

Estamos en este pais: Motivations for English Language Acquisition among Adult Latino ESOL Students

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Estamos en este país:
Motivations for English Acquisition
among Adult Latino ESOL Students

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With the guidance of Sarah Beckjord

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Chapter One:

Testing the Limits of Contemporary Assimilation -- Latinos and the Multi-step Process of Integration in the United States

Amelia and her husband left their home of Peru in 2003. After many years of waiting, they had finally been given a visa to the United States, and “although we were doing well enough [in Peru], there weren’t many opportunities for our children.” In their native country, the 48-year-old Amelia was a teacher, her husband a lawyer and judge. In Boston, Amelia teaches Spanish at a local high school, speaking entirely in Spanish with her beginning-level class and having brief English exchanges that center on the weather or school events with other teachers. Her husband stocks shelves at a grocery. “We left a whole life, friendships, a certain standard of living that we had, he as a lawyer,” she pauses. “We came to the United States to be nothing, as if we were illiterate, for not knowing the language. The language is very important.”¹

Recent census data confirm what any observer of US society can note: the Latino population is rapidly growing. In 2006, the US population included some 17.6 million foreign-born Latinos², a US-constructed term to identify Spanish-speaking persons of Latin American descent.³ This number represented a 25% increase from

¹ The author’s interview with Amelia, student at Boston-based Literacy Connection, 14 March 2008.

² Rubén G. Rumbaut, “The Making of a People,” in *Latinos and the Future of America*, ed. National Research Council (Washington DC: National Academies Press, 2006) 18.

³ “Latino” *American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition* (Houghton Mifflin 2006) Although many scholarly and popular works use the terms “Latino” and “Hispanic” interchangeably,

2000 that contributed to a total (native + foreign born) Latino population of 44.2 million persons, or roughly 1 in every 7 residents of the United States.⁴

This wave of immigration is not unmatched in US history – during the so-called “golden era of immigration” spanning from 1880 to 1920, “23 million immigrants arrived in a country that, in 1900, encompassed 76 million people,” with the majority of the new arrivals from Southern and Eastern Europe.⁵ These immigrants eventually blended into the social fabric of the United States, learning English, improving their socioeconomic status, breaking out of ethnic enclaves, and becoming a reasonably well-integrated part of society within the span of a few generations.⁶ However, the vast majority of these immigrants hailed from a disparate set of countries, bringing distinct languages and cultural identities,⁷ and it has been suggested that “past assimilation was facilitated by the number and diversity of the societies from which immigrants came and the languages they brought with them.”⁸ In a country with a dominant majority language and only isolated pockets of minority language speakers, immigrants had no choice but to adopt the common language and culture quickly in order to communicate with their neighbors and coworkers. Noting that nearly half of all current immigrants to the United States speak a common language, Ruben G. Rumbaut observes that “this fact – not place, not race, not religion, not citizenship – is the single most distinctive difference between Hispanics and non-

Latino will be used throughout this paper. In its strictest sense, the term includes only Latin American Spanish-speakers, the population of study. Furthermore, the use of a clearly Anglo term such as “Hispanic,” derived from the Latin word for Spain and lacking the gender signifying ending of most Spanish nouns, has negative sociopolitical connotations for some Spanish speakers of Latin American origin.

⁴ Pew Latino Center, *Statistical Portrait of Latinos in the United States 2006* released 2008, 2.

⁵ Janice Fine, “Worker Centers: Organizing Communities at the Edge of the Dream. (Ithaca, NY: ILR Press, 2006) 28.

⁶ Samuel P. Huntington, “The Latino Challenge” *Foreign Policy*, 141. (2004b.): 31.

⁷ US Bureau of Census, *Region and Country or Area of Birth of the Foreign-born Population*

⁸ Samuel P. Huntington, “Who Are We? The Challenges to America’s National Identity (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 2004a.) 192.

Hispanics in the United States. It raises significant questions about their modes of acculturation and socioeconomic incorporation.”⁹ These cultural questions are often overshadowed by concerns about illegal immigration or the economic repercussions of such wide-scale immigration, only rising to the foreground with cases of bilingual education or English-only mandates. The lack of nationwide emphasis on this issue, however, does not signify a lack of importance. Cultural differences are often the most immediately obvious between English-speaking, Protestant Americans and the mostly Catholic, Spanish-speaking Latin American immigrants, and the propagation of cultural stereotypes and mistrust is a salient issue¹⁰.

As the quotation by Rumbaut suggests, the cultural impact of the Latino population has been subjected to continuous study and scrutiny as scholars assess the degree to which these newcomers will affect the American cultural landscape. Samuel P. Huntington, a political scientist and leading crusader against the current wave of Latino immigration, alleges that “assimilation successes of the past are unlikely to be duplicated with the contemporary flood of immigrants from Latin America” and argues strongly for a reduction in immigration in his essay “The Latino Challenge.”¹¹ Politician and author Pat Buchanan shares that view, remarking in a 2006 CNN interview that, “many of the Latinos coming in now, they’re patriotic Mexicans, they want to keep their Spanish language and culture and music. When that happens over a period of time — and the numbers are so enormous, and there’s no melting pot ideology anymore in America, what you’re going to have is two

⁹ Rumbaut 2006, 46

¹⁰ Huntington 2004a, 193.

