

STORIES OF CUBAN-AMERICANS LIVING AND LEARNING BILINGUALLY

By

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A DISSERTATION

Submitted to
Michigan State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

Curriculum, Instruction, and Teacher Education – Doctor of Philosophy

2017

ABSTRACT

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This study explores the interplay of bilingualism, identity, literacy and culture for Cuban-American students in the Cuban diaspora. I contextualize their experiences within the social, historical, and political background of Cuban immigration, situating their stories within the conflicting narratives of Cuban-American imagination in the U.S., to explore how manifestations of Cubania shape the language and literacy practices of Cuban-American youth across generations and contexts, within three U.S. states.

Inspired by traditions of phenomenology and narrative inquiry (Clandelin & Connolly, 2000), this study is an intentional narrative “reconstruction of a person’s experience in relationship both to the other and to a social milieu” (CC 200-5), drawing from three narratives of experience, including my own. The three narratives are based on the experiences Cuban-American adolescent girls growing up in different contexts, in search of answers to the following questions:

a) For each participant in this study, what are the manifestations of Cuban identity, or Cubania? b) What are the factors that sustain different or similar manifestations of Cubania, both within and across generations of immigrants? c) How, if at all, do manifestations of Cubania shape the language and literacy practices of Cuban-American youth?

The narratives in this study demonstrate how language, collective memory, and context become semiotic resources that come to bear on the diasporic identities of the participants. Our ideas about Cuban-ness, as well as our experience of Cuban-ness, are somewhat different,

because of the ecologies in which we experienced the culture, as well as our unique family history with Cuba. The relationship between each family and their history with Cuba also shapes what Cuba is to these individuals, making it possible to have different imaginaries of Cuba, as they construct their Cuban identities based on the physical, historical, and emotional sediment that they stand on.

Translanguaging emerges as a language practice that provides key opportunities to enact Cuban identity, as well as to feel connected to Cuban-ness. During times of developing proficiency, translanguaging becomes a scaffold that facilitates inclusion in conversations in their midst. For two participants, their experiences reading and discussing the bible in two languages through translanguaging serves to build and reinforce their Spanish literacy and fluency, as they use their academic language of English to inform their understanding of the Spanish bible. Thus translanguaging and religious literacies emerge as funds of knowledge and a bridge to biliteracy. However, constraints to translanguaging emerge for one participant, who has little opportunity to navigate spaces of Spanish use on her own, and becomes limited in her ability to hold conversations with Spanish speakers who cannot translanguage.

This research on Cuban American students is timely, considering that Hispanics are the majority minority in public schools, and largest minority in at least twenty-two states, including states that previously had little contact with immigration at all (Pew, 2013).

Such an in depth look at a small sample of students is helpful in teasing out the nuances that exist in areas that are known to be both foundational and meaningful to student success in school, such as identity and culture. However, these are nuances that are easily rendered invisible with when we engage in the project of categorization that essentializes all students as one thing or another, in this case, Spanish language heritage students as “Hispanic” or “Latino”.

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This doctoral dissertation is dedicated to Carmen and Gonzalo, in appreciation of their effort and sacrifice to ensure that I received the best possible education. I also dedicate it to Antonio y Cuca, for their constant love, support, and sacrifice as well. Lastly, to all of the Cuban immigrants who have had to leave their homeland behind to start anew elsewhere.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge the following people for their support throughout the writing of this dissertation. First, my mother, for always believing in me, and for being the role model of what it takes to be a dreamer and a fighter, and then persevere in making those dreams come true. Everything I am is because of her. Close behind, is my sister, who has been guiding me since I became her shadow in the first grade. Ever since then, she has shown me how to step boldly into new experiences and opportunities. Seeing her accomplish so much while balancing work and family inspired me to believe in myself, even when things seemed no longer possible. Right next to her is my brother in law, whose generosity, love, and humble support never fail. To STTO, for their hugs and kisses, laughter, late-night giggle sessions, for lending me their bed, their desks, for just being who they are, and giving me another reason to persevere. My good friend Marlene, who could not possibly be more generous with her love, time, and resources. My friend, you were always a light at the end of a dark tunnel. Thank you for not giving up on me, for the pep talks, for the last minute editing, and for finally flying to Michigan. Ricky and D, who so generously invited me into their home so that I could have a space to finish dissertating in style while replenishing my spirit by the ocean. Thank you Lansing friends, Lorena, Tara, Bella, Gerardo, Yun, and many others, for your love, for believing in me, for being near to me during the struggle. Bella, thank you for sharing your home and friendship with me in those last months—I will never forget it! Tara, thank you for being present, like an angel, in those key moments of the journey. Lorena, I have no words to describe how meaningful your friendship has become in my life; I am so blessed to count you as a friend and colleague. Thank you, thank you for being a compass during the stormy nights of the journey.

I thank Rosaura and Sara for sharing their stories with me.

I would like to thank my committee: Mary, Kyle, Ellen, Peter, and Jeff. Mary, thank you for believing in me, for your words of encouragement, for your patience, and for seeing me through. Kyle, I will never forget your kindness, your phenomenological spirit, and the generous bouts of time that you gave to support me, at every stage of the journey.

I am grateful to the College of Education at Michigan State University for supporting my research through numerous fellowships. I am the proud recipient of the Urban Education Recruitment and Retention Fellowship (2010, 2013), the Fellowship for Global Understanding in Botswana (2011), the Summer Recruitment Fellowship (2010), the Summer Research Grant (2013), and the College of Education Fellowship (2015). I am deeply grateful as well to Michigan State University at large for supporting my work through the Janice Marston Endowed Scholarship (2014), and the Nickerson Fellowship in Cultural Diversity and Minority Concerns (2013). I appreciate as well the Graduate School for their fellowship support (2015).

I am particularly grateful for the support of the University of Miami Cuban Heritage Collection (CHC), where my early inquiry into my family's connection to the historical Cuban imaginary took root and began to flourish through the Cuban Heritage Collection Pre-Prospectus Fellowship (2012). Likewise, I am grateful for the Tinker Fellowship for Pre-Dissertation Fieldwork in Cuba (2013), where my inquiry into Cuban culture blossomed.

Finally, I thank God for everything that I am, for showing me that I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me, and that His strength and mercy is greater than the sum of my fears.

PREFACE

Thoughts on Remembering

I am the keeper of negatives.

Proofs

carefully preserved

in endless attempts to capture

ephemeral moments,

storied visions

Re-visioned.

Living

with them,

through them,

from them.

Characters flicker on the wall

five sisters

laughing,

singing

dancing,

sometimes all at once

Accented beauties,

who dreamt

their stories

leaping through life
with their children,
who were everybody's children
(we had five mothers)...
I never saw Cuba,
except in the Super-8 reel of my mind
Neighbors like family,
El Malecon,
bodeguitas, dulcerias,
Ine running into the street to catch Juancho
selling *pan de gloria*
from his cart on Saturday mornings;
Sofia's flirtation with Pancho;
And there is that picture of mom in her communion gown,
one of the few relics that survived
Evidence
of an ancient world
where kids ate *helado de mantecado*
and guava from trees
(not out of a box, like me).
Sometimes I remember these stories
as if
they were my own;

snapshots strung together,
portraits of things past,
developed in my soul.
I have edited the reel,
as we do with all memories,
in service to ourselves,
and our experiences.
In the retelling,
we create new fictions
that tell old truths

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Chapter 1: Logistics of the Study

Introduction

Positionality. In many ways, this study begins with me. Being open to the meaning of another's story involves "situating the other meaning in relation to the whole of our own meanings or ourselves in relation to it" (Gadamer, 1960/1975/2003). I am the daughter of Cuban immigrants. My parents emigrated from Cuba in the early 60's, fleeing communism, leaving behind a society that is in many ways different than it is now. They met after settling in New York with their respective families, several years later making their way to South Florida, where I have lived for most of my life.

Living in South Florida, I became familiar with the many waves of Cuban immigrants as they streamed through my life in daily encounters with neighbors, school friends, church acquaintances, grocery store clerks, and later on when I became a teacher, through my students, many of whom were bilingual and bicultural like myself. Living Cuban history through my own experience, reading about it academically, and researching the Cuban experience beyond the confines of what is familiar to me has made me sensitive to the spatial and temporal dimensions in which the Cuban drama unfolds in the United States.

Although I was born in the United States, I saw and heard many versions of Cuban immigration throughout my life beginning with the stories of my parents, and eventually, my neighbors, school friends, and the media. Looking back, I assumed that my familiarity with these stories were enough to understand the needs of my students, whose family trajectories may or may have not been similar to mine. South Floridians share an ecology populated by diverse groups of Spanish-speaking immigrants and their children. In Miami, particularly, the majority of us share Hispanic roots and traditions. I have always been somewhat self-aware of my own

history and standing as a second generation, bilingual Cuban-American; yet, despite having a good sense of my own identity and language use, I did not necessarily have a firm grasp of the social, contextual, and historical forces that had continued to shape the lives of those who would eventually join the Cuban diaspora in South Florida, many of whom ended up in my classroom.

The Language Ecology of Miami. I began teaching in 1992, in the aftermath of the Hurricane Andrew, the largest and most destructive storm to make landfall in South Florida in over fifty years. This stark reality rendered all back to school activities and deadlines uncertain, as a number of families in the school community had lost their homes. Despite this bleak backdrop, three novice teachers in this parochial school could not contain the excitement they felt in anticipation of welcoming their first group of students. I was the only one of the three that was teaching out of field, and I relied heavily on their knowledge of early childhood pedagogy as I planned for the first weeks of instruction.

All thirteen of my students were children of immigrants. Their parents, or grandparents, had been born in a Spanish speaking country. The majority were Cuban; all but two parents out of twenty-six. All of the parents were bilingual, fluent in English and Spanish. They all seemed to be middle or upper middle class. Having trained to teach adolescents (not preschoolers!) it was not until the first day of class that I realized that some of my students would be learning English in my class that year, given that Spanish was the language spoken at home across the board. Many of my students seemed to speak English to some degree already; of these, all of them seemed to be able to move freely between English and Spanish, except one who favored English; two did not speak at all while they were in school; four only spoke Spanish.

My students' parents were not particularly preoccupied with the issue of language. They seemed to take it for granted that their children would blossom in all ways language-related in

preschool. There was no special language program in place, no testing procedures to determine who spoke another language at home. I was not very concerned either, since as far back as I could remember I had spoken both languages myself.

Throughout that year, in the pre-school building, there was rarely a moment of silence—language was always in the air. That is to say, two languages were always in the air. English was, without a doubt, the default language of instruction. In our classrooms, we did not present lessons in Spanish; we did not make it a practice to read storybooks in Spanish; we did not display Spanish words on the walls otherwise intentionally peppered with print (in English) to create an ecology of emergent literacy. Yet, the three bilingual teachers in this school moved fluidly between the two languages as needed, at will, as did the students, staff, and parents.

This is what teaching early childhood in this parochial school in South Florida looked like in 1992. Being bilingual, and being Cuban, was rather the norm. Although the language of instruction was English, both languages swirled through the hallways, the office, and the conversations of faculty, staff and students at any given time. The language practices I experienced while teaching were mirrored in every aspect of society at large in the city¹. It was business as usual.

Language in the City. As elsewhere in the United States, in South Florida, while English is the official language of business and school, Spanish holds a very prominent place in South Florida. Bilingualism is the de facto norm (Portes & Stepick, 1993) in this city where Spanish speakers are in positions of power on many levels, including local, state, and federal politics,

¹ In the popular culture, some references to South Florida include a large swath of the state from Palm Beach to Key West, to include Broward, Miami-Dade, and Monroe Counties. For the purpose of this study, however, the area of “South Florida” will be used to denote the larger metropolitan area of Miami-Dade County, which includes the city of Miami, the suburbs, unincorporated areas, as well as the beaches. Miami is used interchangeably with South Florida as a rhetorical move. The reference to Miami should not be taken to mean the city of Miami alone. Miami is used locally as a broad reference term, referring to large areas of Miami-Dade County (as the locals do).

business, banking, and school administration.² In many business establishments, including grocery stores, pharmacies, restaurants, and even public schools, employees routinely address customers in Spanish first, anticipating that clients are also Spanish speakers, or at the very least, bilingual. In this city, it is common to hear people from all walks of life speaking in Spanish and English, mingling both together, out of necessity, or for effect, depending on whom they are communicating with. This practice of switching between languages, mingling, or meshing linguistic codes are widely known as code-switching, or within Latin-American communities, using Spanglish. However, recent scholars of socio-linguistics and bilingual education have further theorized these practices under the construct of translanguaging (Garcia, 2009; Lewis, Jones & Baker, 2012).

In addition to Miami being de-facto bilingual, it is also de-facto translingual, meaning that speaking across languages is a normal everyday activity in the city. Translanguaging, the seamless blend of two or more languages to communicate, is part of everyday life in Miami, where bilinguals abound (Castro, 1992; Resnick, 1988). Locals joke about the fact that it is hard to spot a monolingual, or an ‘Anglo’ in the midst of such Caribbean and South/Central American diversity.

Language Ideology and Pedagogy. Despite the fluid language practices of the city at large both within and outside of institutions of power, such as schools, the language of instruction in schools was English. Later on in my teaching career, when I taught the English Language Arts (ELA) to middle and high school students, the notion of using my bilingual knowledge to teach my students was not necessarily on my pedagogical radar. Unlike my preschool students, my high school students were mostly second or third generation students, and

² In Miami Dade County, Cuban-Americans currently hold offices in all political fields spanning city, county, state, and federal governments. There are currently two presidential candidates that are Cuban-American, Marco Rubio and Ted Cruz.

usually fluent in English. Amongst those who may have immigrated at a young age, those in my classes had exited ELL classes already. Thus the curriculum was what is typically referred to as ‘mainstream’—average ELA instruction for the average English speaker.

Although I was known to bring up a similarity or distinction between languages every once in a while, or to use a word in Spanish when speaking one on one, I never sustained a bilingual teaching relationship with my students, mostly because it did not occur to me that they needed me to do so. Frankly, I also suspected that code-switching in the classroom could open a can of worms, since that was the norm in the outside spaces of their lives, and I worried about my students not developing their vocabulary and expanding their academic English if the classroom became a bilingual space as well.

There was one student, Cristina, who became an exception to my usual practice of teaching solely in English. She came to my mainstream tenth grade English Language Arts class in February of her sophomore year soon after she arrived from Nicaragua. Her spoken English was particularly fluent for someone who had never left Nicaragua; she had attended a bilingual school there. She did not have trouble communicating in her accented English, and as a result, bypassed ELL classes. She struggled more with her English writing, grammatically, rhetorically and syntactically.

What Cristina lacked in experience with written academic English she made up for in the intentionality of her efforts, her devotion to learning, and her self-discipline. She was motivated by the desire to graduate from an American college and eventually be able to bring her mother from Nicaragua to live the United States, where she hoped to provide her with a better life. Cristina lived with her aunt while attending high school.

Cristina's maturity and determination to excel and attend an American university disarmed me. She had no interest in falling back on her Spanish in class; rather, she challenged herself daily to perform in English. It became the most natural thing in the world to work with Cristina in Spanish during our one on one session in the classroom and after school. I used both languages separately or together as needed in order to teach her, and she used both languages in understanding, re-voicing, and making sense of what she was learning. I encouraged her to use her Spanish/English dictionary in class, to write notes in Spanish and translate as necessary. I was meticulous about pairing her (and all of my students) during group work in an attempt to facilitate generative spaces for cooperative learning.

However, outside of this example, my own language ideology was consistent with that of the U.S. at large, albeit for different motives. I considered it important to protect the classroom space for English, given the widespread use of Spanish-English translanguaging outside of school. I wanted to be sure that my students were well-versed in English academic literacy. Spanish literacy was generally not on my radar.

Research Overview

My experiences growing up bilingual, and later on, teaching in contexts of bilingualism have sparked a scholarly curiosity about the relationship between bilingualism and literacy in diverse contexts, and in particular as it plays out within the Cuban diaspora in the United States.

In the following chapters, I explore the interplay of bilingualism, identity, literacy and culture for Cuban-American students in the Cuban diaspora. I contextualize their experiences within the social, historical, and political background of Cuban immigration, situating their stories within the conflicting narratives of Cuban-American imagination in the U.S., to explore

how manifestations of Cubania shape the language and literacy practices of Cuban-American youth across generations and contexts, within three U.S. states.

Inspired by traditions of phenomenology and narrative inquiry (Clandelin & Connolly, 2000), this study is an intentional narrative “reconstruction of a person’s experience in relationship both to the other and to a social milieu” (p. 20), drawing from three narratives of experience, including my own. The three narratives are based on the experiences Cuban-American adolescent girls growing up in different contexts, in search of answers to the following questions:

- a) For each participant in this study, what are the manifestations of Cuban identity, or Cubania?
- b) What are the factors that sustain different or similar manifestations of Cubania, both within and across generations of immigrants?
- c) How, if at all, do manifestations of Cubania shape the language and literacy practices of Cuban-American youth?

This study is informed by research across many social science disciplines: migration studies, sociology, cultural psychology, anthropology, linguistics, history, and education. Although it makes my work more complex, I have found it important to situate it across these fields in order to extend the backdrop, as well as the implications, of this work. Each discipline has explored the themes of immigration & identity, culture & language, and education in general, but with the exception of sociology, few have explored these themes together within the Cuban diaspora (R. D. Alba, 1998; Portes & Stepick, 1994). Much has been written about Cuban

exceptionality, (i.e., Golden exiles³), and perhaps for this very reason scholars have not turned to the Cuban diaspora for more in depth studies about the experiences with language, literacy, and learning.

Furthermore, in depth studies on the educational outcomes and language trajectories of the 2nd and third generations are scarce. Although the experiences of first generation immigrants are better known both in research and popular culture than that of subsequent generations, these experiences are less determinative of the future of new racial/ethnic groups than the integration of their children and the generations that come after⁴ (R. Alba & Holdaway, 2013). The second, third, and even subsequent generations often continue to carry the burden of acculturation and adaptation as they learn to balance negotiate their own language and culture with that of mainstream American society (R. Alba & Nee, 2005; Portes & Zhou, 2005; Suarez-Orozco, M. Suarez-Orozco, C., & Sattin-Bajaj, 2010) and schools are among the principal institutions where these futures are in large part determined for these students.

This research on Cuban American students is timely, considering that Hispanics are the majority minority in public schools, and largest minority in at least twenty-two states, including states that previously had little contact with immigration at all (Pew, 2016). At the time of 2011 census, 37.6 million Americans over the age of 5 spoke Spanish at home, making Spanish the country's unofficial second language.

As a group, Cubans comprise the fourth largest subset of Hispanics in the U.S., 70% of whom are concentrated in South Florida (Lopez, 2015). Historically, New Jersey has been the

³ For sociological perspectives exploring the idea of the 'Cuban success story' vis a vis the term, 'golden exile', see Perez, L. (1986), Portes, A. (1996). See Duany, J. (1993) for a sociological perspective on Cubans in Cuban-American novels.

⁴ See Portes and Rumbaut (2001), *Legacies: the Story of the Immigrant Second Generation* for a mixed method study of second generation Cubans in Miami (among other immigrant groups elsewhere) with data on language retention, graduation rate, and college expectancy. Data from this study point to differential outcomes between Cuban-American students attending public and private schools in Miami.

second largest context of resettlement for Cuban families, although pockets of Cubans can be found in other states, including the Midwest. Furthermore, Cuban immigration is on-going, and is not anticipated to wane as long as they continue to receive special legal status as political refugees (Pew, 2017)⁵.

Along with California and Arizona, Florida is in the top three states with the largest ‘Hispanic’ populations (Infoplease, 2014). However, the immigrant history and composition in this state is quite different. The historical legacy of Cuban immigration to South Florida, as well as the cultural impact of the Cuban enclave in this space, is critical in understanding the ways in which Cuban-Americans identify, language, and read the world.

The Evolving Narrative of Cubans in the U.S.

Historical Overview. Just ninety miles off the coast of the Florida Keys lies the island of Cuba, the largest and most populous island-country in the Caribbean. Until very recently, for Americans, the island of Cuba has been shrouded in mystery due to the antagonism between both countries following the socialist revolution of 1959, and the subsequent U.S. embargo on travel and goods to Cuba. From the early sixties until the present, the relationship between both countries has remained strained. While few Americans have been able to travel to Cuba in the past fifty-five years, nearly two million Cubans have found ways to leave the island as exiles, defectors, or refugees, through legal or illegal means, with or without U.S. assistance, in pursuit of any combination of economic, democratic, personal and religious freedom and opportunity (Farber, 2011; Duany, 2006).

⁵ As of President Obama’s historic visit to Cuba in March of 2016, Cubans continue to immigrate into the United States, increasingly taking on added risk to do so. Two groups of recent arrivals have made headlines, the first after being detained in Central American after trying to make their way to the Mexico/Texas border, the second arriving with gunshot wounds on rafts that sailed from Matanzas to the Florida shores. The Miami Herald reports that “in the fiscal year 2015, about 4,476 Cuban migrants were intercepted, spotted or arrived by sea, the largest number in more than seven years”. As of the current fiscal year, they note that 2,562 Cubans have been intercepted, sighted or have landed in Florida (see <http://www.miamiherald.com/news/local/immigration/article68525912.html#storylink=cpy>)

A Tale of Two Cities. The largest concentration of Cubans in the U.S. can be found in South Florida, particularly in the metropolitan city of Miami (Pew, 2016). By measures of economic growth and educational outcomes, Cubans have been flourishing there since the early sixties, when the first waves of Cuban immigration to the United States began, and a largely educated, middle and upper class exodus ensued after the rise of communist leader Fidel Castro. The early exiles hoped that their stay would be temporary, until Castro could be deposed. History soon proved otherwise.

Opinions about U.S. and Cuban relations tend to polarize around two extremes: one of steadfast anti-communist sentiment supporting an embargo and severed ties until the country becomes more democratic, or one somewhat devoid of anti-communist sentiment, perhaps even some degree of admiration towards a country that refuses to allow the U.S. to dictate the terms of their engagement with the world (Pedraza 1996, 2007). These polarized views have recently been in the spotlight as President Obama strives to re-establish diplomatic ties by re-opening the US embassy in Cuba. With these historic changes, combined with the heterogeneity of the Cuban diaspora and increased public awareness, there seems to be increasing convergence around some middle ground between Cuba and the U.S.

However, the first half of the twentieth century told a different story about Cuba and the U.S., and in particular, Havana and South Florida.

Spanish Colonial Cuba. The relationship between Cuba and the U.S. extends back several hundred years, before the United States had even been conceived, from the time the Spanish staked their claim on the newly ‘discovered’ Americas. The Spanish colonized Cuba in the sixteenth century, at a time when their colonial presence in the Americas was intransigent

and far-reaching, colonizing what is now Texas, Florida, Mexico, the Caribbean, Central and South America.

Although Florida would eventually become a part of the fifty states, it was not before the Spanish occupied the territory twice, the second time well into the nineteenth century. Remnants of Spanish colonial presence exist throughout the state, most prominently in Northeastern Florida, where the city of St. Augustine still stands. Farther south on the west coast, the city of Tampa is saturated with the history and descendants of Cubans, many of whom moved between the island and Florida in the service of cigar-making, fleeing revolutions, or a variety of other factors that contribute to the push and pull of migration.

Burgeoning Cuban Identity and Ethnicity. History suggests that the early Spanish colonizers brutally exterminated the indigenous Taino (Duany, 2006). Since that time, Spaniards from different regions and walks of life began setting their sights on Cuba, looking for opportunity on the island that soon became a strategic location for Spain as a port city.

Throughout the years of colonial rule, Spaniards from the different regions of Spain, with distinct regional identities, populated the island. Artifacts of these identities can be found in Cuba to this day, in the cemeteries and the buildings in Havana that were marked for certain types of Spaniards, such as El Centro Gallego, or El Centro Asturiano. Spanish regional identities endured even as Cuban identity was developing. Thus there were Gallegos from Galicia, Asturianos from Asturias, Montaneses from the northern highlands, and Sevillanos/Andaluz from the South of Spain.

The Spaniards from these different regions could vary to some extent in their Spanish cadence and pronunciation, as in their physical features. Spaniards from the south of Spain, with its history of Moorish and Muslim domain, and its proximity to North Africa, were often more

triguenos, with darker hair, brown eyes, and almond skin tones, while Northern Spaniards might also share features that were more *rubios*, associated with blonder, paler features and lighter eyes.

Soon after their conquest of the island of Cuba, the Spanish brought African slaves against their will to work the sugar plantations (Duany, 2006). Unfortunately, Cuba's eventual success in sugar and coffee production was built on the backs of these slaves, who would eventually comprise about half of the island's population.

Historians and sociologists have noted that the ethnic and racial composition of Cuba to be unique compared to other countries in Latin America, "due to singular formative process in which Cuban inhabitants of both Spanish and African origin figured predominantly, to the almost total absence of the aboriginal Indian" (Farber, 2011)

Although Cuba was the last of the colonies to abolish slavery, the social integration of African Cubans did not mirror that of the United States. One significant difference, for example, is that throughout the scourge of slavery, in the eyes of the law, black persons were legally considered persons, not property, as they were in the U.S. (Farber, 2011). Comparatively speaking, after the abolition of slavery, black Cubans were able to integrate more freely into Cuban society (Farber, 2011).

This is not to say that racism did not exist on the individual and institutional level. For example, at more than one point in history, even well into the twentieth century, white immigration was encouraged in order to restore racial balance in favor of whites. In addition, the pattern of economic segregation of black Cubans following the island's independence from Spain is evident to this day in the economic disparity between black and white Cubans in Cuba (Farber, 2011, Pedraza, 1996).

However, overall, structural racism in Cuba seems to have been more ambivalent and less consistent than in the U.S., at the very least not precluding the very idea of a shared national identity. The most famous writer, patriot, and political activist in Cuba's history, Jose Marti, in rallying Cubans together against Spanish colonialism, famously said, "there are no white Cubans or black Cubans—there are only Cubans" (Marti, as Cited in Farber, 2011). Such it is that it became possible that Cuban criollos, primarily white men of Spanish descent who felt little regard for Spain, shared the island, and a sense of Cuban identity with black Cubans, descendants of African slaves who had been brought against their will. Further, as intermarriage in Cuba was not illegal, mulatto and mixed race children were not uncommon; social prejudice and structural racism notwithstanding, black Cubans, and Cubans of mixed race could attain positions of power and social distinction. For example, Antonio Maceo, a black war hero from one of the early *Criollo* revolutions against Spain, holds a prominent place in Cuban folklore. Fulgencio Batista, the last Cuban president before Fidel Castro, was mulatto, of mixed race.

Adding to the black and white diversity on the island were a medley of other immigrants that came to work, or break their journey from elsewhere, and eventually stayed. Havana's position as a port city, as well as the island's geographic proximity to both North and South/Central America made it a stopping point for many who, once there, never left. So it came to be that Chinese laborers stayed in Cuba and eventually created their own Chinatown in Havana; French creoles fleeing New Orleans settled in Cuba after the Louisiana purchase; Sephardic Jews found refuge on the island; as well a motley crew of other Europeans, Arabs, Caribbean islanders, and world wanderers who came to settle amongst the Spanish and Afro-Cubans whose presence dominated the island. Thus pre-revolutionary Cuba had quite a diverse range of races and ethnicities from centuries of migration.

Catholic Church, Identity and Literacy. It would be difficult to disentangle the influence of Catholicism on the literacies and education of the Spanish who came to hold positions of influence in Cuba (Soneira, 1997). Throughout Cuba's colonial history with Spain, education was largely a Catholic endeavor, as Spain did not appear to be concerned with the internal development of the country and its citizens in any way that did not serve its own best interest.

Following the Catholic tradition of Spain, religious congregations flourished on the island. San Francisco de Sales, the school that my mother and her sisters would one day attend, was established in Havana in 1638, amongst many others that populated the island, including Belen Jesuit School, where Fidel Castro ironically received a Catholic education (Soneira, 1997).

These religious orders, schools and seminaries produced many educational pioneers, including the activist priest Felix Varela. Although in other ways complicit in the global, hegemonic reproduction of class privilege that has historically benefitted white families, the church simultaneously created avenues for the poor, illiterate, and marginalized to receive a free education. It is notable that the education of girls seems to have been considered as important as that of males. Black Cubans were also not excluded from receiving an education. (Farber, 2011).

The philosophy and theology of the Catholic church contributed not only to the intellectual formation of Cuban youth, but also in the formation of what one sociologist called the "Cuban conscience" (Soneira, 1997; Y Morales, 1861).

Cuba was not exempt from social class divisions. Tensions between Spanish aristocrats who benefitted from colonialism and Cuban *criollos*⁶ eventually lead to many several (failed) revolutions for independence. The literature of the times show a number of treatises, books,

⁶ The term *criollo* is used in historical literature to denote Cubans born in Cuba with Spanish ancestry. Criollos eventually identified more with Cuba than with Spain.

pamphlets, periodicals, pointing to both the vibrancy of a distinctly Cuban identity from *criollos* and *Mambises*⁷ alike, a revolutionary spirit seeking independence and progress, and a proliferation of both religious and secular leaders, as well as a literate audience that could consume such writings.

Yet, despite the proliferation of religious schools and seminaries, by the close of the nineteenth century, illiteracy was rampant. Additionally, many efforts to improve education were thwarted by the destruction of infrastructure during so many years of revolutions against Spain.

El Ajiaco/Melting Pot. In contrast to the myth of the American melting pot, renowned Cuban sociologist Fernando Ortiz characterized Cuba as *un ajiaco*, a metaphor that compares Cuba to a hearty stew made up of different root vegetables and meats which together create a savory gravy, without compromising the integrity of the individual components. Through the back and forth of the Spaniards and their eventual creolization, the natural pull of the beautiful island, shared sentiments of anti-colonialism, a desire for independence, Catholicism, Afro-Cuban identity and other forms of hybridity, threads of identity blended together with the evolution of shared cultural elements and narratives of progress, identity, and Cubanidad.

The history and ethnic composition of Cuba also shares similarities with that of the U.S. in that non-elite Spaniards also came to Cuba to forge a better living for their families back home, or to reinvent themselves. My own great-grandfather, Manolo Fernandez, was one such Spaniard. With his fateful journey at the turn of the twentieth century began a transnational relationship between Spain and Cuba for the Fernandez family. Although travel and communication were not as easy in these times, it was not unusual for Spaniards to maintain ties

⁷ *Mambises* refers to free black, slave, and mulatto soldiers who fought in liberation armies against Spain throughout the nineteenth century.

with family back home, to travel, and to develop attachments to both countries, as my great-grandfather did.

Other Cubans found ways to travel between the U.S. and Cuba, to “vacation, work, live, and plot revolution” (Perez, 1999, p. 37). Evidence of transnational ties between Cuba and the U.S. can be found in the historical Cuban cigar enclave in Tampa Bay, Florida, in records of Cubans sending their children to the U.S. to receive an education throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and through the legacy of exiled Cuban patriots, such as Jose Marti, who were exiled from Cuba for exercising free speech or inciting revolutions against Spanish colonial rule (Perez, 1999; Farber, 2011). These are some of the ways that the shadow of the United States loomed in the backdrop of Cuban identity.

It is in the intersections of the personal and political histories of both Cubans and Americans, as individuals and as countries, that Cuban identity has been forged for in the last several hundred years (Firmat, 1999), through years of colonial resistance/revolution, hybridity, and transnational movements.

The Politics of Friendship. Like all historical accounts, the history of the U.S. involvement in Cuba is debated and contested by those who view the U.S. involvement in Cuba as one of U.S. over-reach and colonial intentions, versus those who views U.S. involvement as a means for liberation from Spanish colonial rule, and a benevolent presence thereafter. Most of the folk history that I was exposed to in my youth tended to side with the latter. From the point of view of infrastructure improvement and social benefits, the average person benefitted from U.S. involvement, whose efforts contributed to raising the standard of living for Cubans. After intervening on behalf of Cuba to overthrow Spanish rule of the island in 1899, the U.S. heavily invested militarily, financially, and politically in the island, with U.S. companies owning major

shares of sugar, tobacco, and coffee plantations. Even the mafia reportedly infiltrated Havana through the now famous casinos and hotels (Farber, 2011).

While the intentions of the U.S. are criticized by many who resent the overreach of the U.S. into the affairs of the island country after it won its independence from Spain, it was the United States government and corporations that funded and provided for the rebuilding of Cuba after years of failed revolutions had destroyed much of their infrastructure, and they also helped to build up areas that had been grossly overlooked by Spanish colonial rule (Farber, 2011).

Cubans in South Florida. The first and largest group of Spanish-speakers to settle in South Florida were the Cubans, whose immigration history in the U.S. has been quite distinct for many reasons that have resulted in a vibrant ‘minority’ enclave that is actually a majority in this South Florida city (Castro, 1992; Pedraza, 1996; Portes & Zhou, 2005) and a powerful one at that. As the ultimate expression of success and power, at this moment in time, a South Floridian Cuban-American state senator is preparing to run as a Republican presidential candidate in 2016.

Sociologists have theorized that the success of the Cuban immigrants, in terms of social relations, as well as economic and educational outcomes, can be linked to several factors. In the early sixties, the first waves of Cuban immigrants brought with them forms of social capital that dovetailed neatly with those of the American middle class. These first waves of Cuban immigrants consisted mainly of upper, middle, and working class families who were largely white, literate, well-educated, and had enjoyed (or aspired to) a high standard of living in a country very familiar with American culture, American products⁸, and the so-called American dream, of which every culture has their own variety. In other words, the social goals of first waves of Cuban immigrants were consistent with those idealized in the U.S.

⁸ According to Perez (1999), “technological innovation reached Cuba early and easily, often the instant it became available in the U.S.” (p. 18)

Studying biculturalism as the end product, or “natural consequence” of migration is a recent phenomenon (Grosjean, 2015, p.578). In the past, immigrants were thought to assimilate in a linear fashion, into the well-known myth of the melting pot, where they would emerge English-speaking and American. Factors such as race, gender, language, social capital, educational capital, movement, hybridity, and context were overlooked in these types of analysis. In contrast, Portes and Zhou (2005) theorized the process of immigrant integration through the lens of segmented assimilation to explain how immigrant groups integrate into specific sectors of society depending on their race, ethnicity, social capital, group histories and their “specific profile of vulnerabilities and resources” (p. 100). The theorization of segmented assimilation introduced a new perspective in understanding the integration of immigrants into a host society. Integration does not presume that immigrant culture or their language disappear into the fabric of American life, and in fact, the lens of segmented assimilation may account for some of the reasons this might occur at all.

