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**PERSPECTIVES OF BILINGUALS TOWARD  
SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION AND ACCENT MODIFICATION THERAPY**

A Thesis in

Communication Sciences and Disorders

by

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## ABSTRACT

Eight bilingual individuals participated in an interview study pertaining to their experience of learning English as a second language with regards to language issues including, but not limited to, proficiency, language use, and the role of culture and communication and to probe their knowledge about accent modification therapy and about their views toward these services. Broad themes, including a) “Language Use,” b) “Views Toward Bilingualism,” c) “Language Acquisition”, and d) “Views Toward Accents,” with subsequent sub-themes, were established based on common patterns that emerged from the data. Results include direct quotations from the interviews. Factors related to bilingual language acquisition that came up during the interviews include education, immigration, culture, home language, and language modalities such as speaking, listening, reading, and writing. Factors related to accent modification therapy include social factors about speaking with an accent, knowledge of therapy services, and necessity for services. Clinical implications are discussed for speech language pathologists who may work with bilingual populations.

Keywords: bilingualism, accent modification therapy, culture, speech language pathology

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Speech language pathologists (SLPs) provide assessment and intervention to an ever-increasing amount of clients who are culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD). Due to this growing trend, SLPs may lack knowledge about how to structure and plan an assessment and possible intervention for clients whose first languages are different from their own, and whose levels of proficiency in English vary. Becoming fluent in a second language may not be possible for many SLPs, but they can learn to have more awareness about the clients they serve who are CLD and to attain at least a basic knowledge about their cultural and linguistic background. Culture and language are influenced by where people live and/or the community group with which a person identifies (Isaac, 2002).

Populations who come from CLD backgrounds are common in the United States. Lynch and Hanson (2011) report U.S. Census data showing that 74.3% of the population is white; Hispanic of any race; 15.1%, black or African American, 12.3%; Asian 4.4%; American Indian and Alaska Native, 0.8%; and Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander, 0.1%, and that 13% of the population was born in a foreign country. Lynch and Hanson (2011) also reported U.S. Census data indicating that in nearly 20% of U.S. homes, a language other than English is spoken. These statistics indicate a variety of other languages spoken in the U.S. which may include Spanish, French, Chinese, Korean, Hindi, Russian, German, etc. Speakers of languages other than English may appear on the caseloads of SLPs across various settings. These statistics suggest that due to the rapidly increasing number of immigrants who are coming to the U.S. who may have varying degrees of English proficiency, there is a critical need for SLPs to increase awareness and sensitivity to the topic of bilingualism and cross-cultural communication.

SLPs must have sensitivity when working with clients who are CLD. Lynch and Hanson (2011) describe difficulties service delivery providers may encounter when working with clients from a different culture. These are some of the reasons for these difficulties:

“Cultural understanding in one’s first culture occurs early and is typically established during the preschool years. Children learn new cultural patterns more easily than adults. Values are determined by one’s first culture and may have to be revised to be effective in a second culture. Understanding one’s first culture introduces errors in interpreting the second culture. Long-standing behavior patterns are typically used to express one’s deepest values (Lynch & Hanson, 2011, p. 21-23).”

Culture also influences various aspects of how a person communicates. According to Isaac (2002, p. 4),

“The way in which a message is expressed by one or understood by another is influence by a range of factors: sociodemographic factors (for example, age, gender, level of education, area of residence/upbringing, social status); past experiences (for example, upbringing, education, jobs, social interactions); knowledge of pragmatics (for example, how to behave/communicate in a given situation and how the behaviors/communication of others should be understood); the content, including intended effect, of the message spoken or heard; the context within which the communication/interaction takes place.”

These quotes show that culture and linguistic influences are overarching components of how people communicate. These quotes also show how important culture is in shaping a

person's values and behaviors and leads to the question of how can SLPs work effectively with clients from a CLD background? SLPs can do this by developing cultural competence.

Cultural competence is an important skill that SLPs can develop in order to work more effectively with CLD populations. Cultural competence can be defined as behaviors, attitudes, and policies that result in effectiveness in cross-cultural situations (Cross, Bazron, Dennis, & Isaacs, 1989). SLPs can develop cultural competence when working with bilingual clients by understanding cultural differences and being sensitive to how a person may communicate differently due to cultural influence. Cultural differences can sometimes be subtle or much more noticeable.

SLPs can increase their sensitivity when working with CLD clients by consulting with someone they know from that culture. They can also research the culture to have a better understanding of communication styles or ways of interacting that are acceptable and common in that person's culture.

Service delivery providers, such as SLPs who work with clients from CLD backgrounds, will benefit from continued education on the topic of cross-cultural competence and ways to provide effective service delivery to bilingual clients and/or clients who immigrated to the U.S. SLPs can develop strategies to use when they encounter difficulties understanding their client's culture or if their client does not understand the culture here in the U.S.

If needed, clients from CLD backgrounds can receive speech therapy services for accent modification. Accent modification services can be for people who speak English as a second language and who want to sound more intelligible when speaking English. When working with a

client for accent modification, attaining information about the client's attitudes toward being bilingual can be beneficial to identify the challenges they have when communicating in English and to determine why they want to modify their accent. These clients may be immigrants who are in an English-speaking country for the first time. They may have emigrated here and have limited experience speaking English. Important questions to ask are how do these clients acquire English while maintaining their native language, how do they handle communication breakdowns, or what do they think about being able to speak two languages fluently?



## **CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**

The following literature review includes aspects of CLD that are relevant and applicable to the field of speech language pathology and to SLPs interested in working with these populations.

### **Cultural and Linguistic Diversity: Bilingualism and Biculturalism**

Before further investigating the topic of bilingualism, this term must be defined so researchers can have a clear understanding of this concept. Several important terms will be presented in this literature review that are relevant to this research study.

