the previous chapter, the recordings were then transcribed and translated to English and analyzed to determine relevant ideas, coincidences and differences among interviewees, and correlations with the patterns found in the survey responses.

Five of the survey respondents were selected to be interviewed, two men and three women. The results of the interviews are presented next, question by question. Any reference about the participants’ responses is presented using pseudonyms.

**Question 1: According to your survey, you have been an international graduate student in the U.S., right?**

The first question asked them to assure that interviewees were indeed international graduate students in the U.S. All of them responded affirmatively and confirmed they came to the U.S. as international graduate students.

**Question 2: Please share your age, your country of origin, and your first language.**

**Question 3: How old were you when you came to the U.S. to study?**

**Question 4: Do you currently live in the U.S.? How many years have you lived in the U.S.?**

Questions 2 to 4 provided basic characteristics of the participants. All of them were born in Venezuela. All were adults older than 25 years when they arrived to the U.S., 4 of them lived in the U.S. for over 10 years while the remaining persons lived here for 5 years. At the moment of the interview 3 participants were living
in the U.S. while 2 were living in Canada after living in the U.S. for 10 years, adding new perspectives and experiences. These characteristics of the interviewees are summarized in Table 8 (Appendix B).

Question 5: How often do you interact with others in English?

Question 6: Have you been ever told that you speak English with an accent?

Questions 5 and 6, in addition to question 2, provided information about the languages used by the interviewees when interacting with others. All the interviewees spoke Spanish as their first language, and believed and have been told that they speak English with an accent. They spoke English all the time, since they were living in English-speaking countries: at home, at work, and in other environments. They also spoke Spanish with some friends and families who do not speak English and with those who speak both languages. Only one person spoke both English and Spanish in all environments, and one interviewee spoke only Spanish at home. This information is summarized in Table 9 (Appendix B). With the collected information, a description of each interviewee is presented next, using their established pseudonyms.

Question 7: Describe how others react when they note you speak English with an accent.

When asked how others react when noticing they speak English with an accent, interviewees mentioned that reactions go from problems understanding what was said, showing signs of confusion, and up to disregarding the speaker.

The most frequent reaction was not understanding what they were saying, and being asked to repeat what was said. That can be accompanied with a facial expression that shows they were confused. As José explained, ‘‘you’re going to see someone’s
facial expression if they don’t understand something.” Josefina shared a similar experience: “I do notice that when I’m talking to someone their face changes or they just look like it is more work for them, or they are trying to pay closer attention.” Some people get frustrated because of not understanding what the person with an accent said. Sofia explained that she tries to speak more slowly: “Since we speak Spanish, we try to speak faster and we are harder to understand. So I would speak more slowly … so that I was easier to understand.”

These responses concur with the responses to survey question 13, where survey participants were asked to describe speaking English with an accent impacted their life in the US. They mentioned having difficulties to get messages across, needing to repeat phrases, taking extra efforts to be understood, and even being perceived as not educated (Appendix B, Table 2).

Interviewees said that some people made fun of them because of speaking English with an accent. Maria explained,

Before I was more aware as to whether they were making fun of me ...if it was really them ridiculing me because of the way I pronounced something, that was how it seemed. Or when they directly made fun of me for my accent. Now I try to make fun of myself first before they make fun of me.

Josefina believed that such reactions depend on the person who you are interacting with: “Some people take their time and that some don’t... People who were interested made more of an effort to get close to me... others are more interested in my accent than what I am trying to say.” As Maria said, sometimes is just a comment stating
the obvious such as, “Oh, you speak English with an accent” or “I sense an accent that is different. Where are you all from?” Josefina said that sometimes there is a disappointing tone when saying that you speak with an accent. Participants stated these reactions happen in all environments.

Discussing how others react to speaking with an accent, Tony shared a very interesting perspective: “My experience with speaking English in Canada has been different than my experience with speaking English in the United States.” Tony has lived in Canada for three years after living in the U.S. for ten. He explained that Canada has two official languages, English and French, and most citizens speak both languages. However, there is always one prominent language, so Canadians often speak the other language with an accent. He said, “those who speak English well speak French with an accent. And those speak French well speak English with an accent.”

Tony believes that reality results in people being used to accents and not judging of those who have it. He explains that, “They understand me when I speak English with a Latino accent. … it’s easier for them to understand me because the French Canadians speak English with an accent that is very similar to Latino accent.” He mentioned that when he goes to government offices in Canada and he speaks English with his accent, people working there often being speaking to him in French due to the similarities between the French and Latino accents. José also spoke about his experiences while visiting Canada, even though he has not lived there. He referred to more diverse environments were more welcoming to speaking with an accent like “the Canadian
model, where accent is ‘normal’ because there are a lot of immigrants, an even native people, everybody speaks with an accent.’

Back to the reactions in the U.S. when speaking English with an accent, all interviewees claimed they were used to those reactions, and they were not as bothered anymore, although they can sense negative connotations sometimes. As Maria put it, “It doesn’t bother me when they tell me that [I have an accent] because it’s something I already know.” All participants claimed they know they spoke with an accent, and that accent can be improved but it will probably never disappear.

**Question 8: How do you think that having an accent impacted your social interactions in class when you were an international graduate student in the U.S.?**

When framing speaking English with an accent to the academic environment, all participants said the previously mentioned reactions happened in the classroom as well, and social interactions were definitely impacted by it. The look of being confused, the difficulties to be understood by others, the frustration perceived in others all happened when interacting in class, with the aggravating circumstance that understanding concepts, being understood, and participating in class affected their performance and grades.

Tony said, “The reaction I got the most was when they would have a facial expression of confusion because I don’t think they could understand me….It happened often in class.” Sofia said it well: “Without a doubt you can tell when people don’t understand what it is you’re saying so you have to repeat yourself.”
All interviewees were also aware that speaking with an accent made it difficult for them to be understood. Maria explained that “when I heard someone else with an accent that I thought was a little bit more difficult to understand and you can understand better the face of others trying to understand.” Later she added, “Some of them would ask, very carefully, for us to repeat something or they would look very doubtful, but in general it was their face when they were trying to understand what I was saying.”

It is important to mention that those experiences in class were at the beginning of their time in the U.S., 5 or 10 years ago, so their knowledge of English was more limited, their accents were thicker, and they often needed to translate before speaking or to understand terms discussed in class. All interviewees said they were well aware of their limitations with the English language, therefore their confidence when speaking English was also low as they just had arrived to a new country, a new culture, a new language, and a different academic system.

From the responses of the interviewees, it is clear that interactions in class were particularly impacted by their speaking English with an accent. However, most participants also mentioned that reactions depended on how diverse the class was and how much others had been exposed to other languages and cultures. José explained this well: “If you are in a diverse class, you probably won’t have a problem if there are a lot of international students of different nationalities because then everyone has an accent.” He also said, “But if there is a majority in the class of people from the United States that… haven’t been exposed to another culture or another language, or basically English with an accent, then the interactions will be more difficult.”
Josefina agreed when explaining that in her view those with experience speaking with other people whose second language is English try to ignore the accent, “they don’t say anything, there isn’t any major change.” However, she said, “people who don’t have that experience, do notice my accent more strongly….not even a minute will pass and that’s when they are saying ‘your accent, where is it from?’”

In the survey, question 19 about interactions in class (Appendix B, Table 4), participants also mentioned that interactions were easier when being part of classes with large diverse population of students. In the interview, Josefina analyzed that some classmates get tired of trying to understand you because of your accent or not because what I say is grammatically incorrect, but it’s different than how other Americans might say it... there are others who think it’s too much work so they would rather go talk to someone else ... in the class.

José believed this goes beyond speaking English with an accent. He said that when international students engaged in a conversation with the professors or got interested in a topic that American students are not interested in or don’t understand because of being culturally different, they just disconnect and do not follow the conversation.

One of the reasons this may have happened is because speaking English with an accent may be perceived by others as lack of preparation or intelligence. This was also mentioned by respondents to question 13 of the survey. Josefina shared an example that ratifies that statement: “When you are working in groups, well, Americans want to take charge of any assignment we have to do.” She said American students showed their lack
of confidence in the abilities of international students by taking over assignments like writing group papers or doing group presentations. She said that only when studying hypothetical cases or situations outside the U.S. is when they asked international students.

These situations where international students do not feel appreciated may prevent them from interacting with others in class, ultimately affecting their academic performance. As Josefina put it, “Yes, that part of it may have affected me, and the participation. Because your grade is always 20% or more is in participation, and knowing that my participation isn’t very welcomed, that doesn’t help me to participate.” But this also affected them in other ways. Maria said “Yes, it affected me more on a personal level that they would understand me because I was worried that they wouldn’t understand what I was saying.

Question 9: Has accent impacted also your interactions with your professors?

It is clear from the interviewees’ responses that interactions in class were impacted by the role of professors in setting the ground rules in class.

Tony said: "Yes, it impacted me with a lot of professors… it was difficult for me because they didn’t understand what I was saying. They would ask me what I meant." Maria believed that “professors never gave it a second thought. I was actually very surprised with how well professors could understand so many accents or what someone is trying to say.” José believed that "I think that the professors or the professionals that were there, were more flexible and patient in terms of taking their time and trying to understand what it is that you’re saying."
However, the most impacting role of professors was setting the ground rules for participation in class. José remembered that it was very helpful when professors read the classroom rules stating how to interact with other in a respectful way. He said, “You could disagree with someone’s opinions, but you have to do it in an educated way and to have awareness. Basically to do it in a way that the environment will be fluid and positive. for everyone and all the students in the class.” When asked if interactions in class would be different if professors do not set those rules, he responded “I think so.” He believed that it comes down to having common sense. He believed that “having common sense is respecting other’s differences and ideas and where they’re from,” but he also said that “common sense is different for different people.” José strongly believed that “if those rules aren’t put on the table at the beginning, then conflict may arise” because “by freedom of expression some basically understand that they can say whatever they want whenever they want.”