The children of immigrants inevitably inherit the history of their parent’s migration and the experience of resettlement, and the drama of forging new identities and languages invariably takes place in schools. Because context matters in all things, the ecology in which the immigrant story unfolds plays a role in shaping their experiences and identities. With migration exploding globally, attention to hybrid-identity development is critical (Suarez-Orozco, 2004; C. Suarez-Orozco et al., 2010; Suarez-Orozco & Santini-Bajaj, 2010).

The importance of this line of research is highlighted by ongoing anti-immigrant debates and policies that continue to hinder access to equitable education for many minority students with immigrant backgrounds, as is currently the case in states like California and Arizona, where a good chunk of ‘Hispanic’ students, overwhelmingly Mexican, Mejicano/a, Chicano/a or

Mexican-American attend school. Mexican-origin students, who comprise 64% of the total ‘Hispanic’ population in the country, and are heavily concentrated in these two states (Infoplease, 2014), have had a particularly troubling relationship with American schools due to the inequitable conditions of the schools and neighborhoods they are served by, that have historically marginalized their culture, suppressed their language, and ignored their cultural capital (Yosso, 2005)⁹

Although the outcome of Cuban immigration to South Florida has been more positive, my own journey of self-realization has prompted me to wonder about the variety of experiences that vary by person, as well as by context, as Cubans continue to immigrate to the United States. The Cuban experience is complex and layered, varying over different contexts and year of arrival. Although Cubans continue to immigrate to the U.S, the socio-cultural and historical distance between Cubans on the island and diasporic Cubans has steadily grown, and continues to grow, each wave bringing Cubans who are more diverse politically, experientially, racially, and economically (Duany, 1989; Farber, 2011; Pedraza, 1996, 2006). What distinguishes the waves are not just the year of departure, but also the conditions under which they departed, who did the departing, and who was left behind.

With such varied circumstances surrounding Cuban immigration, and such different relationships to ‘Cuba’, what counts as Cuban identity? In my teaching and research with Cuban-American students, I found that regardless of birthplace or knowledge of the island, students of Cuban family origin tended to identify as being “Cuban”. How is it that generations of children who have never actually been to the island, and have no intention of going, still feel

⁹ In his analysis of Cubans in the political landscape of South Florida and New Jersey, Moreno documented that Cubans had dominated the scene in Miami politics for the last thirty years. He also concluded that “the Cuban model is a unique mixture of official privilege and official discrimination, a combination of not experiencing the legacy of oppression which blacks and Chicanos suffered but at the same time facing the language, political, and economic barriers erected by the dominant society” (1996).

‘Cuban’, displaying their Cuban-ness in their everyday lives through language and other manifestations?

I theorize that groups that share a common history, such as ‘Cubans’, or ‘Cuban-Americans’, may display different manifestations of culture relative to their socio-historical and political experiences, as well as micro and macro factors that helped to shape the ecologies where they live.

Theoretical Frameworks

A Sociocultural Orientation to Language and Literacy

A socio-cultural orientation to language and literacy recognizes language as the medium through which culture gets transmitted, and through which we articulate our experiences, our thoughts, and even our literacies. There is not literacy without language, which is “the primary medium for learning, meaning construction, and cultural transmission and transformation (Cole, 1996; Smagorinsky, 2000, p. 2). Because literacy, language, culture and identity are interdependent, it is important to explore the relationship between bilingual languages, bilingual literacies, diasporic cultures, and identities.

Building on the well-theorized concept of Funds of Knowledge introduced by Luis Moll and others (1992; 2000; Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 2000), I situate bilingual language, diasporic culture, and the literacies that emerge from these as funds of knowledge for the bilingual participants in this study. To further appreciate the complexities and singularities of bilingual experience for the participants in this study, I will use the lens of superdiversity.

Superdiversity in South Florida

New patterns of globalization, together with access to new technologies have resulted in the complex phenomena of globalized, multilingual contact zones referred to as superdiverse

sites of language use (Blommaert, 2013a; Bloommaert, 2010; Vertovec, 2007). A super-diverse perspective is useful in teasing out the complexity in spaces where multi-linguals interact. These are spaces where languages, gestures, histories, genders, and purposes converge, but most importantly, where meaning-making occurs between people with different languages, dialects, varieties and cultures in spite of their differences. Although this is not the first time in the history of the world that superdiversity is manifested in cities and countries worldwide, the tools, technologies, languages, and purposes that drive and sustain superdiversity are currently unique (Bloommaert & Rampton, 2011). Perhaps most importantly, is that until recently, language has not been studied through this lens. The lens of superdiversity dovetails well with the new literacies framework in that both language and literacy are framed as social acts.

The concept of contact zones has been recently taken up by sociolinguists to theorize the ways in which difference is resolved in polylingual, or superdiverse contexts (Bloommaert & Rampton, 2011; S. Canagarajah, 2013; Horner, Lu, Royster, & Trimbur, 2011), such as South Florida. In South Florida, the most prominent language (other than English) spoken at home and in society at large is Spanish (Lynch, 2000). Among Spanish speakers in Miami, varieties of Spanish are negotiated in zones of contact as people find ways to understand each other and learn from each other in spite of their differences in vocabulary or language use.

Although the diversity of South Florida includes many other local and immigrant groups, such as African Americans, Haitians, Jamaicans, Brazilian, Filipino, Portuguese, and Vietnamese, the bulk of the diversity that I encountered as a student and as a teacher was a plurality of Spanishes and Englishes spoken by students of Hispanic origin, who are by far the majority in a significant swath of the metropolitan city areas of Dade County, where Hispanic students make up 67.6% of the student population (Smiley, 2014).

The fact that the bulk of superdiversity occurs amongst Spanish speakers may give the impression, to outsiders, that there is nothing ‘super’ about it. However, this may be due to what gets lost when different ethnic groups are categorized under one label (i.e., Hispanic, or Latino). Although we all speak Spanish, we speak different varieties, use different forms of slang, share different cultural experiences, and have distinct identities. Caribbean Spanish-speakers, such as Puerto Ricans, Venezuelans, Dominicans, and Cubans, for example, identify their ethnicity and language with their country of ethnic origin, where their version Spanish has a distinctive rhythm and cadence. Although linguists might categorize these Spanishes as ‘Caribbean’ for purposes of study (Alfaraz, 2002), in their lived realities, these groups are as distinct as Americans, Australians, and the British are, despite their common language of English (Lam, 2004).

Furthermore, a common language does not guarantee a common identity; nor is diversity limited to language (Vertovec, 2007). Even within diasporas, individuals vary, as well as their children, as they acculturate into different segments of society. Too often, the complexity of identity is settled in research by sorting people into discreet categories (i.e., Hispanic, Latino). While categories such as these can be useful when speaking in generalities, once essentialized, they have a tendency to be taken literally, which can lead to deficit views (Orellana, 2003). Instead, in the intersection between educational and migration research, superdiversity is better suited as an analytic tool to help make sense of the social complexities related to migration (Bloommaert & Rampton, 2011). Superdiversity presumes hybridity and communication across difference as the default manner in which immigrants and their children perform identity throughout many generations (Stepick, Stepick, & Vanderkooy, 2011, p. 875).

The lens of superdiversity can be used to complicate the traditional binaries that have been used to understand immigrant families and their children in this new age of globalization.

A superdiverse perspective presumes difference and language variation to be the norm, and shifts the focus instead to the ways in which people “achieve social life” (Blommaert, 2010, 2013b; Pennycook, 2010), thus bringing to the surface the “everyday multilingualism and commonplace diversity” (p. 7) in the contact zones where diverse people live and language.

Cultural Imaginaries in Contexts of Superdiversity

Diasporas are already a version of a culture that exists elsewhere, from which streams of people have migrated for myriad reasons. Whereas past conceptions of diaspora imagined a longing to return to the place from which they were exiled or displaced, recent research has shown that diaspora peoples do not necessarily envision themselves returning to any such conception of home (A. S. Canagarajah & Silberstein, 2012).

Imagination is a crucial component of diaspora communities, especially for the children of immigrants. The second, third, and subsequent generations may never have first-hand experience with the country of cultural origin; or if they do, it may be limited to brief tourist-like visits. Writing about black cultural identity in post-colonial times, Hall affirms that “cultural identity is always constructed through memory, fantasy, narrative and myth” (Hall, 1990). Our cultural identity also shapes, and is shaped, by the ways in which we construct our imagined communities (Anderson, 2006), that is, communities that exist as much conceptually as in reality, such as a community called Cuban-American, or a place called Cuba.

In a critical narrative study, Carroll, Motha and Price theorize the relationship between imagined communities and regimes of truth (Foucault, 1980), which can be likened to discourses that have become ingrained as truths. They found that while at times identity construction responded to and re-inscribed regimes of truth, at other times, it resulted in resistance to regimes of truth by creating new discourses. In other words, while existing imagined communities can

lead to predictable identities that coincide with existing regimes of truth, it is also the case that new identities can help forge new imaginaries, as is the often the case for immigrants in diaspora. They write, “Constructing new identities involves acts of imagination. Through imagination, new meanings are appropriated. In this way, imagination is an essential component in the process of becoming and belonging” (p. 189). Imagining our worlds, in this sense, can be an agentive means of positioning ourselves in relation to other imaginaries.

The construct of 'figured worlds as theorized by Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, and Cain (1998) seems apropos to understanding the relationship to different waves of Cuban immigrants have with Cuba in order to understand the socio-cultural and historical backdrop of their lives. These ‘imagined’ communities, as I conceive them for this study, do not imply fantasy, but rather the lived reality and experience of a person and the projections that their mind makes in coloring in that reality. Together, these things constitute what they term figured worlds:

“Figured worlds in their conceptual dimensions supply the contexts of meaning for actions, cultural productions, performances, disputes for the understandings that people come to make of themselves, and for the capabilities that people develop to direct their own behavior in these worlds...figured worlds provide the contexts of meaning and action in which social positions and social relationships are named and conducted. They also provide the loci in which people fashion senses of self—that is, develop identities” (p. 60).

Yet the individuals in this study are not simply generic representatives of Cuban-ness. They also bring a personal history to this study that is grounded in family as well as cultural affiliations. These histories help to shape us, and it can be argued that in many ways we construct our identities based on these lived histories (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998).

Imaginaries are not purely fictional—they must be anchored to something tangible that reinforces the existence of it. Thus, diasporic identities are often negotiated through language and semiotic resources (Canagarajah & Silberstein, 2012), such as food, memories, stories,

traditions, habits, dress, discourses, and politics from the home as well as the broader community context as all of these resources come to bear on identity development. The narratives in this study demonstrate how language, collective memory, and context become semiotic resources that come to bear on the diasporic identities of the participants. Our ideas about Cubanidad, as well as our experience of Cubanidad, are somewhat different. The ecologies in which we became bilingual are also different. The ways in which we *language* have been shaped by the spaces that we find ourselves in, as well as the ways in which we imagine ourselves to be in the world.

I propose that it is possible, and perhaps inevitable, that different waves of Cuban immigrants have lived different versions of Cuban culture, which they have in turn passed on to their children, resulting in various versions of Cuban identity. The relationship between each family and their history with Cuba also shapes what Cuba is to these individuals, making it possible to have different imaginaries of Cuba.

Identity, Language and Culture in Contexts of Superdiversity

Language is the medium through which culture gets transmitted, and through which we articulate our experiences, our thoughts, and even our literacies. There is no literacy without language, which is “the primary medium for learning, meaning construction, and cultural transmission and transformation” (Cole, 1996; Smagorinsky, 2000, p. 2). Because literacy, language, culture and identity are interdependent, it is important to explore the relationship between bilingual languages, bilingual literacies, diasporic cultures, and identities.

Canagarajah and Silberstein (2012) theorize that in diverse communities world-wide, people achieve a sense of community “situationally through language”. This idea of language

galvanizing individuals towards a common identity is precisely what I believe happens in the lives of the participants in this study throughout the contexts of their lives.

Language can be viewed as an activity that forms part of a social practice that occurs locally and situatedly, as “a part of a multifaceted interplay between humans and the world” (Pennycook, 2010, p. 2). Defined in this way, *language* evolves from a noun to a verb, ‘*to language*’, shifting the view of language from something that you have, to something that you do, for reasons that have locally situated histories. For example, one way that bilinguals achieve social life through language in Miami is by translanguageing, the practice of flowing between English to Spanish in conversation to communicate (Garcia & Sylvan, 2011; García & Wei, 2013). Translanguageing is not a recent phenomenon, but rather a recent way of conceptualizing the ways in which most people in the world language as an integrated language whole, deploying words, varieties, gestures, registers, languages, codes as needed for communication (Garcia, 2009).

There is also an important relationship between place and language. Pennycook posits, “what we do with language in a particular place is a result of our interpretation of that place; and the language practices we engage in reinforce that reading of place”. From this perspective, the fluidity with which the parents, teachers, and students at the Parochial preschool traveled between Spanish and English that I recounted in the introduction can be understood as one activity in the practice of communicating/identifying, one that makes sense in this particular area of Miami, made possible by the sheer number of Spanish-English bilingual people in this ecology, one that has been historically bolstered by incoming waves of Spanish speaking immigrants from Cuba and elsewhere that continues to this day. Because translanguageing is a

common (perhaps even expected) practice in this space, interacting with parents and children in both languages in an institutional setting such as school is ordinary practice.

Theorizing Cuban Identity

The complexities that are foregrounded in using a lens of superdiversity do not preclude the possibility of studying group identity. To reign in the vast possibilities for myriad expressions of Cuban-ness, I will use the Cuban-American scholar and writer Gustavo Perez-Firmat's (1997) theorization of Cuban identity. His exploration of Cuban-ness is not meant to denote three ways or versions of being Cuban. Rather, it is an attempt to capture three ways in which of that elusive thing called Cuban-ness might manifest itself in the world.

Perez-Firmat attempts to describe the notion of diasporic Cuban-ness that I define as 'Cuban identity in action' by exploring the concepts of *Cubanidad*, *Cubaneo*, and *Cubania*. He builds on the work of historian/sociologist Fernando Ortiz, who coined the word *Cubania* in 1939, long before there were any waves of exiled or refugee Cubans in Miami (Perez-Firmat, 1987). For Perez-Firmat, although *Cubania* is at the heart of Cuban identity, the three come together as a necessary package.

Cubanidad, the most shallow marker, is merely the "generic condition of being Cuban" (p. 6) that connects one to a state or nationality. *Cubanidad* refers to the legal and sometimes ethnic marker of being Cuban, an outward marker, as could be found on a passport, or as one could acquire through naturalization. *Cubanidad*, then, is a label, or category signifying belonging to a ethnic/cultural group called 'Cuban'. *Cubaneo*, on the other hand involves expression and personality, "a loose repertoire of gestures, customs, vocabulary...*un estado de animo*, a mood, a temperament..." (p. 6) which manifests itself only in relation to another. Perez-Firmat goes on to describe 'Cubaneo' as a "community building enterprise", and the

communal aspect is key. Through his interpretation, this manifestation of Cuban identity can only rise to the surface in communion, or “embrace” with other Cubans, such as the Miami context, or within Cuban homes. Cubaneo is an apt description for what exists in Miami, a city where seventy per cent of the Cuban diaspora in U.S. reside. Opportunities to enact Cubania abound in supermarkets, cafes, restaurants, church and even schools.

Although Cubanidad and Cubaneo are definite markers of ‘being’ Cuban, both scholars exalt Cubania, which I interpret as that which animates the soul of the individual, as the highest form of Cuban identity. While the former are more superficial, outward forms of Cuban-ness, the latter is the essence of Cuban-ness as it uniquely takes shapes within individuals, whether it is manifested consciously or unconsciously in daily life. Yet, all three are important markers of the diasporic Cuban identity. Perez-Firmat writes, “without Cubanidad, civil society is chaotic; without Cubaneo, social intercourse is lifeless; without Cubania, Cubanidad and Cubaneo lose their spiritual mooring” (p. 6).

It is interesting to me that he relates ethnicity with the spirit. In other words, there is the concept, the word for ethnicity, Cubanidad, that is just a characteristic of birthplace, or a suggestion of cultural ties. There is also lived Cubania, which is Cubania that emerges from your core in spite of yourself, in spite of your American surroundings. It is not an affect, nor can it be affected. It is an expression of your soul, if the soul contains the core of who we are, and the core of who we are has everything to do with our culture, and our identity.

Research Design

Research Questions

- a) For each participant in this study, what are the manifestations of Cuban identity, or Cubania?

- b) What are the factors that sustain different or similar manifestations of Cubania, both within and across generations of immigrants?
- c) How, if at all, do manifestations of Cubania shape the language and literacy practices of Cuban-American youth?

Methodology

I designed this study by drawing from traditions of phenomenology and narrative inquiry. Both traditions are concerned with capturing a person's experience, as expressed through participant narrations and observations of their lifeworld (Clandelin & Connolly, 2000). This study is an intentional narrative "reconstruction of a person's experience in relationship both to the other and to a social milieu" (p. 5), drawing from three narratives of experience, including my own.

During the first two years of my doctoral program, as I found myself in conflict with the ways in which Hispanics were generalized about in educational literature, I thought deeply about my past as a bilingual Cuban-American and began to write my life history in pieces, in order to capture in words what continued to manifest itself as a visceral and intellectual reaction to narratives about Hispanics and education; not that these narratives were false, but rather, they were written about in such a way that it seemed like these were the only narratives that could be true.

Mining one's own story is important for the kind of phenomenological inquiry I am doing, because the act of writing, or re-storying, serves an important epistemological and ontological purpose. It is, after all, only in dialogue with ourselves that we recreate, remember, and reinterpret. Mining one's own story also has hermeneutic value, because it is a form of learning through inquiry. Much can be learned from our own histories, not only for the purely

intrinsic value (which is considerable) but also, a more instrumental value: in light of our experiences, what observations can we make about our epistemology, our teaching philosophy, our values, our beliefs about persons and groups of people?

For we are involved in the world and in our research subjectively; we can never be fully objective, if at all (Van Manen, 2015). We can only strive for some degree of objectivity, furthered by attempts to approach our writing/observations with an open disposition, while always striving to make our positionality clear. I am awed when I consider the countless possible versions of stories about Cuban-Americans living and learning bilingually that might be told. The multitude of possible stories points to the individuality, the uniqueness of the human experience. For me, this is the central driving the project: I assume the pluri-physicality, pluri-lingualism, pluri-experiential, hybridity of us all.

As such, this is my story, as well as two others that I listened to and wrote out, to then interpret in light of my knowledge, academic scholarship, and my experiences. As Clandenin & Connelly remind us, it is not the actual stories told by the participants that are essential, but rather, the weaving of a narrative thread between their experience and the three dimensional space, in order to “make sense of life as lived” (2015, p. 78), and explore those things that are taken-for-granted when we hear that someone is Cuban, or Hispanic, or bilingual. For this reason, my research inquiry was not limited to interviews. I intentionally became involved in the participant’s lives as a researcher in order to capture the narratives that surrounded their lives.

Narrative is also “a way of using language or another symbolic system to imbue life events with a temporal and logical order...and establish coherence” (Ochs & Capps, 1996, p. 17). In the sharing of their stories and the opening of their worlds to me, the two adolescents that I spent time with for the duration of this study became collaborators of this final narrative. The

1 order and coherence of the stories and histories in this book were then crafted, arranged, theorized, and narrated with interjections of my own, additional historical context, and phenomenological musings. As researcher and writer, I had the final say in the ways in which the stories were arranged and told, how they were framed, what was included and excluded.

Participants. The table below details the information about the participants in this study, the contexts in which they were interviewed and observed, and basic demographic information to situate them in the historical context of Cuban migration to the U.S.

Participant	Context	Age	Generational Status	Time of Family migration	Place of Birth	Relationship to researcher
Natasha	South Florida	—	2nd gen	1960's	New York	self
Sara	South Florida	15	3rd gen	1960's	South Fla.	niece
Rosaura	Mid-Michigan	15	1.5 gen	1999	Cuba	n/a

Table 1: Participants and Contexts

Methods

Data Sources. The fieldwork in the Midwest took place through a one-year period during my third year of doctoral studies. The fieldwork in Miami began during my second year of doctoral studies and continued for three years in total. Data collection consisted of observations and field-notes, interviews and memos.

Interviews and Observations. I began a research relationship with the two participants in the study by telling them about my project and why I wanted to work with them. After obtaining parental permission and participant assent for the study, I set up an initial interview and a schedule of observational visits. I conducted interviews to capture the participant's perceptions of their lived experiences within their social and cultural contexts (Titchen & Hobson, 2005). It

was important to me to remain flexible and conversational during these interviews in the hopes of achieving a balance between eliciting answers to the specific questions I had in mind, while being open to the creative flow of interactions with the participants. In this way, the interviews were dialogic.

With Sara, I arranged more formal “interview” spaces to structure our time and conversations in order to help us both leave behind the familiar and taken for granted mode of communication between aunt and niece, as well as the prying presence of the family always nearby. This sometimes meant sitting at the kitchen table while everyone else was sleeping, running errands, or in their rooms. Other times, and more informally, being alone in the bedroom with her, sitting on her sister’s bed while she on hers, in pajamas, reflecting and elaborating on things we had talked about earlier. I continued to make observations about Sara’s lived experience in the domains of family and church throughout a two year period for weeks at a time whenever I returned from graduate school for holidays and breaks.

With Rosaura, the opposite was true; I initially strove to de-escalate the formality of the ‘interview’ or the ‘observation’. We developed a rapport through conversation and several home visits where I was treated like a respected insider. I made it a habit to always have my phone out when we met so that it was part of my presence in the room, whether I was recording or not.

Over a one-year period, I conducted 3 semi-structured interviews, had many informal conversations with Rosaura, and gathered field notes through observations of her with family, and neighbors. With Rosaura, I built intimacy through conversational interviews that that I let flow organically, occasionally redirecting in order to get at specific questions that I had written in my notebook that had not yet come up in conversation.

Most of our conversations took place in Rosaura's apartment complex, either at her house, or a neighbor's house. We also took two excursions, one to the library, and one to the movies.

Data Analysis. As the interviewer and the researcher who sought to draw insight from these stories, immersing myself in Sara and Rosaura's Lifeworld (VanManen, 1990) helped me to better understand their historical psyche, how it was formed, and what factors contributed to their experiences, through their own perceptions. These insights led to narrative possibilities that were organized thematically.

I made sense of the data through an iterative narrative process (Van Manen, 1990) which involved cycles of reflection, writing memos, reading transcripts, and writing pieces that would later be incorporated into drafts, and reading outside sources to help me make sense of the data.

I did not explicitly "member-check" by giving the participants the text of the drafts I was writing for them to read and comment on. I did occasionally clarify my understanding of something previously recorded, either to explore it further, for my own clarification of meaning, or to make sure I did not hear it wrong.

Overview of Chapters

The story (ies) of Cubans in America offers a rich study of the complex, diverse realities lived out by immigrant communities throughout various generations. In the spirit of phenomenology, I tell the story as much as possible from the horizon of the participants, myself included—what they see when they look at the past, how they story it, and how that influences them. All narratives are constructed and informed by individual experience, and as thus are necessarily subjective. Historically, certain narratives usually get privileged, ossified, and circulated over time, until they become taken for granted (grand) narratives. The truth lies

somewhere in between myth and reality, usually residing in the lived experiences of the individual, and even this consists of layers of reality which we narrate our experiences of the past.

In Chapter one, I have explained my positionality, and the journey of language-learning and teaching that brought me to this place. I also described the research plan, methodology, and methods. Lastly, I introduced the participants in this study.

In Chapter two, I share a narrative history of Cuba and its relationship with the United States since the era of Spanish colonization. If I am to examine how social and historical forces have shaped the cultural identities of the Cuban diaspora, and explore the relationship between identity, language and culture, I have to share a (hi)story. Which history? Whose history?

Through scholarly investigation of various historical narratives, tomes, and folklore of the past, I construct a narrative of Cuba that makes most sense to me as a scholar of language, literacy, and Cuban history; as a member of the Cuban diaspora in the United States; as a Cuban American who has spent her life surrounded by narratives of Cuban-ness.

Chapter two includes a more detailed history of Cuban immigration, particularly to South Florida, beginning with the relationship between Spain, Cuba, and the United States that dates back several hundred years. I situate my family's history within this narrative, in order to better understand contemporary Cuban migration to the US.

In chapter three, I narrate my own story growing up bilingual. My personal narrative begins with the things that I remember about my life growing up, whether they be stories that I heard, answers to questions that I asked as I was writing my narrative, or my own lived experience. This narrative privileges my maternal family history, partly because many actors on her side of the family tree are still living, and partly because they have always freely offered their

stories; my father sadly passed away many years ago before I embarked on this project. The remaining elders on the paternal side are very old, or have also passed away.

Chapters four and five contain the stories of the different participants in the study, Sara, and Rosaura. Although both were the same age at the time of the study, Sara's story unfolds in South Florida, while Rosaura's unfolds in a small city in the Midwest. In these chapters, I explore the relationship between the identities of the participants, their language(s), literacies and culture(s). I end each chapter with concluding thoughts based on the research questions.

In chapters six and seven, I further develop important conclusions drawn from the participant narratives by exploring six themes that emerged from the study in light of the research questions. In chapter seven, I theorize my findings vis a vis the literature, and discuss the implications of these findings on how this knowledge may be useful in understanding the needs of bilinguals in U.S. schools.

Chapter 2: Leaving Cuba: History, Waves and Exiles

My Maternal Great-Grandfather	Manolo Fernandez	
My Maternal Grandfather	Santiago	
My Maternal Grandmother	Pia	
My Mother	Magdalena	
My Maternal Aunts	Mariana Sofia Fina Pilar	<i>Magdalena's Sisters</i>

Table 2: A Family Tree

Becoming Cuban: Santiago's Journey to Cuba

In the 1920's, my great-grandfather Manolo Fernandez set sail to the former Spanish colony of Cuba, fueled by dreams of owning a tobacco *vega*, in the hopes of making a better life for his family. He left behind his wife and five children, including my grandfather, in their *caseta* in *Abano*, a small farming village in the northern Spanish region of Cantabria. Like many Spanish families at the turn of the twentieth century, they were struggling to stay afloat after years of economic uncertainty and civil unrest.

In 1927, he sent for his son Santiago. At fourteen, Santiago sailed across the Atlantic in a third class cabin on a steamship to Cuba, where he reunited with his father. Together, they worked and sent money and letters back home in Spain to the family in Abano. Manolo eventually returned to Spain and was never able to return to Cuba before he died. My grandfather Santiago, however, forged a different path.

This is where I imagine that the story of my family begins, with that fateful trip that brought my grandfather to Cuba, where he eventually stayed and fell in love, with the island, and with Pia, my grandmother. Pia's family were *criollos*, descendants of Spaniards from a more distant generation. After wedding Pia, Santiago worked his way up to traveling salesman for *Omar y Lastra*, a Cuban subsidiary of General Electric. Of their eight children, five daughters

survived, all roughly two years apart in age: the eldest was Mariana, then Sofia, Magdalena, Fina, and the youngest, Pilar. The middle child, my mother, Magdalena, was born in 1944.

Santiago was able to provide a middle class living for his family through his job as a traveling salesman. As was typical for the times, Pia, was a housewife. Pia was a pious and gentle soul who concerned herself with her daughter's education in the Catholic school they attended, San Francisco de Salles. She was the eldest of five and had lost her mother as a teenager, becoming one of the primary caretakers for her siblings until marriage. Less information is known about Pia's schooling history. She could read and write, evidenced through letter writing, magazine, and religious book reading practices.

It is not clear how many years of schooling my grandfather received as a child, although it is assumed that he had at least a grade school education. The value and purpose of literacy varies across time and space, and may even vary according to social status. Santiago's literacies were valuable in Cuba at a time when the country was in the process of industrialization and modernization. He was literate in Spanish, able to read and communicate orally, and in writing, as evidenced through his employment, hobbies such as reading the newspaper, and letter writing. Being a young, white male had currency in Cuba, where Spanish-heritage *criollos* were in greater positions of power than their black counterparts.

1930'S-1959: Magdalena's Cuba. At the time of my grandfather's transatlantic migrant voyage in 1927, Cuba was undergoing much internal change. With the aid of the United States, schools, roads, sewers, and other indispensable infrastructures that had been ravished by civil wars against Spain for the past century were being erected and rebuilt throughout the country.

As recently as thirty years earlier, during colonial times, *criollos* struggled for class and political parity with the Spanish ruling class elites. In the 1920's, the *criollo* was the new Cuban,

and Cuba was knee deep in the business of nation building. While there were political, intellectual, and social tensions on the island, there was also constant progress and economic growth.

After liberation from Spanish colonial rule, Cubans were able to grow education, small business and industry throughout the island. By the time the 1930's rolled around, Havana had been restored and rebuilt into a large, modern and capital city that could rival the cities of Europe. Paved roads, highways, and train lines connected the provinces from one point of the island to the other, and public schools extended far beyond the city hubs, all of which led to a rising standard of living. By the 1950's, Cuba ranked higher than the United States in measures of infant mortality, life expectancy, standard of living, and most impressively, stood out from all of Latin America and most of the world, actually, in these measures (Farber, 2011).

Magdalena, my mother, remembers growing up with modern appliances and conveniences similar to those in the U.S. At fifteen, her life revolved around her school-work and events at her school, San Francisco de Sales, her family, and her neighborhood friends. She was familiar with American actors, songs, and classic movies that she and her sisters would see from time to time at the local movie theatre. In school, she learned English as a foreign language as one of the core subjects. She attended Catholic mass in Latin, with her family. During her childhood in Cuba, the tradition of the Catholic Church was to celebrate mass in Latin. Therefore, in addition to the Spanish and English literacies being taught in school, snippets of Latin were in her vocabulary, traces of religious practice and associated literacies.

The stories gleaned from my family and so many others in South Florida were consistent with a vision of Cubans as entrepreneurial, educated, democratically-minded, middle class-oriented people. Politically and economically, the U.S. presence was heavy-handed in Cuba.

There was social unrest across the island in response to government corruption and social inequity as the country struggled between the ideals of democracy and the fascist tendencies of President Batista. Yet this unrest did not inhibit freedom of worship, or the development of free commerce, media, and education from flourishing. There was a country still racially imbalanced in terms of socio-economic status, resources and political power, yet more racially and structurally integrated than the U.S.

Cubans in the U.S. Popular Imagination: A Legacy of Transnationalism

Both Cubans and Americans have been traveling back and forth between the two countries for several centuries. In the 1940's and 1950's, it was common for both Cubans and Americans who had the means to travel by plane or by ferry between Havana and Key West. Migration flowed both ways; American expatriates, most famously, the writer Ernest Hemingway, took up residence in Cuba, and in the early twentieth century, it was not uncommon for American investors, and mafia moguls to own a home on the island.

In the first half of the twentieth century, Cuba was a dynamic entity on the radar of the American popular imagination. Cuba was a popular vacation destination. The Cuban actor Ricky Ricardo, Lucille Ball's onscreen and off-screen husband in the popular sitcom "I Love Lucy", was a household name. Cuban music was an instrumental part of the evolution of jazz in New Orleans, and genres such as 'cha-cha-cha' eventually became a part of the American band mainstream.

South Florida retains artifacts of Spanish colonialism, and of a historical Cuban presence that predates the Cuban revolution of 1959. In the city of Coral Gables, street names read like a map of Spain: Giralda, Granada, and Malaga, for example. A pocket of wealthy Cuban families

already owned homes or property in South Florida prior to 1959. Eventually, two former Cuban presidents would be buried there: Fulgencio Batista and Carlos Prío Socarras.

Cuba and the U.S: Convergent Discourses. Cuban families were also quite familiar with American culture, as well as American products. Cuba was on par with the U.S. as far as standard of living and stood out as the most developed country in the Caribbean and South America. American cars and appliances were a common feature in homes, as was music, television and cinema.

It was a source of amusement for me to discover that the Spanish names of certain household items I had grown up with were actually English brand names, vocalized with Spanish vowel and consonant sounds, that had become part of a “Cubanized” English vocabulary. For example, Kleenex tissues were known as *kleen-e*, Fab laundry detergent as *el fa*, Vick’s Vapor Rub as *vee-vape-ru*. These pronunciations derive from a Spanish reading of English words.

In addition to these types of word appropriations, the discourse of what Americans might consider the ‘American way of life’ was a familiar discourse to Cubans. The idea of education as a means for social mobility and self-improvement, the presence of (and the aspiration to become a part of) a large middle class, the valuing of entrepreneurship, and the notion of working your way up to personal and economic success were part of the Cuban dream, and had been for as many centuries as Spaniards made the journey to the island with the hope of building a better life than that which they left behind in Spain.

The Early Waves: Narratives of Flight and Rescue. My father left Cuba for New York in 1957, discouraged by the political atmosphere of the island. His departure preceded the massive influx of Cubans that was soon to come, most making their way first through South Florida. In contrast, my mother’s family did not want to leave Cuba in 1959. Their eldest

daughter had just gotten married. The thought of uprooting the family to begin again seemed unimaginable. Social conditions and civil liberties in Cuba, however, were becoming progressively uncertain. Grassroots opposition for Castro began as soon as it became evident that he would pursue a course much different from the anticipated democracy the middle class hoped for. In the turmoil and uncertainty following the coup, there were street shootings and mass executions. As the months passed, the government became increasingly repressive towards free speech. The newspapers became nationalized, as did all foreign investments and businesses. When my mother and her older sister were recruited by community organizers to pass out flyers against communism, my grandparents began to fear for the safety of their teen-aged daughters, whose futures in Cuba seemed suddenly uncertain.

My grandparents made the difficult decision to leave Cuba for several reasons. Their primary concern was their family's safety, which seemed up in the air during the aftermath of the revolution. The future they had envisioned for themselves was being threatened with the looming certainty of many restricted freedoms, and freedoms eliminated altogether, such as the freedom to worship, a non-negotiable freedom for them. As a last straw, the basic right of the people to live and work as they pleased was eliminated when all businesses and homes became nationalized. Having never lived under a communist regime, these changes on the island were foreboding. As it turns out, my family left Cuba on the last journey of the *Covadonga* to Spain in 1961, the same ship that the Catholic clergy and sisters were forced to leave on. They would eventually find their way to New York, where my mother later met and married my father.

