

WHY A PREFERENCE FOR ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE OVER A HERITAGE LANGUAGE

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RESUMEN

El presente estudio explora algunos de los factores lingüísticos, socioculturales y de personalidad que han contribuido para que la autora haya alcanzado un buen dominio del inglés como lengua extranjera, haya aprendido otros idiomas con relativo éxito, pero no haya logrado aprender el árabe, su lengua por herencia.

Palabras clave: lenguas extranjeras, lenguas por herencia, adquisición.

ABSTRACT

This is a linguistic autobiography whose objective is to explore some of the linguistic, socio-cultural and personality factors that have contributed to the fact that the author has successfully acquired English as a foreign language, has experienced varying degrees of success while learning other languages, but has not acquired Arabic, her heritage language.

Key words: foreign languages, heritage languages, acquisition.

1.

The present study is a linguistic autobiography whose main goal is to make sense of the fact that I have successfully acquired English as a foreign language and have experienced varying degrees of success while trying to learn others, but I have completely failed to acquire my heritage language (HL). Fishman (2001: 89) defines heritage languages as those that have

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“a particular family relevance to the learner.” Cho, Cho and Tse (cited in Han 2003) propose that “The HL is the language associated with one’s cultural background and it may or may not be spoken in the home.” Throughout my life, I have had very little access to Arabic, my heritage language, in spite of the fact that both my parents were bilingual. One would think that the relevance that Fishman mentions should be a powerful impetus to the acquisition of the language of one’s ancestors. However, that is not always the case.

"Some immigrants pass on their mother-tongue to their children, and use it in their home and church, but these children rarely pass the language on to their own children, so that the ancestral language is lost by the third generation. This pattern of immigrant language shift has become so familiar that many people assume it is inevitable". (Kymlicka and Patten 2003: 6).

They add that, historically, an “expectation of linguistic integration has been widely shared both by native-born citizens and immigrants themselves.” On the other hand, more than integration, there are strong assimilative pressures in many communities, and speakers of minority languages are expected, and sometimes even forced, to adopt the language of the majority “for their own good.”

I was born in Cartago, Costa Rica in the 1950s. Unlike most of the other babies on my block, I had some of the necessary requirements to be reared bilingually —but I was not. That was my parents’ choice. According to research (Hinton 1999:1), “For many [people] parental insistence on retaining the language and values of the old country [becomes] the source of intergenerational conflict.” That was not our case. I am positive that deep down my parents would have agreed with Genesee’s (1994: 1) claim that “maintenance and development of the home language and culture are pedagogically sound and essential components of any effective educational program.” However, their past experiences had shown them that “being different” was not advantageous.

My father was born in Palestine in 1910. At the age of 16, out of frustration, he decided to immigrate to Central America. He wanted to have a better life and, above all, he wanted to further his education and get a better job; therefore, he moved to El Salvador with some relatives. He worked there, learned to speak Spanish fluently, and met my mother, who was a Spanish-Arabic bilingual. My grandparents on my mother’s side of the family were also Palestinian, and they used Arabic as the home language. Consequently, my mother grew up speaking Arabic at home and Spanish at school and with friends. She never learned to read or write Arabic, however. Moreover, like so many speakers of a language with multiple dialects, when she describes her command of Arabic, she evidences lack of confidence. She insists that she never learned “good” Arabic, meaning she is not a speaker of Classic Arabic.

My parents were married in El Salvador in 1932, and my older brothers were born there. My parents tried their luck with different types of jobs in commerce and agriculture. In the words of El Salvadoran historian Pedro Escalante Arce (2001), they were the type of immigrant that “Llega para trabajar y prosperar con su familia. No le interesa ascender en la colocación social, eso vendrá después como fruto de su trabajo.”¹ However, my father used to tell us with a heavy heart that the government had passed a law expressly forbidding Palestinians to cultivate cotton. I have not been able to find a reference to that specific law, but according to Bustamante (n.d.) in the early 30’s new exclusion laws went into effect in El Salvador to reduce immigration. These laws used selection criteria of three types: mental and physical health, police records, and ethnic background. There was a ban on the immigration of many groups, among which were Blacks, the so-called Gypsies, and Palestinians.