¹¹ Huntington 2004b, 32.

languages, two cultures, and eventually two countries.”¹² The sentiment is also evidenced through movements such as Federation for American Immigration Reform. The organization’s website holds that current immigrants’ lack of assimilation impedes economic progress and exacerbates ethnic tensions.¹³ Message forums across the internet are peppered with comments from US citizens who feel Latinos are not assimilating. “[The old immigrants] settled in New York and the first FIRST [sic] thing they did was learn English and absorbed themselves into the American culture and became law abiding citizens of their new country ... [the new immigrants] continue to speak their native language without learning ENGLISH,” an unidentified poster writes on a Tulsa World message board; the author is not alone in his sentiment.¹⁴

At the same time, many scholars refuse to confirm such fears about the subordination of the historic American culture. In their 2003 book, *Remaking the American Mainstream*, Richard Alba and Victor Nee note the changing nature of assimilation, but ultimately argue that, “the key conclusion for us is that there will be some continuity in assimilation between past and present.”¹⁵ Others view a similar trend, noting that although the immigration influx will undoubtedly continue, there is reason to remain optimistic about the overall trends of immigrant integration.¹⁶ In

¹² Media Matters, “On CNN’s Glenn Beck, Buchanan criticized Bush for being ‘scared’ to ‘antagonize’ Hispanics because Republicans’ ‘white American’ base is ‘shrinking’” Media Matters for America, <http://www.mediamatters.org>, Accessed 3 April 2008

¹³ “How Mass Immigration Impedes Assimilation” Federation for American Immigration Reform <http://www.fairus.org>. Accessed 3 April 2008

¹⁴ Staff reports, “Local Hispanic leaders to announce lawsuit against immigration law” Tulsa World <http://www.tulsaworld.com>. Accessed 2 April 2008.

¹⁵ Richard Alba and Victor Nee, *Remaking the American Mainstream* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003) 274.

¹⁶ Tamar Jacoby, “Immigrant Integration – The American Experience” in *Securing the Future: US Immigrant Integration Policy*, ed. Michael Fix. (Migration Policy Institute, 2007) 1.

the words of one scholar, “immigrants continue to do what they have always done: become Americans relatively quickly.”¹⁷

The identification of Latino immigrants’ assimilation as a significant issue in contemporary American society necessitates a defined concept of assimilation. Milton Gordon, in his seminal *Assimilation in American Life*, published in 1964, proposes that assimilation involves seven variables (such as rate of entrance into institutions of host society, rate of intermarriage, and adoption of new sense of peoplehood, among others) that combine to create “adaptation to the core society and culture” of the host country. According to Gordon, assimilation is by and large a unidirectional and irreversible process in which cultural groups are expected to revoke their own practices in favor of those of the host society. The first indicator of assimilation that Gordon identifies is the “change of cultural patterns to those of host society.” “Cultural assimilation, or acculturation, is likely to be the first of the types of assimilation to occur when a minority group arrives on the scene, and ... may take place even when none of the other types of assimilation occurs simultaneously or later, and this condition of ‘acculturation only’ may continue indefinitely.”¹⁸ Thus, the process of adopting a host society’s language and culture does not necessarily suggest that the other indicators of assimilation, such as intermarriage, will become more prevalent.

Alba and Nee discuss Gordon’s work, and particularly his identification of acculturation, noting that, “what was lacking more profoundly was a more differentiated and syncretic concept, a recognition that American culture was and is mixed, an amalgam of diverse influences.” Their definition of assimilation

¹⁷ *Ibid* 11

¹⁸ Milton Gordon, *Assimilation in American Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964) 71-77.

hypothesizes that a single and static culture into which the immigrants blend does not exist. This view has been shared by other contemporary authors, who point out the varying American “cultures” to which immigrants could assimilate: the traditionally constructed culture of the white middle class, but also that of the socioeconomically disadvantaged street culture. They also argue that the host culture may be affected by the newcomers as definitions of what is socially acceptable expand.¹⁹

In rejecting the unilateral direction of Gordon’s proposed assimilation, Alba and Nee agree with Margaret Gibson’s idea of “multilinear acculturation”, an additive process that involves the “purposive selection of cultural practices that are useful to the immigrant group.”²⁰ They also rework Gordon’s concept of assimilation to define it as “the decline of an ethnic distinction and its corollary cultural and social differences” to the point where “individuals on both sides of the boundary see themselves more and more as alike.”²¹ Once again, it is important to emphasize that this contemporary outlook recognizes that the host society is not static and that both cultures will likely change as a result of assimilation. The cultural patterns of the host society, however, are both more widespread and established, and therefore will logically experience less change. Assimilation then, is the process through which cultural and social boundaries between different peoples are dissolved. For the purposes of the current study, acculturation, an important step in the process of assimilation, will be defined as the adoption of selected cultural practices of the host group.