Leaving Cuba. With my mother's family on board, the *Covadonga* first made port en *la Coruna*, then Gijon, and finally continued sailing North to the region of *Cantabria*, where the journey continued as the family boarded a train from *Santander* to *San Vicente de la Barquera*

and onto the tiny village of Abano where Abuelito's family lived, in the same pastoral setting that he had left behind as a child. But economic times were difficult in Spain following wars and political turmoil. Abuelito Santiago's family lived off the land, and lacked the resources to help feed for six more mouths. Enticed by the promise of opportunity in the United States, and bolstered with the knowledge that many Cubans had settled there already, Santiago and his two eldest worked to earn for the family's journey to the United States. They left Spain with visas in hand, and flew to New York in the fall 1962. Their arrival was not through South Florida, nor through Ellis Island, but through Kennedy airport, where they arrived in the midst of an early winter blizzard in the month of October. Magdalena, my mother, remembers getting off the plane and walking through snow that reached up to her knees.

Immigration services provided them one night's stay in a hotel so they could get their bearings, and then they were on their own. Santiago had five dollars in his pocket and the phone number to a distant relative, who never materialized. Not knowing what to do or where to go, it occurred to them to search for familiar names in the phonebook, where they found the name of one of their neighbors from Cuba. These generous and resourceful family friends pooled their resources together and within days, managed to procure a studio apartment for the family with one month's paid rent. They helped to furnish it with two second hand fold-out cots, and a donated sleeper sofa. Magdalena remembers the ham and cheese they brought for them on their first night, along with the subway tokens, and used clothing they were given so that they could search for work. She was sixteen years old.

Within days, Sofia and Magdalena, the two eldest and most readily employable of the lot, began working at a pharmaceutical factory where they did not have to do much speaking. The sisters had rudimentary knowledge of English learned as a foreign language in Cuba; however,

their knowledge of English was the artificial sort of language often learned in foreign language text books [hello, my name is...do you play tennis?] that does not account for regional varieties or vernaculars, and thus did not prepare them for the non-textbook accents of the real people of New York, whose English sounded doubly foreign to them.

My grandfather, belonging to a generation that had been able to succeed with hard work and no formal schooling beyond grade school, and with no understanding of the English language, had a more difficult time finding employment. The family of six huddled together with their donated belongings in their one room apartment, grateful for the help they received, yet uncertain about what tomorrow would bring. Despite the uprooting, the loss, and the uncertainty they faced, they had one very important item— they possessed a green card symbolizing legal residency status, one of the benefits extended to Cuban refugees by the US government.

Just like my childhood memories, this narrative, told second hand and in broad strokes, paints a much smoother and even romanticized picture than what actually transpired. In practice, like many immigrants before them, the Fernandez family faced many hardships and incidents of discrimination because of their language, ethnicity, and immigrant status. Vacant apartments suddenly became unavailable once the landlord heard their accent, as did employment opportunities. My mother Magdalena remembers the day they had to hold my grandfather back from jumping out the window of their fifth floor apartment when, in a moment of despair over the gravity of their circumstances, and unable to fathom how he would provide for his wife and daughters in a country whose language and culture were foreign to him, he lost his head. In Cuba, where he had built his career and reputation from the ground up, he would have been close

to retirement. In New York, he was just another immigrant facing many obstacles as he struggled to imagine a future for his family.

One of the greatest hardships the family endured was the separation from the oldest daughter, Mariana, who had stayed behind in Cuba to help her husband, Marcelino, put his business affairs in order. At the time, they thought they would be able to sell the bakery, *El Leon de Oro*, that Marcelino's family had owned and operated for fifty years, and hoped to join the rest of the family in Spain within a few months of their departure. However, timing was not on their side; the communist grip on the island became tighter and more restrictive. In the chaos of the early years of the Castro regime, hundreds of ordinary people were arrested under suspicion of counter-revolutionary activities.

Marcelino and his mother, an older woman in her sixties, were victims of one of these roundups. Although his mother was released after three months, it was my uncle's fate to be imprisoned for over a year in *La Cabana*, a jail notorious both for its dire conditions and torture of prisoners, before being cleared and released to his wife Antonia, who immediately filed to leave the island. Their travel visas to Spain were delayed by two more years, so that by the time they arrived in Spain 1964, the rest of the family was already in New York. With a newborn in arms, and the knowledge of how uncertain life was for the family in New York, they remained in Spain and forged their futures there.

Despite their hardships in New York, with youth and resilience on their side, the two eldest Fernandez daughters eventually found ways to move the family forward. Perhaps as a consequence of being uprooted at such a young age, and with a less than certain future ahead, my mother married my father quite young, at 19. By the time she was twenty-three, she had two baby girls, of which I was the youngest.

The Exile Wave. My family's departure from Cuba coincided with the first wave of Cuban immigration to the United States, when a largely white, educated, middle and upper class exodus ensued after the rise of communist leader Fidel Castro. Many in this group left with families intact and in many cases, with extended families (Pedraza, 2007; Farber, 2011). Although Cubans who stayed behind were not free to leave the island for many years after the country's turn to communism, sporadic agreements between the US and Cuba made other forms Cuban immigration to the U.S. possible at certain key moments. Most famous of these are the Freedom Flights that took place between 1965-1974, and the Peter Pan initiative, in which thousands of families voluntarily sent their children out of Cuba under the care of the Catholic Church abroad. Exile groups conceived these agreements on the U.S. end and supporters who arranged rescue missions to spare those left behind from the dangers of communism, the prevailing U.S. sentiment about this political ideology during the Cold War.

The exile wave came to the United States with hopes of soon returning, but these hopes were soon dashed when it became apparent that the country would remain entrenched in a communist regime. Suddenly cut off indefinitely from their homeland, the Cuban immigrants did what so many before them have done; they dug their heels in and began to carve out a new life for themselves. For the exile wave, this narrative of exile crystallized into an invisible barrier in the Florida straights that separated Cuba from the U.S. Alienated from the physical island of Cuba, exiles invested much of their energy in the host country, recreating social networks, organizations, and cultural practices (Farber, 2011; Portes & Stepick, 1993). In Miami, the Cubans had the numbers, the capital, and a shared experience of loss and betrayal that galvanized the community. Together with this, plus the reassurance of residency status made

possible by the Cuban Adjustment Act, the Cubans in this space carved out a niche for themselves.

An important characteristic of these first exile waves is that they rarely return to Cuba. For many years it was not possible to, except for sporadic exceptions, as neither government permitted it. The American government prohibited trade and travel with Cuba in accordance with the Helms-Burton Act while the Cuban government villainized those who left by branding them *gusanos* (worms) and traitors, often penalizing family left behind (Farber, 2011). It is only recently in the fifty-six-year history of Cuban immigration following the rise of Fidel Castro that Cuban émigrés can more freely obtain a visa to return, contingent upon having immediate family there. Before the easing of restrictions, return to the island was a distant dream that remained out of reach to most, although even if they had been able to go, many would not, out of sorrow for what all that was lost, fear of persecution, and anger against the totalitarian government regime.

For the exiles, a different relationship with Cuba began to develop once it was clear that there was no return. This relationship was to a Cuban imaginary of the past.

Cubans in the City. Over time, as the impossibility of return became evident, a new Cuban imaginary began to develop. The collective memory of what had once been Cuba became crystallized. The narrative these Cubans lived through characterized by flight, and rescue, and these themes are implicit in the very names of the early rescue missions. The villain in this narrative of Cuban exile is Fidel Castro, who is perceived to have forced these exiles off the island through repressive measures and loss of freedoms. But the imaginary was not simply a memory of something that once existed—it was alive in a different form, manifested in the ecology of the city. These new businesses, families, schools, etc., that were now an extension of

what once existed in Cuba. It was as if there were two Cuba's, and the Cubans had merely traded spaces. Of course this Cuba did have a different flavor, and that was the anglo under-current, with its "American" culture and English language.

To use Perez-Firmat's theorization of Cuban identity, the immigrant Cubans had Cubanidad, the generic marker of Cuban-ness, by virtue of being born on Cuban soil. They took part in Cubaneo, that animated social interaction that occurs between Cubans, with all of the other Cubans around them, and there were always plenty of those in Miami. Lastly, they carried Cubania, the soulful essence of Cuban-ness, in every fiber of their being. It flowed off their tongue every time they spoke English with a Cuban accent. It sat deep in their eyes when they stared wistfully at the sea, remembering *la playa de Varadero*. It resided in the statue of *La Virgen de la Caridad*; in the package of black beans found in the pantry; in the bottle of *Agustin Reyes* baby cologne; in the insatiable desire to eat homemade Cuban food.

While the babies of these immigrants, the second generation, would not have any legal claims to Cubanidad, they inherited a strong ethnic claim, one that was animated by the artifacts and performance of Cuban-ness all around them in the city. Cubans appropriated these spaces in the city with their homes, their businesses, their communities, their language, and their artifacts. They then grandfathered the subsequent generations into that "generic" state of being Cuban, validating their *Cubanidad*. These children were privy to Cubaneo in the city from the day of their birth. It felt natural to them, to live in the United States and claim Cubanidad. For these children, without 'being Cuban', there was no 'being American'. While they had no memory of the actual island of Cuba, and no lived experience there, they had first-hand experience with Cubanidad in the city.

By the time my family moved to Miami in Christmas 1979, artifacts of Spanish-ness, and more specifically, Cuban-ness, were everywhere. The *Sedan*s supermarket chain, owned by two Cuban families, rivaled the large American supermarket chains. Cuban pharmacies could be found in shopping centers everywhere, often dispensing medicine and medical advice from individuals who had been pharmacists in Cuba. There were *carnicerias* (meat markets), *canastillas* (clothing stores for babies), *panaderias* (bakery), and even *botanicas*, (Santeria oriented markets), much to my mother's dismay.

As far as food and restaurants go, there was nothing a Cuban home cook could desire that could not be found in a local *bodeguita* or supermarket, from cured Spanish chorizos for *potajes* to malanga, one of many root vegetables that are staples of the Cuban diet. The *carniceros* in the *bodeguitas*, and eventually the big supermarkets, sold the cuts of meat the Cubans were used to. My grandmother, who did not speak a lick of English, could do all of her shopping in Spanish. Even if the commerce was not Cuban-owned and operated, the employees were likely to be so. From store clerks at the mall to insurance agents, someone with a Cuban surname seemed to always be present in places of business.

I imagine that the version of Cuban-ness that arose in South Florida to be somewhat representative of how Cuban society might have developed in Cuba under different circumstances. The entrepreneurship, skills, professions, determination, desires, community spirit, politics, family cultures, family histories, language(s), and dreams of the Cuban people exiled in the U.S. did not materialize overnight on U.S. soil; these things traveled with them across the sea. Adjustments were made to move forward with plans and dreams so that at least the children, and future generations, could attain the education, the future, and the type of success that families had once had, or aspired to have, in the Cuba they left behind. Gender and

social identities shifted; women who had never worked in Cuba went to work in factories, while live-in *Abuelitas* and *Abuelitos* took care of the children.

It would be impossible to tell the story of the Cuban reinvention in a few paragraphs. However, suffice it to say that in two decades, as Joan Didion (1987) observed, “the entire tone of the city, the way people looked and talked and met one another, was Cuban” (p. 52). What she observed was in fact Cubaneo at its finest.

That such a large group of immigrants could overwhelm a city with its language, business, and other cultural artifacts of daily living did not sit well with the Anglo population, outnumbered as it was by the Cubans who now called Miami their home. Didion (1987) writes, “this [the Cuban population] was not...an invisible 56% of the population” (p. 53). The visibility of the exile community, the financial power collectively wielded, and the audacious ubiquity of the Spanish language was not well-received by all:

What was unusual about Spanish in Miami is not that it was so often spoken, but that it was so often heard. In, say, Los Angeles, Spanish remained a language only barely registered by the Anglo population, part of the ambient noise, the language spoken by the people who worked in the car wash and came to trim the trees and cleared the tables in restaurants. In Miami Spanish was spoken by the people who ate in the restaurants, the people who owned the cars and the trees, which made on the socio-auditory scale, a considerable difference” (p. 63).

The rapid spread of Cubanidad and Spanish throughout the city caused tension with the local Anglo population. These tensions rose to the surface when Miami tried to pass a bilingual referendum to officially recognize Miami as a bilingual city, which in daily practice, it *was*. A small number of Anglo activists succeeded in defeating it. Even though the bilingual referendum was defeated, Miami remained, in fact, a de-facto bilingual city. The ongoing waves of immigration from Cuba, and eventually from Central and South America made it possible for the Spanish language to continue to be replenished in the spaces of the city.

The Marielita Wave. In 1979, one year after my family moved to South Florida, a group of Cubans stormed the Peruvian embassy in Havana. Cuba, a closed society for twenty years now, was suddenly under the microscope of the foreign press. Unexpectedly, Fidel Castro declared to the world that Cubans were free to leave if they so wished as long as they had someone to pick them up, unprecedentedly opening the sea port of Mariel for this cause. Hundreds of exiled Cubans and Americans alike procured boats and sailed through uncharted waters to rescue several hundred thousand loved ones, neighbors, friends and even strangers.

The drama that unfolded added another chapter to the narrative of flight and rescue, still strong after twenty years, newly cemented in the memory of a new generation of Cubans in America, the second generation, of which I was a part. An added twist to the narrative was the casting of Castro as the Machiavellian dictator who slyly gets his way even when it seems that he has been beat at his own game, or as Cubans would say, *siempre sale con las suyas*. Cubans in Miami were just coming up for air in the United States when controversy ensued as an angry Castro emptied jails, hospitals and insane asylums, forcing the “rescuers” to take on these passengers as a condition for taking family and friends. It was this historical moment that inspired the movie Scarface.

At eleven years old, I had a limited grasp on the important political events that were unfolding. I knew that many ‘Marielitas’ were being rescued and brought to the United States, and that for some reason they were being held at the Orange Bowl. Soon, however, I would develop a more intimate understanding about Marielitas, Cubans, and the effects of the revolution on families throughout the years, beginning with the neighbors that rented the other half of the duplex where we lived.

In some ways they were like my family: we spoke the same language, ate the same food, and shared cultural references. In other ways, they were not. English was difficult for them. They were very fluent in Spanish, just like my parents; my sister and I sounded very choppy next to them, and lacked for words. Now in the Florida, they were discovering new cousins they had never met, sons and daughters of family members who had left Cuba with the first wave of exiles. Upon leaving Cuba, their family had been divided, as their grandparents had stayed in Cuba with the extended family.

For the first time, I witnessed firsthand the suffering that the families went through because they could not mourn the death of loved ones, as it would sometimes take weeks before correspondence was received relaying this news. Phone calls to the island were difficult, restricted, and not private. Getting through to family in Cuba, for them, was an anguished process that often ended in tears, as the joy of connecting with the loved ones left behind was always tempered by the news of loss, sickness, or longing. These were new narratives to add to my Cuban imaginary.

Balseros: The Third Wave. In the late 1990's, as the Internet and tourism opened up unsanctioned technological possibilities between Cuba and the US, images of a Cuba in ruins began to circulate more widely to audiences in public forums, in social media venues like Facebook and Youtube. It was here that I caught my first glimpse of modern day Cuba. The images of crumbling buildings and anachronistic features of Cuban society, such as the 1950's cars that are still in operation there, reinforced the distance that existed between the memory of the lived reality of the exiles with the current reality on the island, making the idea of Cuba as a place to return to even less plausible.

During the 1990's, the exile community and the world watched news coverage of bedraggled Cubans nicknamed *balseros* (*rafters*) who risked their lives on makeshift rafts, hoping to be rescued off the shores of Key West. The progressively worsened conditions of the newer refugees living in post-Soviet Cuba only served to reinforce the narrative of escape and rescue, of fleeing and survival, for the established exile community as they watched these stories on the local news.

It was during this wave that an alternate narrative of Cuban immigration was fully realized. The priority for Post-Soviet émigrés, often referred to as economic refugees (Farber, 2011; Pedraza, 2007), was feeding their families, and many seemed not as concerned about communism or Fidel Castro. This wave, less likely to immigrate with their extended families, is characterized by a high rate of return visits and the sending of remittances to family members left behind (Farber, 2011; Pedraza, 2007). This wave of Cuban immigration most fits the profile of what sociologists refer to as transnational, referring to immigrants who maintain active ties in both home and host countries (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001; Pedraza, 2007; Lam & Warriner, 2012), a feature that was not characteristic of the first two waves.

Imagining Cuba: Paradise or Ruins?

Yo fui a Cuba. (I went to Cuba)
“Te gusto?” (Did you like it?) they ask anxiously, expecting a yes.
“Vas a volver?” (will you go back again?)
It’s complicated. (No es facil)

The Cuban experience is complex and layered, varying over different contexts and year of arrival. The changes in Cuban society following the revolution of 1959 disrupted the spaces of Cuban-ness that had previously existed; the changes uprooted institutions, identities, persons and traditions. The departure of much of the middle class, the separation of families, the new

politics of education, and the silencing of religious institutions were some of the factors that radically changed the ways in which Cuban-ness evolved in Cuba. It is not surprising then, that different waves of Cubans imagine Cuba somewhat differently depending on their past experience with the island.

My own perceptions growing up were that Cuba was an undesirable place to be, one from which people seek to leave, as it is for Sara. Our experiences living amongst so many who have left the island, who bring tales of struggle and oppression, support this narrative. We have heard stories about the paradise that Cuba once was, before the revolution of 1959, and we understand that this paradise no longer exists for our family, or for the Cubans in exile. Our sense of Cuban-ness then is connected to Cubans in diaspora in South Florida, and we live our culture within our family context.

Rosaura, on the other hand, describes Cuba as a paradise, as she reminisces about her family there, and the natural beauty of the island, positioning it as a place that to return to. Her family prioritizes their resources in order to return to Cuba as often as possible (more in Chapter 5 and 6). In the Midwest spaces of her life, there is a very small enclave of Cubans, limiting the spaces of Cuban-ness in her life to her family and the apartment building they share with Cuban neighbors.

Yet culture identities endure as immigrant families carve out new spaces for themselves. Culture resides both in the individual and in the spaces in which this culture is shared and manifested. For space is as much a part of one's culture as the artifacts, the collective memory, and the individuals who interact therein. There is a visceral connection to the space, as well as a material connection of artifacts that grow out of historically lived cultural interactions within the group. These spaces make sense to the cultures that live in them. Leaving that space does not

imply that you leave your culture behind—this is impossible, as culture permeates everything we are and everything that we do, beginning with our language.

In times of stability, when life is ‘business as usual’, the average person lives their life not very acutely aware of their everyday lived culture. It is usually during points of disjuncture (as immigration tends to be), or when one is far away from their homeland, surrounded by difference, that one becomes more acutely aware of their culture. In fact, cultural elements that were once undervalued can even take on increased emotional currency, especially when artifacts are all that are physically tangible in a new space.

The next three chapters share narratives of experience of three Cuban-Americans living and learning bilingually. While the three stories are told from the horizon of adolescent girls who identify as Cuban-American, what this means for each of us is somewhat different. For Sara and myself, being Cuban means being connected to the Cuban diaspora outside of Cuba, while for Rosaura, being Cuban entails a lived transnational relationship with the island. While our histories with Cuba differ, for each of us, the role of *la cultura vivida Cubana* is integral to our sense of self, and to our self-identification as bilingual Cuban-Americans in ways that implicate our ways of languaging and being in the world.

Chapter 3: Natasha's Story

Growing up Bilingual: Part I, Up North

Early Language Memories. One of my earliest childhood memories dates back to when I was three years old and we lived in the Brooklyn apartment. I remember seeing my father's silhouette disappear into the kitchen through the crack in my bedroom door early one morning, and minutes later being lured out of bed by the smell of warm bread toasting. Feigning exaggerated surprise upon seeing me creep into the kitchen, he picks me up and sits me down on the counter, my bare feet paddling back and forth as he butters our bread and we talk. This sweet memory of my father and I is safely ensconced in my memory. Although I remember this, and many other snapshots of our life in Brooklyn, what escapes my memory is the sound of our voices and the words that we spoke; was it Spanish, or was it English? As far back as I can remember, it has always felt like I grew up speaking both.

Spanish At Home. My parents tell me that I was raised 'in Spanish', our heritage language. No one seems to remember when I became fluent in English. We concluded that that I must have picked up English from watching television shows such as Sesame Street, and perhaps from interactions with my older sister, who was already in school. At the time my parents were more concerned with our Spanish, which was the language of the home and of our family culture. They realized that we would soon be immersed in English through school, so that even as they gained proficiency in that language, they were careful not to let it encroach on the language of the home, where Spanish was privileged. This practice also ensured that we could communicate with the Spanish speaking elders of our extended family, namely, my maternal grandparents, who were intimately involved in my upbringing during those early childhood years.

That summer before my fourth birthday, we moved two hours south to the suburbs of New Jersey, leaving behind grandparents, cousins, aunts, uncles, and family friends—in short, the entire network of Spanish-speaking people I had ever known. Most importantly, the people who I would have spoken Spanish with on a daily basis were now two hours removed from me.

Family folklore has it that I soon rebelled against speaking Spanish, wanting to speak only in English, although I have no memory of this. I *do* know that I spoke English when I started Kindergarten. I remember listening in awe to my teacher on the first day of school. I remember the wonder of making my first friend, of eating milk and graham crackers during recess, of learning through crafts. I remember working in my phonics workbook at home, with my mother sitting next to me as I read out loud, practicing my letter and vowel sounds. I sang and recited newly learned school songs and rhymes, such as Humpty Dumpty, Twinkle Twinkle Little Star, and Jack and Jill. It is only as an adult looking back that I realize how meaningful these incidents must have been to my English literacy development. Although my mother was still perfecting her own basic English literacy skills, she supported my English literacy development by sitting next to me as I did my homework, asking me questions, listening to the words and songs I learned, and in general, prioritizing schoolwork. She also contributed to my developing literacies by teaching me the numbers, the alphabet, songs, and rhymes in Spanish.

Homework, grades, and schoolbooks were a big deal in our household. In those days, when textbooks were issued to students on loan for the school year, my mother took great care to cover our books and help us label them every fall. Even when she worked afternoon shifts, and my sister and I became latchkey kids, she would keep tabs on us by calling periodically to make sure we were on task with our homework. My father, although less involved, always questioned us about our grades and examined our report cards.

In New Jersey, although we spoke Spanish at home, English was the language outside of the home by default, in school, institutions, and the popular culture. Both my sister and I have very fond memories of the Catholic school we attended, St. Joseph's. We were the only Spanish speakers in the school, although there were other children of immigrants from other countries, such as Czechoslovakia and the Philippines. One year for 'show and tell', my sister brazenly took a Spanish record, a gypsy shawl, and a Castilian headpiece to dance Flamenco for her class. Ever the out-going one, she delighted in showing off her Spanish heritage, while I shyly kept a lower profile.

Living Culturally. There is something worth noting about a field trip taken in the fall to a pumpkin patch. I remember being dressed in one of my loveliest dresses, sent to me by an aunt in Spain. I wore white, knee-high, embroidered socks with hanging pom-poms, and my shiny white dress shoes. My mother made my hair especially nice that morning, and I remember smelling of cologne, feeling pretty and proud on my way to school. As I climbed on the yellow school bus destined for the pumpkin patch, I casually noticed that the other kids did not have "special" clothes on, and I was not sure why. I have a vague memory of hanging out with an adult (possibly the teacher?) close to the bus, where I was kindly supervised as my classmates ran around trudging through the muddy pumpkin vines on the ground.

This *may* have been my first cultural clash with school. For my Cuban mother, a field trip was a special occasion, and special occasions warranted wearing your best clothes. She may have not known that a pumpkin patch was a farm; she may not fully understood the field trip notice written in academic English. She does not remember this incident at all, and I do not remember being traumatized by it, just that it happened. Moments like this from my childhood

helped me to realize that our family was sometimes different, yet it was not a difference that made me feel like an outsider.

For example, in the fourth grade when my best friend Laura spent the day with me, my mother made homemade spaghetti for lunch. Now my mother had a reputation of being an excellent cook, especially with Italian dishes. After being served, we all began to eat, except soon we realized that Laura was just pushing her food around. My mother asked her what was wrong—was it that she did not like spaghetti? Laura shyly asked what ‘those things’ in the spaghetti were. My mother explained that she made the sauce with onions, peppers, chorizo, and *tocino*, or pork fat. Poor Laura was not used to such richly seasoned spaghetti with ingredients that were foreign to her. I watched this transaction quizzically, as I licked the tasty sauce off my lips. Spaghetti with chorizo and *tocino* was my normal, but it certainly was not Laura’s!

Magdalena’s Agency. Despite these moments of discontinuity between home and school, my sister and I do not remember experiencing any discomfort due to our heritage language or our home culture. However, according to my mother, I went through a phase where I did not want to speak Spanish. Now, my mother was an immigrant, and an English language learner, but she never let her accent, or what some might have considered to be her “broken” English, stop her from doing what she had to do--she spoke to all types of people. I have memories of her talking to my teachers, my friends, other mothers, the grocery store clerks, credit card companies on the phone, as well as the mailman, doctors, neighbors, and family friends. It was characteristic of her mothering style to always have my sister and I in tow. We did the groceries together, we went to the gym with her, we went to church with her, PTA nights, outings, etc. The only times we had a baby-sitter were the times in our lives that her work hours

prevented her from supervising us. At different periods during my elementary school years, these hours varied depending on the factory shifts she was assigned to work.

All this to say, that when my astute mother realized I was turning against Spanish, she turned to the nuns, whom she had already befriended with the occasional *flan* and other Cuban goodies that she made at home and dropped off from time to time. Sure enough, she fished out the only Spanish-speaking nun at the high school, Sister Catalina, and befriended her. Before long, Sister Catalina was coming over to our house to talk to us about her Guatemalan missions, so that my sister and I could have a model of fully bilingual adult.

Literacies of the Home

While they were both literate in Spanish, my father had developed more advanced literacies in English. Unlike my mother, who had been forced to leave Cuba in the tenth grade, he had been able to graduate from secondary school and begin his studies at the Universidad de La Habana before political unrest disrupted his academic journey in Cuba. An avid reader, there was always novel at his bedside table; the newspaper, the television guide, and the evening news were also a steady part of his reading diet. Although my mother's journey to continue her education took a longer and more circuitous path, she had left Cuba with a solid academic literacy base in Spanish. She focused her time less on novel reading and more on navigating the mundane texts of ordinary life, such as supermarket flyers, church bulletins, school communications, and the Reader's Digest, as well as sifting through mail, and writing letters to family members.

Literacy Artifacts. Although my father had a long commute to work in the city and was not as involved in our daily school life, one of his main contributions in those early elementary school years was his emphasis on books and historical television series. He was very proud of

the Encyclopedia Britannica set that he and my mother had purchased from a door to door salesman, and he loved to see us refer to volumes to search for information about a topic. He also purchased a very large, hard-cover Webster's dictionary--the kind that was several inches thick and several pounds heavy--that we referred to often. Another artifact that stands out in my memory is a three-dimensional world globe that twirled on its axis. The globe, the dictionary, and the encyclopedia set were often in use by my sister and I, for school projects, or just for fun.

English Television. Another important contribution to our literacy development by my father revolved around the television set. In those days we had one family television in the living room. Dad, who read the TV Guide religiously, was always abreast of upcoming series and network showcase presentations. Whenever a show of historical significance would air, he made it obligatory for us to watch. I remember watching the miniseries for the television adaptation of *Roots* (Haley, 1977), *Doctor Zhivago* (Pasternak, 2002), and *Gone With the Wind* (Mitchell, 1940), for example, as a family in our living room. Shows such as these contributed to the formation of our historical schema; however incomplete or faulty the historical accuracy of these productions may have been, it provided a preliminary historical sketch of sorts, as well as a visual and aural literacy component.

We also engaged in family viewings of more light-hearted television productions, such as *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang* (Flemin, 1968), and the *Wizard of Oz* (Baum, 1939). Like many families in the seventies, we also watched the weekly regulars: *Happy Days*, *The Donny and Marie Show*, and the *Loveboat*, just to name a few. Through these shows, our eyes and ears were immersed in the English language and culture of the popular culture.

Musical Literacies. One Christmas, I remember receiving the 8-Track tape of the Sound of Music from family friends. This was just one more addition to the eclectic music collection

that our family kept (in vinyl and 8-track) ranging from musicals, such as *The Fiddler on the Roof*, to pop, such as The Carpenters, to salsa, such as Tito Puente. A favorite past-time of my sister and I was to lip-synch and act out our favorite singers and movie stars, which were invariably American pop stars. We regularly pored over the album and 8-track covers, spent hours reading through the lyrics and band information, and many more rehearsing dramatic renditions to perform for ghost audiences in our basement.

This fascination with the music and pop stars of our childhood sparked a fondness for reading different teen magazines of the times that highlighted the lives of these singers, such as Teen-Beat and Tiger Beat Magazine. Whenever I had one of these texts in my hands, I would spend hours pouring through every article, following instructions for writing fan club letters and other related activities, like many other pre-teen girls of the era.

Reading Books in English. In addition to music, my sister and I were equally fascinated with books. Because she was older, my sister began accumulating chapter books and novels before I did. She would tell me about the novels she read for school, and as I developed my reading abilities, her novels and the stories she told me about them became something to look forward to.

In elementary school, we regularly went to the library where we were encouraged to read and check out books. I remembering losing all sense of time in my Beverley Cleary, Pippi Longstocking, and Nancy Drew books. Once when I was ten years old and in the hospital, my father, who was not one for gifts, showed up with two books for me: *The Secret Garden*, and *The Little Princess*. I read and re-read these books throughout my childhood years, and to this day, remember them fondly. Despite the oral Spanish in the home, all of our reading was done in English.

Spanish Literacies. Although the language of communication in the home was Spanish, as my sister and I grew older, we naturally got in the habit of speaking English to each other about school and other things. Eventually we spent more time in English mode between school and media than in Spanish, unless extended family was around. English, much to my father's dismay, also found its way into our conversations with them at home. This is when the presence of my grandparents became instrumental in helping me build more foundational layers of Spanish literacy. Whereas my parents could understand my Spanglish if necessary, my grandparents could not. Beyond this, it was through my grandparents, who often came to stay with us, that we participated in Spanish literacies that went beyond the oral.

Pia, gentle and reserved, barely reached 5 feet; Santiago, hard-working, boisterous and sometimes belligerent, reached 6'2. As a child growing up, my *Abuelitos* were the closest thing to heaven, giving my sister and I boundless, unrequited love and care. Children do not have a realistic sense of time, and in my memory, my grandparents were always old, and they had always been grandparents. I was neither aware nor interested in their history from Cuba; my world was right in front of me, in New Jersey, in the present. As I grew older I eventually learned to imagine and appreciate how hard it must have been for them to leave behind everything they knew, and everything they possessed, at the prime of their lives, for an uncertain future.

Spanish Television. Whenever Abuelita Pia and Abuelito Santiago stayed with us, watching Spanish television become another kind of family event. I remember sitting on my grandfather's lap as we watched episodes of *Chespiritu*, and *El Chavo del Ocho*, children's comedy shows that relied on highly stereotyped, slapstick/physical humor (much like the Three Stooges). There was also a particular novela, *Mundo de Juguetes*, whose main character was a

little girl, as well as Spanish variety shows that we would enjoy on the black and white television set in the basement. Watching these shows together inevitably led to conversations about the shows, in Spanish, of course.

As the oldest grandchildren of the bunch, my sister and I participated in the rearing of the younger grandchildren by helping our aunts change diapers, corral toddlers, and play with the babies. We became familiar with the discourse of child-rearing in our Cuban family and learned the associated vocabulary. Through these child events that echoed our own early childhood experiences, we practiced the Spanish songs of our childhood, such as *El Ratoncito Miguel*, purposefully imitating our aunts as they had sung to us, and we now sang to our younger cousins. These oral literacy practices were the bedrock of family life.

Childhood Songs and Rhymes. Spanish song-singing was a form a literacy in our family. My mother would often break out into song while we were in the car on the way to the supermarket, or during the long drive to visit family in the city. During these performances, some of our favorites were Spanish songs with repetitive lyrics. There was a fun one with exaggerated vowel sounds that was my favorite, because one got to sing nonsense phrases while alternating vowel sounds in each different round. It was a silly song, but one that cemented the pronunciation of the Spanish vowel sounds. My grandmother's favorite was a rhyming song (one of my grandmother's favorites) about a lady and her dog that relied on Spanish numerical knowledge, and my sister's favorite, a repetitive jingle about a little girl helping her mother clean throughout the seven days of the week. Although we were not receiving a formal education in Spanish, songs like these were foundational for my sister and I in the learning of our numbers, vowel sounds, days of the week, and other vocabulary in Spanish. These literacy practices

helped us develop phonological awareness in Spanish, allowing us greater linguistic dexterity in alternating between Spanish and English vowels sounds.

Spanish Folk and Pop Music. Singing and dancing were part of my mother and her sisters' esprit de vivre, and everyone in their wake became a participant. As far back as I can remember, when the Fernandez family gathered we would inevitably break out into song over the dinner table, singing Spanish gypsy songs, Cuban folk songs, and Mexican boleros. These were beloved songs that my mother's family had grown up. Everyone had their favorites, and everyone's favorite had to be sung.

All of these Spanish songs were passed down in an oral tradition, and they were learned through repeated exposure, singing bits and pieces until, over time, we joined the family chorus in these sing-a-longs. It was never long before singing led to dancing. I realize now that the act of singing these songs helped me with my Spanish pronunciation, laying the foundation for both Spanish and English literacy.

My family did not discriminate against popular radio songs either! My younger aunts practiced their dance moves in the living room, dragging us in, listening to albums over and over to orchestrate timing and moves. As a result, these songs, both in English and in Spanish, became staples of our home culture and were always on our minds and on the tip of our tongues, in ways that gave us experience with the pronunciation of many Spanish words far beyond our typical repertoire. Little did I know that singing in Spanish was bringing me one step closer to fuller Spanish literacy. My sister and I were not the only ones benefitting from singing and performing songs; my aunts and my mother were also honing their English skills and learning new words and phrases in English through the popular music that we sang and danced to. Sometimes we would all have a good laugh once someone discovered they had been saying

something wrong all along, such as when we discovered that my mother had substituted “hard egg” for “heart-ache” in the song “I’m Gonna Have a Heartache Tonight” by Rod Stewart!

Contexts of Cuban-ness

Without a doubt, the spaces where Cubania flourished always involved family. While there was more contact and intimacy with my mother’s family, visits to my paternal cousin’s apartments in Union City were linguistic adventures of a different sort.

My father’s extended family was not able to leave Cuba until several years after the Cuban revolution. They had to pass through Puerto Rico first, before they were able to settle in New Jersey, where the second largest enclave of Cubans lived. At the time of their arrival, my paternal cousins were already of elementary school age, and their identity, their accents, and their language reflected this difference. I was three years old when I met them for the first time.