Josefina agreed it was fundamental “getting help from professors on facilitating discussions.” She mentioned that it would be great “if the professor states the very first class that there are international students and that isn’t a bad thing for you.” She believed “Americans will be enriched by that experience” and it will be better for all students if professors would said at the beginning of the course that having international students will provide other perspectives and experiences.

Josefina had unpleasant experiences in her program because the rules of respecting everybody’s opinions were not set by professors. Josefina seemed very emotional about these experiences. She said professors mostly ignored international
students in many of the classes she took, making the learning environment more difficult. She said:

Most professors knew that there were international students but there were very few of us in the classroom... I realized that when we spoke... students would ignore us and stop listening right away... Some professors would notice so they would restate what we said and say that it was important and try to connect it to other ideas.

Most interviewees believed that the attitude of professors can make the difference. Tony remembered occasions where his participation was ignored by classmates, “then my professor would say that it was important” and that made the difference on how he was treated in class. Josefina also shared an example when they were reviewing a book in class: ”I said that I had thought that the book didn’t talk about something that I thought was important... Two or three students countered what I said, saying that I was lost because we are talking about what the book does say not what it doesn’t say. “She remembered the attitude of those students being a little rude. That is when the professor intervened and said her comments were valid as they were analyzing the book, what it contained and what did not. Josefina remembered, “It was at that moment that I saw the whole class thinking makes sense. She added, “The professor had to give credit to my point, and after that I felt like now I was counted more as a student.”

Question 10: Do you think your learning was impacted by having an accent?

It is very clear that being an international graduate student in the U.S. represented a challenge for all the interviewees because of English was their second
language and speaking English with an accent. However, interviewees did not believe that impacted their learning because they worked hard. Sofia explained it this way:

I don’t think it had much to do with having an accent, but it was more about trying to understand the professor. At first it was a little bit harder for me because the way for me to communicate was different. If you had a question you really had to think about it or think of it in a way for people to understand.

However, she also said that even though it did not affect her learning, “it can affect how you understand something” and “it may affect your grades like in written assignments and things like that, compare to those who speak English all their lives, maybe that made you grade to be a little bit lower, but not something that significant.”

Maria agreed. She explained that “maybe my own accent didn’t affect me so much as listening to others did… in my case I was careful. I spend more time thinking about how I need to interact in all my classes, so it is extra energy”. Overall she said, “It’s just about working harder.” She remembered thinking that she would see that other people would do things much quicker “because it comes naturally to them,” while she was “so focused on everything with English and trying to understand everything and trying to understand how things are written, culturally too… but yes it affected me because I thought I was learning slower than everyone else.”

Josefina did not think the impact was solely because of her accent. She had professors with accents, and it was harder to understand them as well. She did not think it was due to English proficiency either because, as mentioned before, even if using grammatically correct English, it may be different from how other Americans might say
it. She made a clear statement: "It wasn’t just the English, but the context." She used an example: “I had just gotten here and didn’t have much contact with anything or anyone else. They would ask who has worked at Wells Fargo or who has any relation with Wells Fargo?” She raised her hand because she had an account at that bank. But that was not what they meant. They used the expression of having a relation with as working in the bank. She remembered thinking, “Oh that’s what you’re referring to when you say relation with.” From that moment she realized she had to double check what she was going to say and how to say it, and being better prepared for class. She summarized it this way: ”I did learn, you could even say I learned as much as I would have in Venezuela, but I could have had a better experience at the university if there hadn’t been any language barriers.”

José believed that accent did not impact his learning: “Not learning in particular, but I think it requires … you are forced to do a little more you...have to spend time to basically cover all the topics you need to study.” There was additional component compared to American students: “you are subconsciously more stressed than someone else because you are thinking that people don’t understand you when you are talking” adding that you “have to try to push yourself and work harder and use your energy on being understood."

Question 11: Do you think that speaking English with an accent has impacted the way you interact with others at work?

Comparing their experiences in the academic environment with the workplace, interviewees recognized getting the same reactions. Maria said,
It used to happen most frequently at work. At one of my first jobs, because… it was harder for me to speak English. And I doubted what I said a lot on the pronunciation. So I was more susceptible to any comment regarding my accent, pronunciation. It happened a lot more before and at work. It also happened socially at work.

Interviewees also agreed that once others get used to your accent, the focus is on content. José explained that in a professional setting, interactions with some people during the first month, you are going to have those types of reactions. After the first month, once they are used to your accent, then the conversation moves fluidly without any problem.

Sofia said, “It didn’t impact me but I think there were things that I didn’t say correctly.”

If the workforce is diverse, speaking English with an accent is normal, and people are used to it. José explained that diversity in the workplace affected interactions the same as in academic environments:

in a professional setting… You’ll encounter people who have never been exposed to other cultures or languages... Having a conversation with those people in particular is going to be completely different from someone who has traveled and been immersed in other cultures, in particular in countries that don’t speak English where they already develop empathy because they have been in your shoes.
Additionally, in some cases speaking English with an accent was better accepted in the workplace because it meant they spoke more than one language and that was perceived as an advantage. Tony said the majority of his clients were Hispanic, but he spoke English with most of the people at work. Therefore, speaking both languages was an advantage. Maria shared something similar: “at my job diversity is something that is important” and that sometimes is “necessary to prove that to someone who may be in charge of a project or something based on diversity.” She was involved in initiatives where “One can be a representation that someone understands other cultures or comes from another culture” and it can “give you a boost in those opportunities as proof that they are more diverse at work.”

It is also true that having advanced degrees meant interviewees were well prepared for the job, they had good English skills, and they had other resources like written communication that helped them overcome communication obstacles. Therefore, accent soon becomes less important. José said, “you use written communication as a guide or a support... students at a level of a Master’s program, we can write very well so we utilize that as a way of support for the interactions we have.” Sofia agreed, adding that beyond English proficiency, the importance was on adjusting the communication style to the business environment:

At work I had to be more careful because the way you interact. Likewise in the written part, in the business environment you have to be very careful. Also because it is different than how we interact in our home country compared to the
United States where you have to communicate in a more precise, more concise way.

Comparing these answers to the similar questions in the survey, there is agreement that professional or business environments can be more tolerant and more accustomed to people speaking English with an accent since they are used to having a diverse workforce (Appendix B, Table 5).

**Question 12: Do you think that speaking English with an accent has impacted the way you interact with others in other environment?**

The responses of the interviewees about interactions in other environments agreed on being more relaxed, although there were not specific examples. Only two participants shared examples of interacting with others in public or government offices. Sofia explained that when she went to government offices in the U.S., “you feel it more obviously that you are an immigrant or that you speak another language. They don’t really give you a lot of attention.” She believes that many times is due to being helped by older people in those offices, and they could be more sensitive with how things are said. She sometimes felt they are getting upset when you say something and it’s not in the way they were expecting you to say it so they ask you to repeat it or they look upset. You can tell that they look at you in a different way and treat you a little bit differently. She had often experienced that they cannot decipher where she is from by her appearance, but “once you start speaking they know you are from somewhere else and they change the way they treat you.” When asked why she thought that happened, Sofia
explained that “when I speak with an accent they do realize that I’m from somewhere else” and that was enough because sometimes “they aren’t very open to listening to other types of accents.”

Josefina shared a similar experience when doing paperwork at government offices: “People try to listen to me better ... they look at me like okay I’m prepared, speak to me.” Then she speaks and their reaction is like “it wasn’t as difficult as they thought it would be. “ She also recognized that she speaks louder in those situations because she realized it helps and it also shows more confidence. She said that has also happened at her doctor offices: “I went up to the counter and she looked at me like she was preparing ... she seemed relieved that it was just an accent I had... She looked like had a sigh of relief.”

Maria explained that speaking English with an accent affected her negatively at some points in her life sometimes more than others:

Sometimes I wouldn’t want to go to a certain gathering or event if I thought that would happen. But there were times where I purposely wanted to be at these events as much as possible because I would have the opportunity to practice my English, to meet other people.

These statements seem to correspond to the survey responses to question 20 about interactions in other environments, which said that informal settings are more open minded and relaxed or putting less pressure on persons who speak English with an accent. Respondents also mentioned that the English used outside the academic environments is less complicated and that helps communicate better (Appendix B, Table 5).
Question 13: Has that evolved since you first came to live in the United States?

All the interviewees said their English skills have improved over time, and they continue to work on improving them. Sofia shared that my accent was stronger, and the way I communicated wasn’t as good at first, so people see it harder to speak with someone who doesn’t speak the language. I had already bettered my… my accent, the language, or how I communicated.

Tony said that from the moment he got to the U.S., his accent has changed a lot because he has worked on improving his accent and his pronunciation. Josefina said: “I speak English more than Spanish. I think that has changed, I have the response in English easier, quicker and more concrete.” Maria agreed saying, “Before I was always worried that my English wasn’t good enough and that it was always something I needed to improve. So it has always been about improvement.” José said he had improved his English skills in time. He commented that, although his accent was still thick, “an accent is something that is there, it can get better…it has.“ It was interesting to learn that all interviewees also said their attitude is what has changed the most. They said that they still got those reactions mentioned before, but now they do not let them affect them as much. Josefina explained that “my reaction is what’s different. I feel like since it’s not something new then I expect it. I don’t let it affect me as much. The reaction on my part is what’s different now.” Maria said something similar:

Now I just see it as a part of everyday life. I don’t analyze it too much now … Maybe I make some grammar mistakes when I’m speaking or when I’m writing now. But I also care less about making a mistake.
José agreed and explained it using a powerfully statement:

At this point, I don’t think I give it the slightest amount of importance as I did at first. I feel like I don’t have to prove anything to anyone to show that I speak the language. After being in the workforce for ten years, in a technical department doing what few individuals know how to do or have the necessary education to do it and to have to present results with executives, with the government, with people from other organizations … I handle it in a more productive way now.

Question 14: Did you ever feel “different” while living in the U.S.?