¹⁹ Alba and Nee 2003, 25-26

²⁰ *ibid* 217

²¹ *ibid* 11

The difficulties of establishing a singular “American” culture into which immigrants integrate have already been signaled. It is also important to point out that the processes of assimilation and acculturation are not always viewed as positive. As studies by Herbert Gans and Rubén Rumbaut have signaled, the adoption of certain aspects of American culture – such as eating habits, recreational drug use, a tendency to experience more stress, and the glorification of violence – may cause downward mobility among successive generations.²² In this study, we will refrain from making value judgments on the merits of these processes, and instead focus on finding evidence to test the argument, expressed above by Huntington and Buchanan, that Latino immigrants are not integrating into US society and culture.

How then can we test the assimilation of Latino immigrants? Many of the seven variables, or steps, identified by Gordon are multifaceted and difficult to measure. But testing acculturation, the first step in the assimilation process, is a logical starting point. Within the expansive realm of acculturation, Alba and Nee note that, “one trajectory of acculturation that can be directly glimpsed is that of linguistic change, for which a large, albeit imperfect, body of data exists.”²³ It happens that linguistic unity is an important component of the argument for assimilation: “where linguistic unity has broken down, our energies and resources flow into tensions, hostilities, prejudices, and resentments – within a few years if the breakdown persists, there will be no retreat – society as we know it can fade into a

²² Nancy Foner and George M. Fredrickson, *Not Just Black and White: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives on Immigration, Race, and Ethnicity in the United States*. (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2004) 287.

²³ Alba and Nee 2003, 117

noisy Babel and then chaos.”²⁴ To many, linguistic acculturation is extremely important in maintaining a shared national identity.

Perhaps not surprisingly, a central assertion of Huntington, Buchanan, and others is that adult Latinos are not adapting quickly to the use of English. J. Harvie Wilkinson, a US federal judge, writes, “America has assimilated wave upon wave of non-English-speaking immigrants who quickly learned English. The new immigrants soon sensed it was in their interest to do so. This historic pattern is now changing.”²⁵ As we will see, the argument is not necessarily that immigrants are not learning English: increasing numbers of ESOL enrollment and patterns of language acquisition across multiple generations suggest otherwise. From the third generation forth, virtually all immigrants will speak English. The issue is that “second-generation youths may acculturate slowly, retaining their parental language as primary and acquiring only a limited command of English; second, they may become bilingual but maintain primary allegiance to foreign languages.”²⁶ The issue becomes one not of language learning but of language value: does speaking English indicate the beginning of an assimilative process? Suárez-Orozco believes “the link between learning English and ‘acculturation’ rests on a superficial and reductionistic assumption that speaking English equals acculturation. But simply speaking English does not make one an American.”²⁷ The previously mentioned theories of acculturation seem to support this view. English could be seen as part of the “purposive selection” of practices that are beneficial to the immigrant group, as defined by Gibson. And as Gordon theorized, the process can stall in “acculturation

²⁴ Alejandro Portes and Rubén G. Rumbaut. *Legacies: The Story of the Immigrant Second Generation* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 2001) 116.

²⁵ J. Harvie Wilkinson, III, *One Nation Indivisible* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1995) 152

²⁶ *ibid* 116.

²⁷ Carola Suárez-Orozco and Marcelo M. Suárez-Orozco *Children of Immigration* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2001) 156.

only,” meaning that the other, less easily tracked variables of assimilation will not be achieved. So, how do we know whether to interpret Latino adults’ learning of English as merely the acquisition of a beneficial cultural practice that may end with basic acculturation, or as a symptom of the beginning stages of assimilation into the greater US society? To formulate an answer to this question, it is helpful to examine research on motivations for second language acquisition.

Motivation, as defined by psychologist Robert Gardner in *Social Psychology and Second Language Learning: the Role of Attitudes and Motivation*, involves four aspects: “A goal, effortful behavior, a desire to attain the goal and favorable attitudes toward the activity in question.”²⁸ Independent of language aptitude, the innate ability for language learning, motivation is an important determinant of language ability.²⁹ Motivating reasons must be clarified so that they reflect an ultimate goal (for example, completing a college-level language requirement would not be a goal of language study) and then classified. He identifies two types of motivations for learning a second language: integrative and instrumental, two terms which have been adopted and used widely in subsequent research in the field. The first involves the desire on the part of the language learner to “learn about, interact with, or become closer to, the second language community.”³⁰ For an immigrant learning English in the United States, examples of this integrative motivation could be a desire to have more American friends or a wish to feel more a part of the “American” society. Conversely, instrumental motivation is exhibited by an individual who is learning a language as a practical means to a particular end. The classic example of

²⁸ Robert C. Gardner, *Social Psychology and Second Language Learning: The Role of Attitudes and Motivation* (London: Edward Arnold, 1985) 50.