As far back as I can remember, I was in awe of my Union City cousins. That they were older than me was one particular reason, but there was more. My senses were accosted by their presence when they walked into the room--thick, melodic concoctions of English and Spanish; Jersey accents, Cuban accents, words and laughter swirled together, loud, bold, and fierce.

Each and every one of them had a curious circular indentation on their upper right arm, just like my mother and my maternal aunts. It was the mark of the Cuban immigrant, the *vacuna* they had to endure to enter the United States. These cousins had been branded in Puerto Rico. How I envied that mark! Their accents were an endless source of fascination; this was not a trait shared by my sister and I, nor by my maternal cousins, who were all born in America.

Driving to Union City and spending time with my cousins gave me a glimpse into a different version of Cuban-ness. My father’s family were from *El Oriente*, from the province of *Manzanillo* on the Eastern side of the island, in close proximity to the Dominican Republic.

Their Cuban Spanish was looser and more sing-songy than my mother's. Their names were also more old world Spanish-sounding, like Hortensia, Maria Concha, and Fernandina. What a new treasure trove of syllabus for my sister and I!

Because every family is a world unto themselves, my Cuban cousins had different habits and practices. My father's sisters were older than him, and had not received as advanced an education as he. Perhaps for these reasons, they had not yet learned to speak English beyond a few phrases. These families were also more traditional, enforcing such things as *chaperones*. Also, my paternal cousins and their families socialized with other Cubans mainly, and this was possible because of the enclave in which they lived at the time. Thus when we visited them, we often went to birthday celebrations and other visits in the neighborhood, a world where everyone, including the children, spoke Cuban Spanish, had shared Cuban customs, and ate Cuban foods, which were also plentiful in this enclave in Union City. Yet, the language, the customs, and the food that we partook of with the family in this setting had a slightly different flavor than that of my maternal family. This was my first exposure to a different version of Cuban-ness.

Religion, Language, and Literacy

My mother's family was not able to bring many pictures or artifacts of their childhood with them when they left Cuba in 1962. Over the years, the pictures that did surface, procured from friends and loved ones, often involved the church in some way: pictures of my mother and her sisters as angels in a school Christmas play, pictures of Holy Communion, Antonia's wedding, and baptisms. These were the images that I grew up with, with which, together with stories and anecdotes, I pieced together a narrative of my mother's childhood in Cuba.

Artifacts of Catholic Literacies. I grew up surrounded by these artifacts of Catholicism associated with the rituals of the faith. Even our language was peppered by expressions such as:

Ave Maria, ay Dios mio, Alabao- words used to express mild surprise or worry (similar to expressions in English such as “Oh Lord!”, or “Oh my God!”). I witnessed the passing on of the traditional *medalla* every time a new baby cousin was born—a round, intricate portrait of some rendition of baby Jesus, a guardian angel, or the Holy Family hung by a ribbon above the baby’s crib. In those days, one could easily recognize a Cuban toddler by the tiny gold religious medallion around their neck. We attended family baptisms, driving for hours from city to city on such occasions, remembered as some of the happiest family occasions because all the cousins could be together, speaking English with each other and Spanglish with the adults. We experienced a thick layer of religiosity in our lives, and it manifested itself in both languages, English and Spanish.

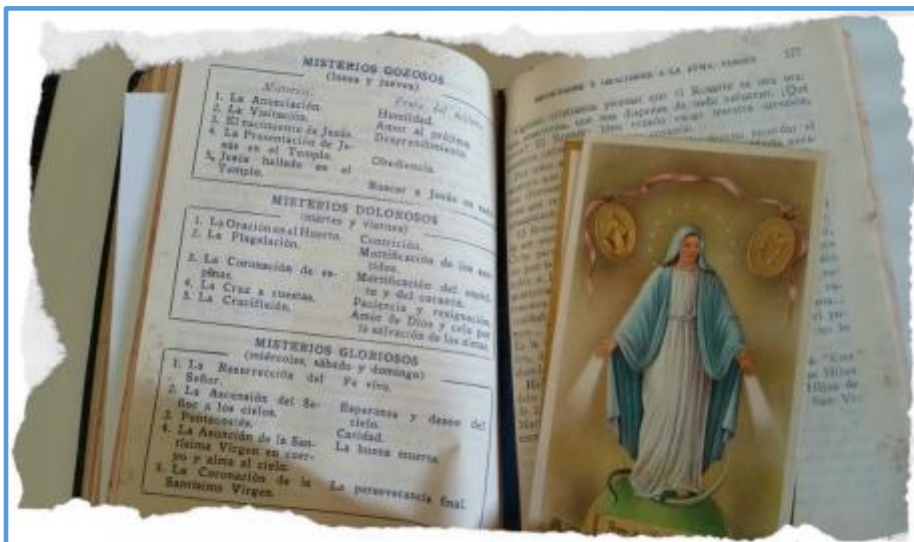


Figure 1: This figure is an example of religious texts used by my mother, Magdalena and her mother, Pia

At home, I watched my grandmother search out a well-lit window to pray every morning. I remember the sight of her lips moving silently as she tenderly turned the pages of her tattered prayer book. Every other page of the book had an insert—prayer cards from baptisms or

funerals, ultra-thin folded rectangles of onion paper inked with cursive, or *estampitas* of the saints.

The saintly statuettes on top of her dresser, reminders of our heavenly friends, were an endless source of fascination for me (my favorite was St. Martin, because he was black, and held a tiny broom). As far back as I can remember, she wore a large medallion of the Madonna cast in gold on a long chain around her neck, and the soft metallic jingling of the Madonna when she walked always announced her presence to me before she entered a room. It is a sound that to this day invokes her memory and brings me peace.

Thus the artifacts, practices, and discourses of the Catholic faith were passed down generationally, from Spain, to Cuba, to my sister and I in the U.S. It was a cultural thread that offered continuity between my mother's childhood in Cuba and now her children's life now in the United States. Being Catholic was as much a part of my maternal family's identity as being Cuban. As far as I knew, there was little distinction between the two. All of the Cubans I knew were Catholic; I was raised hearing stories of my mother's adventures in Catholic school, anecdotes about nuns, and it seemed like most stories about their past in Cuba included some speck of religious life in it. Family traditions and routines also affirmed this: my grandmother abstained from meat on Fridays; Sundays and Holy days of obligation were strictly observed; during Lent and Advent, our family routines shifted accordingly. My mother took us to church at St. Joseph's every Sunday. For many years, she quietly spoke the words of the Our Father and other ritual responses in Spanish, as my sister and I joined the congregation in English. (My father, an agnostic, did not participate in religious ceremonies.)

Eventually, my resourceful mother found a small chapel where a priest celebrated a monthly Spanish mass in New Jersey. This was the beginning of my apprenticeship into the

literacies of Spanish mass. Although we were required to attend mass at St. Joseph's so that the nuns could make sure we had fulfilled our Sunday obligation, whenever possible, we went to the chapel mass in Spanish. Always a daydreamer, my mental distractions were much more frequent and long-lasting in the Spanish mass, but the songs always motivated me to tune in. Through the Spanish mass I learned many Spanish church songs, some of them the Spanish version of songs we sang in mass at St. Joseph's, some of them versions of those my mother had sung in Cuba, and others that were new to all of us. At some point in my church life, I started 'reading' the songs that I sang in Spanish. Although I was never actually *taught* to read in Spanish, as far back as I can remember, there was a song-sheet or misalette in my hands during those masses. I realize now that I learned aurally, through imitation and memorization.

As we grew older, my sister and I spoke English in our home much more frequently, as we played and interacted around school events and homework. While our parents preferred that we speak to them in Spanish, and we obliged, we had become more dominant in our use of English. Also, slipping into English did not mean that my parents would not understand, as by now, even my mother could understand English well enough. Sometimes our languages would blend, most often when we were trying to communicate something in Spanish.

While I never learned to read and write in Spanish, one time my mother encouraged me to pick up a Spanish book and read it, "just like English". To my surprise, I did, and discovered that in fact I *could* read in Spanish. It was in the next phase of my life, however, that my newly discovered Spanish reading skills would come in handy.

Part II: New Contexts of Bilingualism

Miami. When I was in the fifth grade, my family moved from New Jersey to south Florida. Although I had grown up in a Spanish-speaking household, nothing could prepare me

for the culture shock I would experience in Miami. Everywhere we went, it seemed that Spanish was the dominant language, not just in the intimate spaces of family dialogue, Spanish establishments, or bilingual institutions, but in places of business, department stores, doctor's offices, and restaurants.

Before the move, I did not have to strain much to communicate in Spanish, the familiar language of home and family. While interactions with our extended family were primarily in Spanish, those situations had become predictable and routine, and filled with greetings and good-byes; answering *si y no*; confirming what was said or asked with a nod and a smile; and asking by pointing, if all else failed. Although I did engage in more conversation than the above examples indicate, the quotidian interactions with family were fairly basic and familiar, usually revolving around meals or family events, which meant that there would be opportunities to make meaning together as a family. With my younger maternal aunts, with whom I was closer, I could freely Spanglish, because they understood me, and I understood their Spanish, which was much like my mother's.

However, speaking Spanish with strangers who did not know me, in unfamiliar circumstances, was a completely different experience that often left me, literally, at a loss for words--Spanish words, that is. In those early years when we first moved to Miami I found myself in a familiar bind: strain to respond in Spanish to strangers, and risk being mildly chided for the gaps and grammatical errors in my speech, or pummel through in English, taking a chance that the person would be fluent enough to answer back.

Surprisingly, my first experience with school in South Florida added to the culture shock. We had attended a catholic school up north, but in South Florida, there was such demand for Catholic education that these schools were full. My parents, leery of the public school system,

registered us in a secular private school. To me, the name of the school said it all: Arturo Montori Academy.

The school was named after a noted educator in Cuba. It was one of many Cuban-owned private schools in Miami founded by ‘exiles’ from the Cuban revolution who in some cases re-established schools they had operated in Cuba (Otheguy & Garcia, 1987). I was amazed at the fact that the school seemed to operate primarily in (Cuban) Spanish. My fifth grade teacher not only had a very heavy accent in English, but also conducted class in Spanglish. The students in my class were American born, like me; they understood and spoke English, which together with ‘Spanglish’, was their pre-teen social language, and as I would soon realize, the cultural language of Miami youth.

Other typical school norms that I was used to from living up north were missing from Arturo Montori Academy. For example, there was no cafeteria food. Instead, we would order lunch from a local Cuban cafeteria, and it was delivered by a wiry, wrinkled old Cuban man who distributed it (calling out the orders in Spanish, of course) from the back of a pick-up truck. He was usually late, in which case those who had ordered lunch were called out of class and allowed to miss that time as they sat outside and ate the piping hot *arroz congris*, *platanitos maduros*, y *picadillo* out of cantina style aluminum containers. Although this was very unusual, my sister and I did not mind, as the food was fabulous, and it was quite a novelty for us to enjoy the Cuban foods we generally ate for dinner during lunch.

Arturo Montori was not necessarily representative of the quality of education at other Cuban-owned private schools throughout the city, some of which were highly respected. We did not remain in that school long enough to be able to judge the efficacy of the education there, as we soon moved on to public school.

A Sociologist in My Own Backyard. In a few short months after moving to South Florida, I had interacted with Cubans from all different walks of life, from handymen to businessmen, through my classmates in Arturo Montori, family friends that my parents reconnected with throughout the city, and the many visits to different institutions one has to negotiate after a cross-country move, such as insurance agents, realtors, government offices, schools, and doctors. There were Cubans everywhere, in every institution, profession, or job. It was typical to have a secretary, store clerk or cashier speak to you in Spanish, because it was assumed that you knew the language, and were likely Cuban. At times this was fun, and other times it felt as if I were in a foreign country. In his memoir, *Hunger for Memories* (1982), Richard Rodriguez laments the loss of intimacy when his Spanish-dominant family begins to speak English at home. In my case, it was the opposite. The intimacy of the home culture had crept into the outside world. The social and institutional contexts outside of the home indexed Cubanidad, bringing Cubaneó into domains that I had previously only experienced in English.

The Cuban foods that I grew up eating at home were also well represented in the ubiquitous Cuban restaurants throughout the city. In fact, I tasted new foods and delicacies that had not been available where we lived up North, such as *fritas*, Cuban hamburgers. There were Cubans living in the most expensive neighborhoods, like Coral Gables, and Cubans living in humble apartments on in the Southwest, *en la saguesera*¹⁰.

Many of the Cubans we interacted with were already established in Miami, most of them having emigrated in the early sixties, with others trickling in during those sporadic moments of agreement between Cuban and United States. They were part of the historical narrative of Cuban

¹⁰ *Saguesera* being one of many ‘Cubanisms’ that had become part of Spanish-speaking Miami’s vocabulary: a variation of the word ‘southwest’, pronounced phonetically in Spanish by Cubans as ‘sagues’; adding the suffix ‘sera’ was a mild satire on the fact that the entire southwest area of Miami was populated by Cubans.

immigration that my family belonged to, some version of the first immigrant wave from the sixties. Their narrative, like my parents', included familiar themes of loss and exile. The children of these immigrants much like my sister and I, had learned academic English at school, spoke Spanglish, and were bilingual. Many lived with, or in close proximity to their Abuelitos. After the Mariel exodus, that began to change, and it coincided with my entry into middle school.

Different Versions of Cuban Identity. Things I remember about the summer of '79: experiencing what it was like to wear shorts year-round; spending more time with my grandparents, whose move to Florida preceded ours; many carefree sunburns, beach, and pool adventures; falling in love with *pastelitos*; afternoons spent in double-feature matinees watching *Grease* and *Star Wars* with my cousins.

At eleven years old, I had a limited grasp on the important political events that were unfolding around me. I knew through my parents, and the local news, that many *marielitas* were being rescued and brought to the United States, where they were held at the Orange Bowl, the stadium where the Miami Dolphins played. It was a topic of conversation between adults everywhere, and there seemed to be excitement in the air.

Soon, however, I would develop a more intimate understanding about Marielitas, Cuba, and the effects of the revolution on families throughout the years, beginning with the neighbors that rented the other half of the duplex where we lived. In 1980, through the Mariel crisis, as the newspaper and television news referred to it¹¹, tens of thousands of Cubans suddenly appeared on the scene. They soon became our neighbors, store clerks, cashiers, handymen, and classmates.

¹¹ See Portes and Stepick's ethnography of Miami, *City on the Edge*, for a comprehensive account.

In some ways these new Cubans were just like me, indexing Cuban culture and identities through customs, food, and language. In other ways, they were not like me at all. They were certainly *more* Cuban than me; that is, my Cuban-American-ness stood out in stark contrast to their lived Cuban-ness, beginning with their excellent command of the Spanish language. They also had a real connection to the actual island of Cuba, a reality that I had never been exposed to except through family stories. In fact these *stories* that I had grown up hearing were as much a part of my imagination as Cinderella was— I sympathized with the characters, feeling joy and sadness, but at the end of the day, it was just a story to me. Because I was born later on in the U.S., and did not witness those first years of immigrant struggle that my parents and their families endured, I had no first-hand experience.

Furthermore, I had never interacted with Cuban teen-agers just arrived from Cuba, much less at an age when I could understand their hardships. Suddenly, I witnessed the struggles first hand. They struggled in school, not because they lacked knowledge or literacy, but because mastering English through subjects such as History or Science was hard for them. Their families were often divided; grandparents, extended family, and sometimes siblings had stayed in Cuba, unable or unwilling to leave in the frenzy of the Mariel exodus. Because of this, the positive aspects of their immigration, such as reuniting with family, “discovering” cousins they had never met, forging a future in a democratic country, were tempered by the hardship and suffering of leaving others behind. I was an intimate witness to difficult phone calls to and from Cuba, to the uncertainty of communication in those days, to the fear of being targeted by el *comite*¹² (on the

¹² El Comite is the ubiquitous neighborhood communist committee, or watch, that kept track of any suspected anti-revolutionary activity in the neighborhood. This was characteristic of communist Cuba. Although their influence is questionable in the current climate, at the time being targeted by the *comite* was harmful to families in serious ways, including loss of opportunities and privileges surrounding education and employment, and even incarceration.

Cuban side) by saying the wrong thing; and lastly, to many sorrowful visits where inconsolable tears were being shed over the belated news of the death of a parent or grandparent left behind.

It was through my Mariel neighbors that I first learned about the special classes offered by public schools for speakers of other languages, called ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages), in which they were placed in high school. These Cuban teen-agers were literate in math, science, and the Spanish language, often-times more-so than their American counter-parts. I witnessed their diligence with schoolwork. They worried all the time about successfully completing their assignments, graduating, and being able to go to college.

Although I was several years younger than them, I would sometimes help them navigate their homework, clarifying instructions that were written in English, helping them make sense of dense passages in textbooks, or proofreading a piece of writing. During these events I communicated with them mostly in English with choppy Spanish from lack of experience talking about school texts in Spanish. They in turn communicated with me in Spanish interjected with the choppy English they were learning in school. Putting our Spanish literacies, English literacies, and Spanglish to good use, we all worked together to navigate the texts in question.

Immigrant Children at School. Around the time of the Mariel refugees, Nicaraguan and Venezuelan families started streaming into my life as well. My best friend in the sixth grade was from Nicaragua, a country I had never heard of before, while my sister befriended Venezuelan siblings that year. It was through these experiences that I learned about Central and South Americans for the first time. My first impression was that all South Americans were rich; at least this seemed to be the case for the first handful of families that we met! As time passed, however, I would learn more about the diverse experiences of these refugees and immigrants who were not Cuban.

The influx of the Nicaraguans and other Central American refugees coincided with my entrance into middle school, and later on, youth group. Many soon became my closest friends. I met their families, experienced their customs, tasted their foods, and celebrated their feasts, communicating in our different varieties of Spanish and Spanglish. Many of my Nicaraguan friends had attended bilingual or American schools in Managua. They came from all walks of life; some of them lived in nice houses, and others shared small apartments with many family members. I witnessed their heartache and grief as they awaited uncertain futures in the states, celebrating visas and green cards, anguishing over long lines and days languished at INS, and absorbing with horror the stories of those who had been detained in the Krome immigrant detention center.

Over the years I came to appreciate the struggle faced by these Spanish-speaking refugees from different countries coming to America. I drew comparisons between my family's struggles and theirs. I was constantly reminded of the differences in culture, upbringing, schooling, and position between my friends and myself. The families I met were of all different races, heritage, and economic status. Many knew English, and were very familiar with certain American institutions and bastions of pop culture. Some were more classist and elitist than the average person in my life. Others had to learn the language from scratch, and work menial jobs as they worked their way up the educational and career ladder.

At the same time, my advantage as a fluent English speaker, solidly grounded in American culture, with a history in this country, and a daughter of Cuban immigrants, was apparent: I could navigate the waters of schooling easily; I was familiar with customs, rituals, traditions and expectations in school and society; I could move fluidly in two worlds—the Spanish language world of church and society, and the English language world of school and pop

culture. My attendance to college was neither in doubt nor in jeopardy; even though my parents were lower middle or working class by economic standards, the only obstacle between college and myself was financial, and there were ways around this. My foreign-born friends were working twice as hard in high school to keep up with language demands, as well as academic demands, simultaneously trying to stay on track with that American dream of graduating and attending university...which interestingly enough, happened not just to be an American dream, but more of a North, South and Central American dream as well, for those who could afford to dream, at least.

Catholic Literacies in South Florida

Bilingual Ecologies of the Church. After moving to South Florida, my faith practice increasingly became Spanish-oriented for several reasons. A very unique aspect about Miami was that Spanish masses and church groups were prevalent and widely available. In fact, some church groups existed solely in Spanish, such as *Impactos* and *Enuentros Juveniles*. Many of the Catholic clergy that had been pressured to leave Cuba in the sixties had also settled in South Florida, and had subsequently joined the Diocese of Miami in serving the Spanish-speaking population there. By the time of our move, the church served an enormous number of Spanish-speaking and bilingual families combined. Finding a Spanish mass was never an issue. Since we had moved South Florida to be closer to my grandparents, who were not literate in English, we began attending Spanish mass on a weekly basis.

Ironically, in So. Florida I was the minority in the Spanish Catholic landscape of our church, *Nuestra Señora de la Divina Providencia* (Our Lady of Divine Providence)--the name alone was a mouthful for an eleven year-old girl from New Jersey. Our bilingual pastor was

Cuban. The lay leaders of the church, such as the catechism teachers, ushers, group facilitators, as well as the nuns, were mostly Cuban, mirroring the rest of the Miami community at the time.

Spanish Youth Group. I was thirteen when my mother dropped off my sister and I at a youth group led by a new priest who had recently arrived from Cuba. His name was Padre Humberto. In Cuba, he had practiced his faith in an underground Catholic network that existed despite the communist government's restrictions on religious worship¹³. He played the guitar, and celebrated Spanish mass—he did not yet speak English, although he was taking classes to learn the language.

It was the first time that I found myself in a Spanish Catholic environment without my family. Many, if not most, of the youth were in the process of learning English. Let's just say that I did a lot of listening for a while! Interacting with other youth independently outside of school was exhilarating, especially because I was the youngest of the group. There was the novelty of sharing intimately in Spanish with people outside of my family, and even outside of my culture. It was also the first time that I experienced my faith through dialogue and fraternity that was outside of the structure of weekly mass, Catholic school, or catechism. Because the meetings tended to focus on the experience of faith, as well as personal reflections on scripture, there was a spontaneity and unpredictability about the content of the meetings that was captivating. Lastly, the distinct cultural and emotional expression of faith in Spanish—in all types of Spanishes, from countries in Central America, South America, and modern-day Cuba, was novel as well.

While my sister and I were Cuban-American, our academic literacies were in English. Although we could read in Spanish, and were accustomed to attending Spanish mass, the youth

¹³ After Pope John Paul II's historic visit to Cuba in 1987, Castro's government relaxed restrictions on religious worship. Before this, those who openly practiced a religion faced discrimination, as their loyalty to the communist government was considered suspect (Farber, 2011).

group was a site of a different type of Spanish-ness, as it was a medley of Hispanic cultures. In fact, my sister and I were two of the few members who had been born in the U.S. There were Cubans and Nicaraguans who had recently arrived, as well as Venezuelans, and Colombians. We stood out as *las gringas*, as my Venezuelan friend Marco liked to call us.

The youth from these different countries spoke Spanish in very different ways, with accents that were new to me. For example, many words and expressions are pronounced and accented differently:

English Phrasing	Cuban Phrasing	Nicaraguan Phrasing	Venezuelan Phrasing
come here	ven aca	veni ven <i>(accent on 'i')</i>	
baby bottle	el pomo	la pacha	
you	tu	vos	
kid/dude	nino/nina	--	chamo/chama
bus	gua-gua	--	autobus

Table 3: Variations in Spanish words spoken in South Florida by nationality

The ways in which they expressed their faith seemed livelier, and more charismatic than the American way, and even the Cuban way, both of whom followed the traditions of the European mass, which tended to be more somber and traditional. While Cubans in Miami incorporated piano and guitar more than organ music, the style of music and expression of faith was still not as lively as when the Nicaraguans and Venezuelans joined the choir. They introduced percussion, folk guitar(s), clapping, and many ‘home-made’ songs, that were not found in the church songbook; some of the music made you want to dance in church.

Faith Practices and Biliteracy. During my teen-aged years in this youth group, the social opportunities to interact with Spanish-dominant youth outnumbered the time spent interacting in English at school. Over time, as I became more familiar with the Spanish Discourse (Gee, 2008) of faith in this youth group, I began to share my own experiences and reflections in Spanish, and sometimes Spanglish.

Reading in Spanish. Eventually I was exposed to novel genres of Spanish text, such as Bible reading. While there are four distinct Bible readings in the Catholic mass, these readings are printed in the misalette within the order of the mass. In other words, one does not have to look up a reading in the actual bible, which takes another type of text-navigating literacy.

At first, I would take my English bible to youth group, because reading the Bible in Spanish seemed intimidating. I was familiar with Biblical text, with the stories, teachings and parables within, with the ancient names and complex vocabulary, through previous interactions with such texts in English. At first, I would read my Bible in English and try to participate orally in Spanish. As I gained confidence in the Spanish milieu of youth group, I eventually crossed over and began to *read* in Spanish on occasion if I was called upon to do so.

Writing in Spanish. Adding to my Spanish literacy development, there were also many opportunities to write in Spanish, during group activities. Letter writing was a popular genre of youth group. We would write letters of encouragement to each other. Because some of my friends were still learning English, often-times my letters had to be written in Spanish. I wrote phonetically, leaving out accents, and most likely making spelling errors along the way, confusing my s, c, and z sounds, for example, which I still do to this day. However, mistakes did not matter between us. My youth group friends were patient with my choppy Spanish, as I was with their choppy English; we were just happy to communicate and share time together. As

friendships deepened, they would play-mock me because of my different accent or mispronounced words. At the same time, my Spanish-dominant friends were also developing their own bilingualism and biliteracy by interacting with me.

Music in Spanish. Music continued to be a vehicle for Spanish language development for me, although at this stage, it developed outside of the family, in church. A few months before my fifteenth birthday, I learned how to play the guitar informally by observing one of my Nicaraguan friends from youth group. I picked up the guitar chords ‘in Spanish’, learning the ‘DO-RE-MI’ chords instead of English ‘A-B-C’ version. Since Cecilia only knew how to play songs in Spanish, the first songs I learned to play were in Spanish as well. Through my informal guitar lessons with Cecilia, I picked up many Spanish pop songs that had not previously been on my radar, songs that teens from Spanish speaking countries had grown up with, which were different from the songs of my mother’s generation. Singing and playing these songs became an integral part of my social interactions with the church youth. Soon, I was playing the guitar for the youth mass, which was, of course, in Spanish. All of these activities involved reading and writing out lyrics, literacies that built on the ever-expanding aural experiences with Spanish music.

Biliteracy. During this stage of my life, my Spanish literacies developed organically, in response to my involvement with youth group in Miami. By the time I was eighteen, I would often lector in Spanish mass, reading complex biblical passages in front of the Spanish congregation. I sometimes gave talks, or *charlas*, in Spanish, to groups of adolescents on retreat. I was able to interact well in Spanish in different social and institutional contexts. This is not to say that my oral Spanish was as fluent as my oral English, nor are my Spanish literacies as

developed as my English literacies. English has always been my stronger language, and the language of academic literacy.

The development of my Spanish literacy, however, helped me in other ways, for example, while learning French in high school. Whenever I found myself at a loss in conjugating a French verb, or determining whether a word was feminine or masculine, I would think in Spanish. Doing so unusually helped me get it right in French.

Concluding Thoughts

Growing up, I benefitted from the cultural and educational capital that my parents brought with them from Cuba. Although they struggled financially, with language, and in all the other ways the immigrants struggle when beginning their lives anew, their familiarity with American culture and social norms, their Spanish literacy, and the cultural capital tied into their Cuban history and identity were assets that provided funds of knowledge (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992; Moll, 2000) for my sister and I. Although I remember some anecdotes that allude to moments of cultural dissonance, overall, my experiences being Cuban-American in the New Jersey context were quite fluid and positive. As it happens in so many immigrant families, English crept into our Spanish-only household as we grew older and had more exposure to American culture and the academic literacies of school.

It is difficult to disentangle Cuban identity, the factors that helped to sustain it, and the literacies that emerged as a result. However, it is clear to me that the Spanish oral language practices in the most intimate sphere of the home, between my parents, my sister and I, were the foundation upon which all future literacies were built.

Although I spoke Spanish with family, and interacted with Spanish texts through music and church up North, our move to Miami introduced new ecologies that required me to stretch

my knowledge of Spanish. Spanish was no longer relegated to the home and family gatherings. My first experience in a school was an eye opener, as Arturo Montori seemed to operate on their own terms in terms of flexibility of language use and the taken-for-grantedness of the Cubaneo and Cubania that undergird all interactions there. In a study of similar Cuban-run private schools in Miami, Garcia and Otheguy (1987) were surprised to find that, despite such fluid language practices, teachers and administrators did not identify the schools as bilingual, pointing to the fact that textbooks and classes were conducted in English. However, the researchers noted that Cuban Spanish and Cuban culture were the bedrock, backdrop, and basis for everything that went on in the school. Interactions with parents were conducted in Spanish because it was “common sense” to do so; Catholic traditions were observed because it was culturally appropriate to do so. Like the schools in Garcia and Otheguy’s study, as in society at large, in Miami there was not a strict division between languages in many of the social contexts that I encountered.

Through my backyard sociology experiences in Miami, I also learned that there were many different ways of being Cuban. Whereas previously I had only experienced the differences in Cuban-ness between my mother’s and my father’s families, throughout my years growing up in Miami I was privy to a much greater set of experiences, and much more diverse histories and performances of Cubanidad.

Through friendship and interactions with more recently arrived Cuban teen-agers, I redefined by own Cubanidad in opposition to theirs, feeling more American because of my English, and my experiences up North. Their experiences of loss and suffering, however, reinforced the Cuban imaginary that I had grown up with, one of exile and loss, of being pushed out of a repressive society.

The Research Questions

Manifestations of Cuban Identity. Growing up in New Jersey, manifestations of Cuban identity occurred through the use of Spanish with the family as I engaged in the discourses of the home, as well as through participation in the cultural practices of the family. For example, singing and dancing in Spanish with the family was one way that I indexed Cuban identity. Singing childhood songs in Spanish to my younger cousins was another. Attending church practices in Spanish, and familiarity with the relics of Catholicism in the home, such as statues of saints, was another. The normalcy of *chorizo* and *tocino* in my mother's home-made spaghetti, in dressing up 'pretty' for field trips, in reverting to Spanish when in the presence of my *abuelitos* were also manifestations of my lived Cuban-ness.

The centrality of the family to manifestations of Cuban-ness is key. For me, manifestations of Cuban-ness seemed to emerge in the midst of the *Cubaneo*, the lived interaction that occurs when Cubans gather. Growing up, it was the presence of family members that bolstered my Cuban identity, creating a venue for Spanish use, as well as opportunities for experiencing folklore. Simply witnessing, or being in the presence of their *Cubania* helped me to build upon the cultural sediment they left behind as I absorbed it into my own developing hybridized identity as Cuban-American. It is not surprising then that in the next phase of my life in South Florida, where I would eventually interact with many more Cubans on every level of society, that my own Cuban-ness would evolve and manifest in new ways in the spaces of *Cubaneo*, as I responded through my use of language to the life practices around me.

Factors Sustaining Cuban Identity. Relationships and practices of the home were key factors in sustaining Cuban identity for my sister and I while we lived up North. Although stories of Cuba were present in my life in New Jersey, the lived relationship with Cuban culture

was very much kept alive because of the predominance of the Spanish language in our lives. The Spanish language, in turn, was instrumental in facilitating deep relationships with my extended family, particularly my maternal grandparents. For example, because of our language connection, I was able to share the experience of watching Spanish television shows with them, which allowed for shared cultural references outside of the everyday practices of the home. While I did not know a place called Cuba, I knew and participated in a cultural dimension, through popular culture, that other Cubans and Hispanics inhabited through media.

Even as I grew older, and my Spanish grew more strained, the artifacts representative of the practices of the home continued to bolster my Cuban-ness. For example, the Spanish language expressions, such as *Ave Maria*, or *Ay Dios Mio*, that peppered family conversations connected me to the Spanish language. The centrality of Spanish dance of song to the relationship with my aunts was also a multimodal connection to a larger phenomenon called Cuban culture, while at the same time, a means for extending and sustaining Cubania.

Finally, expressions of Catholicism, and the embodied literacies of Catholic faith practice helped to sustain Cuban identity because for me, being Catholic was an extension of being Cuban. Therefore, religious cultural identity and practice helped to sustain and extend the lived experience of Cubania for me into the spaces of church, and religious catechism, in English, even if this knowledge was not overtly manifested in school while growing up in New Jersey.

In the spaces of South Florida, the sheer volume of Cubans and Hispanics made it possible to sustain and continue to evolve in my use of Spanish and knowledge of different cultural realities, keeping Cuban-ness, and Hispanic-ness at the root of daily life. Simply being in that space served to sustain Cubania, as the practices that were once relegated to the intimate spaces of the home were now widespread in society at large. Miami is a space where there are

blurred lines for language use, where Spanish does not stay put in private spheres. Continuous waves of Cuban immigration to South Florida, and even waves of Hispanic non-Cubans helped me sustain Cubania, and greatly improve my Spanish proficiency as well. This continuous identity and language development was reciprocal and continuous as my teen-age years played out in this space, eventually augmented by the more intentional foray into Spanish literacies through the discourses of Spanish youth group.

How Cubania Shaped My Language and Literacy Practices. The Catholic Church, and Catholic faith practices, have always been a source and expression of Cubania, a means of sustaining Cubania, and a medium for bilingual language and literacy practice in my life.

For example, I grew up surrounded by artifacts of Catholicism, such as saints, medallions, and prayer books, all of which have associated discourses and vocabularies. I learned basic childhood Spanish prayers by rote, such as:

Angel de me Guarda, dulce compania, no me desampares ni de noche ni de dia.
Guardian Angel dear, sweet companion, please protect me by night and by day.

Even while attending Catholic grade school in English, I mapped these Catholic literacies and discourses to those I was growing up with at home, from the saints in my grandmother's bedroom, to her prayer book, to my mother's quiet recitation of the *Padre Nuestro* in Spanish while my sister and I loudly chanted the Our Father with the rest of the congregation in English. These oral literacies became a blueprint for future written literacies that I would eventually develop as a teenager in the spaces of youth group in South Florida.

Religious Literacies and Biliteracy. The ongoing motif of Catholicism offered a continuity between my mother's life in Cuba and our life here in the U.S., between Spanish and English literacy. Thus between school and home, the environment that mediated my spiritual

growth was bilingual. Although performed in different languages, the performance of Catholicism in one language reinforced performance in the other.

To explain how this is possible, it will be helpful here to explore the experience of Catholic mass. The mass itself is a multimodal, literate event that consists of readings requiring aural literacy in the forms of listening and understanding, as well as internal dialogue of prayer and applied thought. The tradition of the church also relies on choral responses, requiring memorization of often long and complex passages, or the ability to read them from the misalette, the main text in church. Negotiating the misalette is a complex act, as it is organized according to the church calendar and the Order of the mass. Locating the readings of the day is manageable for most, as the readings are placed in incremental date order. However, one has to be familiar, or if not, decipher, the meaning of the headings, sub-headings, and the organization of the pages corresponding to any given Sunday, which is quite complex. Further adding to this complexity, everything that is said and done in the mass is not in the misalette. Therefore, to follow along, one would need to know when to read the misalette and when to put it aside.