My father, tired of being discriminated against because of his ethnicity, felt that his dreams of a better future for his family would not come true in El Salvador. Consequently, he traveled to Costa Rica hoping his children would not have to endure what he had had to. This event probably marked the beginning of the language shift process in our home. Either consciously or unconsciously, my parents figured that, if their children spoke only Spanish, our chances of blending in and being treated just like the other kids would be greater. MacGregor-Mendoza (2000) aptly describes the status of heritage languages in the world as follows:

Heritage language communities are often comprised of members who have traditionally occupied positions of little political power or social prestige. In general, members of these communities are either immigrants or ethnic minorities who have suffered a history of political discrimination and abuse, or other groups whose members are perceived by the mainstream to be insufficient to warrant any threat to the majority's established language, values, and social structure. Because of their link to communities that are of diminished political standing, heritage languages are often considered by majority communities to be obstacles to the effective assimilation of heritage speakers to the mainstream society.

I think that my parents' decision to give up Arabic was facilitated by the fact that, unlike El Salvador, Costa Rica did not have a close-knit Palestinian community that would promote the use of the language to form bonds with people of a similar background. So I grew up in a monolingual environment—but one rich in linguistic influences. My father had learned Spanish in El Salvador, and my mother, being El Salvadoran, had a foreign accent as well. Even now, at the age of 90, she remembers all the hilarious incidents at the neighborhood store while trying to get her shopping done. For example, once she requested “un botecito” meaning a jar, and the clerk answered that they did not carry those items, thinking that she had meant “a little boat.” In short, that was the linguistic environment where I grew up: mainly Costa Rican Spanish seasoned with wonderful El Salvadoran lexicon.

In spite of my parents' promise not to use Arabic, there were certain occasions when they could not help it, namely, when cursing or blessing. When one curses or blesses, the situation and the topic of the conversation are charged with cultural and emotional factors. Therefore, since those were the only language functions my parents consistently performed in Arabic, they became the only ones my siblings and I became familiar with in a foreign language. Dewaele and Pavlenko (2002: 264) state that “emotion talk, concepts and scripts may differ across cultures . . . as a result, some emotion words may have no translation equivalents.” They later add that “Several studies indicate that in the cases when a second language (L2) is learned postpuberty or even after early childhood, the two languages of an individual may differ in their emotional impact, with the first being the language in which personal involvement is expressed, and the second being the language of distance and detachment.” Harding and Riley (1999:141) talk about “four ‘great untranslatables, that is, jokes, poetry, menus and swearing.”

Struggling to find a place in society once again, my family moved to Limón, on the Atlantic coast when I was two years old. My father was starting a new job in lumbering. He knew nothing about the trade, but he worked his fingers to the bone to provide for his family, and as it turned out, that was the job he did for the rest of his life. In Limón, a large segment of the population spoke an English-based Creole in addition to Spanish. I was never forced to learn that language because all my childhood friends who spoke it were perfectly bilingual. I went to school, and I became literate in Standard Spanish only. However, the school I attended was run by Colombian nuns; therefore, I increased my vocabulary with items from

“Colombian” Spanish. This influence has been long lasting. Now that there are far more Colombian nationals in Costa Rica and many Colombian soap operas on television, the lexicon, the distinct intonation patterns, and the pragmatic norms of the language come back to me and, somehow, make me reminisce about my childhood.

When I was about ten, I came into contact with Standard English. My parents enrolled me in private English lessons three times a week in order to give me a head start. As McPherson (2005: 587) points out, English, being the *lingua mundi*, “enhances [people’s] socio-economic skills and status”, thus making it very desirable. My tutor was an elderly British woman who believed in the importance of drilling until perfect. We would spend hours repeating verb conjugations. I still remember: “I am learning English. You are learning English...” Interestingly enough, I perceived her /lɜ:n/ as /lɔ:n/, and my “learning” became “lorning,” so my older sisters would make fun of me. However, in spite of Mrs. Chase’s demands for a perfect British accent, I did not become bilingual at that time, but this experience most likely influenced my language performance later in life. The effects of instructed second language acquisition are sometimes unexpected, and quite often, not obvious.