When asked if they have felt different, the common answer was always. The interviewees agreed that one of the characteristic of being an international graduate students who speak English with an accent is being different. But they also said that speaking English with an accent made them feel different basically because of the acceptance and reaction they get from others.

Sofia said it well: “Feeling different...well, you always feel out of place, you know?” Maria agreed: “I don’t remember having a really bad experience. But yes, I know that there have been times that people have been frustrated because of my accent or felt it was negative.” Tony remembered that he felt the most different when he started his Master degree: “I felt different, especially because I was the only one who spoke Spanish.”

Josefina made a good point stating that, “It depends how you see it. Different in a good way or different in a bad way.” In her case, she always felt different in a bad way in class, but she felt different in a good way outside class, especially when others told
her that she had achieved so much, with an MBA and speaking two languages. She added, “Then you think, wow maybe I do have that, and it isn’t like you are missing something just because you have an accent.”

As Maria said: “But there are also good things, there are always good things.”

Sofia said she was always aware of what that meant for her: “For instance at work I know that my opportunities to improve have always been my language, written or spoken... I feel different in terms of knowing that I have an accent.” José said something similar: “different yes, in a number of ways,” but then he added:

I speak with an accent because I speak a language that is part of a culture. It’s not specific to a race but to a particular ethnic group, so yes, the language that I speak which is Spanish, is directly connected to the Latino culture.

Participants also mentioned throughout their interviews that when the group is diverse, there is more tolerance to their accent as well as to them bringing different perspectives, and that made them feel different, but welcome.

Question 15: Have you ever felt stigmatized or discriminated against because of speaking English with an accent?

When asked if they ever felt stigmatized or discriminated against because of their accent, all but one interviewee felt they were not. For instance, José said that he always felt different, but that he did not feel discriminated against.

Maria, Sofia, and Josefina made different statements, saying that they were more overlooked at the beginning of their time in the U.S., probably because their English
skills were more limited and their accents were thicker. However, Sofia believe that “sometimes you separate yourself” due to lack of confidence on your English skills.

Tony did feel discriminated in class, especially when working in groups: “I have felt a bit discriminated against. It seems like they would make fun of me, you know?” He remembered a time when working with others for an assignment:

I would get excited to share an idea, and they would say that my idea wasn’t correct... Then I went to the professor and the director and let them know what was going on. In the end I turned in the assignment the way the group wanted it, but it hurt to have to do that. It made me feel pretty bad. It just didn’t feel like the same treatment someone would get who speaks the same language.

Question 16: Do you have an example or anecdote that you would like to share?

The interviewees remembered examples of their experiences of speaking English with an accent throughout the interview. It is interesting that when asked, most of the stories they remembered were funny stories.

Josefina shared that her husband was recently buying a new car that had this feature where you can give commands to the car. She said, “When explaining the feature, the car dealer said something to me like You can record phrases with your beautiful accent so that the car can adapt. That was the joke of the family for a while was “now I am more work for the car!” It turned out the car sometimes understands her and sometimes it doesn’t, and when it does not, she always remembers the car dealer saying your beautiful accent.
Josefina also shared something that often happened with her mother-in-law:

“Whenever we are with his mom, she tries to ask me questions about my family. “ Then she will make comments like, ‘Oh, I talked to someone with your same accent’--meaning that she talked to someone whose first language is Spanish. Josefina added,

She has me in a certain stereotype, his family now thinks that someone who has a Spanish accent is from Venezuela...and ... anyone who speaks Spanish is Venezuelan and anyone who speaks Spanish as a first language is related to us...somehow.

Maria also remembered a funny story:

Somebody said that I had said something without an accent and that I was turning into a real Minnesotan because I said a very Minnesotan phrase with a local accent... and I don’t even notice it! ... How did I pronounce it? I don’t know!

Another anecdote she shared was about working with small children: “I have learned after all these years is that kids, special young children more than anything are the best teachers when you try to correct yourself with an accent or to say you made a mistake.”

She stated that children over 3 years old are …let’s say cruel but sincere. They correct you all the time, and will always correct you. It’s a matter of manners not existing in their vocabulary, but it also gives you an opportunity to correct yourself and to learn from them.
Later Maria explained that she has created this sort of self-challenge game to see “how far I can go to disguise my natural accent and how much I can repeat something and the closest to how it sounds.” She said she is now doing it constantly, although she recognized “I never get it to what I want, but it has kind of become like a game of repeating the words.“

Tony shared another funny story that happened at work because of mispronunciation. They were doing an ice-breaking activity where they would pick up a penny, read its year, and talk about something that happened in their life on that year. Everyone would say things like “my penny is from the year 1954 and that year my parents got married.” When it was his turn, “instead of saying penny, I say, My penis is from 1958… so everyone was like in shock as to what I had said but then they understood that I mispronounced it and we all were laughing.“

José shared a strategy he often used to break the ice when presenting or in meetings: “The first thing I let them know that I have a strong accent and if someone can’t understand me, I really don't have a problem with repeating or I won’t be offended if someone does not understand.” He said that usually others do not ask him to repeat, but it helps to make the environment more comfortable.

Question 17: When you go back in time and reflect on your experiences as an international graduate student who speak English with an accent, what do you think?

The final question focused on interviewees’ reflections on their experiences of being an international graduate student who speaks English with an accent and what that has represented in their life. First, revisiting the topic of the impact that speaking with an
accent had had in their learning, the group agreed that learning was harder but not only because of their accent, which did impact it, but rather because the learning happened in another language, that required much more work, and because the way others treated them.

Tony believed the learning goes beyond how to speak, but rather how to communicate: “The English language has expressions with a phonetic base that are very strong which is different than in Spanish. I worked hard to pronounce better, to speak better, to communicate better is my gain.” Tony stated that “one of the things I learned is...my capacity or ability to listen... I listen to the person, not how they speak.” He added, “the cultural experience is invaluable... I learned now that people’s words, because of one word, can have a different meaning that you didn’t mean or do not realize.” He believed that even though being in immigrant and speaking English with an accent was difficult, especially for others to understand what you are trying to communicate, ”that experience was really a gift, to speak better, to communicate better with others.”

Sofia reflected saying that “it was a significant experience because not only we go to a new country... you start to learn more about other cultures.” She also stated that she learned a lot through social interactions about the language and the American culture, and other cultures as well. She believed that one should get to know as many people as you can to learn more, as she was able to do because of being an international graduate student in the U.S.

Reflecting specifically on her learning, Maria said that the experience “has helped me understand better and become more grateful for what I have because it has
taken a lot of strength and I don’t think it came easily.” She believed that studying an advanced degree in English felt like “the work is double when you have to learn and study in a different language. yes, the amount of studying I have done may have been different if I would have done it in my own language.”

Josefina reflection added a valuable point that the experience may be different for each student, depending on many different factors. She said, “If you ask any American that studied with me, their experience at the University would be completely different from mine. Other people’s expectations with their personal life or being a student or at work, is completely different from mine.” She believed expectations and the judgment from others impact how you experience it and about being an international graduate student who speaks English with an accent: ”I feel like as soon as someone hears an accent for the first time they think you’re not here legally and don’t understand how you can be a student.”

In a deeper level, interviewees shared other valuable insights. José first said, “Adaptation, that’s the first thing I think, the ability and capacity to adapt. The ability to break barriers, to overcome obstacles. That’s the first thing I think about.” He later added, “I realize that I am different anyway because of my cultural belief, although I am an American citizen, and I am a U.S. military officer, I am always different in many different ways.” Most importantly for him was the realization that “I don’t give any amount of importance as I did at first. I don’t have to prove anything to anyone anymore, I have overcome many obstacles and I am very proud of what I have conquered here.” Josefina reflected that
It’s a good experience. It’s an experience that will always help me to keep my mind open to anything that I want to do or anything that could happen and looking at it as something I can consider and not something I would never be capable of.

Maria said that nothing prepared you for such experience: “Until you’ve lived through an experience, everything else is just a thought on how everything is going to be… But my experience wasn’t as difficult as I would have imagined.” She also agreed with José’s statement of being proud of what was achieved: “it’s simply feeling more proud of what I have. She also realized that “someone’s potential is greater than what you would imagine.” Overall she reflected that “It’s been a good experience in general and any problem I may have had I have seen it as a learning experience, even if I didn’t see it that way at first.”

**Summary**

This chapter presented the results of the study which was conducted combining a survey and interviews, using a modified version of the Seidman’s (1991) in-depth interview model.

First, the survey results are presented question by question. Results were represented using charts (Appendix A) and tables (Appendix B) to facilitate their interpretation. The results of the interviews were presented next, question by question. Any reference about the participants’ responses was presented using pseudonyms.

The following chapter presents a summary of findings, reflection on findings, and recommendations of this study.
CHAPTER FIVE
FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The goal of this research was to study the impact of accent on learning for adults in multicultural environments, focusing specifically on international graduate students whose first language is not English.

The primary research question of this study was: How do international graduate students whose first language is not English describe the impact of speaking with an accent in their learning in an academic environment? The secondary question was: How do international graduate students whose first language is not English describe the impact of speaking with an accent in a professional environment?

The significance of this study is based on the fact that the U.S. population is diverse and is predicted to grow in the future (Thomson Reuter, 2012). Therefore, it is important for educators to understand the impact diversity has in their classrooms. Moreover, this study is important because it is focused on adult learners in multicultural educational environments and although there are many studies about multicultural education, there are not many studies focused on adults in diverse learning environments, even fewer focused on international students (Banks, 2006; Banks & Banks, 2004, 2010). This study intends to help educators of adult learners understand students from diverse cultural background to improve and facilitate learning of all.
Methodology

This study was conducted combining two qualitative methods, survey and interviews. The combination of different research tools were useful because my interest was not just gathering written data about international students who speak with an accent, but also understanding their experiences and how the participants made meaning of those experiences. This is supported by McMillan and Schumacher who said that complementary mixed methods of research can be used to “elaborate, enhance, illustrate, and clarify the results of one method with that of another method” (2001, p. 542). The selection of the tools was guided by Strauss and Corbin (1998) recommendation that the choice of the type of data to use should be made based on which one has “the greatest potential to capture the types of information desired” (p. 204).