Bilingualism refers to people who speak two languages and are exposed to two cultures that may be similar or different from one another (Paradis, Genessee, & Crago, 2011).

Bilingualism can differ significantly from person to person, depending on sociocultural factors such as country of origin, native language, level of proficiency, presence of a foreign accent, home culture, and comfort level using the less-proficient language. A person can acquire a new language sequentially, after the person has acquired the first language, or simultaneously, learning both languages at the same time (Paradis et al., 2011).

A bilingual person may also be considered bicultural if they've spent considerable time in two communities and identify as members of each cultural and linguistic community. Many bicultural individuals are immigrants who maintain their native language to preserve cultural identity, while at the same time immersing themselves in their new linguistic community. For bicultural individuals, it may be difficult to maintain their native language if there is not a community of people close by who speak that language.

Attitudes toward language learning also affects bilingualism. Many variables, especially culture, can impact attitudes toward bilingualism and communication disorders (Bebout & Arthur, 1992). Attitudinal differences toward language learning include emotional factors and beliefs about the language being learned and attitudes toward the cultural group who speak it. These attitudes and beliefs determine someone's motivation for learning a second language (Paradis et al., 2011).

Cultural differences between the two languages can affect a person's attitude toward acquiring that new language. For example, in South Asian cultures, interpersonal interactions are more formal than in Western cultures. These interactions may be based on age, status in the family, and gender (Faroqi-Shah, 2012). SLPs that may have South Asian immigrants on their caseloads need to be aware of these types of cultural differences and how they may influence communication when providing services.

Attitudes toward second language learning can affect the level of acquisition and proficiency for the bilingual person (Paradis et al., 2011). Immigrants can vary in their desire to immerse themselves in the new linguistic community. When an SLP is conducting an assessment of a bilingual adult or child, they must consider the families' attitudes about learning English because the client's beliefs are often based on the culture they were raised in (Bebout & Arthur, 1992).

A person's attitude toward a language is also related to his ethnic identity formation and language choice. Bilingual people, depending on their culture, may choose to use their native language more frequently if they identify more with that culture than with American culture. This is also influenced by parents' attitude and behavior toward their native language (Wu, 2005).

If parents have difficulty learning English upon immigrating to the U.S., the children are more likely to develop higher proficiency in their native language in addition to acquiring English for the purpose of their education and communicating with the larger community that they live in.

### **Bilingualism in Speech Language Pathology**

Service delivery for bilingual people can have different forms. Therapy for communication disorders may be delivered in a language other than English if the SLP is proficient in that language. Bilingual speech therapy occurs frequently in areas that have a high number of Spanish-speaking people. Therapy for bilingual people can also focus on improving pronunciation and fluency in English.

When working with bilingual children, SLPs must assess children to reliably differentiate between language disorders and language differences (Kritikos, 2003). SLPs have to also consider the influence of culture on language when assessing bilingual clients (Kritikos, 2003), such as use of appropriate social conventions or interaction styles that are culturally appropriate.

SLPs report that they do not feel very competent in assessing bilingual clients (Kritikos, 2003). Kritikos completed a survey of SLPs in the U.S. about their beliefs about language assessment of bilingual/bicultural individuals. Results of the survey indicated over half of all participants reported that bilingual input in a child's environment would influence their interpretation of that child's language assessment results. The participants would be more conservative in recommending language therapy for a bilingual child than a monolingual child (Kritikos, 2003). This research suggests that more information or resources are needed about how to effectively treat bilingual individuals. SLPs need better resources about how to develop

cultural competence and about how to develop positive professional relationships with clients from cultures other than our own.

Mennen, Stansfield, and Johnston (2005) argued that there is a lack of information available to SLPs about how to provide efficacious and quality services to bilingual clients or clients from minority cultural backgrounds. SLPs often receive limited training in working with bilingual individuals. Clients should be able to choose the language they want therapy in. However, this is not possible if the SLP is not proficient in that language. Lack of information, small numbers of bilingual clients, and small numbers of clients from minority immigrant communities does not justify unsatisfactory service delivery (Mennen et al., 2005).

There is a need for SLPs to expand their knowledge and competencies concerning the topic of bilingual language development and acquisition to better serve the needs of these populations, whether it be for accent modification, to treat language impairments, or to guide parents in the right direction if they have questions concerning their child's bilingual language development (Kritikos, 2003). There is a need for service delivery providers, which include SLPs, to become more effective at working cross-culturally (Lynch & Hanson, 2011). SLPs need more knowledge about a person's experience being bilingual to see how their native language influences their spoken English and how culture influences their communication style and ways of interacting. This could include aspects of assessment such as examining phonetic inventories of the client's English sounds compared with the client's sounds in their native language to see if any sound is missing or if there are any different sounds that may influence each other depending on context.

SLPs must be adaptable and flexible in order to appropriately meet the communication needs of CLD populations. SLPs may sometimes have to refer bilingual clients to better qualified, multilingual professionals, SLPs who specialize in bilingual therapy, or they may work through interpreters if available. This lack of knowledge can lead to over-referral or under-referral of bilingual children (Mennen et al., 2005).

SLPs have also received requests to work with children who are limited English proficient (LEP) or English language learner (ELL) in school settings (American Speech-Language-Hearing Association [ASHA], 1998). This involves the determination of a communication disorder, which may occur in both languages, through assessment and close collaboration with an English as a Second Language (ESL) instructor. If there is not an ESL program at the school, the SLP can act as an ESL instructor if the SLP feels competent serving in this role. If not, referral is necessary (ASHA, 1998).

### **Accent Modification Therapy**

“Accent modification” or “accent reduction” therapy may be for bilingual people who speak with a foreign accent, such as a Chinese immigrant, or even for monolingual people who speak with a regional accent, such as someone from Texas or Boston, MA. Someone may have a foreign accent if they learned English at a later age. A person’s native language (L1) can influence how their spoken English (L2) sounds (i.e. someone’s accent), which also affects various aspects of speech including phonological variation, prosody, rhythm, and syllable stress (Carlson & McHenry, 2006).