When the time came for me to enter high school, I was sent to a boarding school in San José. In seventh grade we had to take both English and French as a foreign language. My English class was painful, mainly because my teacher had what I considered to be a horrible Spanish accent. Probably I was comparing her to Mrs. Chase. To make matters worse, she would teach her lessons in Spanish. I really disliked her. Although I earned good grades in her class, I learned little I could use outside the classroom. French, on the other hand, was a whole new ball game. I fell in love with my teacher. He was about 50 years old, very tall and overweight, and he always kept a glass of water on his desk and, sometimes, even an Alka Seltzer. He was no Apollo, I must confess, but I found him absolutely fascinating. I was only thirteen, and I loved his deep voice. He impressed me with both the depth and range of his knowledge of geography and current affairs; therefore, I did my very best in his class. In fact, I still remember some of the dialogues I memorized back then. However, after two years of instruction, I did not become a Spanish-French bilingual. I still wonder what would have happened had I continued taking French at least throughout high school.

When I was a senior in high school, I became an exchange student. I went to the U.S. for the first time and lived with an American family for a year in a small town in Wisconsin. Soon enough I realized that what I had learned with my British tutor and with my high school teacher was very limited. Although I had been an honor student and had passed the English test they gave exchange students before going to the U.S., I could not use my English to communicate even minimally in a real-life situation. It took me about four months to start to do so. One night my host father told a joke at the dinner table, and to my astonishment, I found myself laughing out loud. It is obvious that in order to “get” a joke, one must understand the language. Likewise, trying to understand a joke steers your attention away from the form of the language and toward its meaning. In fact, many language-teaching experts describe the advantages of using humor in the classroom as a way to lower anxiety and increase motivation. Medgyes (2002: 5) explains the linguistic benefits: “most humorous stuff is deeply embedded in language,” and he adds that teachers can “use language to make humor accessible for students and, conversely, use humor to make the language accessible.” In any case, that night I realized my English had improved a great deal. Without my consciously knowing it, I was starting my personal road to bilingualism. Although I never

received ESL classes in the US, living in an English-speaking community had provided me with an acquisition-rich environment. By the end of that year, I could function quite well in English. I graduated from high school, socialized with American friends, and was able to look after myself in a foreign language. I had an accent, but intuitively knew that there was very little I could do about it, and consequently, this did not bother me. In fact, it pleased me to see that some people found my accent “cute.” Even though I had had some English instruction during my childhood, if you believe in some sort of critical period, you would have to side with Brown (2000:59) who asserts that “in terms of statistical probability... it is clear that the chances of any one individual commencing a second language after puberty and achieving a scientifically verifiable authentic native accent are infinitesimal.”

After a year in the U.S., I came back to Costa Rica and entered college. I had always known that I wanted to be a teacher, but I did not know what I wanted to teach. I liked biology and also literature, but nothing seemed to be completely right. It was difficult to confront that dilemma. By the time I took the admission test at the University of Costa Rica, I had realized that, if I wanted to maintain the English proficiency that had cost me so much effort, I had to keep using the language: that is why I decided to become an English teacher.

When I was in college I met the man who would eventually become my husband, and following the family tradition, he was a foreigner. When we first met, he had recently arrived from Venezuela, and his Spanish was quite different from standard Costa Rican Spanish. In terms of phonology, the most salient feature was that the sound [s] in final position was practically nonexistent. His lexicon included items that were unintelligible to most Costa Ricans. However, the most significant difference was his use of the familiar form “tú,” which in Costa Rican Spanish has been replaced by “vos.” After more than 30 years, my husband and I have reached a linguistic compromise: he has learned to produce the sound [s] in final position, can use Costa Rican slang as well as any other Costa Rican, but does not use “vos” spontaneously. As for me, I feel perfectly comfortable being addressed in the “tú” form and answering in the “vos” form, and automatically incorporate “Venezuelan” lexicon whenever we talk about Venezuela or Venezuelans. I occasionally use the “tú” form when talking to Venezuelans, especially children, but never when I talk to my husband. It simply does not come naturally to me.

My husband and I have two sons who have been brought up in a Spanish-speaking home. However, they are used to being addressed with any of the three possible forms: “usted”, “tú,” or “vos.” My husband consistently uses “tú” with them, I use “usted” most of the time, and their friends and classmates use “vos.” Interestingly enough, in a study conducted at the University of Costa Rica by Hasbún and Solís (1997) where the gender of the addressee was one of the variables considered, 31% of their subjects reported using “usted”, 27.6% reported using “vos” and 37.9% reported using either one when addressing their sons. Some of them explained that they use “vos” with their children all the time, except when they are scolding them. However, I probably use “usted” more frequently because that is the pronoun my own mother used when talking to me. I might sound too formal to some people, but this linguistic behavior is consistent with Vargas’ (1974) claim that there seems to be a dual use of “usted” in Costa Rica, one that reflects formality or respect and another that implies intimacy.