A literate Catholic is also versed in the modalities of the service, knowing when to gesture, kneel, stand, sit, respond, and interact with fellow parishioners based on the actions of the priest and the Order of the mass. Being used to the structure, texts, responses, and symbolic cues of the English mass helped me navigate the mass in Spanish. For me, the rich, ritualistic tradition of the Catholic mass facilitated translingual understanding (across both languages) because of the universality of the daily texts used in Catholic masses throughout the world, and universal uniformity of the mass.

I first witnessed translingual understandings of the mass through my grandmother, who would sit through English mass and say her prayers quietly in Spanish, and you would never

know by looking at her that she did not understand a word that was being said. From this too I learned, not only to be patient, but to listen and look for the cues in my non-dominant language.

Furthermore, I was familiar with the discourses of Catholicism through mass attendance in Catholic school, and through the mentorship of my mother and grandmother. Other institutional artifacts, such as the baptismal font, the sacristy, the tabernacle, the altar, the chalice and ciborium, all of which have great meaning within the church, were found in both churches regardless of the language of the mass being celebrated. In addition, the choral responses serve as a scaffold to those who need it. For example, whereas I cannot recite the Apostle's Creed in Spanish by myself, I can follow along in Spanish mass very well.

Through the experience of Catholicism in Miami, my Catholic identity expanded into somewhat of a bicultural Catholic identity, with the flexibility to worship in both languages. This is actually not quite common. I have found that most bilinguals favor one language strongly over the other when it comes to religious practice, often not even feeling the same when worshipping in the less dominant language. Ultimately, my Catholic identity also reinforced my Cuban identity.

The discourse of youth group was socially constructed by all of us with various backgrounds, and different Spanish cultures. Our common language was the language of the church; it was in this field, in a Bourdieusian sense, that we could all connect and relate. Many of the immigrant teens knew some English that they learned in school in their country, but received support through ESL classes in school. The diversity of Spanishes and Hispanic-ness in the youth group, and the back and forth of language through talk, written text, and song also contributed to our collective biliteracy development. Between my Spanglish and their receptive

vocabulary in English, we ‘translanguage’d’, making meaning together across two languages, emerging more bi-literate as a result.

Chapter 4: Sara's Story

Sara in the City

Sara was born in 1996, into a bilingual household, in a bilingual city. Her parents were second generation Cuban Americans who had come of age in the late eighties. Being fully bilingual, second generation Cuban-Americans meant that her parents had the best of both worlds, able to participate in Spanish or English institutionally, whether that be college, work, or personal life. It also meant they had a choice about the use of language in their home. Like many friends of their generation, they were determined to raise their children “in Spanish”, by keeping this the language of the home. This seemed fairly easy to accomplish in the early childhood years, when in the presence of babies, the default language of love and family, (especially in the presence of *Abuelitas* and *tias*) was Spanish. It was the way that Sara's parents had been apprenticed into child-rearing, the only way they had actually seen it done, other than on television. They had been raised with Spanish lullabies, with *Señora Santana*, and *el Ratoncito Miguel*, not the songless Mockingbird or Brown Bear.

The family's commitment to using Spanish for child-rearing was not uncommon, nor did it seem difficult to achieve. Language support was everywhere, even in the daycare the children were sent to, which, like most local institutions, was Cuban-owned. There, older Cuban ladies coddled the babies, in Spanish. Extended family also spoke to the babies in Spanish—including myself, their maternal *tia*. At home, there were Spanish storybooks tucked in amongst the multitude of English nursery rhymes, and a doll of named *Abuelita* who would recite the *Angel de mi Guarda* in a grandmotherly voice when you squeezed her; this was the same guardian angel prayer I had grown up with. Socially, the families they interacted with were just like them, second generation Cuban-Americans also intent on raising their children to be fluent in Spanish,

the default social discourse of interaction between adults and children at birthday parties and baptisms.

In society at large in South Florida, the prominence of Spanish had not diminished since the eighties. Following the large wave of Cubans, Nicaraguans, and Venezuelans in the early eighties, large numbers of Colombians, Argentinians, Peruvians, among others from countries in Central and South America, found their way to South Florida to stay. Adding to the earlier immigrant waves, thousands of Cuban *balseros* drifted in to South Florida on a weekly basis, keeping the prominence of Cuban Spanish at the forefront. Even so, the symphony of Spanishes in South Florida had expanded, and even amongst Cubans, there were marked variations of Spanish by province, and even wave of departure from Cuba.

In short, the spaces of Sara's life were brimming with Cuban-ness, Spanish, and Hispanic-ness. Sara experienced it every time she walked into a supermarket, restaurant, or *dulceria*. At her parent's side, she witnessed and participated in the Cubaneo that rises to the surface when Cuban and Cuban-American family or friends gathered, across the many spheres of their lives. In the public world around her, including school, she shared with friends who had similar backgrounds, albeit from a range of Spanish-speaking countries. It was no longer easy to tell where the second or third generation kids of Sara's age were from by their Spanish accents, because when they spoke in English, they all seem to share the 'Miami accent'.

Cuban food was center stage in Sara's home and public life, but for Sara's generation, Venezuelan *tequenos*, Argentinian *empanadas*, and Colombian *arepas* had always been a part of the food landscape of Miami as well. In addition to these types of establishments, gas stations advertised pre-paid cellphones to Cuba, and bold signage announcing travel to Cuba travel could be seen in many shopping centers in the linguistic landscape of the city.

While Cubaneo and Spanish continued to be ‘business as usual’ in the backdrop of Sara’s life, within the family, and I suspect, the city at large, linguistic changes were brewing.

The Beauty Shop

It was the day before Sara’s *quinces*, and my role as her aunt and *Madrina* was to take her and her best friend to the beauty parlor for the ritual primping before the fifteen’s celebration. I headed out with the girls in tow to a nearby Cuban beauty salon. While that particular descriptor, Cuban, was nowhere to be seen on the signage of the store, I was adept at reading signs of Cuban-ness in the city.

Once there, I sat behind them in an empty chair, skimming through my notebook in an attempt to blend in. There was an exchange of *hola* between my niece and the nail lady, some nodding and pointing, and a determined one-word request for a ‘French’ manicure by Sara.

There communication went something like this:

Manicurist:	<i>Hola</i>	
Sara:	<i>Hola</i>	
Manicurist:	<i>Cual color vas a querer?</i>	What color do you want? [pointing to an array of colored bottles at her work station]
Sara:	<i>French.</i>	[referring to a French manicure]
Manicurist:	<i>Ahh, el French?</i>	[picking up a bottle of nude polish, she shows it to her]
Sara:	<i>Si.</i>	

Table 4: This table conveys a sample conversation between Sara and the Manicurist

With that settled, Sara and her school friend picked up where they had left off in the car, becoming completely engrossed in an English-only conversation about boys, Facebook, and other matters of teenage importance, as the manicurist worked on Sara’s nails.

Ignored by the girls completely as they gushed about teen-age matters, I opened my eyes and took a closer look around me. Taking a step back to bracket my own experience of the beauty parlor, I became aware of the different layers of Cuban-ness surrounding us that day. I was not a stranger to the Cuban beauty parlor, commonplace as they were throughout the city. In fact, I had never had a manicurist or hair stylist who was *not* Cuban. However, on this day I focused my attention in ways I had never attempted before, in order to notice what an outsider might see, instead of the taken for granted ‘business as usual’ I had grown up with.

The manicurist had arrived from Cuba two years earlier. She worried that her first grade son was struggling in school because he was not fluent in English, and she felt that she could not help him. Nearby, Sara’s grandmother was carrying on an animated conversation, in Spanish, with another Cuban nail lady, while a young, slightly accented bilingual beautician worked on her hair. Spanish music streamed incessantly from the overhead speakers. Adding to the overall buzz of hair dryers, phones ringer and cash register sounds were a myriad of voices, some shrill and loud, others softer and more subdued, uttering words in both languages, although my ears seemed to register more Spanish.

I alternated between running bilingual “interference” for my niece, conversing in Spanish with the manicurist, and observing all the interactions around me. As a novice researcher, I had spent many weeks reading and thinking deeply about Cuban identity and language. That day in the beauty salon, the events unfolding in front of me caught me off guard. As the minutes ticked by, I began to notice unexpected patterns in Sara’s language use that I had never paid attention to before. Sara, who had been ‘raised in Spanish’, who we all assumed was bilingual, seemed to have ‘lost’ her Spanish.

It took three somewhat comical episodes at the beauty parlor for this lapse in Sara's bilingualism to become apparent to me. These are summarized on the chart below:

Episode #1

Manicurist: Te corto la cuticula? (Should I cut your cuticles?)
 Sara: No, I am trying to grow them long.
 (Misunderstands "cuticles" for "nails")

Episode #1

I walked away for a moment, and walking back, see the salon lady impatiently waving her hands, losing patience with my niece, who is staring at her deep in thought:

Salon lady: (in a demanding tone) No te vas a hacer las cejas?
 Aren't you going to do your eyebrows?
 Natasha: Sara, te vas a hacer las cejas?
 (Coming to the rescue, I repeat the lady's words in Spanish)
 Sara: (She casually turns to me and asks) What's a ceja?
 Natasha: An eyebrow!
 Sara: Oh, that's what she's been talking about?

Episode #3

Salon lady: Quien quiere café cubano? ("Who wants Cuban coffee?" asks the salon lady as she walks around with little plastic shot glasses and a Styrofoam cup full of brew)
 Sara: Can I have some?
 I nod, she receives her "shot", and downs it in an instant.
 Natasha: So you don't know "ceja" or "cuticle", but you sure know your Cuban coffee!
 Sara: (matter-of-factly) Obviously, I grew up with "café con leche"! ¹⁴

Figure 2: This figure shows three conversation episodes between Sara and other Spanish speakers in the beauty shop

After these events transpired, I sat back in my chair, amusement turning to bewilderment as I came to terms with the discovery that Sara was not able to communicate in Spanish on that day, and that in fact, it was possible that she no longer understood it. Curiously, during the moments of miscommunication transcribed above, Sara showed no sign of distress; she responded calmly and thoughtfully, not at all dwelling on her lack of understanding. Unabashedly laughing off the incident, she fell back into conversation with her school friend.

¹⁴ Café con leche is the Cuban version of a *latte*, consisting of steamed milk and Cuban espresso, customarily served at breakfast in Cuban households.

Although Spanish was inside and all around them, it was not to be found in their conversation.

At that moment I considered the possibility that for Sara, growing up with *café con leche* did not a bilingual make.

Language at Home

The beauty shop incident prompted me to focus on the languaging taking place inside the home. At this point in the family life, since the kids were older, Spanish was no longer the *only* language of the home, although it still had a prominent place. Once all of the children were in school, it was not as easy to demand Spanish only at home. Although her parents, Gisella and Miguel were fluent bilinguals, their dominant and academic language was English, and like most second generation bilinguals in the city, it was second nature for the languaging of the home to become a hybrid of Spanish and English. Moving across languages, or translanguaging, was common. Sometimes an adult would pose a question in Spanish, and the children would answer in English. For example:

Gisella:	<i>Sara, Ven Aca!</i>	Come here!
Sara:	<i>What mom? Okay.</i>	
Gisella:	<i>Where did you put the clothes I told you to pick up?</i>	
Sara:	<i>I put it in the ropa sucia.</i>	I put it in the hamper.

Table 5: This table shows a conversation episode involving instances of translanguaging, or shuttling between languages

On these two occasions, when Gisella calls for Sara in Spanish, Sara responds in English. The only word she vocalizes in Spanish is hamper, *ropa sucia*, which can refer to both the bin itself, or to the pile of soiled clothes.

Other members of the family were also fluid in their use of language. Even Sara's grandmother, whose dominant language is Spanish, often chose to speak in her accented English

so that she “can practice it”. Sometimes the language practices of the home appear to be Cubanized forms of English. For example, I noticed that Gisella and the kids would ask me to ‘raise the volume’ on the car radio by asking me to *higher* the volume instead of *raise* the volume. Whereas in English, the word “higher” is not used as a verb, here it is being equated with a Spanish form of “raise”, which is *subir*, except it is further being confused with the common verbal expression of *subelo*, which translates into a command such as *raise it*, or *bring it up high*.

Yet the more I observed the language interactions amongst the family, the more difficult it was to find any incidence of Spanish sentences being uttered by Sara, or her siblings, for that matter.

Translanguaging. It was not until these observations of the family’s language use around the time of her fifteenth birthday that anyone noticed that with the safety net of translanguaging, the children rarely had to articulate much of anything in Spanish, except for a word here or there. Furthermore, the use of these occasional words gave the illusion that they understood much more than they actually did.

For example, while preparing for Sara’s *Quince* party, the adults translanguaged amongst themselves, and often with the children. Yet, it was difficult to catch Sara or her siblings responding in Spanish or Spanglish, with few exceptions, such as the one below between Sara and myself.

Natasha: What are you searching for?

Sara: *Caramelo*.

Natasha: Caramelo?

Sara: *Yes! Not the candy, mom wants me to look up the lyrics for that song*

Caramelo was the name of an energetic salsa dance song that used to be a favorite in my family when Gisella and I were young. For this reason, she had chosen it to be one of the key songs for the quince choreography. As Sara went to the computer to do a Google search for the lyrics, I noticed that she typed in the name of the song in Spanish.

Sara: Mom, I found it!

Natasha: Have you ever googled something in Spanish before?

Sara: No! [emphatically, as if to say, of course not!]

The translanguaging of the household seemed to serve a different purpose for the adults than it did for the children. The adults, for the most part, were capable of communicating fluently with the children, and with each other, either in Spanish or English. The fact that they slipped in and out of one language to the other had more to do with habit, context, and performance. Perhaps once in a while they got stuck on a word and recalled it in the other language. Likewise, the grandmother, whose first language was not English, had a good command of conversational English; barring the occasional word here or there, she could also communicate, and understand dialogue in either language, or in both combined. This was also true of the rest of the family, as it seemed to be for the families in their social spheres in the community at large.

Key Words and Small Phrases. Further observations following the *quince*s revealed that Sara and her siblings were not having conversations in Spanish. Additionally, it was not clear to what extent they understood the Spanish being spoken to them by their parents, grandmother, and extended family either. Because the adults translanguaged as they spoke, it was possible that they patched together meanings based on the combination of both languages. Some words and phrases uttered by Sara, for example, are detailed in the chart below:

Spanish word or phrase	Translation	Context
hay cono!	oh shit!	she uses it when something goes wrong, such as spilling her water
cafe con leche	coffee with steamed milk	beauty parlor, breakfast
ropa sucia	dirty laundry / hamper	responding to her mom
pero	but	random usage
caramelo	candy	preparations for quinces
empanada	meat pie	Cuban bakery or restaurant
croqueta	ham croquette	ordering in a Cuban bakery
si, no, no se	yes, no, I don't know	mostly when responding to her grandmother, and at times to their parents if responding to something asked in Spanish.
aqui	here	

Table 6: This table is a compilation of small words and phrases spoken in Spanish by Sara and her siblings

It was not unusual for words and small phrases like these above to pepper Sara's oral language. It seemed that some words were only uttered in Spanish, such as *ropa sucia*, *croqueta*, *cafe con leche*, and *empanada*. Generally, names of Cuban food items or specialty dishes were always pronounced in Spanish by the children. In fact, when it came to these words, their Spanish pronunciation was rather on point: the Spanish 'i' was pronounced like the long vowel sound of the English 'e', and the Spanish r's came rolling off the tongue with relative ease. On

several occasions, Sara even cursed in Spanish. Had I not just made the discovery about Sara's Spanish loss, and subsequently that of her siblings, I would have assumed that they were fluent speakers of Spanish. As it turns out, Sara's parents and grandmother were equally surprised when we sat down to talk about my observations.

Growing Up With Café Con Leche

Reflections on Language, Identity and Culture. I wondered what Sara thought of her Spanish ability, and how she reconciled her language, culture, and identity in her mind. Months after her fifteenth birthday celebration, we sat down to talk.

Researcher: I wanted to talk to you about your fifteen's. I was wondering what it meant to you?

Sara: It's a celebration of becoming a woman, maybe going from a child to a woman, and also just celebrating my 15th birthday.

Researcher: And how do you know that that's what it means?

Sara: Because of my culture and the way I was raised, and also the people around me. Growing up in Miami this is a Cuban-American culture, so I've had a lot of fifteen's and I've learned about the culture and the actual meaning of the fifteen's.

Researcher: You mentioned "my culture" and I'm wondering what that means to you?

Sara: As in where I came from. I come from a Cuban culture, and a Cuban heritage. And also my grandmother and my mother, they also taught me about the fifteen's, what it actually means.

Researcher: So do you think that when you have a daughter, she would want a 15's party like you?

Sara: Yes! Yes. Well, for our generation right now it [quinces] is very popular, but I don't know when she starts growing up, if it's going to be as popular. But I would like to do it because it is a tradition and I would at least like to celebrate most of my Cuban culture. If I, lets say, marry an American, or if I like raise my children in a very American culture I would also like to incorporate the Cuban culture so they won't forget it.

As Sara envisions her future and the likelihood of her daughter celebrating her fifteen's, she considers that this might depend on what is popular for that generation when the time comes. Astutely, she decides that it would also depend upon the need to incorporate Cuban traditions into her lifestyle in the event that she found herself married to an *American*, or living in a "very American culture". Perhaps like me, living amongst immigrants and their children had given Sara some insight into the acculturation process. Or was this evidence that she had "gotten the message", especially from her mother and grandmother, that maintaining your roots was something that could be lost? What is clear is her understanding that creating opportunities for cultural practices was something necessary that she anticipated having to do for her children, if in her imagined future she was not surrounded by people who shared her Cuban roots. It is possible that her recent experience with her fifteenth birthday preparations fostered an increased awareness of her Cuban-ness as something with which she wants to be connected to.

Researcher: I was wondering if you knew the music, the Spanish music, that you danced to before the 15's? Were you into Spanish music before the 15s?

Sara: [shaking her head to indicate no] I'm still not into Spanish music that much!

[Laughter]

Researcher: But there were specific Spanish songs that you danced.

Sara: Yes, yes. But, for me it was just a dancing song, except maybe Caramelo, that was a song that I had to dance with my court, and it gave me those deep roots, because my mom told me shad had grown up with that song, and I'm like ...really? But, I'm more into modern music. I'm not big into Spanish music. Maybe 'Chino and Nacho', but those are like more modern Spanish music...

Preparations for the celebration seemed to have created spaces for claiming and enacting aspects of Cuban identity in ways that Sara and her siblings had not been drawn to before. For example, they learned to "dance Cuban" in preparation for her party, and continued to develop their Cuban dance moves through subsequent invites to their peer's birthday parties. This was

the first time Sara had expressed excitement about dancing to Cuban music, which she had previously refrained from dancing during family parties. When she googled Cuban music on the eve of the party, this required her to type in Spanish words and ask for their spelling, something she had not had a reason to do before. All of the siblings referred to the Spanish songs they were dancing to by name as they demonstrated the choreography to me in the living room. Sara's interest in the party, her engagement with Cuban dance, and the rhetoric about culture and roots seems to imply that Cuban-ness was a salient aspect of her identity at this point in time.

Researcher: Do you consider yourself American?

Sara: I consider myself American, yes I do, but I also consider myself Cuban. Like Cuban-American. So I have my Cuban roots, yet I was raised in America where I also have freedom, and I was blessed to have a lot more things than other people do. So I have my Cuban roots and the traditions, and I still have my Spanglish moments. Yeah...I consider myself Cuban-American.

Researcher: What does it mean to be Cuban-American?

Sara: That my family came from Cuban roots, that I was raised here in Miami in this 'Cubanish' environment. And, my mother introduced me to Cuban songs, and we eat Cuban foods. It's mostly about my roots and where I am living now at this moment.

Sara's identity as a Cuban-American seems to begin with ties to a Cuban past, where those who came before her established Cuban roots, except that she came to be born in America so that she could be free. Her Cuban side is where she comes from, manifested through 'roots' and 'traditions', language and food. Yet it is very clear to her that she is also American, feeling a sense of belonging to the country where she has been raised, and where she imagines her future. The fact that her American imaginary is characterized by freedom, voice, and "things" alludes to the fact that her imaginary of the island of Cuba, one that has been forged by her experiences in Miami, is characterized by oppression, and lack of material goods. If to be Cuban-American

means to be free, to be Cuban and not American, to be ‘over there’ on the island still, is to be to live without freedom, something clearly undesirable.

Much like my own history, Sara had been a witness to new generations of Cuban immigrants. She knew the story of her father’s cousin who had fled Cuba by sea, with her three-year-old baby in arms, floating with other *balseiros* in the waters between Havana and Key West until being picked up by the Coast Guard. One of her most influential History teachers from middle school had also arrived as a *balseiro*, and all of his students knew his story. Her own father had left Cuba via Spain when he was four years old, later arriving in South Florida in the third grade. All of these stories helped corroborate, for Sara, the narrative of oppression in Cuba, from which people try to escape by any means possible.

Cuban-ness on a Continuum. Although Sara does not hesitate to identify as Cuban, when asked to talk about more recently arrived Cuban immigrant students at school, she distinguished herself from them:

Sara: I’m similar to them in some ways considering my roots, but I am not LIKE them. I do not consider myself as true a Cuban as they are.

Although Sara considers herself to be Cuban-American, she distinguishes herself from those kids at school that are much more Cuban than her, as manifested through their clothing, their language, and their group membership. This complicates the environment that Sara imagines herself to live in; Sara recognizes that there are different versions of Cuban-ness in the city. While her sphere of Cuban-ness is characterized by a particular style of dress, the translingual language practices around her, proficiency in English and cultural references in two languages and two cultures, there are other spheres of Cuban-ness around her that are quite different. Just like the manicurist at the beauty shop, there are groups of more recently arrived

Cuban students at her school who are likely living out a different version of Cuban-ness and/or Cuban-American-ness.

Sara: [In school] I don't really show that I'm Cuban. It's not because I don't like to, it's just that it's not me. My personality is not really Cubanish. I mean I don't talk like the Cuban kids that just came. And I can tell who they are from a mile away because of how they dress. It's not my type of group

Sara does not think that she manifests Cuban identity by her clothing or appearance, and she distinguishes herself from the Cubans whose dress signify that they have recently arrived. In Sara's mind, her appearance and her music is American, as is the place where she imagines her future, albeit a hybrid future that she plans on creating for her children. Perhaps being Cuban-American is its own imaginary for Sara and many others of her generation—a version of American-ness where it is typical to have an immigrant family, with cultural roots in more than one country, bilingualism as the societal norm, and a future in which all of these traditions will continue.

New Spaces for Language Use

With the passage of time, I was able to witness new experiences with language amongst all of the children in the family, particularly Sara. Months after Sara's *quinces* celebration, a beloved uncle passed away. This uncle, a Spaniard, was a grandfather figure to Sara. He enjoyed speaking in English, although it was a very slow, laborious process for those accented words to come out of his mouth! In the hospital room during his final days, I witnessed Sara, as well as her siblings, share words of endearment at his bedside in his final hours. The fact that they made it a point to try to speak to him in Spanish, or at least Spanglish struck me. It was a phenomenon that I had also noticed the children engage in when they were in the presence of small children, with whom they also tried to address in Spanish to gain their favor.

After her uncle's passing, Sara met elder members of her extended family from Spain for the first time. She was eager to meet them, having heard so much about their history. Upon arriving from the airport, they lavished greetings and praise on the siblings, singling out Sara, the eldest, in much of their conversation, all in Castilian Spanish. Sara grinningly soaked it all up. However, when they began to ask her questions about her life, her mother or grandmother had to come to the rescue to translate.

Soon the conversation took a different turn as all the Spanish speakers in the room took over, in order to engage my widowed aunt and the newly arrived Spanish family. I sat next to my cousin's wife, the only American in the room, to engage her in conversation so that she would not feel out of place in the midst of the Spanish conversations around her. When anecdotes were being told in Spanish, I began to translate for her benefit. Eventually, Sara came to sit by my side as well so that she could make sense of what was being said.

The discourse in the room was over her head, which led her to sit next to the only non-Cuban American in the room in order to get the translated version from me. In circumstances such as this, Sara could not hold her own with her level of Spanish knowledge.

In spite of her inability to communicate with them, Sara was very willing to engage with these family members. This willingness to engage *in* Spanish, *with* the Spanish-speakers in her family, is important in that it clarifies that her loss of Spanish is not a matter of teenage rebellion against the language.

Writing in Spanish. The bulk of Sara's writing occurred in English. However, I was able to witness two literacy events in Spanish by exploring Sara's Facebook posts. In a print-out of over a hundred pages, the first Spanish word written on her wall was a reference to 'tio',

which she posted when he passed away. Later, there was another entry where she responded to a friend by writing, in Spanish:

Tu eres mi Hermana de un otro madre. Sorry, at least I tried!

(You are my sister from another mother)

It was surprising to encounter this written text in Spanish after so much time spent with Sara with little evidence of Spanish speech, much less writing, initiated by her. Although grammatically speaking, *un otro madre* should be written as *una otra madre*, she clearly got her meaning across. When asked why she had written this particular phrase in Spanish, she explained that her friend spoke more Spanish than her.

On another occasion upon returning to Michigan after an extended stay with Sara's family in South Florida, I discovered a note that Sara had snuck into my suitcase. The note read:

We miss you and love you! Love, Valdes Familia

I was tickled for two reasons: first, I was touched at the love note and had been pleasantly surprised to find it while unpacking a few days after arriving; second, there was the unexpected use of the word *familia*, instead of family. Her choice of the word *familia*, instead of family, seemed to be a very purposeful indexing of identity, implicating the entire family as well. To me, it felt that her use of *familia* was a move towards encapsulating an important reality, as if perhaps to say we were not just family, we are *familia*, with *tios*, *abuelos*, Cubanisms, histories, and artifacts that connected us to a lived Cubania. It was also a good reminder, for me, not to be quick to draw conclusions or make bold claims about Sara's proficiencies or her bilingualism, which was more dynamic and unexpected than I might have imagined.

Becoming Bilingual Again

Bilingual Spaces of Youth Group. Two years after the *quinces*, I accompanied Sara to a youth group meeting. I was surprised to see that language-wise, things had not changed so much since I had been in a part of a youth group in the contexts of South Florida. Although the majority of the teens seemed to be English dominant, it was clear that these were bilingual settings. Both adult and teen leaders flowed from Spanish to English as the pleased; one adult leader spoke solely in Spanish. It was taken for granted that everyone listening would understand, evidenced by the translingual prayers, conversations, and instructions uttered by the leaders. Key concepts and names of the structure of the groups were in Spanish, such as:

Spanish Word	English Meaning
<i>palanca</i>	Lever; referring to a letter of encouragement
<i>base</i>	Base; referring to the second person in charge
<i>celula</i>	Cell; as in small group
<i>rector</i>	Leader; referring to the first person in charge
<i>equipo</i>	Team; as in, the team that prepares the retreats
<i>capilla</i>	chapel
<i>el Centro</i>	The center; referring to the building where youth group meets

Table 7: This table is a compilation of Spanish words used in the context of Sara's Youth Group

These were not common words for Sara, and I was surprised when I heard her use them in the context of the roles and activities that she was getting ready to perform, such as:

Example a. Do you want to go with me to el Centro tonight?

Example b. I'm part of the equipo for the next retreat.

Example c. I need to write so many palancas tonight!

The practices and events available through church kept Sara immersed in a bilingual language ecology where translanguaging was the norm, further connecting her to spaces where Cubaneo is manifested, potentially creating further opportunities for Spanish literacy development.

Community Contexts. Around the same time that Sara began attending bilingual youth group, she began her first after-school job at a cupcake store. While I was waiting for her to finish working one day in order to drive her home, I overheard the tail-end of a transaction between her and a customer. The Spanish-speaking customer handed Sara a bill, and as Sara gave her the change, I heard her say to the customer:

Dos twenty-five.

Two twenty-five.

She tried to make the change in Spanish, and when she hit a wall with the ‘twenty-five’, she switched to English. The customer took her change and went on her way. I later asked Sara how she was managing the interactions with Spanish speaking customers, to which she replied:

*It’s all right. Sometimes I get stuck, but we find a way, or someone else helps.
Buy yeah, I need to practice my numbers!*

Statements like this, together with her willingness to share with Spanish speakers in the family, suggest that Sara is positive towards the Spanish language, and that it matters to her.

These more recent anecdotes about Sara point to the fluidity of both language and identity, and how both react to life’s practices. It is possible that her use of Spanish may change substantially if she finds herself in spaces that require more Spanish use.

Academic Spanish Classes. Sara’s willingness to engage with Spanish more formally came to light during the following school year, when she chose to take Spanish to fulfill the

foreign language requirement for graduation. I happened to be there during the first weeks of school to witness the event.

In South Florida, public elementary schools required Spanish class through the fifth grade. As such, Sara had taken Spanish throughout her elementary years in school. Now in high school, she enrolled in a class called ‘Spanish for Spanish-speakers’. However, during the first week of class, it became clear that the class was over her head. She did not pass the placement test that the teacher used to gauge where the students were at with their Spanish. Sara, along with several other students, was given the option to move to ‘Spanish for Non-speakers’.

Sara had mixed feelings about this. She was disappointed that she did not count as a speaker of Spanish when it came to academics, although she was happier to be in a class where she could understand what was being said. When I asked her if she was happy to be in Spanish class, she responded:

Sara: I would like to learn the second language of Spanish, considering it was my first language. I would like to learn it again. It kind of comes in handy here and there. I mean, knowing Spanish becomes important if you're meeting your family from Spain!

On the other hand, later on she would tell me how the new class was so basic, that it was a joke to her, and most of the other kids in it who were ‘bilingual’ and bicultural like her.

The Research Questions

Manifestations of Cuban Identity. Sara claims allegiance to two nationalities, American and Cuban. Without hesitation, she seamlessly unites these two identities into the hybrid of Cuban-American identity. For Sara, being Cuban-American seems to involve a family history with Cuba in generations past, having access to cultural stories and artifacts, such as songs and foods, and being surrounded by similar people who share a common background. She characterizes her relationship to the Cuban-American diaspora by referring to the most visceral

things that surround her: stories, music, food, Spanglish, Cuban coffee, and *quinces* celebrations. These things together with her family life seem to create her world, and make being Cuban-American a possibility for Sara.

At the core of Sara's Cuban identity, her *Cubania*, are the intangible roots, traditions, and language made manifest through her family life, which overlaps with the ways in which other families in the community live culturally as well. Her Cuban-ness is not anchored to the island of Cuba, but rather to her family's history with Cuba, a history that she inherited. It is a history that continues to be recreated through evolving language use that includes translanguaging, as well as through the recasting and maintenance of traditions, such as the "fifteens". While Sara inherited the political and cultural history of her Cuban grandparents and Cuban-American parents, this history, through roots, tradition, and language, seem to contribute to a positive sense of identity.

While Sara's Cuban imaginary is U.S.-centric, she understands that the language, traditions, and artifacts being recast in Miami would not be there if not for the Cubans that came before her, in her grandparent's era. She envisions a future where she would pass on her Cuban culture to her children, but not in Cuba--very much tied to American things. It will be an acculturated, hybrid version. Sara seems to take acculturation for granted, and presumes that the newcomer Cubans will eventually become "more American". Her folk theory about acculturation seems to imply eventual hybridity, not assimilation, because she qualifies the statement, saying they will "still have their roots".

Manifesting Cubania Through Los Quinces: Making Culture. The preparations leading to the event of the fifteenth birthday celebration was important on many levels. The *quinces* provided key opportunities to "discover" things about their culture for Sara and her

siblings. It is important to note that the *quinces* was not just something that happened to Sara; it was a whole-family experience. For the adults in the family it was a site of reunion and bonding with extended family and friends that they did not see very often, building upon cherished relationships, and bringing Cubaneo to the surface at every point of contact. The fact that Sara was privy to Cubaneo on so many levels, within the home, and in the community at large is another key factor that helps to sustain Cubania, animating a real Cuban imaginary.

The gathering of so many, old and new, together at the fifteenth birthday celebration animates, on a smaller, more intimate scale, the Cuban-American imaginary writ large. The younger siblings were involved in the preparations, and most importantly, they were a part of the choreographed ‘court’ dances and rituals. In this way, the younger generation is apprenticed into cultural ways that themselves are transformed by the parent’s generation in a new context, illustrating how “Families not only inherit culture, but are makers of culture...often improvising...creating new texts” in the process (Pahl, 2008).

In this case, the role of her mother and her grandmother was instrumental in passing on meaningful family memories, in creating this tradition for her daughter, and teaching her this rite of passage, all of which created this multi-modal event, or text, of the *quinces*. The practices surrounding the *quinces* demonstrate the important of the family and the lived culture within the spaces of family, language and identity is enacted, sustained, and actively promoted.

Cultural Artifacts. Exploring artifacts of lived culture is one way to understand Sara’s lived experiences of language and identity, by looking at the ways in which artifacts “open up figured worlds” for Sara (Barlett, 2002, p. 309). For example, translanguaging is an artifact that opens up Sara’s figured world of Cubanidad, connecting her to the larger imaginary. She mentions those “little moments of Spanglish” as one of the traits that make her a part of the

Cuban-American community. Translanguaging also becomes a tool for the community to scaffold Sara into the conversation, helping her understand the Spanish pieces and other nuances.

It does not always work, apparently, as the episodes in the beauty shop suggest. Translanguaging through the mixing of Spanish and English contributed to the illusion that Sara's reception language knowledge was greater than it actually was. It is possible that Sara was not able to communicate in Spanish that day at the beauty shop because the discourse was not the familiar discourse pattern from the home. There were specific words, such as eyebrow and cuticle, embedded in Spanish phrasing being spoken by unfamiliar actors in the beauty shop, who seemingly did not employ the verbal or physical cues that Sara would have needed to understand them on that occasion.

However, when the salon lady walked around offering Cuban coffee shots, Sara was able to interpret her words through her actions and the presence of a familiar artifact: the Cuban coffee shot, which happens to be a key ingredient in the other artifact that she smugly referenced, the *cafe con leche*.

The Semiotics of Coffee and Milk. Both the *cafecito Cubano*¹⁵ and the *cafe con leche*¹⁶ are artifacts associated with family rituals that map onto her Cuban-ness. For many Cubans, *cafe con leche* is breakfast, comfort beverage, and bedtime snack. It is more milk than coffee, sweetened by the sugar and the hands that make it. I remember my own mother, and my grandmother, making *cafe con leche* for my sister and me early in the mornings as we sat at the kitchen table before going to school, or late at night waiting with anticipation in pajamas.