I organized the mentioned research tools following Seidman’s model of three stages for in-depth interviewing because this model looks for “understanding the lived experiences of other people and the meaning they make of that experience” (1991, p. 9). My modification of Seidman’s model consisted on using a combination of one survey followed by interviews to cover the three stages. The survey was useful to understand the characteristics of international graduate students as a sample of a larger group, while the interviews were useful to gain insights of the subjects by understanding their experiences the meaning they made of their experiences.

The survey was done in English and the interviews were in Spanish. It was important for me to design the research tools to encourage their participation and understanding, taking into consideration that research conducted with minority and
multicultural populations could present some challenges related to cultural background and language can be barrier (Banks & Banks, 2004; Padilla, 2004). These authors also believe that researchers must be aware of cultural traditions and traditional customs to ask questions that promote accurate responses from the target population. I felt equipped to conduct this research because I am a Hispanic, my first language is Spanish, I speak English with an accent, and I was an international graduate student as well. Moreover, I was also born in Venezuela as were all the interviewees. That made me aware of cultural traditions and customs of the Hispanic interviewees and also idioms and cultural references of that national origin.

Limitations of the Study

The first limitation of this research was the participants. I was targeting international graduate students who attended the same university I did, they may have had experiences similar to mine. If the scope was expanded to include other educational institutions I could have had different experiences.

The second limitation was the contact information was sometimes limited or updated. I contacted the offices in the university who tracked international graduate alumni, but all efforts were unsuccessful in getting contact information of a larger group of former students. Therefore, I used contact information of former classmates and their peers which was sometimes outdated. Have I had better and more accurate contact information of potential participants, the sample of the international graduate student could be larger and maybe more representative.
The third limitation was limiting the participants of the interviews to Spanish-speaking participants of the survey. This limited the scope of this study by not including international graduate students who speak other languages.

The fourth limitation was that participants all attended the same school and programs as I did. The possibility of knowing me might have affected their responses on the data collection tools. This could be a limitation for some of the participants who could feel more or less comfortable when answering questions, sharing ideas, or reflecting on their experiences with me.

The fifth limitation is not including the educators’ perspectives in this study. A follow-up study would be recommended including the experiences of students and educators, it could be beneficial to broaden perspectives and develop best practices about teaching adults in multicultural environments.

**Summary of Findings**

The participants of the study were adult learners, older than 30 years old, which came to the U.S. as international students to pursue advanced degrees, whose first language was not English and spoke English fluently with an accent. This corresponds with the target of this study. Although that was the goal, there was a predominance of Venezuelans in this study. This was probably due to using my personal contacts to find the participants. In the majority of the cases, an average of 10 years had passed since they came to the U.S., so they had enough time to experience the life and culture of the United States as well as using the English language. That also meant they have had the
opportunity to reflect on their life experiences. The main findings from this small study are summarized next.

Multicultural classrooms are a reality in the U.S., and being an international graduate student required hard work and English proficiency was not enough to succeed. Even though participants claimed that speaking English with an accent did not impact their learning, they recognized it impacted social interactions, self-confidence, and overall their life in the U.S. This could be explained because language is indivisibly connected with identity and ethnicity, creating expectations based on preconceived ideas and assumptions. That may result in discrimination and stigmatization.

Those perceptions and assumptions can have unpleasant consequences in the academic environments like having their credibility questioned, being ignored, or made fun of. The attitude and actions of professors are fundamental to create a welcoming learning environment. Still, adult international graduate students will overcome those obstacles to focus on achieving their goals.

Learning in work environments seemed easier because of being focused in the task at hand, making accent a less relevant factor. What was clear in both environments is that people who have been exposed to other cultures, perspectives, experiences or languages were more tolerant and welcoming.

Finally, participants recognized that being different is good. They also recognized their English skills have improved and their attitude is what has changed the most, paying less attention to other people's reactions and focusing of what they have overcome and achieved.
Reflections on Findings

This section connects topics from the literature review and data from the surveys and interviews and reflects on the process and meanings.

Multicultural Classroom

Participants mentioned being part of advanced degree programs with many international students from different countries. This corroborates the report saying the number of international students have been growing every year in the last 60 years, reaching a record high of over 800,000 international students in the 2012-2013 academic year (ICEF Monitor, 2012; Institute of International Education, 2012)

Some classes in those programs had many American students as well, some from diverse cultural backgrounds. This corresponds with the reality of having multicultural classrooms in a multicultural USA, corroborating the shift in the racial and ethnic distribution of the U.S. population in the last 60 years in a trend that will continue in the future, according to the projections made by the U.S. Census Bureau (Grieco et al., 2012).

English as Second Language

Despite the requirement of taking a certified English proficiency test to be admitted to an academic program in the U.S., participants agreed that was not enough to succeed both inside and outside the academic environment. This corresponds with Andrade and Evans (2009) who stated that mastering English is critical to their academic success and cultural adjustment of international students.
**Hard Work Required**

Participants also recognized that being international students whose first language is not English required hard work. Participants repeatedly mentioned relevant terms like *being harder, needing an extra effort, needing more time*. Interviewees shared experiences that demonstrated what Castañeda (2008) has stated, that being a graduate student requires hard work, long hours of study and self-discipline, and international students have an extra challenge with the language to compete with classmates or those whose first language is English.

**Speaking with an Accent Impacted Life in the U.S.**

The majority of participants believed that speaking English with an accent impacted their life in terms of interacting with others and adjusting to the life in the U.S. Some participants saw this impact as positive and others saw it as negative. Regardless, most participants remembered having difficulties to communicate because speaking English with accent, especially at the beginning of their time in the U.S.

Those experiences manifest what Wan (2001) defined as cultural dissonance, stating that it has implications on the international students’ adjustments and successful learning experiences since it affects their motivation to cope with language inefficiencies, academic issues and social interactions.

**Speaking with an Accent Impacted Self-confidence**

Lack of self-confidence when speaking English was also a common experience for most participants, especially at the beginning. Some participants expressed having few
interactions because feeling embarrassed, uncomfortable, or intimidated because of the possibility of mispronouncing or being misunderstood. There is literature that supports that international students have to overcome the fear to speak up because of their accent or language fluency in order to join discussions (Andrade & Evans, 2009) and the mastering of English is crucial to succeed while studying in the U.S. (Malone, Nelson, & Nelson, 2004).

**Language, Identity and Ethnicity interconnected**

Some participants mentioned that international students used to work and stay together while being more distant from American students. That can be explained by Goodenough who states that a person most likely will identify as belonging to a group to which he or she is most similar with by the use of a language in which this person is highly competent (1981). Therefore the use of language creates and identifies affiliation to specific social groups (Gumperz, 1982) which was experienced also the participants of this study.

Additionally, interviewees recognized they felt different not only because of speaking English with an accent but because they speak another language that is part of a culture, in this case the Hispanic culture. That cultural identity is larger than the language they speak; it involves values, beliefs, food, and music, among other factors. That identification helped them get together as a group.

The reasoning supporting that relationship is that communications do not happen disconnected from culture. According to Fought (2006), when communicating in a social context, a person combines internal and external factors defined by his or her ethnic identity. The author explains that language is only one of the internal factors
along with speech, fluency, accent for instance, and they are combined with external factors like heritage for instance. This is what Lippi-Green defines as communicative competence as the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately with people from other language and cultural backgrounds (1997).

That does not mean that the person who speaks a language and self-identifies with a specific ethnic or cultural group cannot adopt a second language and identity as his or her own. The participants of this study stayed in the U.S. after achieving their advanced degrees, have lived in English-speaking countries for many years, have adopted the English language as their current language, and have embraced the American culture.

The relationship between language and identity is so important for persons with diverse backgrounds, like the participants of this study, that most develop the ability to code switch, where different languages and values are used according to the environment on where they are. The interviewees explained how they use one or both languages depending on situations or environments they are involved with.

This corresponds with Lippi-Green (1997) who stated that these individuals often have to choose between linguistic and cultural codes used in their native versus non-native groups when wanting to signal belonging. This perfectly fits the reality of the international graduate students involved in this study. It also fits the concept of a multicultural society stated in the literature review where different groups share different socio-cultural heritages, similarities, and identities, beyond national and ethnic boundaries, as defined by Banks and Banks (2010).
Impact of Accent in Social Interactions

This is important in the context of this study, which is focused on the impact that accents have in learning because learning happens in a social context where students exchange ideas and goals, discuss topics to expand their understanding, learn from each other as well as from professors using language (Kozulin, 2003; Merriam, 2001). Therefore the way learners speak influences their learning experiences (Derwing & Munro, 2009).

To begin with, if a student speaks with an accent it may be difficult for others to understand him or her (Lippi-Green, 1997). This was experienced by all the participants of this study who speak English with an accent. As stated by the interviewees, accent was the main factor impacting social interactions because it affected communications. Interviewees mentioned situations where speaking with an accent generated reactions in others which manifested differences: different language, different pronunciation, and different culture. As participant shared, sometimes is a facial expression, a gesture, or the body language of the hearer that shows difficult to understand, confusion or a different disposition towards the speaker. Sometimes is just a comment or a tone of disappointment when they say you speak with an accent or ask where are you from. The bottom line is the speaker knows when they are treated differently because speaking English with an accent.

This corresponds with the literature that speaking with an accent is often associated with specific cultural values. Moreover, authors agreed that accent is the
largest predictor of ethnicity, after physical appearance and the way one is dressed (Atagi, 2003; Derwing & Munro, 2009; Lippi-Green, 1997). Authors like Rakic, Steffens, and Mummendey found evidence of the importance of accents in ethnic perceptions and social categorization made by listeners (2011).

Fought (2006) talks about accent hallucination where the mind can create accents where none exist, which she explains is due to the expectations about language and ethnicity overriding the actual speech in the minds of the hearers (p.186).