Having an accent is a natural aspect of someone’s speech and no accent is better than another. However, sometimes accents can affect communication in a negative way. Everyone

speaks with an accent, but sometimes an accent that involves many deviations from the local dialect can cause decreased intelligibility for those who are listening. Listeners may try harder to understand someone in these cases. Decreased intelligibility can lead to difficulties communicating, avoidance of different social situations, and frustration at having to repeat messages. In these cases, listeners may also find an unfamiliar accent distracting (ASHA, n.d.).

If a person is going somewhere for a job interview, they do not want their prospective employer to be distracted by an unfamiliar accent. Carlson and McHenry (2006) completed a study in which they examined how the presence of an accent affects a person's employability. Results indicate that presence of a foreign or regional accent does not affect a person's chances for employment. However, the participants in this study did receive lower employability ratings. This research indicates that successful employment can be a motivating factor for people considering accent modification therapy. People may also consider therapy if their accent is very distracting to people and if their accent takes away from the message they are trying to communicate (Carlson & McHenry, 2006).

SLPs would have to assess a person's accent to determine what part of their speech (e.g. prosody, syllable stress, rate of speech, intonation, etc.) is causing communication breakdowns to occur. The SLP will then develop a plan to help their client communicate more effectively, especially in situations where the client may find more challenging, such as job interviews or presentations. The client may focus on speaking English that is closer to Standard American English (SAE) in terms of prosody, sounds, grammar, and social language (Carlson & McHenry, 2006).

There are no existing research studies examining attitudes or beliefs towards accent modification therapy services. These types of services are still new to the field of speech language pathology and people may not be familiar or aware of these services. SLPs usually provide service delivery for those with speech or language disorders, but it is still within the SLPs' scope of practice to provide services to populations seeking accent modification. In the case of accent modification therapy, the client does not have a speech or language disorder. Clients seeking these kinds of services simply have an accent that they want to modify or change so they can speak more clearly and be more readily understood by others. People may seek out accent modification therapy because these communication difficulties may be causing problems in the workplace, affecting their education, or for ease of communicating in everyday life (ASHA, n.d.).

### **CHAPTER 3: RATIONALE FOR RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

The purpose of this research study is to examine the experiences of people who acquired or who are in the process of acquiring English as a second or third language and also to examine their views and awareness of the availability of accent modification therapy services by using a semi-structured interview method. This type of information found in this research study may be pertinent or applicable when taking someone's case history during an assessment, identifying areas of communication breakdowns, and developing appropriate, functional goals for therapy. This research study also serves to identify challenges and barriers, if any, that ELLs encounter when acquiring a second language and to acquire further information about their attitudes toward being bilingual.

There are many bilingual children and adults in the U.S., in all walks of life. Many bilinguals can be found in higher education settings, and I have chosen to interview individuals from this group.

There are also different opinions regarding foreign accents and whether or not therapy is necessary or needed for clients who desire to modify their accent. SLPs should understand how people perceive accented speech, whether it be positive or negative perceptions. Based on the research concerning SLPs' knowledge of working with bilinguals and with clients from CLD backgrounds, current research in accent modification therapy, and research in speech language pathology with bilingual clients, the following research questions were formulated:



a) What do bilinguals experience when learning English as a second language with regards to language issues including, but not limited to, proficiency, language use, and the role of culture and communication?

b) What do bilinguals know about accent modification therapy and how do they feel about it?

## CHAPTER 4: METHOD

### Participants

Data were collected from 8 university students who acquired English as a second language about their experiences being bilingual and their views of speech therapy services. Participants for this study represent a variety of L1s including Chinese, Korean, Russian, Hindi, and Spanish. A specific nation of origin was not required for this study. Participants were recruited via flyers posted in buildings on the campus of The Pennsylvania State University. Participants were also recruited via email. For the purposes of reporting the results, participants were assigned a pseudonym to maintain confidentiality. Table 1 provides descriptive information about each participant.

**TABLE 1**

| <b>Participant Name</b> | <b>Description</b>   |
|-------------------------|--|
| John                    | John is an undergraduate student, who speaks Russian as his L1 and emigrated to the U.S. from the Ukraine in 7 <sup>th</sup> grade. He learned English in the ESL program at his school. He mostly uses English now, except for with a few people that he speaks Russian with. |
| Sally                   | Sally is an undergraduate student who speaks Spanish as her L1. She estimates that she uses Spanish only for about 2 hours during any given day. She speaks Spanish with her parents, a few friends, and during the summer with co-workers. She notes that her primary         |

|        |   |
|--------|---|
|        | language now is English.  |
| Jen    | Jen is a PhD student who speaks Korean as her L1. She speaks it mostly with family and church friends. She immigrated to the U.S. when she was 3 years old.   |
| Amy    | Amy is a PhD student who also speaks Korean as her L1. She uses Korean for 3-5 hours every day mostly with her family on the phone. She maintains her Korean language skills by reading books, reading online newspapers, and by “thinking” in Korean. Other than those instances, she communicates using English.  |
| Kristy | Kristy is a graduate student who speaks Spanish as her L1. She uses Spanish mostly with her family, but she says she uses it quite frequently. She also maintains her native language by listening to music in Spanish, watching T.V., and reading books in Spanish. She was an ESL student in elementary school for 2 years before she exited the program. |
| Rita   | Rita is an undergraduate student who speaks Chinese most of the time, despite being in an English-speaking country. She only uses English at school or for certain activities online.   |
| Ashley | Ashley is a graduate student. She also speaks Chinese as her L1 and estimates that she spends an average of 4 hours a day speaking  |

|      |  |
|------|--|
|      | Chinese. She uses Chinese in a variety of ways including speaking, reading, writing, and listening. She has been studying English for 12 years and uses English mostly for school-related activities.  |
| Matt | Matt is a graduate student who speaks Hindi as his L1. He uses Hindi for an estimated 3 hours every day. When speaking to his parents, he only uses Hindi. He speaks both languages with his spouse and friends depending on the environment he is in. |