²⁹ Rod Ellis *The Study of Second Language Acquisition*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994) 237

³⁰ Gardner 1985, 51-54.

instrumental motivation is someone learning a new language in order to get a higher-salaried job; this could also arguably include a desire to help children with their schoolwork. Gardner asserts, “there is a relationship between attitudes and motivation on the one hand and second language achievement on the other,”³¹ and indeed, a number of studies have demonstrated a strong correlation between an integrative motivation and second language learning.³² Thus, students with an integrative motivation might experience a higher level of ESL -- English as a Second Language -- or ESOL -- English for Speakers of Other Languages – learning.³³

For the purposes of this paper though, we need to ascertain whether Latino students learning English have an integrative or instrumental motivation. The first would indicate a desire to assimilate to US society, a judgment that English language skills would enable the speaker to feel stronger ties with the US culture. The speaker, generally a first-generation immigrant, might then pass these integrative motivations on to his or her children, furthering the process of assimilation, or the process through which cultural and social boundaries between different people are dissolved. The second, in contrast, might demonstrate an interest in achieving the tangible benefits that are conferred on English speakers (for example, obtaining a better job) and not signify a desire for assimilation. A better job, achieved through improved English ability, may incidentally increase integration (if the English-proficient immigrant has a high proportion of Anglophone coworkers, for example), but without an integrative motivation, it is unlikely that the immigrant will initiate steps toward assimilation. By adopting selected cultural practices of the host group (in this

³¹ Robert C. Gardner, “Attitudes and Motivation in Second Language Learning” in *Bilingualism, Multiculturalism, and Second Language Learning*, ed. Allan G. Reynolds. (Hillsdale, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1991) 47 -50.

³² Rod Ellis, *The Study of Second Language Acquisition*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994) 510.

³³ Henceforth, we will use the more inclusive ESOL, which acknowledges the fact that many English students are learning their third or fourth language.

case, language) while eschewing further involvement in the host society, a large proportion of ESOL learners who display only instrumental motivations may suggest an assimilative process stalled in acculturation-only. Though by no means guaranteeing the pessimistic vision outlined by Buchanan and Huntington, high levels of instrumental motivation could reasonably indicate a lack of desire on the part of the Latino immigrant to assimilate into US Society.

A basic, globally applicable assumption is that a person emigrating to a certain country will learn the language of that country: Chinese moving to Chile learn Spanish, Sudanese moving to France learn French, and Latinos moving to the United States learn English. In most cases, the immigrant language minority population is so far numerically inferior to that of the language majority that the incoming residents have no choice but to learn the language of the majority in order to live and work in the country. As we have established, however, a number of parties -- from political scientist Huntington to anonymous blog posters reflecting popular sentiment -- feel that the sheer number of Latino immigrants in the United States is shifting the language majority/minority balance to the point where immigrants may no longer desire or need to learn the majority language, resulting in a radical shift in the cultural and linguistic landscape.³⁴

Chapter Two of this thesis will explore the reasons why a certain sector of society, represented by Huntington, believes that the perseverance of Spanish is not detrimental to select immigrants. This signifies a belief that Latinos don't need to learn English, and the deterrents cited explain the counterlogical argument that certain minority language residents of a country may not benefit from learning the majority language. The second half of the chapter studies the evidence that Latino

³⁴ Huntington 2004b, Staff Reports 2008, Media Matters 2008.

immigrants are in fact undergoing a process of linguistic acculturation, but questions the significance of this, whether proven linguistic acculturation is leading to a result of assimilation into US society.

Chapter Three outlines the setup of the current study that was conducted to test the instrumental or integrative motivations of Latino students currently enrolled in ESOL courses in Boston, Massachusetts, and Chapter Four examines the basic demographic data conducted from participants in this study to draw conclusions about the general characteristics of adult Latino ESOL students in Boston. It also analyzes their demographic data in light of the deterrents mentioned in Chapter Two, to test to what extent students overcame these perceived obstacles in order to begin learning English. Chapter Five features the profiles of eight ESOL students that participated in the in-depth survey interview, highlighting their demographic data as well as their motivations for English acquisition. Chapter Six analyzes the recorded motivations of all students in the present study, drawing conclusions about their instrumental or integrative-ness and suggesting specific profiles of students who may be inclined more toward a pragmatic (instrumental) or social (integrative) motivation. The concluding chapter summarizes the findings of this study and its implications about the assimilative process of Latinos in the United States.

Chapter Two:

Latinos and Learning English – Assessing the Evidence

“When I start to take English, it’s hard, I feel like I never gonna learn English. It’s so difficult in the city where I was living [East Boston] most people speak Spanish. They answer you in Spanish.”³⁵

There is undeniably more Spanish in the air than there was even two decades ago, as media markets and politicians strive to reach a new demographic and businesses cater to a potentially large source of revenue.³⁶ But does an increased presence of the Spanish language imply that immigrants are not learning English? Many would say yes; immigrants are not linguistically acculturating. “As the number of Latino Americans rises, the pressures to learn English may fall. The Spanish language is now so common throughout the United States that it is relatively painless for a member of that community to progress through life without ever learning English,” says Federal Judge J. Harvie Wilkinson.³⁷ In his book, *Who are We?*

³⁵ The author’s interview with Nogly, 30, student at Gardner, 6 March 2008.

³⁶ Jacoby 2007, 3.

³⁷ Wilkinson 1995,161.