I believe this explains that invisible barrier mentioned in chapter one which can definitely impact how people can be categorized by others.

**Discrimination and Stigmatization**

The importance of those preconceived ideas and assumptions made when listening to a person who speaks English with an accent is the consequences of those perceptions, what further actions may happen based on those perceptions. Lippi-Green (1994) believes for instance that there is accent discrimination in the court system and in the workplace.

Lippi-Green also considers that when people reject an accent they also reject the person speaking (1997). Previous studies that show that people discriminate more based on accent that on looks (Derwing & Munro 2003; Lippi-Green, 1994). Other authors believe that society is fast to point out differences rather than similarities, especially when a person that looks or sounds different or looks familiar but behaves in an unusual way (Goodenough, 1981; Kwon, 2009; Malone, Nelson, & Nelson, 2004).
The majority of the participants of this study did not feel discriminated against because of speaking English with an accent. However, they all remember situations where they did not feel accepted or welcome. My opinion is that participants overcame those unpleasant experiences, made them learning experiences, and forgot the details about them.

**Different Is Good**

Being different and speaking with an accent is not always bad. Participants mentioned many occasions where they felt welcome and even accepted. They were often admired by others because they came to the U.S. to study and to pursue a better future while leaving everything they had behind. Their academic and professional achievements are also admired by others. After all most people in the United States do not have advanced degrees.

There was a revelation in the experiences shared by the interviewees. The all agreed that those who are welcoming to people who speak with an accent are usually people who have been exposed to other cultures, perspectives, experiences or languages. These are people who recognize that speaking English with an accent means these persons speak more than one language. The bottom line is these people value different opinions and perspectives, and difference in general.

This corresponds with Fought’s (2006) statement that there are different perceptions of speakers who speak with an accent. The usual example is the different attitude towards a person who speaks English with a British accent compared to a person who speaks English with Latino accent. The British accent is considered charming or
belonging to an educated person, whiles the Latino accent is probably perceived as uneducated or their legality is questioned. This was corroborated by experiences of some participant of this study who were involved in situations where they were perceived according to a stereotype of being an illegal immigrant because of speaking English with a Latino accent.

The Academic Environment

Some participants remembered that their credibility was questioned by classmates because of speaking English with a Latino accent in the academic environment. This corresponds with Kwon (2009) who stated that not being able to master their English skills can make international students feel ignored and left out by their classmates and professors. There may be unpleasant situations of classmates making fun of others, which was something shared by some of the interviewees. These students can also feel intimidated because they fear mispronouncing a word, which was also mentioned by some interviewees.

However, the possible consequences go beyond having difficulties in communicating or having social interactions. For instance, if a professor ignores the input of students who speak with an accent, he or she is opening the doors for classmates to ignore those students as well, which can create a hostile learning environment for this set of students.

The Role of Educators

It was clear the participants believed that educators need to be aware of the impact they have when reacting to diverse population in class and how their behavior
can contribute to facilitate or not social interaction of their students, which eventually will affect their learning (Nieto & Zoller Booth, 2010).

Educators are responsible for setting the ground rules and the tone in class. Interviewees shared experiences where their professors did and did not establish clear rules for interactions in class that were based on respect of opinions and differences. By doing so or not, they do more than setting rules in class. Their attitude can be fundamental for teaching all students how to accept and work with persons from different backgrounds and cultures. Such impact goes beyond the classroom by transforming students’ views and perspectives. Therefore, the role that educators play when teaching adult learners about diversity can be of central importance for society as well. Students who know how to work with diverse classmates will be better equipped to deal with differences outside the classroom. This impact may help us all to make an already diverse society in a learning opportunity to transform individuals and achieve a society where all can improve and strive.

When the adult learners are also international students, the classroom is a multicultural learning environment. Connerley and Pedersen stated the importance of awareness by educators to be prepared to deal with the tension, challenges and difficulties of teaching in multicultural environments (2005). I would also argue that educators have to be aware of their own assumptions and preconceived ideas when teaching multicultural students because “culture can encourage or discourage transformative thought” (Mezirow, 1991, p. 3).

**Adult Learners**
Another important factor to be considered by educators is that international graduate students are adult learners who should not be categorized as one group with the same characteristics or needs because they have different cultural backgrounds, beliefs, and systems of values (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2012). Therefore, their educators cannot use the same strategies, practices and foundational concepts as teaching youth or children (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2012).

Educators also need to be aware of the guiding principles of adult learning (Knowles, 1984). These students want to know what, why, and how they will learn something, and they have prior experiences, resources, and mental models. If these students are mistreated by educators who do not respect them as persons because of stereotypes or misconceptions, they will just disengage and disconnect.

However, even if professors fail to provide a welcoming environment, and the reactions of classmates are discouraging, international graduate students will overcome those obstacles and focus on their goal. This happens because they are adult learners who are self-directed, can set their own goals, and organize their own learning around their present life needs, as stated by Knowles, the father of Andragogy (Merriam, 2001).

**Impact of Accent in Learning**

Narrowing the focus on the impact of accent in learning in the academic environments, different authors believe that international graduate students whose first language is not English, or have difficulties with their English proficiency, may be finding their learning impacted because of their language barriers as well as their cultural backgrounds (Kwon, 2009; Swaminathan & Alfred, 2001).
Most participants of this study recognized that speaking English with an accent impacted their communications and understanding in class. However, they did not believe it impacted their learning. Interestingly, they did recognize they had to work hard to understand concepts and do assignments as well as improving their English skills, which is a contradiction. All participants mentioned they had to work harder that what they would do if classes were in their native language.

I believe participants answered that accent did not impact their learning because they did learn, and they did achieve their degrees. Therefore, they did not see accent as a factor that prevented them from learning. However, I believe this was because these participants viewed such impact not as negative but rather a challenge and a motivation to learn and perform better.

**Work Environment**

Comparing the experience of the participants in class with their workplace, they mentioned that the reactions are the same at first. But once others are used to their accent, the focus moves to the at hand. Some respondents also believed the professional or business environments were more tolerant to them because they are also more accustomed to people speaking English with an accent, and the workforce may be diverse depending on the line of business. Their observations corroborated what was stated before, that those with experience in diverse environments are more tolerant and welcoming, and therefore, there is less pressure and learning happens easily.

Another important factor mentioned was that the academic English used in class was more complicated than the regular English, making interactions easier in non-
academic environments. Some talked about social interactions happening in informal environments were more open minded, more relaxed made it easier.

**It Gets Better**

Most respondents believed their English proficiency improved in time. They mentioned that improving grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation skills were part of their continued learning experiences. Participants also expressed that having more interaction with others was a determining factor in improving their language skills. There was also agreement about being more confident about speaking English compared to when they arrived.

This makes sense. Spitzberg (1989) in Taylor (1998) explained the multicultural learning scenario from the perspective of interpersonal communication theories where a foreign student, or in his definition the stranger, and the individual from the host culture communicate to evolve the way they perceived each other. This changed or revised interpretation of our cultural ways is often “the result of our efforts to understand a different culture that contradicts our own previously accepted presuppositions” (Mezirow, 1991, p. 168). Adding the perspective of adult learners they are, these students will find the reason and motivation to get the job done, either in the academic or the professional environment. However, the journey can be more or less pleasant depending of the people they encounter during their journey.

**Final Reflection**

All participants reflected on their experience as international students who speak English with an accent. All of them found them invaluable. They learned to adapt, they
learned to be open to new experiences. They also learned about other cultures and about their own. They learn to learn from difference. They learn what multiculturalism is.

They also mentioned that they know the difficult situations and the unpleasant reactions will continue to happen. They are aware of that they speak English with an accent and most likely that is not going to change. They all agreed that they will continue working to improve their English skills.

However, the most significant change they have experienced was their personal attitude about it. They all said they did not pay too much attention to them as they did at the beginning of their time in the U.S. They all felt proud of their achievements and they felt empowered to achieve any other challenge they have in the future. They believed that anything is possible and that is a very powerful conclusion. Here is José’s reflection as closing statement:

After being the workforce for ten years, in a technical department doing what few individuals know how to do or have the necessary education to do it and to have to present results with executives, with the government, with people from other organizations I can tell you that I handle it in a more productive way… I am different anyway because of my cultural belief I am always different in many different ways... I don’t give any amount of importance as I did at first. I don’t have to prove anything to anyone anymore, I have overcome many obstacles and I am very proud of what I have conquered here.

Recommendations
The goal of this research was to study the impact of accent in learning for adults in multicultural environments, focusing specifically on international graduate students whose first language is not English. The research questions focused on the impact that speaking English with an accent had in learning in academic and professional environments. Based on the finding of this study, the researcher has three recommendations for further studies and actions.

The findings of the study were clear for the participants of few graduate programs of one Midwestern university. The sample of participants who responded is small. Additionally the interviewees were from the same country.

The first recommendation of the researcher is to expand the study to a broader audience to include more universities and colleges, more programs, and international graduate students from different countries. Such studies will be helpful to understand international graduate students better and adjust practices to facilitate the learning of them and of all students.

The second recommendation is to include the perspective of educators and administrators in related researches. This study only listened to the voices of the students, but studying in a higher education institution involves educators and administrators too. It would be interesting to listen to the voices of educators who teach international graduate students to determine how they experience teaching international graduate students as well as all students in multicultural classrooms. Likewise, the perspectives of administrative personnel could provide decisive input on how rules and procedures can be inclusive to all students, Americans and international.
The third research recommendation is to expand studies about speaking English with an accent. The United States is a nation with a history rooted in immigration with a population increasingly more diverse in a society that gathers multiple cultures and languages. Speaking English with an accent happens beyond foreigners coming to the U.S. to study as international students. It would be interesting to expand on the impact of speaking English with an accent to include national born participants.

**Recommendations for Further Actions**

The first recommendation is that educational institutions should provide training and resources to all employees to facilitate cultural inclusiveness. These should also include the topic of speaking English with an accent to facilitate understanding and help social interactions.