**Design and Data Collection**

Qualitative methodology was the design for this study. This method was chosen based on the research questions to obtain information about the personal experiences of bilingual university students pertaining to the topics of English language acquisition and views of speech therapy services, specifically about accent modification. Data were collected through language history and proficiency questionnaires and through recorded, semi-structured interviews. Twelve questions were used during the interviews. These questions focused on aspects of second language acquisition such as education, immigration, language partners, language environment, accents, etc. Refer to Appendix A for the list of interview questions. Each interview lasted between 5-15 minutes. Participants were encouraged to elaborate and explain using as much detail as they wanted. There was no time restriction for the interviews.

## **Language History and Proficiency Questionnaire**

Information that participants provided in the language history and proficiency questionnaire, which was used to obtain information about participants' background and proficiency levels in their two languages, are included in Appendix B. Each participant completed the questionnaire prior to starting the interview.

## **Data Analysis**

Data were analyzed by developing typed transcripts of the interviews and examining the data to look for patterns of themes that most of the participants discussed. Broad themes and sub-themes were developed to analyze the data using the Strauss and Corbin method (1990). These broad themes and subthemes were developed based on the patterns in the data. The data were broken down into thought units. Thought units are the smallest unit of qualitative data that form a complete idea. Each thought unit was assigned a broad theme and a sub-theme. The data from these interviews show what information was learned about the participant's experience acquiring English and any views they have about accent modification services.

## **Reliability Measures**

After the coding was completed, a reliability check was conducted based on the interviewee responses and the coding scheme (which includes broad themes and sub-themes), to see if the coding themes would be consistent across coders. An inter-rater reliability coder who was trained in the operational definitions of the coding themes and coding procedures assigned codes to five thought units for each interview question, chosen by the reliability coder in a non-systematic fashion. The reliability coder assigned codes to 37% of the data. The primary

researcher and the inter-rater reliability coder discussed what they coded and they also discussed any disagreements in codes. Any disagreements in codes were resolved through discussion of the operational definitions. An agreement score of .813 was calculated using Cohen's kappa before the disagreements were resolved. Cohen's kappa is a scoring method that computes for chance agreement for inter-rater reliability in research studies (Cohen, 1960). According to Landis and Koch (1977), kappa values above .81 are considered to be "almost perfect."

A member check or member validation was also conducted to increase the reliability, credibility and accuracy of these results (Bryman, 2004). An email was sent asking the participants to confirm the broad themes that were established based on the topics that came up during the interview simply by replying "yes." Five of the eight participants had contact information. These five participants were emailed and four of them responded with "yes" indicating agreement with the four broad themes that were established based on their responses. The other participant did not respond to the email.

## CHAPTER 5: RESULTS

### Broad Themes and Sub-themes

Refer to Appendix C for a list of broad themes and sub-themes with operational definitions included. The results of this study are discussed in this section, which include four emerging themes or major broad themes that were established based on the data set: (a) language use, (b) views toward bilingualism, (c) language acquisition, and (d) views toward accents. Sub-themes were developed for each of the four broad themes. Although language proficiency was part of the research question, this topic did not emerge as a broad theme in this data set. The following table indicates how many participants in this study mentioned each broad theme and sub-theme:

**TABLE 2**

| Coding Scheme: Broad theme and Sub-theme                     | # of Participants who mentioned this theme | Percentage of Participants who mentioned this theme |
|--|--|---|
| 1.1 Language Use: Environmental dependent                    | 5 out of 8 participants                    | 63%   |
| 1.2 Language Use: Comfort levels with language partners      | 8 out of 8 participants                    | 100%  |
| 1.3 Language Use: Identifying the most important modality of | 8 out of 8 participants                    | 100%  |

|  |                         |      |
|--|-------------------------|------|
| language use   |                         |      |
| 2.1 Views toward Bilingualism:<br>Positive aspects about being bilingual | 8 out of 8 participants | 100% |
| 2.2 Views toward Bilingualism:<br>Negative aspects about being bilingual | 2 out of 8 participants | 25%  |
| 3.1 Language Acquisition: Learning English as part of educational system | 8 out of 8 participants | 100% |
| 3.2 Language Acquisition:<br>Immigration                                 | 7 out of 8 participants | 88%  |
| 3.3 Language Acquisition: Difficult aspects of learning English          | 8 out of 8 participants | 100% |
| 3.4 Language Acquisition:<br>Understanding the culture of a language     | 7 out of 8 participants | 88%  |
| 4.1 Views toward Accents: Positive aspects of having a foreign accent    | 1 out of 8 participants | 13%  |



|   |                         |     |
|---|-------------------------|-----|
| 4.2 Views toward Accents:<br>Negative aspects of having a foreign accent                      | 2 out of 8 participants | 25% |
| 4.3 Views toward Accents: Therapy is individualized/personal for each person                  | 4 out of 8 participants | 50% |
| 4.4 Views toward Accents: Therapy is for improving pronunciation and /or language proficiency | 3 out of 8 participants | 38% |
| 4.5 Views toward Accents: Necessity of therapy services                                       | 5 out of 8 participants | 63% |