Challenges to America's National Identity, Samuel Huntington lays out a summary of the specific factors that certain anti-immigrant and culture preservationist groups allege facilitate the maintenance of Spanish in the Latino American culture.

The impact of the predominance of Spanish-speaking immigrants is reinforced by many other factors: the proximity of their countries of origin; their absolute numbers; the improbability of this flow ending or being significantly reduced; their geographical concentration; their home government policies promoting their migration and influence in American society and politics; the support of many elite Americans for multiculturalism, diversity, bilingual education, and affirmative action; the economic incentives for American businesses to cater to Latino tastes, use Spanish in their business and advertising, and hire Spanish-speaking employees.³⁸

An examination of the veracity of each of these allegations would be beyond the scope of the current research as well as unproductive in a specialized study about motivations. However, in order to demonstrate the validity of the argument that immigrants can successfully live in the United States without speaking the majority language, it is important to point out that several of these asserted deterrents to learning English have been empirically verified by independent sources. By discussing immigrants' geographical concentrations in ethnic neighborhoods and strong ties to the country of origin, as mentioned above, as well as low levels of education in the native country and barriers to participation in ESOL programs, we can understand many of the deterrents to learning English. This information is useful not only in giving credibility to the argument for the possibility of living without the majority language, as mentioned, but also for establishing the barriers that have been overcome by Latino students currently studying English. After establishing the perceived deterrents for learning English, the second part of this chapter will focus on evidence that despite these deterrents, Latino immigrants across the United States are in fact learning English.

³⁸ Huntington 2004a, 19.

Let us begin with the assertions of geographical concentration as conducive to the continued use of the Spanish language. A thorough analysis of 1990 census data by Jasso and Rosenzweig suggests that “Spanish-language foreign-born men residing in a local area with substantial Spanish-language concentrations suffer no penalty for not knowing English”, and even that such immigrants will sacrifice lower wages to live in these so-called immigrant enclaves.³⁹ A study by Barry Chiswick and Roger Miller concurs that immigrant/linguistic concentrations “tend to retard the acquisition of or investment in destination-specific skills (e.g., language proficiency) and to lower nominal earnings. The assimilation or adjustment of immigrants is enhanced the smaller the extent of the concentration.”⁴⁰ These ethnic neighborhoods logically reduce the cost of not knowing English, as day-to-day transactions can be carried out in Spanish. In Miami, Huntington argues, Latinos “created an enclave city with its own culture and economy, in which assimilation and Americanization were unnecessary and in some measure undesired.”⁴¹ Residents of these ethnic neighborhoods can attend religious services, vote, pay taxes, and receive many government services all while speaking Spanish.⁴² Many times, workers can even obtain a low-skills job in an ethnic enclave, making the economic, as well as social, cost of not speaking English quite low.⁴³ As Jasso and Rosenzweig conclude, by locating in an immigrant enclave, “the Spanish language immigrant can almost completely eliminate the effects of lack of English language proficiency.”⁴⁴

³⁹ Guillermina Jasso and Mark R. Rosenzweig, *The New Chosen People: Immigrants in the US* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1990) 319.

⁴⁰ Barry Chiswick and Roger Miller “Do Enclaves Matter in Immigrant Adjustment?” *Discussion Paper No. 449* 2002, 25.

⁴¹ Huntington 2004b, 43.

⁴² Wilkinson 1995, 161.

⁴³ Geoffrey Carliner, “The Language Ability of U.S. Immigrants: Assimilation and Cohort Effects” *International Migration Review*, Vol. 34, No. 1. (2000), 161.

⁴⁴ Jasso and Rosenzweig 1990, 327.

A second central reason for a perceived tendency of Latino immigrants to fail to learn English deals with the “proximity of their countries of origin” as previously quoted, a proximity that doubtlessly aids in the maintenance of ties to the home country. The shared border between the United States and Mexico facilitates the relatively low-cost voyage between the two countries. Central American immigrants face a longer and slightly more costly journey to the United States, but it is still seen as a much less permanent move than the voyage made by European immigrants a century ago. Immigration selectivity, therefore, is low: Less committed immigrants may easily journey to the United States and retain the possibility of a low-cost return to their native country⁴⁵. The popular “two year myth” propagated in many Latin American countries leads Latinos to believe that after two years of living and working in the United States, they can return to their countries of origin with their earnings and experience a vastly improved quality of life.⁴⁶ Never mind that this myth rarely comes to fruition, the expectation of a temporary stay would plausibly offer fewer incentives to English acquisition, especially for immigrants settling in a region predominantly populated by Latinos. Globalization is an additional factor that undoubtedly lowers the opportunity cost for immigrant families seeking to maintain transnational ties to their home countries. Travel to the home country is cheap and relatively accessible, and readily available phone cards and internet cafes offer cheap and instantaneous communication with the native country.⁴⁷ These continued connections with an immigrant’s country of origin likely contribute to a negative

⁴⁵ Chomsky 2005, 112.

⁴⁶ Jennifer Gordon, *Suburban Sweatshops: The Fight for Immigrant Rights* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2007) 34.