The need for cultural inclusiveness goes beyond the boundaries of the classroom. International students should find a welcoming environment when for instance doing paperwork at their schools, or when needing technical support, or when visiting the library. Therefore, cultural inclusiveness training should reach all employees to impact their practices and behaviors.

Educational institutions may be looking to increase global perspectives by admitting international students. However, that intention may not be effective if international students don’t feel accepted and welcome.

The second recommendation is that educators should be prepared to teach multicultural students. This involves cultural inclusiveness as mentioned, but also teaching strategies that facilitate learning for all students.
Educators need to establish clear rules for respectful interactions in class. Educators should facilitate intergroup activities to avoid isolation of students by ethnic groups. Educators should include international perspectives to their curriculum to encourage class participation. Educators also need to know how to address difficult situations related to cultural differences.

Strategies like the mentioned will help educators provide learning environments that welcome differences and facilitate learning of all students. Additionally, educators need to be aware of their own preconceived ideas and assumptions to avoid stereotypical references or promoting alienation and mistreatment of students.

The third action recommended involves school administrators. In addition to be involved in the implementation and practice of the previous two recommendations, they should include diversity in institutional strategies, plans, and practices. Additionally, administrators should make sure that their educational institutions have established mechanisms and procedures to facilitate environment that welcome cultural differences and also address when culturally different students are mistreated or discriminated against.

The benefits of having institution-wide cultural inclusiveness, multicultural teaching practices, and strategies that value diversity go beyond international students. They are fundamental to be considered when reaching out potential domestic students from diverse cultural backgrounds. I believe educational institutions will not be successful in multicultural USA unless diversity is seriously considered.
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http://www.iie.org/Services/Project-Atlas/United-States/International-Students-In-U.S.


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Figure 1: Foreign Born Population In The United States 1850-2010

(Grieco, Acosta, De la Cruz, Gambino, Gryn, Larsen, & Trevelan, 2012)

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census of Population, 1850 to 2000 (in Gibson and Jung, 2005), and American Community Survey, 2010.
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(Grieco, Acosta, De la Cruz, Gambino, Gryn, Larsen, & Trevelan, 2012)
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(Thomson Reuter, 2012).

(Based on U.S. Census report http://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2015/demo/p25-1143.pdf)
Figure 4: International Students in The U.S., 1952 - 2013 (Brown, 2012)

In 2012/13

819,644

international students studied at U.S. colleges and universities

The number of international students studying in the U.S. grew by 7% over the prior year and is now at a record high.
Figure 5: Graduates & Undergraduates International students in the U.S.,

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According to your previous responses, you have been an international graduate student in the United States, right?

correct 23  100%
no 0
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Figure 16. Survey Question 9: Years Lived in The United States
Figure 17. Survey Question 4 (pie): Country of Origin

**Country of Origin**

- Colombia: 8.7%
- Mexico: 8.7%
- Romania: 4.3%
- Venezuela: 4.3%
- Blank: 73.9%
Figure 18. Survey Question 4 (bars): Country of Origin
Figure 19. Survey Question 5: First Language
Figure 20. Survey Question 6: English Fluency

Do you speak English fluently?

- yes: 19 (82.6%)
- no: 0 (0%)
- most times: 4 (17.4%)
Figure 21. Survey Question 10: Frequency of Interactions in English

How often do you interact with others in English?

- all the time: 21 (91.3%)
- some times: 2 (8.7%)
- not much: 0

91.3%
Figure 22. Survey Question 15: English Proficiency at Arrival

How do you think your English proficiency was when you first came to the US?

- Basic: 8, 34.8%
- Good enough: 13, 56.5%
- Advanced: 1, 4.3%
Figure 23. Survey Question 14: English Proficiency Test

Did you take a test or course to certify your English proficiency before being admitted to a higher ed institution in the United States?

- yes: 22 (95.7%)
- no: 1 (4.3%)
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Do you think you speak English with an accent

- yes: 23 (100%)
- no: 0 (0%)
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Figure 27. Survey Question 12: Impact of Speaking English With An Accent

How do you think that speaking English with an accent has impacted your life in the US?

- yes 18 78.3%
- no 5 21.7%
Figure 28. Survey Question 11: Impact of Speaking English With An Accent
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>basic</td>
<td>I feel much more comfortable to speak to anybody, to speak in public and to just say what I feel I want to say. Few years ago, I used to doubt a lot more before I was feeling comfortable to speak up. I have noticed that I can read much faster than few years ago, and also keep more ideas in my mind without switching to my native language.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>It's better now. I have studied English, and practiced.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>When I took the test, I was able to read and write to an acceptable level. The test did not have any component to measure speech proficiency in English. That changed few years ago.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>However, the speech proficiency has improved after communicating everyday in English and listening the speech patterns of native English speakers (Standard American English). Nevertheless, when working with people from other English speaking countries (Australians, Britons, etc) and people from the South of the United States I discovered that my coworkers from the mid-west region of the U.S. had a hard time with these accents as well.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes it was. I was able to achieve an advanced proficiency level.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes, it has improved considerably.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes. I have been living in a English speaking country the last four years.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes. Months after being immersed in the classroom interactions as well as social good enough</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>good</td>
<td>a lot. Over the years my english skills have improved</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>enough</td>
<td>I have learned a lot of vocabulary and I feel more confident speaking in English. However, I still have a thick accent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>It has improved significantly.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Now I only think in English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>When you are newcomer has the knowledge but not the practice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>One does not know the English's idioms, the person only knows an academic English.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Proof of that is the toefl, that none or very few Americans would approve, and that is a prerequisite for all foreigners to study at an American university.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes the most I studied and interact with others I improve my written and spoken language. I did not change my accent but improved my grammar and became more confident</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes, always learning new words, expressions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes, I continuously realize that my level of communication in English improves overtime. Every so often when I was in school I would say: Now I can understand everything! Realizing than even when I’ve said that in the past I still wasn’t getting 100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes, i m considerably more fluent now</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes, increased fluency and more awareness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes, practice and interacción con English speaking people hELPS tune out theory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes. My interactions in academic classes, lectures, papers, presentations, and interactions with other classmates and professors increases my efficiency in increasing my language skills.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>yes. My english is better now. And I am not afraid of making mistakes either.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>advanced</td>
<td>By far ... Colloquial English is not taught in schools.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2. Survey question 12 : Impact of accent in their lives, “yes” answers & question 13

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>12.- How do you think that speaking English with an accent has impacted your life in the U.S.? 13.- Could you please expand your previous answer?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>yes</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>○ Could make communications more difficult at times</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>○ Having an accent can often be perceived as having low level of education and immigrant needs. It may cause insecurity and lack of acceptance with native speakers. However, having an accent has not stopped me from obtaining a high level of education and a professional job. It has labeled me as a foreigner everywhere I go. But there is nothing wrong with that. I am a foreigner anyways.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>○ I don’t think it was negative, people for sure will know that I was from outside but they like my accent (most cases). It might have been harder at first trying to get my message through. I did needed to be careful and speak slowly if I wanted to avoid any confusion. At work I have not issues, actually people love my accent. At school teachers sometimes were more strict, I guess they wanted me to loose some of my accent and be more 'americanize'?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>○ I have noticed that people may need to make an extra effort to keep a deep conversation with me. I feel that some people seem distracted by my accent while I am speaking.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>○ I noticed that some people cannot understand me. Some of them asked me to repeat what I was saying and others no but I can tell they didn't understand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>○ I was teased because people didn't understand me. It takes more time to explain things to people. Sometimes people would approach you when they notice the accent because of the opportunity of learning more about your culture. Some may avoid you when they hear an accent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>○ Individuals often ask for checking what I really want to say and what they understood before asking. The pronunciation of a combination of different vowels which does not exist in Spanish is a challenge for me. Many words with consonants are also a challenge for me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>○ Interactions with people will change the moment they listen to an accent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>○ People look at me weird when they notice my accent. I guess it is not expected. Some people have difficulty understanding me so I have to repeat. That is not a problem but some people are rude</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>○ Perception from peers with insular mindset that i may not be a sme or lack knowledge.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>○ Pronunciation is always an issue with few words, accentuation could be an issue with words that are grammatically similar to English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>○ Some people are less willing to pay extra attention or make any effort to try to communicate with someone with an accent and simply shut down any communication. In a business setting you don't want to repeat yourself all the time if someone has trouble understanding you because of your accent. One can be seen as not a very effective communicator.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>○ Some people were considerate and try their best to understand my English. Other people were just rude and pretended they don't understand me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>○ Sometimes in a positive manner and sometimes in a negative way.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>○ Sometimes you have to more mindful about how to speak so that people understand you a bit better.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3. Survey question 12 : Impact of accent in their lives, “no” answers & question 13

12.- How do you think that speaking English with an accent has impacted your life in the U.S.?
13.- Could you please expand your previous answer?

| no | ○ I think people will expect an accent upfront even before any conversation begins.  
○ Since my arrival in Minnesota 16 years ago, I have always worked hard to improve my English phonetics and English speaking skills. I have been teaching college level courses in English for more than 10 years, and so my accent has not hindered my professional life in the U.S..  
○ Speaking slowly has helped to allow listeners understanding |
### Survey question 19: Impact of speaking English with an accent in class