**Broad Theme 1: Language Use**

The participants in this study shared various aspects of their lives as it pertains to their bilingualism and their culture. An important broad theme that emerged from this study is perspectives about language use, which has different components including a) environmental dependent, b) comfort levels with language partners, and c) identifying the most important modality of language use. Some of the participants shared that English tends to be the predominant language used in their life, despite continued efforts to use their L1. Use of L1 is mostly with family or within minority communities who share the same language. Other participants shared that most of their friends shared the same L1 so they are able to use L1 more

often than English, which may be due to their lower comfort level using English. Language use is also dependent on the area and the local population of that immigrant community. Using their L1 more often in the U.S. is more difficult because such an emphasis is placed on using English. Participants discussed who they were most comfortable using L1 and L2 with in order to identify if there were people they were less likely to approach because they were afraid of making an error in their English. If the time period since the participant had acquired English was longer, they reported that they would choose which language to use depending on their language partner and which one their language partner was more comfortable using. These participants were comfortable and confident in their proficiency in English. If the participant travels frequently to their home country, these experiences will help them maintain their L1. The following sub-themes were found for “Language Use” and examples of quotations from the interviews follow:

### **Environmental Dependent**

Five out of the eight participants discussed how important the linguistic environment was when choosing which language to use. Often coming to school the participants would use primarily English and then use L1 at home with their family. Some of the participants knew a lot of people who spoke their L1, so the language they would use was dependent on who they were with. To illustrate this point, Jen said, “So during the day I would speak English. Then when I would come back to my family, we would speak Korean. So I guess I kind of spoke both by the time I was four or five, but I was encouraged to speak more Korean at my home” and again when she said, “so I think that was also one of the big reasons the switch of languages happened pretty quickly because it was an environment where I had to speak English more.”

## **Comfort Levels with Language Partners**

All of the participants discussed comfort levels using English or their L1 depending on their language partner. This sub-theme is related to how confident the participant feels in their English skills and also how proficient the language partner is in the chosen language. This is evident when Matt answered question 7 (“Who are you least comfortable speaking English with and why) by saying, “Anyone who speaks my native language and has less command over English. I, unconsciously, switch to Hindi because my brain tells me to do so.”

Sally discussed her family beliefs and comfort levels when using Spanish when she answered question seven by saying, “I would say with my family, again. Just like that connectiveness that we have and then again also because I don’t know if this is just my specific culture but they see us as our generation being more Americanized. And with them their values and culture is so important that they want to conserve that so, you know, if we don’t show, you know, that ability to even speak in that language that they can it’s kind of like “c’mon guys.” You know, our culture is so important so in that sense.” Her family is more comfortable using Spanish to communicate, which is closely related to their cultural beliefs.

## **Identifying the Most Important Modality of Language Use**

All of the participants discussed what they thought was the most important modality of language use (chosen from speaking, listening, reading, or writing). Sally made a valid point about using a new language when she answered, “I would say speaking because I feel like that’s the most tangible, that’s what you would use the most besides writing and things like that. Understanding is really important too, but at the end of the day, you have to express yourself.

You have to articulate, you understood, and you kind of have to respond to that. And if you can't do that, that's that limitation again. So I think speaking is really important and everything else of course like reading and writing, but as far as what you are going to utilize the most, I would say speaking." John illustrated this point when he said, "I think speaking would be the first thing. Communication is the biggest part. Writing and reading, if you can do that, that's great, but you can't carry a pen and a piece of paper with you everywhere trying to go through a job interview and stuff like that. I think speaking is the number one thing and I think understanding would go along side with speaking because you would have to understand what you are saying."

## **Broad Theme 2: Views toward Bilingualism**

The second broad theme that emerged from this data set was "views toward bilingualism." Motivation was an important perspective of second language acquisition that all the participants shared. From this motivation to learn language emerged different sub-themes that the participants mentioned. Participants mentioned experiences that they perceived to be positive aspects of being bilingual and there was also a few that mentioned negative aspects of being bilingual. Motivation could be specific reasons that were shared about why the participant had to learn English, whether it occurred through schooling or through circumstances related to immigration. Participants also mentioned the role of culture and how culture is an integral part of learning a new language. Examples of quotations are as follows:

### **Positive Aspects about Being Bilingual**

The participants discussed what they liked about being bilingual and how speaking two languages was beneficial for them. Sally had this to say about learning English in elementary

school: “But it was difficult and I think that at first my first few years of schooling, I got very good at, like, nonverbal communication. Those cues you pick up on like socially. Things like that just became more natural to me than verbal communication at first. What seemed like a setback then isn’t a setback now, but it was difficult in the beginning stages.” Jen thought learning English at a younger age was easier and therefore a positive aspect of being bilingual when she said, “Picking up my second language when I came to the U.S., it was challenging, but also because I was a younger age, I think that transition was easier and then it wasn’t just trying to study it, but by naturally living and picking it up from people around me. So I think that transition was easier.” Learning English at a younger age appeared to make learning the language easier for these participants.

### **Negative Aspects about Being Bilingual**

Only two participants said something that was negative about being bilingual. This was evident when Jen said, “Sometimes I do feel like I’m not like totally 100% in either language because I can pick and choose whatever I feel comfortable with.” Kristy concurred when she answered, “...in elementary school, it wasn’t as easy. I was kind of, I guess ashamed, being from a different culture.”

### **Broad Theme 3: Language Acquisition**

The third broad theme to emerge from this study is “language acquisition.” Each bilingual had a strong motivation to learn language, whether that motivation was intentional or unintentional. A person needs a strong reason for why they are learning a new language, whether it is because of the environment they are in or because they like to learn languages. Factors

relating to motivation could be extrinsic or intrinsic in nature. Intrinsic motivation to learn language means that acquisition of English happened naturally and no intentionality was involved. Extrinsic motivation could mean that the participant had to learn English more purposefully. A participant with extrinsic motivation has to make a conscious effort to improve their English skills.

### **Learning English as Part of Educational System**

All of the participants learned English because it was somehow incorporated into their education system, even if the participants grew up in a foreign country. This was evident when Matt said, “I learned to speak English in school in India. It was an English medium school. My parents chose to send me there because they wanted me to be able to have a wide variety of options in terms of where I wanted to study or work.”