From 1986 to 1987 my husband, my two children and I lived in the United States so I could go to school there. Once again I lived in the Midwest. I really wanted my oral proficiency to improve so that I would “feel” truly bilingual. I thought that there was a gap that I had to

close. Although I had a fairly good command of the language, I longed for the opportunity to polish my speaking ability. During those two years my oral English improved gradually, and I ecstatically discovered that I no longer had to search for words—at least not all the time.

My husband had the opportunity to develop his language proficiency, and he was quite successful. He has most of the characteristics attributed to the good language learner. He “is willing to make mistakes ...tries to get a message across even if specific language knowledge is lacking... and is a willing and accurate guesser” (Lightbown & Spada 1999: 50). His language acquisition was mainly naturalistic or what Klein (1986: 16) calls “spontaneous.” Klein says that this term “is used to denote the acquisition of a second language in everyday communication, in a natural fashion, free from syntactic guidance” (16). Although my husband had had English in high school and volunteered to take a three-month introductory course upon arrival, which was obviously, to use Klein’s term, a “systematic and intentional intervention,” he picked up the language mainly at work from friends and coworkers, from Public Television programs he watched with our children, and from reading the newspaper. Like all naturalistic learners, he was forced to face the challenging tasks described by Klein (1986: 17):

- to utilize his actual and... quite limited repertoire in an optimal fashion, in expressing himself as well as in understanding others...
- to approximate to the target language, i.e., the language as used by the environment

My two children progressed differently at the beginning. At that time, I firmly believed that age was the most crucial issue in language acquisition. My beliefs were based on the premise that the earlier in life a second language is introduced, the easier the process of acquisition would be. Contrary to my expectations, my older son, who was seven years, four months at the time, acquired the language quickly and remarkably well. On the other hand, my younger son, who was five years old, progressed more slowly, and during the first six months, he had a heavier Spanish accent. However, for some time I neglected to consider other important variables involved in the acquisition process. It took me awhile to realize that the difference in acquisition in this particular case was best accounted for by the availability and quality of the input each child received. While my first-born started first grade right away, my second son had to stay home for a whole semester because he was not old enough to go to kindergarten. It was not until we joined a cooperative, and he began a program where his teachers and most of his classmates were English speakers, that his language acquisition sped up. Gass (2003) discusses the types of information that learners must have in order to construct L2 grammatical knowledge and what they need to do with the information in language use situations. First, she provides a historical view of input showing that researchers have claimed that learners need positive evidence or input, that is, “the set of well-formed sentences to which learners are exposed . . . This is the most direct means that learners have available to them from which they can form linguistic hypotheses” (2003:225), as well as negative evidence or feedback, that is, “the type of information that is provided to learners concerning the incorrectness of an utterance. This might be in the form of explicit or implicit information” (225-6). A third requirement is output, or “opportunities for language use” (227). However, she adds that learners also require interaction that affords production of the type where “hypothesis testing and the increase of automaticity are involved” (244). While my older son's school provided the opportunities pointed out by Gass, his brother stayed at home with one of his parents who

consistently spoke Spanish to him. Perhaps the best sources of input available to him were children's PBS programs such as *Sesame Street* or *Reading Rainbow*, which he enjoyed very much. Because of their nature, the programs provided plenty of comprehensible input but no negative evidence or opportunities for interaction. Nonetheless, in spite of everybody's progress in English, we always kept Spanish as the home language.

After I finished my Master's, we returned to our home in Costa Rica. My husband and children stopped using English for oral communication because there was no opportunity for its use. However, they all read books in English and watched US cable TV. As for me, I continued using English at work. My two years' stay in the US made me feel more confident, and I cheerfully accepted the challenge of teaching higher-level courses.