#### Please share an example

- Don’t think that having an accent impacted too much. Specially because of the class diversity. I shared some courses with people from different countries and therefore a variety of accents.
- Greatly, encourage people conversation and help to improve by speaking
- I feel some people doubted the credibility of my ideas because I speak with an accent.
- I noticed that the international students ended up working together in class assignments or socially interacting among ourselves outside of the classroom. I am not sure this was due to communication style or for personal interests.
- If the class was a class with a greater number of foreign students the interaction was richer. On the other hand, if the class had a greater number of native English speakers the interactions and exchanges were different.
- I’m introvert and I think I avoid situations where I wouldn’t be comfortable only speaking English. I’d prefer to go to an event where I new there is going to be someone who speaks my language.
- Sometimes it gives you some advantage, or at least as an excuse.
- I tend to look for other international students, even if they didn't speak the same language. Looking for people who would go through a similar experience.
- My English was so basic that my social interaction in class was very low
- Repeating myself multiple times hoping someone will catch what I want to say . It’s a little frustrating when you can’t tell the pronunciation difference between a native English speaker and yourself . This made a little bit shy participating in classes
- Sometimes, my ideas were not understood as I though. Consequently, my ideas were not considered in class participation.
- Sure! Because I felt intimidated, I felt discriminated, until I realized that there were people who pronounce worse than me.
- Until I internalized that does not diminish my ability to learn and be successful.
- At times I felt embarrassed to interact with my classmates and at times to ask questions. I was afraid I was going to be misunderstood or that I was going to mispronounce words
- Can be positive, especially having others who speak and accent and also Americans who don’t care about it and follow you during conversations
- honestly, I am a very outspoken person and I didn’t feel like I had any issues as I was thinking that the only way to get better at English was to speak it.
- I didn’t feel any impact with peers
- I don’t think it affected my social interaction. Maybe my class participation of i wasn’t sure I have structure my ideas right in English. I might have felt less confident to speak out
- I think speaking English as a second language definitely made me slower in my class interactions in the beginning. I would try to think of a clever answer to the instructor’s question just to realize that by the time I raised my hand the instructor was already moving to the next topic. It took some time to catch up.. Also, I consider myself a well-educated person. However, it’s definitely hard to sound smart when my vocabulary in English is just a fraction of what I can say in my mother tongue.
- It certainly does to some extend. When most of the students in class were internationals, I tended to participate more than when they were Americans. I guess it was a sort of stage fright.
- It did not impact my social interactions.
- Not really
Table 5- Survey question 20: Differences when interacting in other environments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>20 Was this different when socially interacting in other environments?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>○ No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>○ Mostly the same. However, classrooms are a bit more tolerant than the business environment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>○ biz school brings some of the taste from corporate environments. Sometimes (too often) happens in corp america</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>○ I feel that in other environments people seem more open to appreciate that I speak two languages. In other environments, people usually reinforce that speaking another language is such an advantage, while in the classroom, other students usually made me feel in disadvantage for not speaking English as a my native language.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>○ Not at all, the interactions were the same.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>○ Not really. Outside the classroom I mostly talked in Spanish with relatives and friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>○ Talking academic English is different in talking street English. I have had hard times I understanding slang, or metaphors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>○ Talking English at work was easier, I communicated better.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>○ Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>○ Yes, a little bit because if you’re doing volunteer work or if you join a club, association, church group it’s not the same situation. People are usually nicer and more open minded.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>○ Perhaps at work is similar, because it’s more competitive.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>○ Yes, because in other environment, the people can be more flexible, less rigid, had less censorship, maybe they could understand that I had other language, that I was learning, and they could help me to improve my English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>○ Yes, I think so.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>○ Considerably. In social environments, I was never worried about my accent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>○ No really</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>○ No.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>○ Not really</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>○ some people tried to correct the way I pronounced words, which can be annoying at times.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>○ Yes it was.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>○ When socially interacting with people who knew and accepted me, I felt more comfortable.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>○ Yes, middle of the country people has less range of sounds from foreigners. Therefore, it requires more attention to establish good communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>○ Yes, non academic environments can be harsher, specially due to others awkwardness (sometimes they shut down when hearing an accent)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>○ Yes, there is less pressure to perform well in a more informal setting outside of the classroom or not in front of the instructors</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 6- Survey question 21: relationship with speaking English with an accent

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>21 Do you think that is related to your accented English? or to something else?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>○ No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>○ accent, appearance, the minnesota insularism and being different</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>○ Culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>○ I do believe that the interactions differ depending on the level of cultural competence of the native speakers and their willingness to interact with someone with accented English.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>○ I think is more related to my level of English proficiency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>○ I think it is related mostly to the accent, but also to the &quot;funny&quot; way to express myself. When either talking or writing, I can say things in a different way than Americans. The things I say may be grammatically correct, but still somehow different from the way people here are used to say things. That makes them feel I say things in a &quot;funny&quot; way.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>○ In conferences, I write down my ideas, and then read them. It increases the efficiency in communicating my ideas,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>○ Maybe some people do not want to make the effort to understand others or because different styles and interests</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>○ Mostly the accent, as sometimes I just prefer to go through the trouble of putting my audience through the trouble of interpretation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>○ to relate to others depends on the empathy with them, an accent is only a matter of tolerance, some people just do not want to understand or don't try to understand. The communication does not depend on an accent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>○ Yes, in part. There are other variables too, like knowing or not the topic at matter or even knowing the culture (social rules) idioms.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>○ At times, it's also the grammar. You want to look smart, and not being underestimated.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>○ Certainly to the accent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>○ Cultural differences with an accented English as background noise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>○ I did not have different issues when interacting in the class or outside with others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>○ Many times it is related</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>○ most likely accent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>○ No.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>○ Yes. Having an accent can be sort of embarrassing at times.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 7- Survey questions 18: Impact of using a second language in learning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18 How do you think your learning was influenced by the fact that English is not your first language?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Undoubtedly, it requires and extra effort</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• I had to dedicate more time to my studies compare to the time I spent studying in my own language. I just didn’t know until after I have to go through this experience. I had to look for extra help to make sure I’d do things correctly. You feel you have to prove yourself in class when doing a presentation or writing a paper.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• I had to put more emphasis on : 1. Trying to grasp the material better, and 2. trying to make myself more clear (when people changed their faces in the middle of my statement I immediately explain what I said using different terms).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• I know I spent more time reading the class books, and double checking that I correctly understood what the professor said, than other students (American Students). I could be a much more efficient student if the classes were in my native language.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• I needed to be involved in the American culture in understanding English. How to talk about diversity in Venezuela where the term many not exist, and it is a very high point in USA? —</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• I needed to increase my learning skills because this is what I needed when I was talking English with accent. By now, I am a more active learner than before.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• I went to hamline and completed to graduate degree. I found professors and peers that celebrated the fact of me being different but also found those who valued my ideas as less because my accent and appearance did not confirm their standards instead of the content of the message.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• It was challenging. Executing presentations wasn’t easy, so it required a lot of practice. I needed to pay extra attention to avoid missing anything from my teachers.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• It was difficult</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Misunderstandings of assignments and explanations of concepts</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• My learning was not influenced by my pronunciation or accent, my learning only and always will depend of my intellectual capacity, this does not decrease my intelligence.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Self confidence is a big factor on improving and at the beginning is hard to overcome the fact that people might not understand what is being said</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• At the beginning it took a bit longer to read materials and acquire more vocabulary</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• At the beginning of my studies I think I had to work harder than some of my classmates because I first needed to truly understand what I was asked for and then needed to formulate an appropriate answer.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Can be harder to grasp and or explain certain concepts and ideas, especially in a nonacademic environment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• first few years was a little harder as my vocabulary was not that good</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• I do not think it was a problem for me at all.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• I don’t think my learning was negatively influenced by the fact that English is not my first language. But, It definitely took more effort on my part. I had to pay extra attention to follow a fast paced class when sometimes I couldn’t understand 100% of the conversation, especially when idioms or pop culture references were used.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Also, taking notes in a second language it’s definitely harder because there is no time to translate anything. One truly needs to “think” in the second language, which takes time and a conscious effort to achieve.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• It has not been influenced.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• It might be harder sometimes. Especially when completing written assignments, professors did not grade different esl from native speakers and I always wanted to have someone from the U.S. Checking my assignments before delivering them. I</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Require additional time to translate specific terminology</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 8- Summary of Interview participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewee</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Country of Origin</th>
<th>Age at Arrival</th>
<th>International Grad Student</th>
<th>Time in the U.S.</th>
<th>Time in Canada</th>
<th>Current Age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Tony</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Venezuela</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>10 years</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Maria</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Venezuela</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>13 years</td>
<td></td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Josefina</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Venezuela</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>5 years</td>
<td></td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Jose</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Venezuela</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>13 years</td>
<td></td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Sofia</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Venezuela</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>10 years</td>
<td>1 year</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 9- Languages used by Interview participants in social interactions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewee</th>
<th>First Language</th>
<th>Speak English with Accent</th>
<th>Language used in social interactions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Tony</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Maria</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Josefina</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Jose</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Sofia</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix C

Survey
My name is Guadalupe Banuls and I am a graduate student completing a Doctorate of Education program at Hamline University in St. Paul, Minnesota. I plan to conduct a research project focused on international graduate students whose first language is not English, with particular interest in understanding the impact of accent in their social interaction when learning in a multicultural classroom.

This study will be conducted using a combination of surveys and interviews. The main purpose of the survey is to gather background and information about learning in multicultural classrooms from international graduate students whose first language is not English. The purpose of this statement is to request your participation in the survey.

The survey will be conducted in English and your responses will be anonymous. It will take approximately 25 minutes to complete the survey. At the end you will be asked your interest in participating in a follow-up interview. If you agree to this, please provide contact information at the end of the survey.

It is important to know that your participation in this study is voluntary and confidential. If you agree to participate in this study, the confidentiality of your participation and your responses will be strictly protected throughout the study as well as after its completion. Your privacy will be protected by using pseudonyms for those who choose to be interviewed. Again, the survey results will be anonymous. It is also important to know that the survey responses will be securely and electronically stored in a password-protected dedicated computer drive and it will be kept for one year. The potential risks are minimal. You may withdraw from the study at any time with no consequences.

I have received approval from the School of Education at Hamline University for this project. This research is public scholarship and will eventually be available in Hamline University's Bush Library Digital Commons and the information obtained from this project may be published or used in other scholarly ways.

If you agree to participate, please click on the “I agree” checkbox as electronic signature. You can print this statement to keep it for your information. You can also receive a copy of your responses of this survey if an email is provided at the end of the survey.