### **Immigration**

Immigration was an important motivating factor for the participants as they were learning English. If the participant moved to the U.S. from another country, learning English is part of assimilating to American culture. This point was illustrated when John said, “Coming here was a big motivation.”

Ashley said this when answering question 8, “Yeah, of course I do agree with that because it’s U.S. and English is like the official language and I think the same situation happens in China, like people get to China to work or to, like as immigrants. They have to learn Chinese. That’s the same situation happening everywhere, I mean all over the world so I do agree with that and I do agree that native, all the native speakers do expect immigrants to learn and speak

English then they can communicate and so I do agree that if I want to stay here or if I want to have a job here, then that's quite important to do."

### **Difficult Aspects of Learning English**

When prompted to explain what was difficult about learning English, John said, "In English, specifically it's the, I've even noticed it with my friends, saying such thing as "a, an, the" because it doesn't really make sense to us. It's like an extra word and spelling is very difficult. Even until now for me because I spell phonetically. If you give me a word like "hippopotamus" or something like that if I didn't know how to spell it I would just write a word and be like "what is that?" But I would just write it phonetically because that is how we write it in Russian and Ukrainian. A lot of people have the same mistakes because the silent letters or such things that are the hardest part about learning English in particular. They didn't have spelling bees so when I got here that was something new."

Amy said, "I guess there were a lot of times when I felt frustrated especially when I was an undergrad exchange student mostly because I couldn't really understand what other people were talking about. Especially when I was taking courses, it was a different type of English. It was mostly their lectures and specific terms that you need to know to understand what their lectures are about. Understanding what other people were saying was the most frustrating part I would say."

### **Understanding the Culture of a Language**

The connection between learning language and understanding the culture behind the language was evident when Jen said, "...if you really want to immerse yourself into that

community and learn that language I think liking that culture or understanding that culture comes first and then learning the language can be more enjoyable and also easier. So, I guess, liking the culture and connecting with the people is really important.” Amy said, “I mean, for me, I can’t really separate the two, language and culture. Cause culture is mostly about how people think, how that specific language user thinks so like I guess, for me, I would always try to learn how the target language users will think through their language.” Kristy stated, “I do, very much. Just in Spanish, in general, it’s different in every country that speaks Spanish so it is important to know the culture and you know, when I speak with someone from Spain, I don’t speak the same type of Spanish I would speak with someone who’s from Dominican Republic. So I guess it is important to learn it.”

#### **Broad Theme 4: Views toward Accents**

The fourth broad theme that emerged from this data set was “Views toward Accents,” Participants were prompted to discuss their views and knowledge about accents and accent modification therapy. Topics that were discussed include experience with speech therapy, awareness of the field of speech language pathology, pride in one’s culture and native language, and perspectives about speaking with an accent. Participants may view speech therapy for accent modification as a way to learn and speak Standard American English (SAE). Most of the participants were aware that speech therapy services were available. However, they did not know a lot about what these services are about or much about who can pursue these services. Examples of quotations for each sub-theme are as follows:



### **Positive Aspects of Having a Foreign Accent**

John said this about having an accent, “Personally I like to have a small accent to distinguish me from everybody else. It might kind of give somebody, or when I’m talking to somebody, it might give like a “oh, are you from a different country?” and I’m like “yes” and I could talk about it a little bit. I kind of like that. So I think that would be a beneficial thing.”

### **Negative Aspects of Having a Foreign Accent**

Sally shared, “Unfortunately, you know, there are stereotypes and discrimination going on, seriously, just because someone has an accent and it’s true. Because you’re automatically judged and not necessarily on purpose. They would take that into consideration whether you get a job or something like that, but automatically you have this “ok, wow, they’re not an English speaker and I just feel like there’s this stereotype. If you hear someone with an accent you automatically assume “oh, they’re less educated or less knowledgeable than someone else,” but that’s not the case at all.”

### **Therapy is Individualized/Personal for Each Person**

When probed about the awareness of accent modification therapy services, Sally stated, “Especially it depends what field you’re trying to go into, but trying to modify your accent, it depends what you’re trying to do. It’s important, but to some people it’s not. So I don’t know, I guess that’s on a personal level. That depends on the person.” Kristy shared, “Yes I have heard and I guess it just depends on the individual. I know people who do have an accent and they don’t care if they have an accent when they are speaking English. I know people who have looked for accent modification therapy and I guess it’s to each their own.”

## **Therapy is for Improving Pronunciation and/or Language Proficiency**

Matt shared his views toward accents and accent modification when he said, “I think they are helpful in teaching people how to pronounce, and say words correctly and in the process they learn to understand the person speaking English.” Amy said, “I don’t know exactly what they do with these people who would like to improve their pronunciation so I can’t really say if it’s helpful or not, but I mean if these people really want to improve their pronunciation then I guess it could be helpful.”

## **Necessity of Therapy Services**

Some participants shared whether or not they felt accent modification therapy was necessary for someone who wished to sound like a native speaker of English. Rita said, “Therapy to correct an accent? You mean, like, have them speak Standard English without some native accent? I think for most people, it’s not necessary. Like, if you are not, it’s not required in your work, required by your job and if you don’t have a problem communicating with others, understanding each other, I don’t think it’s necessary because it’s kind of like diversity. Diversity in language, something like that, identification of yourself, where you come from, and what culture you have, stuff like that, so I don’t think it’s necessary.” Jen said, “If they don’t have that language therapy, they’re left on their own. You know, and having someone really sit down with them, you know, and help them through it, I think is very important.”

## CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION

### Summary

Participants in this interview study all reported their experiences about the process of acquiring English as a second language, what aspects were difficult, and what aspects were beneficial. Although each person had a different experience, there were similar patterns that emerged. This research study aimed to obtain more detailed, descriptive information about bilinguals, how and why they acquired English, and their ideas about language and culture. The main findings or broad themes from this study about the specific, anecdotal experiences of bilinguals, what they know about accent modification therapy, and how they feel about these services are as follows: a) language use, b) views toward bilingualism, c) language acquisition, and d) views toward accents with sub-themes for each area (see Appendix C). Language use and acquisition are critical components of second language learning, suggested by the emerging broad themes from this research study.

Participants in this study reflected on the experiences of learning English as a second language and how it has influenced their lives. They reflected on what was difficult about learning English. Originally, it was assumed that participants would talk about challenges to learning English and any communication barriers they experienced due to limited English proficiency. However, this sub-theme did not emerge from the data. Difficulties about learning English were discussed in the interviews, but the participants focused more on what was beneficial about being bilingual. Many of the participants acquired English at a younger age so it may have been easier to learn.

Participants spoke positively about speaking two languages and being able to identify with two cultures. The participants had a sense of pride about their bilingualism. They mentioned more positive aspects about bilingualism and only a few negative aspects. Some of the participants acquired English naturally due to being in an English-speaking environment. Other participants are still gaining proficiency in English due to lack of exposure or experience with English. The language environment determines which language the participant chooses to use and also which language their language partner is most comfortable with. The participants will accommodate the people they are with to make them more comfortable.

More information about language use emerged from this study that was not known previously. Language use for the participants was related to the language environment they were in and the comfort level or confidence in using English with certain people. The participants identified speaking as the most important aspect of learning English.

Culture was another topic discussed by the participants in this study. Most of the participants felt culture and language learning were closely related. Some participants felt that while learning English, culture was also naturally learned. They felt that culture and language are hard to separate. One participant felt that liking the culture of the language they are learning and taking an interest in the new culture is important and helpful.

Another important finding from this study suggests that the people interviewed in this study, in general, do not know much about speech therapy services for accent modification. This type of therapy can often be targeted for bilingual individuals or monolingual individuals who wish to be more easily understood by others and to not be judged or stereotyped for sounding

different (i.e. having a foreign accent). Some of the participants felt positively about speaking with an accent because it shows diversity and that changing or modifying an accent is dependent on the individual and their life circumstances. If a person is having difficulty being understood because of their accent, then therapy can be beneficial. However, these results indicate that people may be unaware that SLPs can offer help in this area.

### **Limitations**

There are certain precautions that must be taking when interpreting qualitative research. Generalizations usually cannot be made for qualitative research due to the nature of the data. However, qualitative research is useful because it depends largely on descriptions, categories, and words (Meline, 2006). Theories can be developed, interpretations can be formulated, and emerging research questions can be gleaned from the results of qualitative research such as this one. Interpretations of qualitative data can also be subjective. That is why having inter-rater reliability is necessary to increase the credibility of the results.

It is important to note that the themes and sub-themes were partly driven by the questions. By using structured interviews, participants were primed to think about certain things even though their responses were not restricted.

This research study focused on eight bilingual university students. There are other ways this study could have been completed that may have yielded differing results. A larger number of participants may give more credibility to the results. All the participants were close in age, being in their twenties or thirties. Interviewing older bilinguals that learned English at a later age, such as in their twenties or thirties may yield differing results. A focus group, such as a recruiting

participants from a certain ethnicity or participants sharing the same native language, may provide more specific results pertaining to culture and language. Also different interview questions probing other, unaddressed aspects of bilingual language acquisition and speech therapy services for bilinguals may yield differing results.

### **Clinical Implications and Future Directions for Research**

As SLPs, we must develop greater understandings of the perspectives and experiences of the populations we work with. Overall, SLPs report that they do not feel competent in conducting assessments and planning interventions for bilingual/bicultural individuals (Kritikos, 2003). SLPs will have trouble empathizing with their client and developing strong rapport if they are unable to relate to them and their unique experiences of language learning.

Cultural sensitivity and cultural competence are important skills for SLPs to develop. This involves learning more about our CLD clients and how culture influences learning English as a second language. For the SLP, we want to know what bilinguals experience when they learn a new language (e.g. English) and how that affects our role in planning intervention. For instance, when planning an intervention for someone modifying their accent, obtaining information found in this research study can be beneficial. Asking the client how they feel about being bilingual or how they feel about their accent is important to identify any negative effects the client may have experienced. Using some of the interview questions (see Appendix B) may be beneficial during the assessment process to provide more information about the client and their communication needs.

Another question SLPs must consider is how to educate the public about the variety of people that SLPs are qualified to work with, which includes people with communication disorders, swallowing disorders, or language differences. Most of the participants in this study had heard of accent modification, but they did not know much about it. There are a variety of ways SLPs can raise awareness of our field to the public and it is important that SLPs collaborate together to find ways to do that.

Future directions for research include further probing the views that people have about speaking with a foreign accent and how that affects their interactions with people who speak with an accent. Research could also target specific groups, such as those people who have received accent modification therapy to assess the effectiveness of therapy services, what therapy techniques were most helpful, and to research the underlying, motivating factors for why they sought out services.

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## Appendix A

### Semi-structured Interview Questions for Bilinguals

1. Describe your experience being bilingual (in terms of why you learned two languages and how you became fluent in English).
2. What was difficult or challenging about learning a second language?
3. Which language are you more comfortable using and why?
4. What motivated you to learn a second language?
5. How do you feel about being bilingual and why (example-Is it difficult? Is it fun? Does it make you more confident? Etc.)
6. Who are you most comfortable speaking English with and why?
7. Who are you least comfortable speaking English with and why?
8. Do you feel that people in the U.S. expect immigrants to learn and speak English? If so, do you agree with that expectation?
9. How do you feel about speaking your native language around people who don't understand it?
10. What in your opinion is the most important aspect of second language learning (reading, writing, speaking, or understanding) and why?
11. Do you feel that adapting to a new culture or country is important in second language learning and why?
12. Have you heard of speech therapy services for adults who want to improve spoken English or to modify their accents while speaking English? If so, what are your views on these speech therapy services? Do you think they are important and helpful or not?