⁴⁷ Foner 2004, 284.

perception of long-range language-learning,⁴⁸ an observation confirmed by Jasso and Rosenzweig's analysis of census data: "Among the foreign-born from Spanish-language countries, those from countries located nearer to the United States are both less likely to have acquired English-language skills and more likely to be located in communities with higher proportions of Spanish-language residents."⁴⁹

Level of education is firmly associated with a lower cost and greater benefit to learning English.⁵⁰ Latino immigrants, however, have notoriously low levels of education: among the population in 2006, fully 50% lacked a high school degree. Research demonstrates that educationally disadvantaged adults frequently experience psychological attainment barriers such as "a lack of confidence in their ability to learn and negative perceptions of the utility of education."⁵¹ Pedagogical studies suggest that if a student has not completed a minimum level of education in his or her first language, learning a second one is demonstrably more difficult; for example, students who did not learn about sentence structure in Spanish will have difficulty in understanding the placement of indirect object pronouns in English as compared with Spanish. It has been observed that an additional year of education increases the probability of fluency by about five percent.⁵² The level of education in an immigrant's native country also correlates with economic utility of English. It is generally concluded that immigrants with a high level of schooling in their native language (twelve or more years) will reap more economic benefit from increased English proficiency, as much as a 76% jump in earnings. For immigrants with low levels of basic education, however, (and it bears noting that a third of foreign-born

⁴⁸ Elisabeth Hayes, "Hispanic Adults and ESL Programs: Barriers to Participation. *TESOL Quarterly*, Vol 23 No 1 (1989) 48.

⁴⁹ Jasso 1990, 328-29.

⁵⁰ Carliner 2000, 161.

⁵¹ Hayes 1989, 48.

⁵² Carliner 2000, 179.

Latinos have less than 9 years of schooling)⁵³ the economic benefits from learning English are limited, as increased English proficiency results in only a 4% increase in wages.⁵⁴ As such, Latinos without a high level of education in their native country will likely face both mental and emotional barriers when trying to learn English, as well as a decreased economic incentive to learn English.

Aside from the aforementioned three reasons why learning English may not be necessary or useful for immigrants, there are a number of barriers associated with ESOL classes themselves. By surveying 200 Latino adults actively attending ESOL classes, Elisabeth Hayes identifies the most important perceived barriers to English acquisition, including: “I didn’t have time to go to school,” “I thought it would take too long to go to school,” “It was more important to get a job than go to school,” “I didn’t think I could go to classes regularly,” and “I couldn’t pay for child care or transportation.” Her research also demonstrates psychological or emotional reasons for not learning English, including, “I felt I was too old to learn,” “I didn’t want to answer questions in class,” “I thought starting classes would be difficult, with lots of questions and forms to fill out,” “I didn’t know anyone who was going to the adult education classes,” and “I was afraid I wasn’t smart enough to do the work.”⁵⁵ Taken together, these results suggest a number of barriers, most commonly relating to the prioritization of work over education or lack of transportation or childcare resources, but also barriers that suggest a lack of self-confidence among immigrants. Many times, as discussed, the lack of self-confidence may stem from a low level of native country education.

⁵³ Pew Latino Center 2008, 24.

⁵⁴ Tia Elena Martinez and Ted Wang *Supporting English Language Acquisition: Opportunities for Foundations to Strengthen the Social and Economic Well-being of Immigrant Families* (Baltimore MD: Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2007) 8.

⁵⁵ Hayes 1989, 55-57.

Despite these reasons why Latino immigrants would not need to learn English, several indicators suggest that Latinos across the United States are in fact acquiring English skills, and at rates more or less equal to those of other immigrants. The US Department of Education's Office of Vocational and Adult Education, Division of Adult Education and Literacy finds that 1,172,579 adults, 71% of whom were Latino, were enrolled in AEFLA-funded English literacy programs in 2005 – according to census figures from the same year, this number represented about 1 in 10 of the 10.3 million foreign-born US residents who speak English less than very well.⁵⁶ Even more students may be waiting to take classes: a 2005 survey conducted by the Adult Education State Directors' Professional Development organization of the English class waiting lists of 1383 grant recipients shows a mid-estimate of 93,840 students on waiting lists at the survey sites. This only includes the 917 sites that kept waiting lists; the remainder of institutions did not. The researchers note that oftentimes, institutions give up on waiting lists when their length becomes overwhelming, instead reverting to a lottery system to allocate class spots. Although breakdowns by ethnicity were not available, it is reasonable to assume, given that a large majority of students in the AEFLA study were Latino, that a similar majority of waitlisted students were also of Latino origin. A recent New York Times article testifies to the same trend of long waiting lists and demand outstripping supply. In Framingham, Massachusetts, a suburb of Boston, hundreds of people used to spend the night in line in order to secure a registration spot in ESOL classes. The new lottery system involves picking handwritten names from a box.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Fernanda Santos “As Demand Grows, Waiting Lists Lengthen” *The New York Times*, 27 February 2007

⁵⁷ *ibid* 2.