I appreciate your participation in this study. Please do not hesitate to contact me with any question, comment or concerns you may have at any point of this project.

Guadalupe Banuls
My email address is xxxxxx and my cell phone number is: xxxxxx
You can send any correspondence to this mail address: xxxxx
Survey

1.- Do your agree with the terms of this study?

Please provide the following information:
2.- Gender
3.- Age
4.- What is your country of origin?
5.- Which is your first language or mother tongue?
6.- Do you speak English fluently?
   □ yes    □ no    □ most times
7.- According to your previous responses, you have been an international graduate student in the United States, right?
   □ Correct    □ No

Please provide information about your life in the U.S.:
8.- How old were you when you came to live in the United States?
9.- How many years did you live in the United States?
   □ more than 10 years □ 5 to 10 years □ 3 to 5 years □ 1 to 3 years □ less than a year
10.- How often do you interact with others in English?
    □ all the time □ some times □ not much
11.- Do you think you speak English with an accent
    □ Yes    □ No
12.- Do you think that speaking English with an accent impacted your life in the U.S.?
    □ Yes    □ No
13.- Could you please expand your previous answer?

Share some of your experiences as an international graduate student in the U.S.
14.- Did you take a test or course to certify your English proficiency before being admitted to a higher ed institution in the United States?
    □ Yes    □ No
15.- How do you think your English proficiency was when you first came to the U.S.?
    □ Basic    □ Good Enough    □ Advanced
16.- Has that changed since then? Please explain
17.- Have you ever been told that you speak English with an accent?
    □ Never    □ Some Times    □ Often
18.- How do you think your learning was influenced by the fact that English is not your first language? Please explain
19.- How do you think that speaking with an accent impacted your social interaction in class? Please share an example
20.- Was this different when socially interacting in other environments?
21.- Do you think that is related to your accented English? or to something else?
22.- Do you have any final comment or experience that you want to share with the researcher?
Final remarks. - THANKS!

Thank you very much for participating in this survey.

Please remember that the confidentiality of your participation and your responses will be strictly protected throughout the study as well as after its completion.

If you want to receive a copy of your responses, please add your email address below

Follow up interviews

The following phase of this study includes face-to-face interviews with some of the participants responding this survey. Your participation in this phase of the study is also voluntary and your responses will be confidential, and your privacy will be protected by using pseudonyms.

If you would like to participate in a follow up interview please select “I agree” below and add your contact information

"I want to participate in a follow up interview "

☐ I Agree ☐ I do not Agree

Contact Information

You will be contacted to set up a convenient date and time for the interview. Please add a phone number, email address, and any other information I can use to reach you
Appendix D

Interviews
Consent Letter for the Interview

Month, Day. Year

My name is Guadalupe Banuls and I am a graduate student completing a Doctorate of Education program at Hamline University in St. Paul, Minnesota. I plan to conduct a research project focused on international graduate students whose first language is not English, with particular interest in understanding the impact of accent in their social interaction when learning in a multicultural classroom.

This study will be conducted using a combination of surveys and interviews. The main purpose of the interview is to gather experiences about learning in multicultural classrooms from international graduate students whose first language is not English and the meaning they make for those experiences. **The purpose of this letter is to request your participation in the interview.**

The Interview will be conducted in Spanish and your responses will be confidential. It will take approximately 50 minutes to complete the interview. The interview will be recorded and transcribed for analysis. In some cases a follow up interview may be needed.

It is important to know that your participation in this study is voluntary and confidential. If you agree to participate in this study, the confidentiality of your participation and your responses will be strictly protected throughout the study as well as after its completion. Your privacy will be protected by using pseudonyms for those who choose to be interviewed.

It is also important to know that the recording and transcripts of the interviews will be securely and electronically stored in a password-protected dedicated computer drive and it will be kept for one year. The potential risks are minimal. You may withdraw from the study at any time with no consequences.

I have received approval from the School of Education at Hamline University for this project. This research is public scholarship and will eventually be available in Hamline University's Bush Library Digital Commons and the information obtained from this project may be published or used in other scholarly ways.

If you agree to participate, please fill out and sign the Consent Signature Sheet attached and return it to me. You can keep this statement and the interview questions for your information.

I appreciate your participation in this study. Please do not hesitate to contact me with any question, comment or concerns you may have at any point of this project.

Guadalupe Banuls
My email address is xxxx and my cell phone number is: xxxxx
You can send any correspondence to this mail address: xxxx
Consent Signature Sheet for the Interview.

Participant copy (English)

Month, Day. Year

By signing this form I agree to participate in the face-to-face interviews as part of the research study conducted by Guadalupe Banuls in order to complete her Doctorate in Education from Hamline University.

I understand that the main purpose of the interviews is to gather experiences of international graduate student with particular interest in understanding the impact of accent in their social interaction when learning in a multicultural classroom.

I understand that my participation in this study is voluntary and that I may withdraw from this research project at any time. I also understand the interview will be recorded and transcribed, and that my response will be kept secure and confidential.

Interviewee:

Name: ____________________________

Signature: ________________________

Date: ____________________________

I appreciate your participation in this study.

Please do not hesitate to contact me with any question, comment or concerns you may have at any point of this project. My email address is xxxx and my cell phone number is: xxxxx You can send any correspondence to this mail address: xxxx

Thanks, Guadalupe Banuls

Participant Copy
Interviewer Protocol

- **Institution**: Hamline University - School of Education
- **Research Project**: How do international graduate students whose first language is not English describe the impact of accent in social interactions when learning in multicultural classrooms?
- **Interviewer**: Guadalupe Banuls
- **Language used**: ☐ Spanish ☐ English ☐ Other __________________
- **Interviewee**: ________________________________
- **Location, date and time of interview**: ________________________________
- **Interview Status**: ☐ scheduled ☐ consent signed ☐ recorded ☐ transcribed ☐ analyzed

**Introductory and explanatory remarks:**
Thanks for accepting to be interviewed as part of my research project. I would like to remind you that the main purpose of the interview is to gather experiences about learning in multicultural classrooms from international graduate students whose first language is not English, and the meaning of those experiences.
The interview will be conducted in Spanish and it will take approximately 50 minutes to complete. The interview will be recorded. Recording and transcripts of the interview will be securely kept for one year. The confidentiality of your participation will be strictly protected throughout and after the study. Your privacy will be protected by using pseudonyms. You may withdraw from the study at any time with no consequences.

**Development of Interview Questions (Interview questions available in next page)**
- **Question**: (Time to answer)
  
  Interviewer notes:
  ...

**Getting ready to finish / Final Remarks**
I really appreciate your participation in this study. You have my contact information in the Consent letter. Please do not hesitate to contact me with any question, comment or concerns you may have at any point of this project.

**Post Interview Comments and/or Observations:**
Interview Questions. - English

1. According to your survey, you have been an international graduate student in the U.S., right?
2. Please share your age, your country of origin, and your first language.
3. How old were you when you came to the U.S. to study?
4. Do you currently live in the U.S.? How many years have you lived in the U.S.?
5. How often do you interact with others in English?
6. Have you been ever told that you speak English with an accent?
7. Describe how others react when they note you speak English with an accent.
8. How do you think that having an accent impacted your social interactions in class when you were an international graduate student in the U.S.?
   Please share an example
9. Has accent impacted also your interactions with your professors?
   Please share an example
10. Do you think your learning was impacted by having an accent?
11. Do you think that speaking English with an accent has impacted the way you interact with others at work? Please share an example
12. Do you think that speaking English with an accent has impacted the way you interact with others in other environment? Please share an example
13. Has that evolved since you first came to live in the United States?
14. Did you ever feel “different” while living in the U.S.? Please share your experiences.
15. Have you ever felt stigmatized or discriminated against because of speaking English with an accent?
16. Do you have an example or anecdote that you would like to share?
17. When you go back in time and reflect on your experiences as an international graduate student who speak English with an accent, what do you think?
   Please feel free to share any other experience, insight or comment you want about your experiences about the impact that speaking English with an accent have had in your life
1. De acuerdo a las respuesta de su cuestionario, usted ha sido un estudiante internacional de posgrado en los Estados Unidos, correcto?
2. Por favor diga su edad, país de origen, y cuál es su primer idioma o lengua materna
3. Que edad tenía usted cuando vino a los Estados Unidos a estudiar?
4. Vive usted actualmente en los Estados Unidos? Por cuántos años ha usted vivido en los EEUU?
5. Cuán frecuentemente habla usted Inglés?
6. Alguien le ha dicho alguna vez que usted tiene acento cuando habla Inglés?
7. Describa por favor cómo reaccionan las personas cuando notan que usted habla Inglés con acento?
8. Cómo cree Usted que tener acento impactó sus interacciones sociales en clase cuando era un estudiante internacional de posgrado en EEUU? Por favor comparta un ejemplo
9. Impactó igualmente el acento las interacciones con sus profesores? Por favor comparta un ejemplo
10. Cómo cree Usted que hablar Inglés con acento ha impactado su aprendizaje?
11. Cómo cree Usted que hablar Inglés con acento ha impactado la manera en que usted interactúa con otros en el trabajo? Por favor explique más en detalle
12. Cómo cree Usted que hablar Inglés con acento ha impactado la manera en que usted interactúa con otras situaciones o ambientes?
13. Ha eso evolucionado desde que usted vino a vivir en los Estados Unidos por primera vez?
14. Se has sentido usted alguna vez “diferente” mientras vivió en los Estados Unidos? Por favor cuénteme sus experiencias. Ha eso cambiado con el paso de los años?
15. Se ha sentido usted alguna vez discriminado, estigmatizado, dejado de lado, o fuera de un grupo, por hablar Inglés con acento? Puede por favor compartir una experiencia
16. Tiene usted algún ejemplo o anécdota que quiera compartir?
17. Cuando usted recuerda sus experiencias como estudiante grado internacional que habla Inglés con acento, que reflexión le viene a su mente?