The ritual of sharing the *cafe con leche* usually occurs in the presence of family, in the intimate space of kitchen table early in the morning. It is not remarkable to me that Sara

¹⁵ Cuban espresso, a very dark, bitter, strong coffee usually served in small shots, sweetened intensely with sugar

¹⁶ steamed milk flavored with a dash of Cuban coffee.

articulated *cafe con leche* in Spanish on that day--this is a phrase that is only ever articulated in Spanish, both in our family, and in the community.

The main ingredient the *cafe con leche*, the *cafe Cubano*, is another artifact that represents Cuban-ness in the city. Every Cuban household has *una cafetera*, a Cuban Coffee maker, which is traditionally used in the mornings and late afternoons. However, many Cubans pick up their *cafe Cubano*, otherwise known as *un cafecito*, through the walk-up window of the ubiquitous Cuban restaurant, which in itself represents yet another artifact of Cubanness in the city. Every Cuban restaurant has a small corner space dedicated to serving walk-up customers. The main draw is Cuban coffee, and the two popular Cuban variations of milk and coffee, *cortaditos* and *cafe con leche*. One can drive up any major street and find dozens of these restaurants with an open window serving walk-up customers. Wherever there is Cuban Coffee, there is sure to be Cubaneo.

The Cuban coffee window, Cuban coffee shots, *cafe con leche*— these things have always been present in the backdrop of Sara's life, and they connect her to this phenomena of Cuban culture, as does the culture of 'quinces', and the 'not understanding but tolerating' the same Spanish being spoken around her. Moreover, most of the adolescents in her life share very similar experiences, if not from being Cuban, from some other version of Hispanic-ness in this super-diverse city.

How Do Manifestations of Cubania Shape Sara's Language and Literacy Practices?

Cubania, Language and Literacy. One way that Cubania shapes Sara's language practices is through Cubanized expressions in English, and the peppering of Spanish words here and there. The Spanish oral literacies of the home are also beginning to seep into written text.

In a span of two years, I was able to observe Sara's writing in Spanish on two occasions. The first was in reviewing her Facebook posts, where she had responded to a friend in Spanish, writing:

Tu eres mi hermana de una otra madre. Sorry I tried...

(You are my sister from another mother)

showing that Sara is amenable to Spanish literacy if she feels capable of expressing herself in this way.

The other occasion was upon my return to Michigan after a trip home, when I opened my suitcase to find a note from Sara that read,

We miss you! Love, your Familia!

The note in particular was quite telling. She indexes Cuban identity by the use of the Spanish word *familia* in lieu of the English 'family'. The fact that such translingual writings do not happen often suggests a very deliberate sharing of Cubania, a grounding of our relationship, and the family relationship as a Cuban, bilingual one. The fact that Spanish eventually popped up in her writing is not terribly surprising given the oral language practice of translanguaging in the spaces of her life, and that "literacy is a part of a wider landscape of communication" (Kress 1997; Pahl, 2008).

In Sara's case, like mine, it is likely that her English academic literacies map onto her Spanish literacies. Even her Googling of the lyrics to the Spanish song, *Caramelo*, demonstrates how there may be small spaces where both languages interact and come to bear on written literacy.

Finally, the activities at church keep Sara immersed in a bilingual language ecology where translanguaging is the norm, which can potentially create further opportunities for Spanish literacy development in the future.

Chapter 5: Rosaura's Story

Angela

There I was in Burlington Coat Factory when I heard someone speaking in Spanish--and not just any Spanish. From the moment I heard her speak, I knew she was Cuban. I followed the sound of her voice until I found her, a lively woman of short stature with long, gently curled black hair swirled around a large banana clip, a little girl at her side. She was on the phone speaking animatedly in Spanish, so I hovered nearby, determined to introduce myself as a fellow Cuban. It was uncharacteristic of me to stalk Cubans, but recent events had changed that. I had been told that there was a small community of Cubans in the city but I had yet to bump into any. Seconds before entering the store, I had received an email notifying me that I had been awarded a fellowship to travel to Cuba, a first for me. Needless to say, I had Cuba on my mind.

As soon as she finished her call, I made a move. Tripping over my words, I introduced myself in Spanish as a fellow Cuban, shared my story about how I came to be in Michigan, and how I had been searching for a Cuban presence in the Midwest. If this information weren't enough, when Angela discovered that I had no family in Michigan, she generously welcomed me into her life. I left the store with her phone number in my pocket and an invitation to a baby shower the following week, where she was eager to introduce me to more Cubans. From that moment on, Angela became a friend, and my liaison to all things Cuban in the city.

Cubans in the Midwest City

In this mid-sized city in Michigan, there is very little citywide presence of Hispanics, who make up a little over 8% of the population there; Cubans only make up .55% of that (Pew, 2014). Business and storefront signs are invariably in English. There is a Mexican grocery store, a sprinkling of Tex-Mex restaurants, and one authentic Mexican food truck. There is a gas

station that boasts of a Cuban sandwich, but upon further inspection, it turns out that the cook is Peruvian.

Yet, the pocket of Cuban families that I met through Angela dominate the scene both in the low-income apartment complex where they live, as well as the local factory where she works alongside many other Cuban women. Although certainly not as extensive as the larger enclaves in South Florida and the Northeast, the apartment complex and the factory seemed to serve as an informal mini enclave of sorts, not in a strict sociological sense, but rather, in the sense that living culturally in such close proximity could offer. Co-workers and neighbors shared information about employment, and often carpooled to work. They shared knowledge about neighborhood resources, such as garage sales, the Head-start program, and the Spanish butcher at the Mexican bodega.

During my visits it was not uncommon for current and former Cuban neighbors to drop in to chat, share a meal, or borrow an appliance. On one occasion while I was visiting, a friend of Angela's popped in to do her laundry, because her washing machine had broken. Conversations between these Cuban families invariably led to stories about loved ones 'back home' in Cuba, or someone's recent trip to there. These were not conversations I had been privy to back in Miami, where my Cuban friends and family actually spoke little of Cuba, and did not travel to Cuba.

Julia. A few doors down from Angela lived Julia, her friend and co-worker. Angela and Julia shared a lot in common, as did the great majority of the Cuban women in their lives. They were fourth wave emigres, who worked together in a factory as their husbands struggled to find work elsewhere; they were raising children in the United States, while speaking very little English, and had left most of their family behind in Cuba. Both of their families were transnational, sending back money to their families on a regular basis, and traveling to Cuba

every chance they could in order to visit their family. Unlike the earlier wave Miami Cubans in my world, these families were not inclined to remain physically distant from Cuba, whatever their political inclinations.

While Sara was growing up in the bilingual ecology of Miami, being Cuban, without dreaming of going to an island called Cuba, another Cuban girl in the Midwest was adapting to cold, gray winters in a city where Spanish was rarely heard. Cuba was always on her mind, even though the memory of her first four years of life on the island was a blur. This was Rosaura, Julia's daughter, a tall, somewhat pale fourteen-year old in the ninth grade with very curly black hair almost down to her waist, and glasses. Julia, her husband Roberto, and Rosaura had left Cuba through legal means eleven years earlier, leaving behind siblings, grandparents, extended families and friends, a reality that kept them mentally, emotionally, and financially straddling two countries.

The day I met Rosaura, I was sitting on Angela's couch watching a video of her most recent trip to Cuba. Angela narrated scenes from her trip, throwing in stories of family struggles, neighborhood happenings, and other news about those still living in Cuba while I watched her family dance *salsa* and *merengue* on the video streaming behind her. As I sat in her living room, I soaked in the ambient Cuban sounds and smells in the air: salsa music, Angela scolding the kids in a Spanish that had the cadence of my father's from *el Oriente*, the eastern portion of the island; the aroma of familiar foods, that pungent blend of garlic, vinegar, and onion melding together in a *sofrito* on the stove-top.

Rosaura walked through the back door without knocking, prompting Angela's two young children to run towards her excitedly to be picked up and kissed. Angela hugged her warmly, then quickly shifted gears to complain about the recent misbehavior of her two-year-old, who

was then picked up lovingly and chided by Rosaura. The two-year old bashfully looked down and put his head on her shoulder. I was struck by Rosaura's intimacy with Julia's children, and the familiarity between both families.

Rosaura and I sat down to talk in the living room while the children played and scuffled around us. Video scenes from Cuba continued to play on the big screen television in the background, and the sounds of Angela's shouting at the kids competed with the noise of the pressure cooker. From time to time I would catch one of the children standing very still nearby, intently focused on Rosaura and myself. Eventually I realized that it was not only the presence of a stranger who was suddenly monopolizing their precious Rosaura, but the fact that we were speaking in a language that they were not used to hearing in their house—English.

After our initial conversation that day, it became clear to me that Rosaura had much to teach me about her world and her experiences. For several months we would continue to meet at Angela's house because it seemed like the natural thing to do—Angela encouraged me to visit, and once there, she would call Rosaura to come over. These first visits with Rosaura at Angela's house always took place in the presence of family members, children and neighbors, a space that was always permeated with the faces, sounds and smells of Cubaneo, a space where Cubans came together.

Rosaura's Story

Rosaura was born into a rural community in the central part Cuba in 1998, the decade when Cuba faced one of the most extreme economic crisis' of their time following the demise of the Soviet Union (the fourth wave). When she was four, she and her parents immigrated to the U.S., as did many other thousands of Cubans. Although they first landed in South Florida, they chose to head further north in search of blue-collar jobs and an opportunity to reinvent

themselves. Rosaura's mother, Julia eventually found work in the factory, and her husband Miguel worked different jobs as dishwasher and cook in local restaurants. It intrigued me that they chose to live outside of South Florida, where they could have evaded the language barrier, compared to the Midwest. I wondered what it would have been like for Rosaura to learn English and grow up in this context.

Although her family was from a rural part of Cuba's interior, they had access to basic literacy education due to an expansion of educational opportunities in rural areas following the revolution of 1959. It was clear that literacy was a priority for Rosaura's family. Despite the relative isolation of living in a city with little to offer by way of a familiar language or Hispanic diversity, Rosaura's mother Julia was quite resourceful and proactive about Rosaura's literacy and language learning. Both were encouraged in her efforts to promote both English and Spanish language development beyond oral competency.

For example, she regularly scoured garage sales in search of Spanish books for Rosaura to build up her Spanish reading ability. Julia also remained active and present in Rosaura's schooling. Rosaura attended, since the elementary grades, middle class schools outside of her district that her mother deemed better than the local schools available closer to home. When Rosaura was in middle school, her mother befriended a Spanish-speaking counselor to help her advocate for her daughter during a difficult time. She had also taken her to be tutored on more than one occasion, taking advantage of free programs for this purpose.

Julia recounted her despair when Rosaura was struggling with reading in the fourth grade, and was in danger of repeating a grade. She shared how she funneled that despair into action by ordering a Disney reading program she saw advertised on Spanish television. Although the CDs

she received by mail set her back several hundred dollars, Rosaura learned to read in English and successfully passed the year.

By the time I met her, Rosaura had been a straight A student and an avid reader for quite some time. Although she received ELL support during her early years in school, she had exited ELL programs by the fifth grade. Interestingly, Rosaura was still tested for ELL status at the beginning of every school year, a fact that was puzzling to me, given her proficiency with language, a fact that became apparent to me within the first few minutes of our conversation.

The topic of college came up frequently in my presence. Because of my association with the university, Julia took the opportunity to ask me questions about the college application and selection process in the United States, which was different from that in Cuba, where Julia had attended college to become a teacher. In Cuba, although university is free, students are tracked into certain careers by the government. I explained to them how in the U.S., the opposite was true—while university was not free, students could elect to study whatever they chose. We also spoke about potential scholarships and government financial aid they could apply for.

Both Julia and Rosaura imagined a future where Rosaura would go to college. Rosaura hoped that it would be a college in a different state.

R: I want to go to another state for college so that I can learn more about America. I already know Michigan.

Julia: Imagine! Yo le digo que nosotros vamos a donde ella vaya, la dejamos a ella, y viviremos por allí algún lugar cerca...

Imagine that! I tell her that we will follow her wherever she goes. We can leave her at the university, and then we'll look for somewhere to live close-by...

In a good-natured, optimistic manner, Julia joked about following her daughter to whatever state she would move to for college.

While Rosaura's educational future might seem, at this point, to be on par with the average American student, it was in fact still much more fragile and uncertain. Early on, Julia hinted about her concern with Rosaura's lack of school friends. A few months into our relationship, she shared about her daughter's ongoing struggle with OCD, hinting at socio-emotional issues that had developed in her as a pre-teen. It became apparent to me that social isolation was an all too common problem for teens like Rosaura. On one occasion while I was visiting, a Cuban family came to visit and drop off their teen daughter so that she could spend some time with Rosaura. Julia confided in me that the girl was struggling with loneliness and social isolation. Both sets of parents had decided that it would benefit the girls to spend time together outside of school. Whether or not they had anything in common as teen-aged girls, they knew at least that they shared a common Cuban language and culture, and the shared struggle of navigating two worlds.

Seeing the dilemma faced by these families made me realize the irony of their situation. They left the hardship and uncertainty and instability of their country behind in order to build a better future for their children. Yet along with the negativity they had escaped, they had unquestionably also left a social network of neighbors, friends, and family who are the bedrock of one's well-being. They had left behind the ease of language, culture, and shared history, ways of living culturally that we take for granted on a daily basis. Whatever positive gains occur during immigration, there is always loss involved as well. Further, there is also always transformation. One cannot remain the same when everything around you changes. Sometimes, perhaps often, this type of radical change is isolating, and confusing, perhaps even more-so when those closest to you are transforming at a different pace, as happens between immigrant parents and children.

Living Culturally: Children of the Enclave. The tension between what was happening ‘over there’ in Cuba versus ‘over here’ in the U.S. was a common theme in the community enclave where Rosaura’s family lived. In the spaces of the low-income apartment complex where they lived, the Cuban families had re-created a social network of neighbors and friends.

Little children and neighbors were frequent actors in Rosaura’s life, making it possible to “live Cuban” beyond the confines of her apartment, extending the cultural practices of the home into the homes of the neighbors living in the same complex. On many occasions, walking from Angela’s house to Rosaura’s, I would hear little children shouting to each other in Spanish as they played outdoors, or neighbors conversing in Spanish. On one occasion while working at her kitchen table, a posse of four and five year olds from the neighborhood knocked on her door to see if she could play with them. They tumbled in and greeted Rosaura’s mother with hugs and kisses. One chubby, brown-skinned five-year-old was eager to tell the story of his family’s sadness over the death of a beloved aunt in Cuba, exclaiming:

“es muy triste” (it is very sad)

to which Rosaura’s mother quickly responded by saying,

“*si mijo, yo se*”

Yes I know, sweetheart

and then quickly shifted the focus of the conversation to something more upbeat. She looked at me with a shrug and a sigh, lamenting,

Imagine, esta es su vida

As you can imagine, this is their life

When Rosaura entered the room they swarmed towards her like a school of fish, pleading with her to come out and play. I recognized one little girl, Esperanza, who had knocked on the door on another occasion to get help from Rosaura on her kindergarten homework.

It was clear that there was a sense of community between the Cuban neighbors in Rosaura's complex who knew each other by name, took care of each other's children, and shared commonalities of journeying from Cuba to the states, and leaving family behind. There was a sense of *confianza*, or trust, that characterized these neighborly encounters. This mini-enclave in the middle of an ethnically mainstream community seemed to be a bridge to the imagined community of neighbors in Cuba. Living it out here in daily practice kept the possibility of the same phenomena in Cuba alive, so that for Rosaura it is not too foreign to return to Cuba and experience somewhat of a similar camaraderie over there.

'Being here and being there' was a common motif in the lives of these families, who all had someone (or many someone's) left behind in Cuba. On one occasion, Yamile lamented,

Nosotros no hechamos pa'lante!

[We don't move forward financially here]

indicating that although the families worked hard in the U.S., often in menial jobs, much of that money was sent back home to improve the lives of those left behind in Cuba. They also traveled to Cuba whenever they could, a journey that on the one hand jeopardized their *economic* well-being, while on the other positively charged their *emotional* well-being long enough to continue the hard work of a forging a new life in another country. While this type of journeying back to Cuba could seem financially counter-intuitive to some, or politically nonsensical to others, I came to understand that for these families, the return home existed on a higher plane than their personal economics or politics, which had little to do with their motives. While economics and

politics were complicated, reuniting with family was not. For them, this was as necessary as breathing.

Los Quinces. When I met Rosaura, she was looking forward to a trip to Cuba that she would be taking with her mother in the summer. The impending trip was both a source of excitement and anxiety. Rosaura was excited for the trip in a special way, because the last time she had returned to Cuba she was a small child and could not remember much about the trip. Additionally, this trip was special because they were planning on celebrating her *quinces* in Cuba with her family there, which included grandparents, aunts, cousins, an older half sister, and a young niece. They even planned to have professional *quinces* pictures taken in Cuba. Lastly, although her mother was only traveling for three weeks, Rosaura was to stay for an extra month with her older sister.

Her quinces had been celebrated in the U.S. on a smaller scale. At church, one of the members had volunteered to hold a small luncheon in her honor, and to take pictures in order to mark the occasion. They did not go further than this in order to save money for the ‘real’ celebration, which was to take place in Cuba.

While there was excitement about the trip, I witnessed anxiety as well, noting that there were inevitable consequences to the transnational journey home. About one month before the trip, Julia confided in me that she was in danger of losing her job because of the trip. In her minimum wage job at the factory, she had no benefits, much less a paid month of vacation. She had not yet told her boss that she would be gone for a month. That was one source of anxiety. The other was the combined loss of wages together with the expenditure of the trip. While she did not regret the trip, and in fact could see no other way forward than for Rosaura to take the

trip, it was not without an emotional and economic toll. She had been taking pills for her nerves in order to sleep at nights, and was concerned about losing her job.

Fortunately, when the time came, Julia did not get fired. While her boss was not thrilled, it was a situation that occurred frequently at the factory where so many Cuban ladies worked.

Different Spaces, Different Language

Conversations between friends and family in Rosaura's house, as in Angela's, were always in Spanish. The only exception seemed to revolve around my presence there, when I was meeting with Rosaura. From time to time I would catch one of the children standing very still nearby, intently focused on Rosaura and myself. Eventually I realized that it was not only the presence of a stranger who was suddenly monopolizing their precious Rosaura, but the fact that we were speaking in a language that they were not used to hearing in their house—English.

Communicating in two languages simultaneously, as we did in Miami, was not a practice that she engaged in, perhaps because she had little opportunity to speak to other fluent bilinguals, either at home or at school.

Researcher: Do you get to speak Spanish at school?

Rosaura: No. Actually, at the end of the school year, Mrs. ____ the ESOL teacher introduced me to three students who were learning to speak English, but they all spoke Spanish. Two of them were Cuban and one of them, I think, was Chilean. It was just fun listening to them and how they were trying [to learn English], so I talked to them in Spanish. But there weren't that many [chances to speak Spanish in school].

Researcher: So generally in your other classes, or during lunch, you don't really get a chance to speak Spanish?

Rosaura: Yeah. Yeah.

Researcher: Yeah you don't? [laughter]

Rosaura: Yeah, I don't. [laughter]

The Spanish speakers Rosaura referred to from school were emergent bilinguals who were just beginning to learn English, so the default language for communication between them became Spanish. Rosaura had little opportunity to interact with these girls, however, as they did not share classes or lunch periods together. She described several other friends from school as international students, with whom she used English as a Lingua Franca to communicate, given they all spoke different home languages. Whereas at school she had little opportunity to speak English, at home the opposite was true.

Researcher: At home, do you have opportunities to speak English?

Rosaura: When I'm alone.

Researcher:—When you're alone?

Rosaura:—Aha, like in my room. [chuckling] It's funny 'cause I always have on my mind, you know, don't lose Spanish, don't lose Spanish. The more I practice, the more I say it, the more likely I won't tend to forget it. So it's like every day, I have to decide- do I speak in English, or do I speak in Spanish? When I'm in my room alone, I'm like, well I spoke in Spanish all day, I might as well speak English. Then comes night-time and my mom calls me to read something in Spanish and I'm like, okay, this is my break time, Spanish now. So yea, it's interesting that at home I can speak both.

It surprised me to learn that Rosaura feared 'losing' her Spanish, when it was clearly such a dominant force in the life of the family, the mini-enclave, and her relationship with family in Cuba. She had both oral and written literacy in Spanish. She seemed fluent and comfortable speaking Spanish with her parents, and with the neighborhood families. She read Spanish books for leisure, and at a younger age had practiced her Spanish reading through "homework" prepared by her mother during the summer months off school. In fact, she indicated having a preference for Spanish:

Rosaura: Don't you think that when you speak Spanish it's more like *cayadito* [softer], and more like...I don't know; I feel that when I speak Spanish, my voice is just different. Smoother. I don't know.

Researcher:—Hmm. So you like your “Spanish voice” better than your “English voice”?

Rosaura:—I think so.

Her comment was intriguing; it left me wondering if speaking in Spanish enabled her to present a different version of herself, one that she was not able to enact at school, where there were no academic opportunities, nor many social ones, for Spanish. Yet at the same time, her preference for the Spanish language seemed interesting to me given an earlier comment, several hours into our first visit, when she suddenly exclaimed, “you don't know how good it is to be able to speak to someone in English!” This abrupt exclamation mid-conversation suggests that there was something limiting about the language compartmentalization she experienced, one for home, alone in her bedroom, and one for school.

This spontaneous exclamation of relief in being able to speak in English with me seems to contradict her stated preference for Spanish. On the one hand, perhaps it was the novelty of having someone to speak English with that prompted this exclamation. It seemed to me that Rosaura came to life when she shared with me about things she was learning about at school, or novels that she had read. Yet, there was a tension between her stated preference for Spanish, the intentionality behind her speaking it in certain circumstances, and her choice of English.

Language Fears and Power Struggles . On more than one occasion, Rosaura expressed fear about losing her ability to speak Spanish, prompting her to make very deliberate choices about language use.

Rosaura: *There's slang for every language— Cuban slang too. I've always tried to stay away from it here in America, and maybe not use words that you would typically hear kids using or speaking. It kind of makes me remember that,*

you know, I'm still Cuban, you know, like when I speak. When I use a lot of slang words with my friends I kind of feel like I was born here. But I have to remember, you know I wasn't born here, I was born back over there. So.

Researcher:—Why do you have to remember?

Rosaura:—Um, I feel like if I get out of touch, out of place with myself, I'll start forgetting the language more easily, because I've grown so norm...so comfortable in this language, um, in this way of life, and I feel like I'm gonna forget Spanish more easily.

Researcher:—Are your parents afraid of that too?

Rosaura: I don't know...but I think in a way they are because they are always telling me you know, talk Spanish whenever you can, don't forget it, and things like that, so.

The fact that Rosaura qualifies the context in which she restricts her English slang to “here in America” hints to her personal language ideology, one that is based on a dual frame of reference. In her mind, there is formal Spanish and slang-Spanish spoken in Cuba, and there is American English and American slang spoke “here in America”. Yet speaking American slang in America, in her mind, is an indication of being more American, or perhaps favoring an American identity, or getting too comfortable with the American language. It is as if there is an internal competition between language and identity inside of her.

She feels that she must be careful when American spaces evoke American slang, because this is dangerous to her Cuban identity. It is almost as if she has a fear of assimilation, that the American language and culture will swallow her up. Because of this, she is so careful about *where* she is Cuban, *where* she speaks Spanish, *where* she asserts American-ness, and *where* she speaks English, as well as what type of English she speaks, and how others might read into that. She is careful, even protective of, her language, and by extension, her culture and identity.

In observing her choice of language use in different contexts, it became clear that Rosaura made choices about her language use for other reasons as well. Rosaura's mother, Julia,

would often come into the room while I was working with her daughter at home. If we were not in the middle of an audiotaped conversation, I tended to switch to Spanish as much as possible in order to include Julia in the conversation, whereas Rosaura tended to continue in English, ignoring her mother's presence in the room. On the one hand, this could merely represent a teenager bothered by her mom's intrusion, attempting to mark a boundary by engaging me in English as we spoke about her life.

Yet the opposite phenomenon occurred outside of the house. Rosaura, who consistently engaged me in English for hours when we met at her house, would suddenly switch to Spanish outside of the home in front of others. This occurred on two different outings. One day at the public library, we were about to check out books when Rosaura turned to me and began to speak in a hushed voice in Spanish, turning away from the clerk to ask me questions about the check-out process.

Her actions surprised me, because I knew that she had checked out books in the past, and also because she did not choose to engage the library clerk standing a few feet in front of her to obtain this information. Instead she chose to ask me, in Spanish. Likewise, as we were waiting to pay at the movie theatre concession stand, she turned to me to confer about her purchases in Spanish, while the English-speaking clerk waited on us. On both occasions, her demeanor seemed to suggest a need, or desire, to have a private moment of conversation, in Spanish, by stepping back from an impending English transaction.

Rosaura was fully capable of using English to communicate with the clerks in these public spaces, yet she chose to go through me, a close cultural insider, in Spanish. While it was unnecessary for the purposes of comprehension, this performance seemed to be a deliberate move to delineate a boundary between these non-Cuban, non-Spanish speaking others, and

herself. In doing so, she included me into her intimate language circle, while excluding the English-only speaking clerks. Thus her use of Spanish in these public spaces was simultaneously created intimacy and distance.

Although I had not been in a public space together with her and her parents, I knew anecdotally that Rosaura, like so many other immigrant children, often brokered understanding between English-speakers and her parents (Suarez-Orozco, 2010). I could imagine Rosaura engaging in this same behavior with her parents, conveying information given to her in English by store clerks, and waiting for them to problem-solve the decision in Spanish, so that she in turn could finish the transaction in English. And yet, while Rosaura usually used the English language to bridge difference between outsiders and her parents, she could also chose to use exclude her parents through her language use, as evidenced below.

Researcher: Do you ever speak in English to your parents?

Rosaura: Like sometimes, when I'm mad at them and then I speak it, and they're like, "don't speak English to me" and I'm like, "if you want to understand English, learn English!"

This response on her part could simply be an example of teen-age sass. Regardless, I also interpreted it as an indication of the power she wielded because she spoke the English language, and was growing more familiar with a culture to which her parents were still outsiders. What are the repercussions of this power? What happens when unfamiliar others apprentice your children into a language and culture that you are not familiar with? It can cause a disjuncture, a power differential, perhaps even insecurity, making the process of coming of age, in some ways, lonelier. Although her parents go through great lengths to mark her quinces in the Cuban way through traditions, artifacts, trips, special benchmarks/events, at the end of the day they remain

outsiders to what it means to be fifteen in an American school and on a daily basis once she leaves the house.

Even in school, she did not have many friends to share these momentous events with. Where perhaps in school, even amongst some Spanish speakers, they would not understand the desire or the benefits of returning “home” to Cuba.

Reading Canonical Texts. I sat at the kitchen in Rosaura’s house on a Wednesday afternoon in May while her mom served me lasagna with *tostones*. Although I loved both of these foods, this was not a food combination that I was used to. In my experience, it was strange to mix Cuban and Italian food on the same plate. Julia then offered me rice, which I declined. Neither Rosaura nor her mom were a fan of lasagna, but their dad brought it home frequently from the restaurant where he worked as a dishwasher. It was my turn to be turned off about a Cubanized version of dinner, just as my American friend Laura had been turned off when she ate my mother’s version of Cubanized spaghetti many years earlier in New Jersey.

As we chatted over dinner, I learned that reading was a big part of Rosaura’s life, and that her mother was instrumental in seeking out books for her to read.

Rosaura: I like school. You know sometimes some things are not as exciting as other classes, but I still like school.

Researcher: Do you have a favorite subject?

Rosaura: English. English is my favorite class. Literature...and Math too, I really like Math

Researcher: Do you like to read?

Rosaura: I LOVE reading books. I LOVE reading poems. I have three [poetry books] at my house.

Researcher: What’s your favorite book?

Rosaura: It's really hard for me to choose, but I really love historical fiction a lot, any kind, and fiction. I'm reading a Christian series right now, and I just like it 'cause I can relate to it.

Once Rosaura learned I was a former English teacher, she seemed eager to talk books, especially those that we had in common.

Rosaura: [incredulously] You never read the lottery?

Researcher: I don't think so

Rosaura: [animatedly] It's a short story by...somebody, I forgot her name. Wait, wait, wait, wait, wait....

And off she ran energetically up the stairs to look for it while I ate my *tostones* in the kitchen with her mom, who was preparing to make Rosaura, who had earlier stated her preference for Cuban food, a *jamon con tortilla*, a ham omelet. Later, Rosaura filled my ear with the hidden messages the author intended about society in *The Lottery* and the savagery in *Lord of the Flies* while a Spanish *telenovela* played in the background and mom swirled eggs in the pan.

I listened, taking in these sights and sounds that were faintly reminiscent of my own childhood. I was transported to the kitchen table of my childhood, where I sat next to my sister, English schoolbooks strewn around as we did our homework. Spanish resonates through the house, perhaps Cuban music on the radio, and the intoxicating smell of vinegar and garlic from my mother's Cuban cooking hangs in the air. I remember my love affair with *Little Women* and the *Secret Garden* in the 5th grade, *Call It Courage* in 6th, *To Kill a Mockingbird* in the 9th, my sister and I quizzing each other on our Spelling words.

Cuba On Her Mind. One day, as she was telling me about Cuba, Rosaura shifted gears to a school anecdote.

Rosaura: You know, I was reading about stuff [online] for the Odyssey in language arts...and then I came upon this website, "Latin American news". And it talked about Cuba and the water situation, about Fidel Castro finally

letting...something about water in caves and the ocean. But my family [in Cuba] always had a well, and the water has always been clean. It's very cold, but luckily my grandpa has this heating machine..."

She was referring to the difficulty of obtaining clean water in Cuba, a problem that had developed in the 1990's as the infrastructure of Cuba deteriorated, and as a result, water became rationed by the government. She recounted this story in an animated way and I was struck by the way that her mind hopped from the Odyssey to Cuba. On one occasion, I took the opportunity to ask her about this.

Researcher: I notice that oftentimes when you read something you make comparisons to Cuba, or to your experiences with Cuba a lot. Would you say that's true?

Rosaura: Most kids write about fantasy and science fiction, and things out of this world, that they imagine and aren't real. But I always tend to stay with what I know, and what I know is Cuba, that's my life.

It did not surprise me that Rosaura loved the canonical literature that she was reading in school because I had loved them as well. What struck me were the constant connections she made with Cuba through many of the stories that she read. It became apparent that Cuban culture was central to the way that she understood and enjoyed canonical text in ways that she may or may not have always been able to express.

Researcher: Do you sometimes read in Spanish?

Rosaura: Yeah, my mom gets these books at garage sales sometimes. When I was little my mom bought me this autobiography about this girl, she was born in Cuba and she came here...And I have my bible that I read in Spanish and English.

I was intrigued to discover that the aforementioned Bible was a bilingual Bible, one of Julia's more unique garage sale finds. Rosaura and her family attended a local Protestant Christian church, where they often attended services.

Rosaura displayed great intellectual curiosity towards learning, and reading to learn. In fact, based on my interactions with her, I deemed her to be so capable with the English language that it surprised me to learn that she used her Spanish language as a scaffold at times to better understand something in English, a finding that emerged organically as she was remembering how she had learned English in the primary grades.

Rosaura: When I started learning English, I remember distinctly, I would always take the longest time on all the tests, on everything from 2nd grade all the way up to 7th grade. I was always the last one to finish everything. Because for some reason my mind, it always goes through this procedure. I would get very nervous when taking a test, and I would have to translate. And every word that I was thinking was in Spanish, and then I'd go back over it in English until I could understand the question perfectly. I just needed to make sure my answer was correct, so I had to read it in English, translate it to Spanish, and then translate it back into English.

Researcher: Do you still do that now?

Rosaura: Yes, I do

Researcher: Yeah?

Rosaura: In some cases, when the test is a little hard. My teachers always say, 'she's a very diligent student', and 'she always takes her time'. And some kids look at me with this face like, "come on, Rosaura"! [humorously] and I'm like, I'm always very proud to take my time! [laughing]

Researcher: [laughing with her] And do you do the same thing in math, do you think you translate in your head?

Rosaura: I think I never do that with math, because math is more about numbers and things. I think I learn every subject in a different way. Science has always been a subject that I can be one of the first ones to finish, and get a good grade. And sometimes science has reading in it, but I don't have to translate that. But in English, Literature, History, Geography-- oh yeah, I do.

Despite my teaching experience in contexts where there were many students like Rosaura, and my familiarity with reading research, I was not expecting to find that Rosaura still built on her first language actively, perhaps deliberately, through what she called 'translation', to

make sense of text. It did not surprise me that she did so in the primary grades, as it can take emergent bilinguals up to seven years to build academic knowledge. However, given her fluent English proficiency, and her academic schooling in English, it was unexpected to find that she still felt the need to translate from English to Spanish and back to English for comprehension.

Rosaura was fluent in English, a fact that became apparent to me early on as she expressed herself effortlessly during our conversations. There was never a time when she did not understand something that I asked in English. I also had the opportunity to read snippets of her journal, and other school work written in English. Having been an English teacher for many years, I felt that her oral and written language was on par with the average English speaker in the ninth grade. This was not surprising, given that all of her formal schooling had taken place in the United States. She enjoyed school, enjoyed learning, and most of all, enjoyed reading.

One explanation for this could be the performance anxiety that she alluded to when testing. However, further conversations revealed other possible motives, suggesting that these ‘translations’, while important for comprehension, might also be tied to performances of identity, which manifested through this embodied literacy.

I wondered what it is like to have her two languages somewhat compartmentalized, one for home and one for school. Although at school she has friends who speak Spanish, it seems like in her home community she does not have anyone who speaks English and Spanish fluently. Several hours into our first visit she suddenly exclaimed, “you don’t know how good it is to be able to speak to someone in English!”

While I wondered about her English, Rosaura wondered about my Spanish.

Rosaura: Do you watch telenovelas?

Researcher: I don’t.

Rosaura: I thought you might be picking up words from these...you were more comfortable speaking Spanish today.

Researcher: Really! Why, was I uncomfortable at first?

Rosaura: I don't know, I felt at times you would forget words.

Researcher: Probably! Sometimes I get tongue-tied in Spanish...

Clearly, Rosaura was well aware about the ways in which she, as well as others around her, used language!

Bilingual Readings

Rosaura's mental text translation was not limited to school text. As mentioned earlier, one of the books that she read for personal edification was her bilingual Bible. The same scripture verses were written in Spanish on one side, and in English on the other. Rosaura brought this Bible to the library where we met on one occasion so that I could see it.