## Appendix B

### Language History and Proficiency Questionnaire

| Participant Name | L1      | # of Years Speaking L1 | Proficiency Rating for L1 |
|------------------|---------|------------------------|---------------------------|
| John             | Russian | 21                     | 8.5                       |
| Sally            | Spanish | 21                     | 9.25                      |
| Jen              | Korean  | “All my life”          | 8.5                       |
| Amy              | Korean  | “Over 30 years”        | 10                        |
| Kristy           | Spanish | 23                     | 10                        |
| Rita             | Chinese | 21                     | 8.75                      |
| Mary             | Chinese | 24                     | 9.75                      |
| Matt             | Hindi   | “All my life”          | 10                        |

*Note.* A scale of 1 to 10 was used to rate language proficiency, 10 being highly proficient for speaking, listening, reading, and writing. The average was calculated.)

| Participant Name | # of Years Learning English | Proficiency Rating for L2 (English) |
|------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| John             | 13                          | 9.25                                |
| Sally            | 17                          | 10                                  |
| Jen              | “Since age 3”               | 9.25                                |
| Amy              | “From age 5”                | 9.25                                |
| Kristy           | 20                          | 10                                  |
| Rita             | 11                          | 5.25                                |
| Mary             | 12                          | 7.25                                |
| Matt             | 20                          | 10                                  |

*Note.* A scale of 1 to 10 was used to rate language proficiency, 10 being highly proficient for speaking, listening, reading, and writing. The average was calculated.)

## **Appendix C**

### **Coding Scheme**

#### **Broad Theme #1 Language Use**

Operational Definition: The broad theme “Language use” can be statements about when the participant uses their native language and when they use English. Language use is dependent on the environment (e.g. school, home, social gatherings, etc.). Language use is also dependent on the comfort level in using that language with certain people. Language use includes aspects such as speaking, listening, writing, and reading. This broad theme may include statements about any of these aspects of language use.

#### **Sub-themes**

##### **1.1 Environment Dependent**

Operational Definition: This subtheme can be statements about using either L1 (the participant’s native language) or L2 (the participant’s second language, e.g. English) depending on what language environment they are in or what language environment they are exposed to most of the time.

##### **1.2 Comfort Levels with Language Partners**

Operational Definition: This subtheme can be statements about people they are comfortable using their native language with and people they are comfortable using English with and why.

This can include comfort levels with themselves using the L1 or L2 or with the listeners' comfort level with either language.

### **1.3 Identifying the Most Important Modality of Language Use**

Operational Definition: This subtheme can be statements about what the participant considers to be the most important and beneficial aspect of language use and why they believe so.

### **Broad Theme #2: Views toward Bilingualism**

Operational Definition: This broad theme can include any statement about how the participant feels about being bilingual.

#### **Sub Themes**

##### **2.1: Positive aspects about being bilingual**

Operational Definition: This subtheme can include any statement that is about what the participant perceives to be positive aspects about speaking two languages and why.

##### **2.2: Negative aspects about being bilingual**

Operational Definition: This subtheme can include any statement that is about what the participant perceives to be negative aspects about speaking two languages and why.

### **Broad Theme #3: Language Acquisition**

Operational Definition: This broad theme can include any statement about the process of learning English, why the participant learned English, and specifically how the participant learned English.

#### **3.1: Learning English as part of educational system**

Operational Definition: This subtheme can include any statement about the participant learning English in their educational systems, including foreign countries where English was taught as a class subject or if the participant was in ESL/ELL programs when they began attending school. Participants may not have a strong, purposeful motivation because they were forced to learn English upon entering school.

#### **3.2: Immigration**

Operational Definition: This subtheme can include any statement about the participant learning English because they or their family immigrated to the United States. They had to learn English because they moved to the U.S. The participant may have moved to the U.S. and just naturally began learning and acquiring English.

#### **3.3: Difficult aspects of learning English**

Operational Definition: This subtheme can include any statement about what the participant perceived to be challenging or difficult when acquiring English.

### **3.4: Culture**

Operational Definition: This subtheme can include any statement about the role of culture when learning a second language and how culture plays an important role in second language acquisition.

#### **Broad Theme #4: Views toward Accents**

Operational Definition: The broad theme, “Views about Accents,” can include any statement pertaining to having an accent due to speaking English as a second language, modifying a person’s accent by seeking out therapy services, importance of speech therapy services for modifying accents, and whether or not these services are warranted.

#### **Subthemes**

##### **4.1: Positive aspects of having a foreign accent**

Operational Definition: This subtheme can include any statement that is about what the participant perceives to be positive aspects about having a foreign accent and why.

##### **4.2: Negative aspects of having a foreign accent**

Operational Definition: This subtheme can include any statement that is about what the participant perceives to be negative aspects about having a foreign accent and why.

##### **4.3: Accent modification therapy is individualized/ personal for each person**

Operational Definition: This subtheme can include any statement about accent modification therapy being perceived or viewed as individualized and personal depending on the person seeking services.

#### **4.4: Therapy is for improving pronunciation and/or language proficiency**

Operational Definition: This subtheme can include statements about the participant perceiving accent modification therapy services as being for the purpose of improving pronunciation or improving knowledge of the language being learned.

#### **4.5: Necessity of therapy services**

Operational Definition: This subtheme can include statements about whether the participant believes that therapy services are necessary and important or not and why.

#### **Broad Theme #5: Not Applicable**

Operational Definition: This code applies to any statement that does not apply to any the research questions and cannot be categorized into any of the other broad themes.



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