After teaching for eight years, I went back to school in the US. I no longer viewed my staying in an English-speaking country as an opportunity to improve my oral proficiency. I was convinced that I had reached a plateau. Traveling was simply my chance to acquire enough background to do research in my university back home. Probably, I was satisfied with the degree of bilingualism I had already acquired. I came to the realization that although I could function quite well in an English-speaking environment, I would never be equally fluent in both languages or what is called a balanced bilingual (Romaine 1989: 14)

However, my doctoral program gave me a wonderful new opportunity. As part of the requirements, I had to take two semesters of a language not related to the family of languages my L1 belongs to. I immediately felt that I had to take advantage of this second chance. My parents had not taught us Arabic when we were children, but now I had the opportunity to learn a little about my Heritage language. I informed my advisor I was going to take Arabic. I checked class schedules for the following semester and was ready to begin in the fall, but when I decided to unofficially "observe" the class, I was bitterly disappointed. I stood in the hallway and listened to the lessons. What I heard was a lecture in English about the grammar of Arabic. I had erroneously believed that teachers in US universities no longer used the Grammar Translation Method (for a discussion of the shortcomings of this method, see Richards and Rodgers 2001). Once again, I missed the chance to learn something about my heritage language, and this time it was my own choice.

After doing some more research and meeting the instructors, I selected Swahili instead. I studied very hard and enjoyed going to the lab to listen to short lectures in Swahili. In addition, my instructor would ask us to answer questions in the form of a very simple narrative. We had to tape those assignments. I would rehearse many times before actually taping my answer, and I would revise it carefully until I was satisfied with the final product. As a result of this experience, my insights into the process of language acquisition became deeper and more realistic. I had forgotten what it was really like to start from zero. I knew I would most likely never become very proficient in Swahili because once I left the university my chances of meeting a Swahili speaker would be practically nil. However, I made a lot of progress, and I took every opportunity I had to practice the language. Thanks to an encouraging instructor, I was able to hold very simple conversations.

I learned a great deal about myself as a learner during those two terms. First of all, at times I became impatient. I wanted to understand everything my teacher said, and not being able to do so frustrated me. It dawned on me that I have a very low tolerance for ambiguity. Ehrman (1996: 116 cited in Ehrman 1999) describes how complex languages are and how they can baffle learners:

Language learning for real communication use, especially in situations that demand structural and lexical precision, is an extremely demanding whole-person engagement. It requires the learner to cope with information gaps, unexpected language and situations, new cultural norms, and substantial uncertainty. It is highly interpersonal, which is in itself fraught with ambiguities and unpredictabilities. Language is composed of symbols, which are abstract and often hard to pin down. Concepts and expressions in any two languages do not relate one-to-one.

The second thing I learned about myself concerns my motivation as a language learner. EFL teachers and researchers have generally accepted the axiom that language learners with higher levels of motivation will be higher achievers. Furthermore, most motivation theories include the distinction between intrinsic motivation, i.e., performing a behavior for its own sake, and extrinsic motivation, i.e., performing a behavior as a means to an end. Traditionally, the latter type of motivation has been considered less effective in language acquisition. However, my experiences as a language learner make me side with Deci and Ryan (cited in Dörnyei 2001: 28-9), who argue that “if they are sufficiently self-determined and internalized, extrinsic rewards can be combined with, or can even lead to, intrinsic motivation.” While taking Swahili, I became aware of the fact that grades, extrinsic rewards par excellence, matter a great deal to me. Although I always tell my EFL students not to focus on grades but on progress, I do not seem to be able to heed my own advice. Deep inside I felt that as a language teacher I was expected to be a model language student; consequently, I studied hard and practiced regularly not only to acquire the language but also to receive high grades. For instance, I got only good marks on my tests and assignments during the first semester, so my instructor gave me an A for the course. Nonetheless, in retrospect, it seems to me that somehow I was not fully satisfied and thought that I could, or maybe should, have done even better. This is probably why I half jokingly told my teacher that I really deserved an A+. After pondering for a moment about my comment, she challenged me to get only perfect scores on the second course. She promised an A+ if I did. I accepted her challenge and studied even harder. At the end of the term, I cannot honestly tell what made me happier: enjoying the rewarding experience of being understood by a sympathetic native speaker or getting my A+.

After I came back to Costa Rica for the second time, I decided to take additional language courses. Although the University of Costa Rica offers a wide variety of foreign languages including Arabic, I took two reading comprehension courses in French and an intensive course in Portuguese. This time, though, my experience was different. First, French was a reading comprehension course. I knew that my greatest strength as a language learner lies in the area of reading. I felt very confident in the class because my knowledge of Spanish was very helpful, I had had a little French in high school, and I had taken another reading comprehension course during my doctoral program, not to mention the fact all the other students were professors and that I found the whole experience very enjoyable. My instructors were respectful and the classroom environment was full of camaraderie. Since I was instrumentally motivated and was never forced to speak French, fulfilling all the course requirements was not too difficult. Second, Portuguese was another Romance language, so I had a lot of background knowledge to build on. However, unlike French, this course integrated the four basic language skills, which implied a greater linguistic challenge, and to make matters worse, except for two professors, all the other students were undergraduates. A few of them spoke some Portuguese; therefore, especially at the beginning, I felt a bit uncomfortable trying out my baby language. I worked hard at home and tried to remain unnoticed during oral activities in class. I never

volunteered to do anything. My oral participation was limited to those opportunities when the teacher directly called on me. Despite my concerns about making a fool of myself in front of my potential students, I enjoyed the experience very much.