Researcher: When you read the bible do you read the Spanish side or the English side?

Rosaura: Well, I try to read them both. If I don't understand something very clearly I go to the English side, but I try, I start reading it in Spanish.

Researcher: Yeah?

Rosaura: Yeah, my mom has always encouraged me to do that. I can look up scriptures really fast-- I underline the English section.

Researcher: Are you faster in English?

Rosaura: Um, I think I am, yeah.

Researcher: Do you understand most of the vocabulary in Spanish?

Rosaura: Like, some of the words I encounter I tell my mom, what does this mean? But she doesn't know some of them either. Some of the words are tricky. And there are some in English that I don't know either.

I had suspected that Rosaura would be faster, and perhaps more proficient, at reading in English since the bulk of her academic reading was for school. What I had underestimated,

however, was the interaction between languages and how this contributed to her understanding of text. The opportunity soon presented itself to observe her making meaning of our reading of the Bible.

Researcher: Can you show me what you highlighted yesterday?

Rosaura: [She searches] actually, let's see...this is where I had it marked... well this one was really interesting, I liked this one. This was in Job 5:2 and it says, "Resentment kills the fool, and envy slays the simple."

Researcher: Hmmm. What do you like about it?

Rosaura: That I don't have any idea what it means! [laughter] It sounds so interesting, like I understand the first part and the second, kind of, because I feel it's so simple, but the meaning behind it is so large. I feel like like it can mean a lot of things, so that's what I like about it. [Long pause] What does it mean to you?

Researcher: Hmmm. Let me read it again.

I went back to the text, and re-read the passage aloud in English. Then I asked her if she could read the Spanish verse for me.

Rosaura: "El resentimiento mata a los necios, la envidia mata a los insensatos."

We were both silent as we thought.

Rosaura: So now when I hear 'insensatos', I go okay, now I understand that part. So I kind of go back and forth if I don't understand what it means.

Researcher: so 'insensate' helps you understand 'fool'?

Rosaura: Um, 'simple'. 'Simple' and 'fool', yeah. 'Cause 'insensato' is like...(small pause) oh, los 'necios'. That's fool.

At that moment Rosaura made the connection between the word *necio* in Spanish, and *fool* in English. The act of re-reading the text, in both languages, seemed to help her make meaning from the passage as she compared the vocabulary words. It is not entirely clear to me which language served as a scaffold here. What seems likely is that reading both versions side

by side enabled her to compare words: *insensato* to fool, and *necio* to simple, clarifying the meaning of these words, helping her to piece together the meaning. Given that she originally confessed to not understanding the passage clearly, it appears that she pieced together the meaning by drawing on knowledge fragments from Spanish *and* English.

Being Bilingual

During earlier interviews I strived not to ask too many pointed questions, instead leading Rosaura into certain topics that I hoped she would share her experiences of. However, on this occasion, after many months of meeting, I took the opportunity to ask her more pointed questions about her language use.

Researcher: Do you consider yourself bilingual? Do you ever think about it?

Rosaura: I think it's the coolest thing ever. I don't think anybody can fully know all the vocabulary and verbs in the language. But when you get to understand anything that anybody throws at you, whether it's professional or in everyday life, I think there's a value because you are able to talk to them. If I can have thoughts and talk in that language, then I feel more bilingual.

This was pretty wise language ideology she shared with me on that day. Without having to prod her much further, she continued to theorize about language and bilingualism.

Rosaura: wherever you are, whether you are in school, or just at home, your language is just as useful. It's not like in the time you are in school that language is cut off, it's not important anymore only English in the classes. And I feel, like in English class, I also try to keep my thoughts in Spanish, because both my languages are useful, whether I'm in school, or at home.

Rosaura had established that her Spanish language, and her Cuban culture, was not something that she left behind at home when she went to school. She was deliberate in the ways that she brought these funds of knowledge to bear on the texts that she read.

Journeys of Language and Self

Researcher: Is language ever a problem for you? Like, is it ever a problem in school that you want talk in Spanish, or at home that you want to talk in

English? Is it ever a source of frustration or discomfort? Or is it really not something that you think about?

Rosaura: [nodding] I think so. I remember we were reading the Odyssey, and I was comparing one of the Odysseus' stories with one of my life stories. I was trying to explain to my English teacher, and I was like, "if I could speak to you in Spanish right now you would understand and it would be so much simpler" because in Spanish there were words that I didn't know how to say in English, so I was a little frustrated and I wanted to talk to her in Spanish, because then I could get all my thoughts out, but in English I was struggling a little to explain to her what I was trying to say.

Researcher: What would you have told her? Do you remember?

Rosaura: I would tell her about how Odysseus went away, and he stayed for a long time. And how I went away to America, and stuff like that. And it's been a journey for me. So...yeah.

We remained both silent for a few moments, as the weight of her answer settled in the room around us. Having spent many months in dialogue with Rosaura at this point, I believe that she did have the words to express what she wanted to say to her English teacher on that day, but perhaps those words in English simply did not carry the same meaning, or *sentimiento* [feeling] that saying it in Spanish would for her. Sometimes words are not just words; they code an entire history heavily laden with emotion. Journey was at the core of her identity. Although it was not my journey, I understood it, because I had been a witness to these types of journeys all of my life.

Rosaura felt an immediate connection between her immigrant journey and Odysseus'. Being American, being Cuban-American, had been a journey, an odyssey to be exact, one that she was still finding her way through. I imagine that on that day, the emotion she felt was 'in Spanish', just as her journey had originated 'in Spanish' and would return to Spanish every day as she returned home from school, and throughout the years as she returned home to Cuba.

There was always a back and forth to her life, from Cuba to somewhere else, from somewhere else back to Cuba. Cuba was always on her mind.

Perhaps these understandings and connections that Rosaura made were lost in translation, or were not able to be translated, but they were certainly felt. Feelings, emotion, perceptions and intuitions, are what we feel intimately, and may often constitute our deepest connections with text. These connections that occur at the gut level, in our very soul, involve our identity and our emotions, not just our minds. In order to co-construct meaning, we carry our whole selves into the text and into our writing. There is something very vulnerable about this act that should be respected, but this can only happen if teachers are sensitive to this phenomenon in the first place; it seems that on that day, her teacher was not.

Rosaura yearned for Cuba in a way that had not been my experience. She was always imagining and striving for a relationship and a future in both countries.

Researcher: Do you see yourself maybe going back to Cuba in the future?

Rosaura: I do... I want to leave an impact not only on America, but on my nation, I think in some ways Cuba, it kind of gave me my identity, and I want to give something back to it for teaching me Spanish, for being part of that society, even though it's really poor and all that stuff, it's amazing when you go there, it's alike a paradise. And I'd like to help kids in Cuba a lot, and also kids here.

Contrary to the narrative that I was familiar with, Rosaura positioned Cuba as a place to return to, and not only a place from which people leave.

Rosaura: ...even though it's really poor and all, it's amazing when you go there, it's like a paradise.

Researcher: Tell me about Cuba being a paradise.

Rosaura: [excitedly] Oh my gosh, when I went to Cuba, you know in Olguin, though I was born in Freyde, it's a providence in Olguin, and then further on comes the country part. My mom was born in the country, and my dad was born in 'el pueblo', the town. As you go into the country there is this part called Cangrejera, and then Porterillo, and it's just full with mountains. Some

mountains were so high you see a little circle of clouds going over them, and they're just beautiful. There are these hills, and a lot of rivers... just beautiful rivers. And you can always see palm trees and herds of cows and horses and just, everything around you...

Rosaura gushed with animated details about her birthplace in Cuba, referencing small towns that I had never heard of. I was struck by her intimate knowledge of the towns where her parents were from, and by the sense of pride and belonging she exuded while she spoke. Her account highlights the natural beauty in the pastoral spaces of her birth country, and the warmth of the family relationships there, without alluding to the starker realities of daily existence in Cuba, such as the embargo, daily water rations, the uncertainty faced by the people remaining there, and poverty.

Yet, although her memories about Cuba were positive, I already knew that the reality was much more complicated. In daily life, the Cuban imaginary of Rosaura's world involved *both* beauty and suffering. While her perception of her Cuban past may have been paradise, she actively suffered in real time. This struggle was on-going, manifested in the discourse surrounding remittances to those who stayed behind in Cuba, in the challenges of language and education in the U.S., in the financial struggle faced by her parents, and in the social isolation that she experienced in school.

On Being Cuban-American. During one of our last conversations, I asked Rosaura to self-identify.

Rosaura: "I consider myself Cuban American, because even though I love my country, I've learned to love this country. And even though there's many problems between these two countries...they are similar, in many ways, and I've grown to love them both."

On the one hand, her response surprised me, because she had always been so intentional about foregrounding her Cuban identity. Cuba was her birthplace, and she retained transnational

ties with the country. On the other hand, her hybrid identity was not surprising at all. To paraphrase Sara's logic in chapter 4, *where* people are shapes *who* they become. Despite her history, her culture, and her neighbors, Rosaura's life had played out primarily in the United States. It would be naive to suppose that this place would not mark her identity in some way.

Rosaura's decision to claim American identity in addition to Cuban identity also indicates her dual frame of reference when it comes to citizenship and nationality. While family and economics trumped politics for her parent's transnational generation of immigrants, individual experience and expediency trumped politics for her. In fact, the construction of Cuba as a place of return and comfort may seem ludicrous to those who subscribe to the dominant narrative.

Rosaura: One day I was talking to my friend about Cuba, how it's a beautiful place and all these things. And I know the president might look like a bad person, but he's actually done some great things for Cuba. Like for all those who didn't know how to read, or grew up in the mountains and 'eran inalfabeto' [were illiterate], he started with those people first, and tried to give them an education and things like that. And my friend came out of nowhere saying that Fidel Castro is a bad person and all these different things. And I was like, [opens her mouth in disbelief], okay! Woah! Well, this is my family history and this is how I see it.

Researcher: [nodding] Um huh.

Rosaura: And so, she came on very strongly. I don't think we've ever touched on that topic again, because she's in debate club, and I know she can come at you like a hurricane.

At the time of my conversations with Rosaura, Cuban politics were not on the forefront of the news. As a largely invisible cultural minority at her school, and in her city, Rosaura had not had many opportunities for exposure to other viewpoints about Cuba's history. In fact, it was through the sharing of my own family history that she learned about the *marielitas*, *balseros*, and exiles that had constituted earlier waves of Cuban migration to the U.S.

Regardless, empowered by her life history and active relationship with Cuba, Rosaura was agentic in rejecting her friend's narrative about Cuba and sticking to her own.

Although she constructed herself as a hybrid of Cuban and American, she was limited by the way that standardized tests in school box her in to the more essentialized construct of 'Hispanic'.

Rosaura: In school, on [standardized] tests, you always have to write in your nationality and all. But um, you know, sometimes there is no place to write that I'm Cuban and American. I think on these tests I mostly put that I'm Hispanic. I've grown to that habit. I'm just Hispanic.

It is unfortunate that she could be considered "just Hispanic", with all of the richness that her Cuban-ness afforded her.

The Research Questions

Manifestations of Cuban Identity. Rosaura strives to manifest Cuban identity in everything that she does, from the way that she dresses, to the way that she speaks. However, it is through her investment in the use of Spanish that her lived Cuban-ness is most asserted. Her Cuban identity and use of Spanish flow from her connection to a Cuban imaginary full of hope and memories.

The importance of her Cuban identity surfaced repeatedly in our conversations, and through stories of her performance of Cuban identity. Related to this was her deep fear of losing her Spanish, which to Rosaura, is one way to perform Cubanidad. Thus, she found ways to practice it, such as when she chose to initiate reading her bilingual bible in Spanish, or when she thought in Spanish while doing her schoolwork. On one occasion she even commented that she sometimes practiced speaking English with a Cuban accent so that "people could know" that she is Cuban. The fact that she felt that she had to go out of her way to perform Cubanidad outside of her home so that *people could know* implies that this identity is vulnerable, or threatened,

making her choices to engage with biliteracy and bilingualism agentive acts of resistance against mono-lingual, mono-cultural expectations.

For all individuals, identity is a site of struggle and negotiation, as we position ourselves and are positioned in our worlds (Carroll, Motha, & Price, 2008). We proleptically inherit identity and culture as social, cultural and historically situated individuals (Cole, 1996).

Throughout our lives, we develop countless versions of identities, some that we choose, many that are ascribed. Individuals may develop, or be ascribed, diasporic identities, as well as ethnic, and pan-ethnic identities, in addition to social, racial, religious, gendered and any other conceivable category of identity. While Rosaura is very clear about her identity as a young Cuban-American woman, her experiences at school make it clear that this identity is obscured behind “Hispanic”, and possibly further obscured behind her placement in mainstream English Language Arts class, where expressing oneself in Spanish is not offered as an alternative practice, even when Rosaura struggles express her thoughts about Oddyseus’ journey to her teacher.

In some ways, the fact that there was no outside support for Spanish other than the small enclave within the apartment complex intensified the dominance of Spanish as the language of the home and the extended community there. At the same time, for Rosaura, losing her Spanish was not an option. It was necessary for her to communicate fluently in Spanish in order to communicate with her parents, and just as important, to be able to communicate when she returned to Cuba.

Rosaura’s daily life at home, and with neighbors in the mini-enclave, are spaces in which she lives culturally amongst cultural insiders like herself, where she does not have to give a second thought to being Cuban.

Factors Sustaining Cuban Identity. For Rosaura, the Spanish language, living culturally at home, her family history, and transnational ties to Cuba are key factors that sustain her Cuban identity.

Her decisive use of Spanish ‘in her head’ as she learns, her choice of the Spanish language when addressing me in public spaces, and her stated preference for the sound of the Spanish language are ways in which Rosaura uses language as a way to assert and maintain her Cuban identity.

Rosaura’s connection to the island of Cuba is an important factor that sustains her identity. Contrary to the narrative that dominates the larger ethnic enclaves, Rosaura positioned Cuba as paradise, a place to return to, and not only a place from which people leave. Her ‘figured world’ of Cuba as paradise, although quite different from the dominant narrative, is positive in that it allows her to perceive that part of her identity and culture in a generative and loving light, regardless of the crumbling buildings, the water shortages, and overall poverty her family back home still faces.

This, bolstered by her lived, transnational relationship with Cuba through family ties, the neighborhood enclave, and trips back home, help her sustain a positive sense of identity and relationship with Cuba. Her Cuban identity, and language, is critical to her connection both to her family in the U.S., as well as her family in Cuba.

How Do Manifestations of Cuban identity/Cubanidad Shape Rosaura’s Language and Literacy Practices? In Rosaura’s imaginary, what she chooses to see and not to see, what she is too young to see, and what she sees precisely because she is so young, constitutes her figured worlds, that are always with her as a part of her history and identity. It is with this element of being with which she reads text, as a Cuban-American girl, with all of the histories

and experiences that this identity implies for her. All of these aspects of her travel with her into the books that she reads.

The way that Rosaura read and wrote about her world was colored by her subjectivity as a Cuban-American girl. Her literacies always seem to connect her back to Cuba. She leveraged her language resources and cultural history (i.e., her lived experiences) beautifully in ways that help her make connections with what she read for school, most clearly exemplified through her personal connection with Odysseus. She finds a way to imagine her way into the fictional account of the Odyssey by imposing her lived reality and background knowledge into her work with this unit, reminding us that the fictional stories read in school are always filtered through the stories we have in our heads, real or imagined, compiled through our lived experiences.

Clearly Rosaura's bilingualism and biliteracy, and her ability to use them to make sense of text are an asset to her learning, yet her story shows that it is an aspect of her learning style that remains largely invisible to others unless she is asked. This invisibility is as unfortunate as the rendering of her Cubanidad into the generic construct of Hispanic.

Chapter 6: Exploring Themes

In the previous chapters I shared the stories and experiences of three Cuban-American adolescents and the interplay between language, culture, identity, and literacy manifested throughout the spaces of their life. The purpose of this study is not to simply compare their experiences, but rather, to lay the observations gleaned from these stories side by side in order to see what can be learned from them. In chapters three through five, I narrated the stories of three adolescent Cuban-Americans living and learning bilingually in different contexts. I wrote concluding thoughts at the end of each of these chapters to reflect upon the research questions in light of each narrative.

In this chapter, I will outline specific themes that emerged from the narratives of the three participants in the study, as they entered into dialogue with my focal research questions. I situate these themes within existing research, and extend the discussion by exploring the pedagogical implications. The six themes that will be explored are as follows:

- Imagining Cuba: Paradise Ruins, and Re-imaginings
- Cuban-ness on a Continuum: Hybridity as a Complex Phenomenon
- The Relationship Between Language, Identity, and Space
- The Phenomenon of Translanguaging: Affordances and Constraints
- The Journey: Opportunity, Resilience, and Investment
- Religious Literacies and Biliteracies: Hidden Funds of Knowledge

Imagining Cuba: Paradise, Ruins and Re-imaginings

When I started this project, I believed that there was one Cuba. After six years of thought on Cuban identity, however, I have come to realize that there are in fact many Cubas; or at least, many different understandings of a place called Cuba. One's identity as Cuban is related to the

way that imagines Cuba, which in turn is related to the way that one performs Cuban-ness. Hall reminds us that identity is more about becoming than about being (1991, p. 225), as one is grounded in an on-going history, the “sediment” upon which we build our current selves (Holland et al, 1998).

Implicating the imaginary in the development of identity, Motha and Price (2008) theorize how “constructing new identities involves acts of imagination” through which “new meanings are appropriated...in the process of becoming and belonging” (p. 189). Therefore, to identify as ‘Cuban-American’ is to imagine that such a thing is possible. For example, although they have not grown up in Cuba, Natasha and Sara’s relationship to a place called Cuba, whether real or imagined, grounds them to a figured world of Cuba.

In diaspora, language, collective memory, and context become semiotic resources that come to bear on their diasporic identities. For the three participants, their ideas about Cuban-ness, as well as their experience of Cuban-ness, are somewhat different, because of the ecologies in which they experienced the culture, as well as their unique family history with Cuba. The relationship between each family and their history with Cuba also shapes what Cuba is to these individuals, making it possible to have different imaginaries of Cuba, as they construct their Cuban identities based on the physical, historical, and emotional sediment that they stand on. Ruins and re-imaginings. While Rosaura was born in Cuba and traveled there again as a young child, Sara and Natasha have had to imagine a place called Cuba all of their lives. Their connection to Cuba is through diaspora, because they were born and raised with no first-hand knowledge of the island, and no hope of return for their family. Nonetheless, both Sara and Natasha have a strong sense of Cubanidad.

Although Sara and Natasha are not in touch with the actual island of Cuba, they have an identity and a history tied to their own version of Cuba. This imaginary is kept alive by the collective cultural memory of the family, as well as the translanguaging practices of the home, extended family, and community in their lives.

Diasporic identities are often negotiated through language and semiotic resources (Canagarajah & Silberstein, 2012), such as food, memories, stories, traditions, and discourses of the home as well as the broader community context as all of these resources come to bear on identity development. Natasha's upbringing was rife with artifacts of Cuban-ness that came to define her, such as her grandmother's saints, dances with her aunts, Spanish folk songs, and Cuban food. The beauty parlor anecdote in chapter 4 illustrates the symbolic power of certain artifacts, such as the *cafe con leche* has for Sara, in identity development.

Furthermore, Natasha and Sara grew up hearing the stories of their parents' and/or grandparents lives in Cuba, as well as the circumstances of their migration, when the families were pushed out. Both of their lives have also been saturated by the stories of others Cubans arriving in South Florida amidst great physical and emotional suffering, contributing to their imaginary of Cuba as a place of ruins, from which people want to escape. The stories of those who left, the live television footage of *balseros* risking their lives at sea in desperate attempts to find a better life, and the actual success of immigrant families all around them serve to bolster this idea of Cuba being undesirable, and the U.S. a refuge where lives are not stagnated, as is evidenced when Sara characterizes Cuba as a place where freedom and opportunity do not exist.

Pictures of current-day Havana read like a metaphor for them, illustrating how the place that their family once called home is now in decay. In their view, the crumbling buildings in Cuba are proof of that those Cubans who stay on the island continue to be exploited, deceived,

and forgotten by their government, while those who can, leave. The state of the infrastructure, the yields of the land, the values of the people, regional traits, and of course, the politics have irrevocably changed the actual island of Cuba and the Cuban people there to such an extent that there is no going back, because what once Cuba for their parents and grand-parents is no more.

For them, the ways in which they live Cuban with their family, and the languages with which they speak and enact Cubania keep them connected to a living Cuban imaginary in diaspora. The Cuban-ness of South Florida is more ‘home’, more recognizable than Cuba. Furthermore, they are content to leave it that way. The invisible barrier between the 90-mile stretch of water that separates Cuba and the U.S. does not allow for the possibility of a glimpse of what is remains of the old paradise.

For Rosaura, the opposite is true. Rosaura does not refer to a metaphorical place when she says,

I write about what I know, and what I know is Cuba.

She has both a geographical and emotional connection to Cuba, which for her, is a paradise.

R: even though it's really poor and all, it's amazing when you go there, it's like a paradise.

Me: Tell me about Cuba being a paradise.

R: [excited] Oh my gosh, when I went to Cuba, you know in Olguin, though I was born in Freyde, it's a providence in Olguin, and then more on comes the country part... There are these hills, and a lot of rivers... just beautiful rivers. And you can always see palm trees and herds of cows and horses and just, everything around you.

Her words express intimate knowledge about countryside, as well as a sense of pride and belonging. She highlights the natural beauty of the pastoral setting, without mentioning words that point to the starker realities of daily existence in Cuba, such as the U.S. embargo, water rations, uncertainty, and poverty. Yet, Rosaura's connection to Cuba, although imagined as

paradise, involves both beauty and suffering, because of her familial ties to Cuba. She suffers the hardships of her family trying to make ends meet in the U.S. while worrying about those left behind. The struggle is real and reflected in the communal discourse of the enclave, where so many of her Cuban neighbors share a similar history and a similar struggle. Discourse about sending remittances back home, buying medicine to send to a sick loved one in Cuba, working hard in the U.S. yet never making it above the poverty line because they invest so much in returning home to take care of their loved ones are motifs that are echoed from household to household.

In her immigrant memoir, Eva Hoffman writes, “It’s amazing what you can make a paradise out of”, (Hoffman, 1989), referring to her shabby childhood in Poland that she yearns for as if she had left the Garden of Eden behind. Likewise, contrary to the narrative that dominates the larger ethnic enclaves, Rosaura positioned Cuba as paradise, a place to return to, and not only a place from which people leave. Her ‘figured world’ of Cuba as paradise, although quite different from the dominant Cuban-in exile narrative, is positive in that it allows her to perceive that part of her identity and culture in a generative and loving light, regardless of the crumbling buildings, the water shortages, and overall poverty her family back home still faces. This, bolstered by her lived, transnational relationship with Cuba through family ties, the neighborhood enclave, and trips back home, help her sustain a positive sense of identity and relationship with Cuba. Her Cuban identity, and language, are critical to her connection both to her family in the U.S., as well as her family in Cuba.

Cuban-ness on a Continuum: Hybridity as a Complex Phenomenon

During the course of this study I had the opportunity to travel to Cuba through a fellowship from the Tinker Foundation. At the time, I was trying to capture the ephemeral

phenomena called Cuban culture. I stayed with a Cuban family I had never met, distant relatives of my brother in law, who lived in Cuba. Although we were strangers, after 24 hours together, they felt comfortable calling me ‘Cubana’. I spoke Cuban Spanish with them, shared familiar Cuban foods, and most importantly, had an interest in discovering my Cuban roots on the island. The Cubaneo between us came easily, and felt natural, even though we were strangers, even though I was far from my home in the U.S.

Several days into my fieldwork, Cuba was feeling less foreign to me, until one day that I was conducting an interview on the street. My new Cuban family was trying to help me recruit a young black Cuban man whom they thought would make a good candidate for an interview. They called me over to introduce him, claiming,

“Ella es Cubana!”

She is Cuban!

The young man looked at me skeptically and said,

“Ella es Cubana?”

She is Cuban?

I nodded confidently and said:

“Si, yo soy Cubana!”

Yes, I am Cuban!

To which he said:

“Cubana? No, [shaking his head] ella no es Cubana. Ella no es Cubana hasta que no se pase el dia haciendo la linia, hasta que no sepa lo que es la lucha. Hasta que no se pare en la esquina de Neptuno de noche con las Jineteras y vea lo que pasa de verdad de noche en la Habana...”

“Cuban? No, [shaking his head] she is not Cuban. She is not Cuban until she wastes an entire day languished in a queue for food, until she experiences the struggle of figuring out how to survive by improvising from day to day, until she

stands on the corner of Neptune Avenue in the company of prostitutes and watches the underbelly of Havana late at night...”

On that day, a man who had no relationship with me, because I had no relationship with the island, called me out on my Cuban-ness. He took one look at me and knew that I did not know his Cuba, and if I did not know Cuba by experiencing la lucha of being Cuban in that space, than I could not call myself Cuban. He positioned me far from the point where I had positioned myself on the continuum of Cuban-ness.

And yet, back in Michigan, Angela positioned me as Cubana soon after we met, when she introduced me to her friend saying,

“Ella es Cubana, pero oye, Cubana de verdad!”

She is Cuban, and I mean really Cuban!

There is always complexity in defining culture, even in when self-identifying. To say that one is Cuban, or that one is any ethnicity, is a complex thing that can mean different things to different people. There can be worlds of difference between people who claim Cubanidad, as the young man in Cuba pointed out to me. In the next section, it will be helpful to revisit the constructs of cubania, cubaneo, and cubanidad explored in Chapter One. These three constructs provide a way to parse out certain ways in which Cuban-ness is enacted, claimed, or made manifest in the lives of the participants.

Cubanidad. Cubanidad is merely the label, or status of being Cuban branded on a birth certificate or passport; it is an outward characteristic that carries no emotional attachment. For Natasha and Sara, Cubanidad is an inherited family trait. They are not legally Cuban, not according to their passport, or birth certificate. Although they were born in the U.S. however, both identify strongly and positively with their family culture, and are accepted as Cuban in

many spheres of their lives. Even so, they both qualify their Cubanidad by hybridizing it into a Cuban-American identity. Rosaura, on the other hand, is legally Cuban by birth. While Rosaura strives to find ways to show off her Cuban-ness, “so that people could know” that she is Cuban, Sara hedges against being ‘really’ Cuban by pointing out that she is not as Cuban as certain kids in school who are more recent immigrants, and Cuban by birth:

Sara: I’m Cuban, but not as Cuban as them.

Sara and Natasha qualify their Cuban-ness by hybridizing their identity to show that they are not only Cuban, but American. Using Cuban as an adjective is one way of explaining what type of American you are, and where your heritage is from. This strategy was efficient for me as a teen-ager in the spaces of church and school, amongst so many other Spanish-speaking teens with different national identities. Against the backdrop of the super-diversity of Spanish-speakers, my American-ness stood out, both through my English proficiency as opposed to Spanish, and my comfort with the culture, which earned me the nickname of ‘la gringa’.

Sara explains her hybrid identity by referencing cultural ties to Cuba (roots) as well as a reference to place, i.e., America, where she was born, and where she lives.

I consider myself American, yes I do, but I also consider myself Cuban. Like Cuban-American ...so I have my Cuban roots, yet I was raised in America where I also have freedom.

She characterizes her Cuban side as the place where her family heritage comes from, manifested through ‘roots’ and ‘traditions’, language and food, artifacts that connect her to Cuban-ness. Yet it is very clear to her that she is also American, feeling a sense of belonging to the country where she has been raised, and where she imagines her future:

*It’s mostly about my roots and where I am living now at this moment.
You become more of where you are. It’s not a bad thing, it’s an eventual thing.*

Such matter-of-fact claiming of a hybrid identity seems unproblematic for Sara, as it was for Natasha growing up. This everyday hybridity is not unusual, and has been researched across ethnicities and contexts in diaspora studies. For example, in his ethnographic research with the multilingual (Panjabi and Gujarati) Blackhill youth in England, Harris (2006) found that they:

“...simultaneously inhabit a number of ethnic and cultural sub-communities whose practices articulate together drawing both on residual traditional elements informed by diasporic influences, and on emergent local elements with different emphases dominant at contingent moments...This is all accomplished with little or no overt sign of crisis or serious discomfort” (p. 12).

Like the Blackhill youth, the ‘lack of overt crisis’ caused by Sara and Natasha’s hybridity is noteworthy, in that complexity and hybridity do not necessarily imply a fragmentation of identity.

Language is another key way that individuals index identity. In his research with Tamil youth in Sri Lanka, Canagarajah (2011) found that translanguaging, emblematic use of language, and receptive knowledge of their heritage language allowed the youth “resolve the dilemma of mobility and identity”. Likewise, translanguaging plays a key role in identity and a sense of belonging to Sara and Natasha as they were growing up with various degrees of bilingualism at different stages of their lives. Although not Cuban by birth, Sara and Natasha claim membership in the diaspora through their heritage language.

Cubaneo. Translanguaging facilitates participation in the spaces where Cubaneo happens, where Cubans get together and inevitably draw out the Cuban-ness in each other through gestures, language, and shared cultural understandings. In fact, spaces of Cubaneo provide key opportunities to enact Cuban identity, as well as to feel connected to Cuban-ness. The spaces of Sara and Natasha’s lives South Florida are saturated with Cubaneo, like the beauty

parlor, quinces dance practices, or church groups. It is even easy to find in the streets of South Florida streets, especially in front of restaurants where Cubans gather to drink their cafecito.

In Michigan, I experienced Cubaneo when I visited Rosaura and her neighbor, Angela, during the months that I was interviewing her. In fact, I believe that this is the reason why Angela declared about me:

“Ella es Cubana, pero mira, Cubana de verdad!”

She is Cuban, but I mean really Cuban!

Between Rosaura and her neighbors, Cubaneo binds the mini-enclave together, allowing for a space that provides an outlet for cultural expression, cultural understanding, and mutual support.

Cubania. The third dimension of Cuban-ness explored in chapter one is Cubania, the innermost, almost soulful expression of Cuban-ness that comes from the inside out, with intention, whether alone or in the company of other Cubans. For all of the participants, family is the font of Cubania. Through prolepsis (Cole, 1996), cultural values, as well as language, are transmitted to the youth in an ongoing cycle of *la cultura vivida* (Moll, 1992) throughout the generations. However, as it is with people everywhere, individual creativity, agency, circumstance and will eventually come to bear on the lived trajectories of these youth. Traces of Rosaura’s Cubania can be seen in the ways that she reads Cuba into canonical texts like the *Odyssey*, or how she writes about Cuban things in her journal, asserting:

People write about what they know, and what I know is Cuba.

In Sara’s case, the way that she casually claims Cuban-ness through her relationship with *cafe con leche* points to her Cubania, as does her desire to raise her future daughter to know her Cuban culture and celebrate her quinces.

The Relationship Between Language, Identity and Space

In diverse communities world-wide, especially in modern diasporas, it is common for people achieve a sense of community “situationally through language” (Canagarajah & Silberstein, 2012). In the absence of a physical place or country, language becomes the galvanizing force that maintains the culture, as is the case for Sara and Natasha. Thus the importance of language to cultural identity cannot be overstated. Language, in this sense, could range from a native speaker-like proficiency to a hybridized version of language, like Spanglish, to gestures, body language, and cultural competence. One of the ways that the Cuban-American community in Miami achieves social life is through translanguaging. This is how language, in this space, has reacted to the influx of the Cuban diaspora throughout the past fifty-five years. For Sara and Natasha, translanguaging is one of the markers of Cuban-American-ness through which they both perform identity. The contact zones of the family home, church, youth group, quinceas, and supermarkets are some of the many spaces where varieties of Spanish and bilingualism get negotiated amongst those languaging in the superdiverse city of Miami. In these spaces, Cubanidad is understood, and Cubanese flows in either language, although not without its glitches, as some of the experiences in the previous chapter imply.

The Welsh origins of translanguaging can be traced to Cen Williams, who coined the term as “the planned and systematic use of two languages for teaching and learning inside the same lesson” (Lewis et al, 2012 a, p. 643), in his research into the revival and maintenance of the Welsh language in Wales. Recently, research on multilinguals conducted by scholars of sociolinguistics, migration, and second language studies have revolved around the richness, fluidity, creative, and multimodal uses of language amongst multilinguals (Pennycook, 2010; Blommaert & Rampton, 2011; Rampton, 2012). Amongst scholars of bilingual education and

critical socio-linguistics, the conversation about bilingualism has evolved more into a conversation about multi-lingualism and language-in-use, to describe the ways in which multi-linguals pool their languages together through the phenomenon of translanguaging (Garcia, 2009; Canagarajah, 2011).

For Sara and myself, translanguaging was critical in anchoring us to the Cuban imaginary in the diaspora. During times of developing proficiency, translanguaging became a scaffold that facilitated inclusion in the conversations in our midst, as was the case for Sara in the beauty parlor in Chapter 4. Likewise, we likely scaffolded the more Spanish-dominant elders and new arrivals with our understanding of the English language and culture. Translanguaging, then, became a tool of inclusion within the family and South Florida Spanish-speaking community. Thus Natasha's and Sara's bilinguality can be directly traced to their identity as Cuban-American, as well as their connection to the larger Cuban diaspora kept alive through language and culture within family life at home, and in the community at large.

Space and Language. Where we get to experience our Cubanidad has implications for the ways in which we manifest it; certain spaces make certain things possible. In Miami, the widespread, supportive, bilingual milieu facilitates communication in Spanish for youth like Sara and her siblings, making it possible for emblematic uses and multi-modal displays of language to count as cultural expression, which further makes it possible for them to “achieve social life through language” (Pennycook, 2010). Furthermore, the Cuban-ness of Sara's family, although nuanced, is mirrored in the spheres of her social life, in school, church, and the community at large. Even the quince celebrations, her own as well as those she attends, become spaces for cultural and language expression.

Although Cuban Spanish was a language acquired in the home for both Natasha and Sara, Natasha developed further along the continuum of bilingualism because of the many other spaces in her life where Spanish was the language necessary to “achieve social life”, such as the church youth group and social spaces of Miami during her childhood.

Because everyone in the household was bilingual by the time that Sara was born, she was able to achieve social life through English and translanguaging at a teen. Then, as she began to interact more independently with others outside of the family circle, she relied on the translanguaging potential of others, such as in the space of the cupcake shop, and the beauty parlor.