The mere fact that students are enrolling in English classes, however, does not imply that their English is necessarily improving. After all, studies have shown that it takes adults an average of 110 hours of instruction for English proficiency to rise one level of ability,⁵⁸ and anyone who has attempted to learn a second language can attest to the difficulty of the task. Perhaps a better determinant of the success of linguistic acculturation is the measured longitudinal trends of English acquisition. Using data from the 2000 census, Portes and Rimbaut conclude that among recent (1990-2000) arrivals to the United States, 44 percent reported poor or completely lacking English skills. Only a quarter of pre-1980 arrivals, however, reported similarly deficient ability, leading the authors to conclude that English ability improves with time, independent of other variables.⁵⁹ More recently, data collected by the Pew Hispanic Center in 2006 suggests a continuing trend: 58 percent of Latino immigrants arriving after 2000 spoke English less than very well, while only 18% of pre-1990 arrivals had limited English.⁶⁰ Portes and Rimbaut also found that linguistically isolated households, in which no person aged fourteen or older has a high level of English, were found among slightly more than two in five recent arrivals. Less than a fifth of the pre-1980 immigrants reported a similar situation of linguistic isolation.⁶¹ Another study, based on data from the 1980 and 1990 US censuses of population, finds that each year of US residency increases the probability of English fluency by 1.1 percentage points. The author also writes that “among native-born children of ethnic groups who have come to the US in large numbers during the past 30 years, such as Latinos and East Asians, a substantial fraction did not speak English well

⁵⁸ McHugh et al 2007, 6.

⁵⁹ Portes and Rimbaut 2006, 224.

⁶⁰ Pew Hispanic Center 2006, 23.

⁶¹ Portes and Rimbaut 2006, 222.

when they entered grade school, but at most 3 to 5 percent of teenagers and adults in these groups reported speaking English poorly or not at all.”⁶² Within the span of 20 or more years, it seems the majority of previously English-limited immigrants will increase their language ability.

Generational analyses of the acquisition of English by immigrant families have consistently found a similar pattern. Some members of the immigrant generation learn English, though the majority continues to speak the native language at home. The second generation, attending school in English, typically understands their native language but chooses to respond to their parents in English. Members of this second generation tend to speak English at home and when forming their own households; thus, in the third generation, English is spoken almost exclusively with loss of the native tongue rampant.⁶³ As Huntington points out, the recent nature of the wave of Latino immigration makes comprehensive analysis of the language acquisition of the second and third generations impossible, and the possibility exists that the sheer size of the Spanish-speaking population, as well as strong ties to family members in the country of origin, will encourage continued use, and even preference, of the Spanish language in the third generation and beyond.⁶⁴ Alba acknowledges data that suggest Latinos may be a generation behind in their switch to English, but concludes that, “by any standard, linguistic assimilation is widespread, and more or less complete assimilation – that is, English monolingualism with at best fragmentary knowledge of a mother tongue – would appear to be the experience of the majority in the third generation of all contemporary immigrant groups.”⁶⁵ An

⁶² Carliner 2000, 179.

⁶³ Alba and Nee 2003, 220.

⁶⁴ Huntington 2004b, 38.

⁶⁵ Alba and Nee 2003, 228.

extensive binational longitudinal study of Mexican migrants carried out by Espinosa and Massey finds the same conclusion: “At the broadest level, therefore, our results question the alarm frequently expressed about the threat of immigration to the status of English as the language of government, commerce, and public affairs in the United States. Our study of people from the largest contemporary source of immigrants to the United States, a population whose connection to the United States and level of sociocultural integration are often regarded as problematic, we find very clear evidence of an ongoing process of linguistic assimilation.”⁶⁶

As we have seen, there are many documented reasons why Latino immigrants may not need to learn English or why English skills may not necessarily serve their interests, ranging from the regional concentrations of the population to the questionable economic benefits of English acquisition for uneducated immigrants and the increasingly transnational nature of immigrant families. Yet, an equally large body of empirical evidence suggests that Latinos are, in fact, undergoing linguistic acculturation, albeit at a pace slightly slower than previous waves of immigrants. The key word in this assertion is “linguistic”; as we discussed in the previous chapter, acculturation or linguistic assimilation does not imply the implementation of the remaining stages of assimilation. The crucial determinant in projecting assimilation into US culture, then, will be the reasons why Latinos feel it is important to acquire English skills.

Although scant, current research on this exact topic does exist. In a 1977 survey of 60 Latino students at a school in Arizona, Oller et al examined reasons for coming to the US and reasons for wanting to learn English. He concludes,

⁶⁶ Espinosa and Massey 1997, 45.