Conclusion

What are some of the reasons why I have not learned Arabic? Kymlicka and Patten (2003: 6) affirm that the following two conditions might prevent language shift, and I would add, promote the acquisition of one's heritage language:

- The tendency of immigrants to maintain regular connections back to their country of origin, aided by improved transportation and communication technologies.
- The rise of an ideology of multiculturalism, that is, the idea that immigrants should not have to abandon their ethnic identity in order to integrate, as required by older models of assimilation, but rather should be able to visibly express their ethnic identity in public, and have public institutions accommodate this.

Unfortunately, the first condition no longer applies to my family. Once in Costa Rica, the only visitor we received from the old country was my uncle who decided to stay here, and just like my parents before, quickly assimilated to the social norms and linguistic community. In addition, after my father's death, we lost contact with our relatives in Palestine. As to the second condition, although I have never felt discriminated against because of my roots, my community has not encouraged me to explore that part of who I am either. My parents wished for their children to have pride and knowledge about their background, but they understood that it was important to conform to the sociolinguistic and cultural context in which we are embedded.

Why is it that I have experienced varying degrees of success in learning other foreign languages such as French, Portuguese or Swahili? Passing the French and Portuguese courses meant moving up the academic ladder, which in turn produced a salary increase. In spite of the fact that I enjoyed the courses very much and that I was aware that they afforded me the opportunity to understand the processes of language acquisition better, the prevailing motivation was clearly extrinsic. Although I felt compelled to work hard, I never made as much progress as I did in my Swahili course even though Swahili was a graduation requirement while taking foreign languages at my university was voluntary. Finally, Swahili was different in many ways: it was a language unfamiliar to everyone in the class; all the students were undergraduate and I did not know any of them; and the instructor was not only a native speaker but also a linguist and a superb teacher. However, what stands out in this particular situation is my choice of languages. Although I had the chance to take Arabic, I did not because Arabic was offered only late in the evenings, and that schedule was somewhat inconvenient for me, so I selected French and Portuguese instead. Once again, I missed the opportunity to learn my heritage language. However, I cannot help wondering how much the fact that French and Portuguese are Romance languages weighed on my decision. Obviously, as a learner, I perceive French and Portuguese as closer, and consequently, easier to acquire. Perhaps taking a language perceived as "difficult" might be intimidating to a language teacher who fears linguistic failure. The extrinsic reward of getting ahead, professionally speaking, might be stronger than the intrinsic motivation to acquire my heritage language, a personal goal for self-realization.

Why did I acquire English?

The answer to this question is undoubtedly complex. I can attribute my success in the acquisition of English to a number of factors. First of all, English was my first foreign language. This encounter took place in an instructed setting before puberty. Second, I had the chance to live in an English-speaking community for a whole year before entering college. Third, English was regarded as a very prestigious and useful language in the community at-large and in my home in particular. This attitude exerted a critical influence on my motivation to learn the language. Fourth, I chose English teaching as my major and was privileged to have competent teachers who were highly skilled and who inspired me to keep developing professionally, which includes improving my language competence. Elsa Orozco showed me that teachers have awesome responsibilities and that preparing for that challenge was a life-long commitment. Patiently and lovingly, Lorraine Goldman taught me most of what I know about writing. Ian McNiven opened my eyes to the great joys that literature can afford. Later in life, Kathleen Bardovi-Harlig showed me how second language acquisition research must inform my teaching practice. Fifth, after I finished college, I had the opportunity to live in the US for extended periods of time, which provided me with the opportunity to become fully immersed in the language and the culture. Finally, I enjoy learning languages so the task is not daunting but exciting.

Note

1. He/she comes [to El Salvador] to work and prosper with his family. He/she is not interested in moving up the social ladder. That will come later as a result of his/her work.

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