For the most part Sara can interact with others in her milieu with the Spanish that she knows, since the family elders in her life are bilingual. There is also no sense of urgency for Spanish maintenance tied to an imminent return to Cuba. Despite her desire to speak more Spanish, and a supportive linguistic landscape for bilingualism, she is casual about her limited Spanish repertoire, considering it a natural side effect of acculturation:

You just become more of where you are. It's not a bad thing; it's an eventual thing.

Then again, her place in the city, and her hybrid identity has never been threatened in the contexts of her upbringing.

Unlike Sara, maintaining Spanish is high stakes for Rosaura, whose imagined future involves being actively involved in Cuba. Her experience elucidates how certain spaces also make certain manifestations of language and identity less possible. In the spheres of Rosaura's life, the home and apartment complex are the spaces where Spanish language flows, while outside of this space, it is English only. In some ways, the fact that there was no outside support

for Spanish other than the small enclave within the apartment complex intensified the dominance of Spanish as the language of the home and the extended community there.

One way to interpret the fact that Rosaura feels that she has to hide in her bedroom to think in English is that she is experimenting with ways to reconcile her separate language worlds. This tension is made manifest through her fear of losing the language, resulting in contrived efforts to use Spanish. Her avoidance of English slang, and her use of English alone in her bedroom are an example of how she makes choices about which language to think and work with, choices that are tied to performances of identity. For Rosaura, losing Spanish is not an option. It is necessary for her to communicate fluently in Spanish in order to communicate with her parents, and just as important, to be able to communicate with family on her trips home to Cuba.

She also uses language to create boundaries between intimates and strangers, using language to include or exclude others, including her parents. There is power in language, perhaps even more-so when multiple languages are possible. While these acts can be interpreted as typical teen-age power-plays, I believe that language adds another layer of complexity in these situations.

Yet, Rosaura displays remarkable creative agency despite the separate ecologies for language that exist between home and school. Despite this separation she is actively biliterate and translingual, and in fact marshals these assets into the texts she reads for school, her artwork, and “Cuba” in ways that sustain her identity and her relationship with that country and her family culture, as exemplified through her experience in reading the *Odyssey*.

It is ironic that Sara, who languages in spaces supportive of bilingualism, speaks less Spanish than Rosaura, who languages in spaces (outside of her home) that are more restrictive towards bilingualism.

The Journey: Opportunity, Resilience and Investment

In Chapter two, I began my personal narrative with my grandfather's journey to Cuba. In some ways, his journey represents that of so many other immigrants in the early twentieth century who traveled across land and sea in search of a better life. He could not have predicted the many twists and turns that his life would take, including criss-crossing the Atlantic Ocean once more to the land of his birth, and then again in the opposite direction to forge a life in yet another country, and another language.

These immigrant journeys are long indeed. They involve cultural adaptation and integration, identity refashioning, language acquisition, and many more changes that ripple well through the second, third, and subsequent generations. Becoming bilingual, often an outcome of hybrid cultural identity, can be a dynamic journey full of growth, conflict and drama, especially when one of the languages is a minority language in the context of use. In the language and literacy journeys of the three participants, it took effort, along with opportunity and investment, to develop bilingualism and biliteracy.

Journey is an apt metaphor to describe 'becoming bilingual' because it captures the dynamic element inherent in the term. Sara, Rosaura, and myself will always be involved in the process of 'becoming' bilingual, because that is the very nature of language-in-use. Our languages will evolve depending on the spaces that we find ourselves in which will dictate the opportunity for language use, as well as the discourses that we choose to be a part of (or are invited into).

Rosaura's Journey. I owe the conceptualization of the theme of 'journey' to Rosaura, who tells the heartbreaking story of the day she lost her words in English when asked to describe her connection to Odysseus' journey to Ithaca during the reading of *The Odyssey* for school. Her narrative, in particular, was marked by the journey of language learning and acculturation in ways that are problematic.

Like Odysseus, part of her identity is that of a journeyer, a theme that cuts through everything in her life. She travels between languages and cultures on a daily basis as she journeys between home and school. These semantic journeys can be challenging, especially when there is tension between the spaces of language use, where some languages are welcome, and others are not.

Rosaura's "journey" is best understood in relation to her family history, and in the larger context of Cuban migration to the U.S. since 1959, when a steady stream of Cubans began the journey to other countries. In fact, the concept of diaspora stems from the notion of journey. A journey implies a stretch of travel, with elements of the unknown, such as the monsters, deceptive characters, and distractions that Odysseus faces on his journey. For example, the intoxicating plants given to Odysseus' crew by the Lotus Eaters causes them to forget the urgency of their journey, distracting them from their end goal.

To use this as a metaphor in Rosaura's life, the intoxicating lure of English language and culture for immigrant adolescents in the U.S., as well as the monolingual policies of schools and society, can become a hazard to maintaining Spanish use. To fight these monsters, Rosaura engages agentively with language, exercising her power both in public, as she did with me in the library, and private spheres, as she does at home in her bedroom.

While one might view the immigrant journey as one with a clear-cut departure and “arrival”, or destination, for Rosaura’s family, it is an on-going, transnational journey that implies a back and forth between two countries, Cuba and the U.S. Even though her family “arrived” in the U.S. twelve years ago, they are still on a physical, financial, emotional, political journey.

In light of this, it is no wonder that she relates Odysseus’ journey to her family’s ongoing journey as an immigrant family, a journey that is still in progress as her family struggles to find a secure place in American society while constantly attending to the loose ends in Cuba. The journey continues as her family struggles to make ends meet here while frequently sending their hard-earned wages back to Cuba to help their more needy families. It continues as an ongoing journey of returning to Cuba to be with family, and coming back home to the United States. In fact, home is a relative term when one has two countries and two homes.

Investment on the Journey. It takes resilience, adaptability, and personal investment in acquiring an identity that includes language fluency, and then access to those spaces where this can actually happen. In other words, bilingualism does not just happen out of the blue.

Writing about identity and human agency, Norton posits that “if learners ‘invest’ in language and literacy, they do so with the understanding that they will attain a wider range of symbolic and material resources, which will, in turn, increase the value of their cultural capital and social power” (Norton, 2013, p.2). Her conceptualization of investment “conceives of the language learner as having a complex identity, changing across time and space, and reproduced in social interaction.” (Norton, 2013, p.2), a description that is apt for Rosaura, who is invested in retaining fluency in Spanish partly because she imagines a future in both Cuba and the U.S., with two languages, and two cultures. While she does not worry about losing her English, she

stresses over the possibility of losing her Spanish, which leads her to contrive opportunities for Spanish along in her bedroom, to make up for the fact there is little opportunity outside of the home for her to engage with others in Spanish. This is another ‘monster’ that she must overcome on her bilingual language journey.

Sara and Natasha’s journeys look somewhat different than Rosaura’s, primarily because their destination does not include a return to the island of Cuba. Although they do journey between cultures and languages, it is a more seamless travel due to the different ecology, and socio-historical positioning of their lives.

Resilience. One last commentary on the theme of journey is that one must be resilient to endure the journey and reach the destination. In the language and literacy journeys of the three participants, it takes effort, along with opportunity and investment, to develop bilingualism and biliteracy. Furthermore, the resilience and investment necessary to maintain a bilingual cultural identity is not only in the purview of the participants; the family is instrumental in making this a reality. For example, Julia diligently put her educational social capital to good use throughout Rosaura’s upbringing in the U.S. by teaching her Spanish literacy, scouring garage sales for used Spanish books for her to read, and advocating for her education in general. The legacy of education in Cuba is one of many threads that contribute to Julia’s agency in supporting her daughter’s bilingualism and biliteracy.

Magdalena also devoted herself to putting her social and educational capital to use, despite not being able to complete her own education in Cuba, through a constant involvement with and prioritization of her daughter’s learning. Her determination in finding spaces for bilingual faith practices were instrumental in the development of her daughter’s biliteracy. In Natasha’s narrative, it is clear that the environment that mediated her spiritual growth was

bilingual, as Magdalena agentively wove the spaces and languages of their experiences together, making it both possible and generative to meander from one to the other.

Individually, the participants also demonstrate resilience. Natasha was resilient in developing complex religious literacies that equated to academic knowledge of Spanish through her involvement in church during her teen-age years. Sara was resilient in her patience during lapses of communication that occurred because of language gaps in the Beauty Salon, and in continuing to find opportunities, and the will, to increase her Spanish knowledge. Yet Rosaura is the most resilient about her language use, because she is so under duress, alienated from other speakers.

Religious Literacies: Hidden Funds of Knowledge

One of the richest threads to emerge from this study is the relationship between language and religion, in particular, the ways in which the participants travel across languages to make sense of the religious texts in their lives. Language and religion are deeply interwoven phenomena. In fact, according to Mouton & Mukherjee, “it is through the various forms of language that the living vitality of a community’s religious beliefs is passed down from generation to generation” (2013).

The aural nature of Christian service for Rosaura, and of Catholic mass for Natasha and Sara, as well as the practices of the home, are important ways in which the language of religion is passed on to them. This aural knowledge provides a base for further literacy development when interaction with religious texts and holy books are involved.

Mouton and Mukherjee (2013) note that, “Religion, in fact, can be said to exist largely in language, and hence the overwhelming significance of sacred languages and holy books.” The

participants in this study use their oral language, the literacies of school, and literacies of religious to make meaning of sacred text through Bible reading, for example.

Natasha and Rosaura's experiences in reading and discerning the Bible in two languages, through translanguaging, serves to build up and reinforce their Spanish literacy and fluency. Both participants used their dominant academic language, English, to inform their understanding of the Spanish bible. Rosaura reads her bilingual Bible in both languages to negotiate meaning for herself. Natasha first engages in English readings of the Bible and Spanish/Spanglish conversations about the text with Spanish-dominant peers. These religious literacies are rich funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 1992; Moll, 2000).

For Natasha, the context of church shaped her Spanish language and literacy practices. In New Jersey, religious practices in the home experienced in Spanish laid a foundation for the religious practices at school in English. Institutionally, the bilingual language policies of the Catholic Church helped Natasha sustain ethnic identity, heritage language, and biliteracy. Although she never received formal literacy education in Spanish, she benefitted from the Catholic Church's response to the surge of Spanish speaking immigrants in South Florida in the 1980's and the subsequent flexibility of language practice in youth groups. The practices she engaged in, Bible reading, faith sharing, Sunday masses, and choir provided a space and a purpose for her to engage with Spanish literacy in ways that she was not required to do at home or at a school.

Likewise, through her recent participation in bilingual youth groups in Miami, Sara is beginning to use more Spanish as well. For Sara, church is a space where Cuban-Americans worship and gather. Even though the language of the mass that her family generally attends is in

English, the experience of faith is a bilingual, Cuban-American experience for across sites of worship and fellowship, from the home to youth group.

Reading, interpreting, and discussing the bible requires a complex set of literacy skills. Bilingual students attempting to engage in Biblical literacy in their non-academic language may find this to be quite a challenging feat. Yet it is often the case that children from immigrant families, especially those in the second generation, attend religious services in their heritage language, which is not the language of school. Because it is largely “through the various forms of language that the living vitality of a community’s religious beliefs is passed down from generation to generation” (Mouton and Mukherjee, 2013), the heritage language often plays a privileged role in the religious practices of immigrant families.

While it is not uncommon for children of immigrants to have oral fluency in their heritage language, it is less common for these students to be fully biliterate, in light of the fact that the dominant language of school in the United States is English (Garcia, 2009). For this reasons, the fact that religious literacy in the heritage language played a role in the literacies of these participants is an important finding, rife with possibilities for the teaching and learning that occurs in school.

Chapter 7: Implications for School and Beyond

I began this inquiry motivated by my own experiences growing up bilingual, and later, living amongst and teaching bilinguals throughout my lifetime. There are many layers to the stories that were told in these chapters; there are stories about the ways we use language, the ways we perform identity, the relationship between space and language in our lives, and the ways in which our bilingualism, and in turn, our biliteracy, ebbs and flows in relation to these factors.

Individually, the stories are quite rich and textured, and with further development, can stand alone as case studies. Taken together, the experiences of these girls offer a glimpse into the complexity of human belonging, learning, and languaging by unveiling the micro-interactions that sediment into identities and cultural practices across time and place.

Such an in depth look at a small sample of students is helpful in teasing out the nuances that exist in areas that are known to be both foundational and meaningful to student success in school, such as identity, language, and culture. As a literacy scholar who is committed to the practice of teaching, it is important to me to include some thoughts on possible implications of this work for pedagogy and future research. In light of this, I will address some key issues that directly affect the lives of bilingual youth in classrooms. Specifically, I will explore the following:

- What can these narratives teach us about language and literacy in contexts of superdiversity?
- How do these narratives contribute to our understanding of new possibilities for culturally relevant teaching and learning?

- How do the experiences of the three participants in this study challenge our understanding of what it means to be bilingual, and Cuban-American?

Language and Literacy in Contexts of Superdiversity

The participants in this study were very clear about their identities when asked; they all identified as Cuban-American, for various reasons unique to their own experiences. However, these nuances are casually rendered invisible with when we engage in the project of categorization that essentializes all students as one thing or another, in this case, Spanish language heritage students as “Hispanic” or “Latino”. Labels are useful as a guide, or initial classifying mechanism for understanding culture, as long as we remain aware that our knowledge about this culture will continue to grow in layers. As teachers, we must strive to recognize difference not for the purpose of ‘othering’, but rather to see more closely, and draw out what students bring with them to the classroom. In a sense we are always on a journey of learning, about ourselves, about the world, and about others.

Culture is like an iceberg. The tip is the part that teachers see, react to, and expect to influence in the classroom. Yet, much like the bulk of an iceberg is hidden by the sea that surrounds it, a student’s life-world, history, experiences, and their ‘structural integrity’ are not readily visible unless these are drawn out; unless a teacher dives in. While knowledge of pedagogy and subject matter is fundamental to teaching, relating to, and understanding students are variables that can make or break even the most well-intentioned instructional goals.

The language and hybridity inherent in contexts of superdiversity affords us expectations of complexity, so that we can re-orient our disposition to rely on categorization, and instead, be disposed to look for the nuances within cultural groups, and amongst our students. Expecting complexity in students and cultural groups does not equate to expecting complications, or that

students are complicated in irreconcilable ways. Rather, it is a recognition of the uniqueness of experience that every person brings to a group. A lens of complexity should allow us to explore deeper, instead of glossing over differences, while at the same time then taking the time to look for sameness in “everyday multilingualism and commonplace diversity”. Instead of getting caught up in the difference, we should instead focus “on the interaction between sameness and difference” in superdiverse settings (Creese, Blackledge, & Hu, 2016; Gilroy, 2006).

Norton’s research on identity and literacy in multilingual classrooms suggests “teachers lack of awareness of learners’ imagined communities and imagined identities could compromise a learner’s investment in the language practices of the classroom” (2013, p.4). This is evident in the anecdote of Rosaura trying to explain her connection to the Odyssey. Although her resilience carries her through the lesson, her teacher’s lack of insight into Rosaura’s imagined identity tied into a beloved imaginary of Cuba limits the potential of her pedagogy, as well as learning opportunities for Rosaura.

As I reflect on my own teaching practice as a secondary English Language Arts teacher, I wonder how many stories I, like Rosaura’s teacher, may have stifled because I did not understand the nuances that characterized the identities of the *Hispanic*, bilingual students that I taught. I focused on my similarities with them, such as Spanish language use, and some connection to an immigrant family, without dwelling in significant ways on difference. While I am confident that I worked hard in every sense to connect with my students, I know now that there were also likely many missed opportunities for connections that could have resulted in more significant opportunities for learning.

Understanding the relationship between identity, language and literacy is critical to adolescent’s engagement with text (L. Hall, 2016; Kirkland, 2011), a hallmark of successful

literacy education. Feelings, emotion, perceptions and intuitions, are what we feel intimately, and may often constitute our deepest connections with text. These connections that occur at the gut level, in our very soul, involve our identity and our emotions, not just our minds. In order to co-construct meanings we carry our whole selves into the text and into our writing. There is something very vulnerable about this act that should be respected, but this can only happen if we as teachers are sensitive to this phenomena in the first place.

Leveraging Transnational Literacies as Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy

Building upon a new literacies conceptualization of literacy as ideological (Street, 2003), I understand transnational literacies as culturally bound ways of knowing and reading the world that cross cultural, national, and/or ethnic boundaries. Transnational literacies include the multiple and hybrid languages and identities individuals develop due to their experiences from multiple social and geographic locations. In this way, transnational literacies are an asset for immigrant students to use and explore in classroom settings.

At times, transnational literacies may be more akin to transcultural ones. In Natasha's narrative, for example, her identity is not tied into two physical places, but rather to the physical context of the U.S., and the cultural spaces (also in the U.S.) where Cubanidad is expressed. This phenomena is perhaps a similar to the experiences of other cultural minority groups within the U.S., for example, African-Americans, or Jewish Americans. While both of these groups share cultural differences from what is considered to be 'mainstream' majority culture, the in-group culture is expressed within the United States, without necessarily engaging with, or desiring, a lived relationship with the heritage countries of Africa or Israel. Even if students do not travel outside of the country, they do travel between cultures. In fact, *all* students have culture, not just

minority students. Because culture is implicated in language, learning, and literacy, I see it as imperative that culture be factored into pedagogy and learning.

For example, even when immersed in academic English and “book” English through the classics she read at school, it is clear that Cuban culture is central to the way that Rosaura understands and enjoys canonical texts. With *The Odyssey* specifically, she finds a way to imagine herself into the fictional account of Odysseus by relating Odysseus’ journey to her family’s ongoing journey as a transnational immigrant family, a journey that is still in progress as her family struggles to find a secure place in American society while constantly attending to the loose ends in Cuba.

In his study of black male’s (dis)engagement with the canonical text, *the Iliad*, Kirkland defines literacy as an ideological artifact that is the product of “one’s belief about one’s self and one’s place in the world” (2011, p.7). He describes how a white teacher, Mr. Derrick, decolonizes the *Iliad* by “bridging ideological distances” and “offering readers opportunities to find themselves...amongst the universe of words”, as they “used the text to understand themselves” (p. 7).

Coincidentally, the student’s in Kirkland’s engage with another of Homer’s work, the *Iliad*, while Rosaura engaged with the *Odyssey*. While recent research has suggested that the traditional canon is out of touch with culturally diverse youth on many levels, these narratives suggests that when taken up with transnational students in mind, some canonical texts can be powerful mediators for students’ own literate journeys.

Rosaura’s agentive ability to engage in a dialogic understanding of *The Odyssey* teaches us to consider pedagogy of possibilities in regards to the potential for transnational readings of the world and the word. Because Rosaura learns “with” and “through” her culture, her

background knowledge is culturally and experientially specific, as is the case for all students.

However, her transnational experiences do not preclude her from relating to a canonical text such as *The Odyssey*.

My intention is not to promote canonical literature over other types of literature, rather, to discuss the possibility that it is not the canonical texts themselves, but rather the ways that they are taken up in curricula and pedagogy, often to the exclusion of any other text, and without consideration to the students who will engage with them, that become problematic. However, it is just as problematic to assume that students who are considered by teachers or consider themselves outside of so-called “mainstream culture” cannot engage with certain texts. Students like Rosaura remind us that there is no text prescription for students.

As we read other stories, other plots, of other journeys, we continue to learn about our own. Reading the stories of other characters and their journeys are opportunities to deepen our understanding of our past and present stories. Rosaura does this on her own. In Kirkland’s piece, the teacher had to modify the curriculum to help his students achieve this because of their ideological differences. For Rosaura, perhaps her transnational literacy is her bridge.

Although Rosaura was successful at relating to the text due to her transnational literacy and funds of knowledge, she was not as successful in articulating it to her teacher—not because she was limited in her English proficiency; rather, because the story was so personal that she felt she could only explain it in Spanish. In this moment, the teacher could have modified the assignment for her. Perhaps the teacher should have asked her to write her account in Spanish, and then translate it to English; or she could have asked her to write her story through a non-verbal modality, such as photography. Or, the teacher could have taken a cue from Rosaura,

assigning this to the whole class—every adolescent is on a journey of sorts. Instead, her story was never heard in class, and her contribution was silenced.

In researching the literacies of transnational students, Jimenez (2003) urged researchers to explore “those literacies that are necessary for students to negotiate their lives” in order to ensure their success in school and beyond. This, adding to the well-developed legacy of research affirming the ways in which students learn through culture (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Moll, 2007; Paris, 2012; Gutierrez, 1999) urges us to consider the nuances and unpredictability of culture when it comes to our students.

Translanguaging in the Lives of Bilingual Students

Translanguaging has become an epistemological move to align the practice of moving between languages as “essentially sociolinguistic, ecological, and situated”, in contrast to the linguistic use of the construct of code-switching, “a term from linguistics which analyses the speech of bilinguals” (Lewis et al, 2012b, p. 659; Garcia, 2009). A translanguaging orientation to language departs from an instrumentalist view of compartmentalized language as a thing that individuals possess, to a socio-cultural view of language repertoires that people use fluidly.

At the same time, critical orientations to language study, historically marginalized languages, and multilingual practices have reached a new level of prominence as scholars push back on the ways that powerful majorities have used existing language hierarchies and strategies of linguistic imperialism to marginalize non-dominant language speakers (Canagarajah, 1999; Bale, 2012; Cushman, 2016; Garcia, 2009; Garcia & Wei, 2013). With this imperative in mind, scholars such as Cushman (2016) and Flores (2014), for example, advocate translanguaging as a human right and a means to resist linguistic imperialism.

For example, Vidal-Ortiz' (2004) characterizes the use of translanguaging amongst Puerto Ricans as “a creative and political use of two languages...[that] challenges assumptions of “purity” and correctness in language”, (p. 256) . Translanguaging, as the narratives in this study also indicate, represents a common form of being communication in the world for multi-linguals; it is adaptive, fluid, as individuals use it to respond to language situations in their lives (Garcia, 2009; Canagarajah, 2011; Bloomaert, 2013a/b), and to claim membership in cultural communities regardless of language proficiency (Canagarajah, 2013).

Proficiency is not the goal of translanguaging; mutual understanding is. There are times when translanguaging facilitates understanding by bridging the gap between those who are more fluent Spanish speakers and those who are more fluent English speakers. In this way, translanguaging facilitates communication, while indexing membership in the Spanish-speaking language community at large, as was the case for Sara in the beauty parlor in Chapter 4. At other times, translanguaging is simply another way of being and languaging in this community, in this locality, that signals identity as well. For example, when Sara inserts words such as *pero*, or *ropa-sucia*, into her dialogue.

Being able to translanguage then, is not the same as being bilingual, at least not in the traditional sense of the word that implies proficiency in two languages. I find Hornberger's (2012) continua of biliteracy useful in characterizing the bilingualism of the three participants in the study. Hornberger's in one of many ecological models that takes time, space, and place into consideration in understanding the development of biliteracy, while also allowing for various other points of intersecting proficiencies. To be clear, I view bilingualism as an evolving feature in a repertoire of language practices, theoretically aligned with a multi-lingual, translanguaging,

new literacies standpoint. However, I do find it necessary to make distinctions between proficiencies and what they do or do not afford the participants.

Sara. For example, Sara is bilingual because she translanguages in a context supportive of the practice between English and Spanish speakers. It is a situated bilingualism made possible in a space saturated by Spanish speakers and Cuban Spanish. I define this phenomenon as culturally bilingualism. Sara continues to evolve along a continuum of bilingualism every year that I see her. At the time of the study, however, there were times when she could not communicate with others in Spanish, such as the beauty shop anecdote illustrates.

Sara's case is reminiscent of Zentella's (1997) study with the Puerto Rican girls of El Bloque who translanguage together in Spanish and English to make meaning. By doing so, they scaffold understanding for those less fluent in Spanish. Perhaps like Sara, they are more bicultural than they are bilingual. Being bicultural, for them, in this context, includes the snippets and/or emblematic uses of language. They are on the continuum of bilingualism, and they are already insiders to the meanings behind much of the semiotics and nuances of the language and its expressions: for Sara, these included '*hay Dios mio*', *pero*, *the Cuban coffee shot*, *quinces*. This biculturalism is no small feat - there are culturally specific meanings embedded in the words that make up our language, and it is an important part of language learning. This is why textbook language in foreign language classes, devoid of socio-historical/cultural learning, is not effective, nor does it get a person very far when in a foreign country.

Yet, while translanguaging is strategic in uniting different generations of speakers, and in galvanizing speakers towards a common identity, it can also complicate the ecology for Spanish learning, or repertoire building, for younger and more recent generations of cultural bilinguals,

like Sara, who then have little opportunity to use Spanish in such a way that it would deepen their knowledge of the language. In contrast, my experience growing up bilingual led to a different trajectory with the Spanish language, due to the spaces that I found myself in that required more Spanish use (e.g., mass).

In his research on linguistic landscapes, Wiley characterizes multilingualism “as an attribute of the community, not the individual” (De Klerk and Wiley, p. 323). My experience seems to point in this direction, given the prominent and widespread Spanish ecology of Miami when I arrived on the scene as a young child. As she adapted to the community in this place, my language repertoire also expanded.

Yet this was not the case for Sara, who seemingly knows less Spanish at fifteen than she knew when she was three. Grossjean (2015) explains this socio-linguistic phenomenon by exploring the relationship between language and space:

A change in spatial environment clearly affects our capacity to deploy linguistic resources and skills and imposes requirements on us which we may fail to meet – a quite common globalization experience which we accept as a sociolinguistic problem... A lack of competence to communicate adequately is here not seen as a problem of the speaker, but as a problem for the speaker, lodged not in individual forms of deficit or inability but in the...environment (p. 574).

In other words, Sara’s Spanish loss should not be traced to any deficiency within her, or her family. Rather, her language loss can be explained by looking at what is happening with language in the environment. The shift in Sara’s knowledge of Spanish between pre-school to high school is consistent with findings of language loss in the third generation across the country (Portes & Stepick, 1993). However, that Spanish loss occurs in a context such as Miami where the Spanish language holds social and political currency is important to note, and will be discussed further later in this chapter.

This finding begs the question: is Sara, in fact, bilingual? It depends on who you ask. Sara herself claimed to be bilingual, while also describing regret when she was unable to communicate with her Spanish family. Once outside the safety net of the translanguaging community, Sara is limited in her ability to communicate in Spanish. However powerful, benign and beneficial this type of insider bilingualism, or bicultural bilingualism is, it is a situated sort of bilingualism that requires a certain context, and certain interlocutors, to work. Otherwise, outside of these specific contexts, her bilingualism flounders. Although some may frown upon the suggestion of limits on what a person can or cannot do with their language, I find it necessary to label the phenomena in order to talk about it; a conundrum, and a great irony, to be sure, given that I started this project complaining against labels.

If we understand bilingualism as a fluid thing, and bilinguals as individuals who use language along a continuum of many intersecting paths to include literacy, it makes sense. This view does not create a condemnation. In fact, happily, Sara has continued to move along in that continua of biliteracy as she matures, and is exposed to different contexts where knowing Spanish matters. Because she increasingly engages in activities outside of the home independently, such as swimming classes and church groups, she has needed to use a different type of Spanish. She also intends to continue to be bilingual, and is in a community where being bilingual is highly valued and expected.

The notion that bilinguals have separate compartments for their languages and even separate and distinct cognitive capacities no longer holds sway (Cummins 2008; Garcia, 2009). This reality does not mean that bilinguals cannot speak one language at a time, but it does mean that their languages coexist on more of a sliding scale, as “languages mesh in transformative ways, generating new meanings and grammars (Canagarajah, 2013, p.8). What matters in these

circumstances is not grammatical correctness, but the fact that “users negotiate both the diverse semiotic resources in their repertoire and the context to produce a text that is rhetorically most appropriate and effective for the situation”.

Whereas translanguaging scholars like Garcia and Canagarajah have attempted to shift the focus away from characterizations of proficiency when it comes to bilinguals and language, the narratives in this dissertation suggest that there are arenas where proficiency matters. For example, when applying for a job in Miami, being proficient, that is, able to communicate independently with a Spanish speaker using the discourse of the employment site (i.e., an insurance agency), matters.

Affordances of Translanguaging. Understanding the maintenance and development of bilingualism and bicultural identity matters on many levels, not the least of which is that these attributes are rich funds of knowledge, as the narratives in this study demonstrate. Both languages interact in ways that encourage language development in English as well as Spanish, a phenomena that comes to life when Rosaura reads her Bible bilingually, or when Natasha maps her English literacy onto her Spanish religious practices. These interactions of language are in fact the cornerstone of the phenomena of translanguaging, which can enhance what we already know to be the benefits of bilingualism.

Translanguaging has been found to be a useful pedagogic tool in teaching ELL’s and students attending heritage schools (Hornberger & Link, 2012; Garcia & Sylvan, 2011; Garcia, 2009), as well as a means of exploring language ideologies (Devereaux, and Wheeler, 2012). Furthermore, translanguaging has both social and cognitive advantages. Lewis, Jones, and Baker trace the origins and conceptualizations of translanguaging from the classroom to the community, finding that translanguaging, “accents that two or more languages are not just the

result of bilingual education but the very nature of how a bilingual thinks, understands, and achieves” (2012, p. 667). Thus bilinguals, by their very nature, translanguages as a way of being in the world.

There are many more advantages of bilingualism that can be leveraged for teaching and learning. Bilingual students can reference other languages as they search for meaning, which can lead to greater metacognitive awareness (Orellana, 2006), although they can also benefit from overt instruction in cognate and strategy usage to make the most out of this advantage (Jimenez, 1997).

Furthermore, if languages are structurally similar, as Romance languages are, this similarity can enhance language understanding. For example, as a bilingual Spanish speaker student learning French, I had an advantage. I was accustomed to using the ‘feminine’ and ‘masculine’ form of words in Spanish, and had practice conjugating verbs orally, even though I lacked formal literacy training. When learning French, I simply applied my oral knowledge of the Spanish language to my lessons, and most of the time, it worked.

Lastly, bicultural identity and bilingual maintenance have been associated with positive psycho-emotional well-being, adjustment, acculturation, and school success (Suarez-Orozco, Pimentel, & Martin, 2009).

Constraints of Translanguaging. As social practice, translanguaging is one of the many organic ways that individuals communicate in diverse communities. Sometimes in communication, grammatical protocols take a back seat to connection and resolving the immediate need for understanding, as people go about the business of achieving social life through language.

However, there is a difference in *achieving* social life through translanguaging, and being proficient in more than one language. In fact, socio-linguistic use of the word bilingual can be confusing to an outsider to the field. For example, while Sara considers herself bilingual, and would seem to be supported by translanguaging literature (Garcia, 2009) she would not be able to claim bilingualism when applying for a job, even in Miami. Thus these tensions about what counts as competence in different spaces are important to explore, because they may have material impacts on students' social futures.

The proliferation of terms for the status of one's language (heritage, native, L1, L2, ELL, bilingual, multi-lingual, pluri-lingual) makes it difficult to peg down what types of translanguaging pedagogy might be beneficial for what students, in which contexts, under what circumstances. According to Valdes (2005), "the notion of the native speaker, especially as applied to bilingual individuals, is neither simple, obvious, or straightforward" (p. 415), which may explain why there is so much confusion and inconsistency in the labels used for multilinguals in the U.S. (Short & Fitzsimmons, 2007). Although scholars allude to this complication, (Garcia & Sylvan, 2011; Hornberger & Link, 2012), a more clear, concerted effort is needed across disciplines.

For example, the three participants in this study could be considered heritage language, bilingual speakers. All of them index identity through language, even though all three have varying degrees of proficiency. Yet, although they were both raised 'in Spanish', neither Sara nor Natasha consider themselves native speakers in comparison to those, like Rosaura, born in Cuba.

While Rosaura began her English language journey in school as an English Language Learner (ELL) with no English knowledge, while Natasha and Sara had a different experience.

Natasha, who was already bilingual, began her schooling in a typical American, English monolingual Kindergarten. Sara, in contrast, began Kindergarten in an ecology where she and most, if not all, of her peers were bilingual as well. In Natasha's case, being bilingual did not make her an ELL (a classification that did not even exist at the time). Yet in Sara's Miami, students are placed in ELL classrooms if they list their home language as Spanish, even if they speak English. Being bilingual, or having a Spanish heritage language can be problematically conflated with ELL status.

While Sara is invested in maintaining Spanish, the widespread presences of bilinguals and the use of translanguaging in the spaces of her life, while positive in many ways, does not allow for as many opportunities for her to develop her Spanish further. Still, there is hope for Sara, who is in a favorable ecology for Spanish development. Biculturalism and bilingualism are dynamic traits that can change over time depending on the contexts and the language communities in a person's life.

Ideally, schools should be involved in the maintenance of heritage languages, which implies a need for translanguaging pedagogy. However, translanguaging pedagogy may be more focused on the process than the outcome of bilingualism (Lewis et al., 2012), which may be at odds with the language goals of individuals desiring more academic proficiency for goals like employment or continuing academic work. An interesting conundrum that surfaces is that widespread use of translanguaging can limit opportunities to maneuver solely in one language, which in turn diminishes development of proficiency, in turn limiting the social currency one can claim through the language.

In essence these stories complicate what it means to be bilingual, and not only because of the duality implied by the term. It is not simply a matter of knowing words and phrases. For

these three Cuban-Americans, being bilingual is sensitive to time, space, place, history, sense of self, present and future identities. While other scholars have theorized that identity, language prestige, and context matters in second language learning and bilingual development, contexts (such as Miami) that are more supportive of bilingualism, where the so-called minority language of Spanish is one of the languages being spoken, have not been explored in depth. My study, then, contributes an example of how such contextual depth can be explored in conjunction with the development of bilingualism for individual students.

Translanguaging has mostly been studied in terms of language minority learners, ELLs, and second generation students with low literacy backgrounds, or bilingual students whose language is given low status. Heritage language users who are not ELLs in the traditional sense, like Sara and Natasha, represent the majority of second and third generation bilingual speakers. Therefore an important caveat about the use of translanguaging is that social context of the use may play an important role in the extent of the development of both languages being spoken.

Bilingualism does not sustain itself without political support, as history has proven in many parts of the world. We cannot expect every child to have the will that Rosaura has had in protecting her bilingualism, nor the opportunity. The Miami context teaches us that even under positive and agentive conditions, bilingualism still dies if (even in the presence of translanguaging) if real opportunities for language use do not exist, or are not created, in school and society. If spaces are key to language use, it seems logical that we then need to create spaces that accommodate this fact, especially when it comes to bilingual development. This recommendation opposes what schools in many parts of the country do now, not only in staunchly ideological monolingual states like Arizona, but even in a space like Miami, where Spanish is a language of power.

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