Among the reasons for coming to the US, instrumental motives were ranked more important than integrative ones. Highest ranked was “to learn English”, next “for job training” then “to get a job”, and so forth ... from this it would appear that subjects are fairly instrumentally motivated, yet of the questions concerning reasons for learning ESL, the two highest ranked questions are typically considered as indicative of an integrative orientation toward the target language and culture, namely questions 21 [interest in the culture] and 22 [interest in the language], in that order.⁶⁷

These results are interesting, but they test a different question: why immigrants came to the United States, as opposed to why they began English classes after establishing residence in the country. Furthermore, given that this survey was conducted 30 years ago, well before the recent increase in immigration, it may not be very applicable to the current Latino population. More recently, the Pew Hispanic Center in 2004 surveyed over 2,200 Latino adults nationwide about their attitudes toward the English language. Of foreign-born respondents, 57 percent answered affirmatively to the question “Do immigrants have to speak English to say they are part of American society, or not?” Two-fifths felt that immigrants need not speak English to consider themselves part of American society. While this question clearly tests an integrative motivation, it does not tell us whether the respondents themselves spoke English, or were taking steps toward that end. English ability may be important to immigrants in the abstract, but respondents themselves may be deterred from class participation by one of the reasons outlined in this chapter. When 1500 Latinos in a separate survey were asked, “How important is the goal of teaching English to the children of immigrant families?” 96 percent of the foreign-born felt that the missive was “very important.”⁶⁸ This question does not ask *why* teaching English is important; it’s possible that respondents merely feel English is

⁶⁷ John Oller, Lori Baca, and Fred Vigil. “Attitudes and Attained Proficiency in ESL: A Sociolinguistic Study of Mexican Americans in the Southwest” *TESOL Quarterly*, Vol. 11 No. 2. (1977), 177.

⁶⁸ Pew Hispanic Center Fact Sheet. “Hispanic Attitudes Toward Learning English” 2006.

necessary for a better job and are not interested in questions of integration. The research for the present survey, then, will expand the paradigm created by the previous two by serving as a contemporary analysis of the integrative and instrumental motivations that Latinos have for enrolling in ESOL classes.

Chapter Three:

Testing English Acquisition and Motivations Among Latino ESOL Students – A Framework for the Current Study

“[My husband told me] please please you have to learn English ... My first day [of English] was frustrating, I ask myself, ‘if you don’t go to this place where will you go? Finish.’”⁶⁹

As little previous research has focused specifically on the motivations of adult Latino students in ESOL programs, the overarching focus of this study has been to gather and record such primary source data.

In order to best obtain accurate representations of students’ motivations, I decided that a personal interview would be most effective. As Gardner noted in his research, surveys, while effective for quantitative data, may not adequately measure the strength of a particular motivation. A written survey would handicap the significant number of Latino students who are not fully literate neither in English nor Spanish. Additionally, the strength of language learning motivations is difficult

⁶⁹ The author’s interview with Miriam, 44, unaffiliated student, on 14 March 2008.

to measure using a written questionnaire. Participant observation, while a useful method of data collection, does not reveal the mental processes that compose language motivation, and would be difficult to achieve with more than a handful of English classes in the limited timeframe of this study. Oller et al, in their aforementioned examination of motivations, suggest that:

“Indirect scales concerning subjects’ attitudes toward themselves, their native language group, and the target language group seem to be more informative than scales which ask subjects directly about their motives for learning ESL or for traveling to the US. It occurs to us that the sometimes anomalous results that arise in relation to direct questions may be due to the tendency of subjects who do not have strong opinions on a topic to offer an answer which they think will conform most closely to the preferences of the person or persons who posed the question.”⁷⁰

Their perception of an interviewer bias is valid and undoubtedly present in the current as well as any participant research project. However, the suggestion that an scale to measure attitudes will prove more accurate in determining the motives for learning ESL is dubious; it seems to only test an integrative (whether the target society is a desirable one into which to assimilate) rather than instrumental motivation. After examining all of the possible methods of data collection, I determined that a ten to fifteen-minute personal interview with students speaking the language of their choice would be the most efficient and reliable structure for the current survey.

In order to understand basic tenets of the interview process, I consulted the appendices of two highly-regarded studies, Whyte’s *Street Corner Society* and Fenno’s *Home Style*.⁷¹ Both of these research projects are based on participant observation; each author lived or spent a great deal of time in the given environment

⁷⁰ Oller et al 1977, 183.

⁷¹ William Foote Whyte, *Street Corner Society* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1955). Richard E Fenno, Jr. *Home Style: House Members in Their Districts* (New York: Longman, 2003).

and based his conclusions on the observations culled from such exposure. Despite the difference in the information gathering technique, their suggestions on conducting oneself in order to achieve the most unbiased results, approaching the target society, and introducing the project idea proved helpful. They emphasized the importance of establishing rapport with the subject, and indeed, it seemed as though the more time I spent talking about general topics (how they liked English classes, my own arduous acquisition of Spanish, how even after much practice I can't pronounce "Boston" with a Spanish accent, etc) before beginning the actual interview led to a more talkative and informative response. Fenno noted of his project that, "it is an obvious characteristic of this project, and of participant observation research generally, that it deals with a small number of cases ... it was a deliberate decision to sacrifice analytical range for analytical depth."⁷² The present study has neither the depth of Fenno's project (he spent years following selected Congressmen to their home districts) nor the sheer number of participants of many surveys. In falling in the middle of these two extremes, however, the current study is able both to generalize trends (with a statistically significant n=34) and examine in-depth some of the reasons behind language acquisition.

Boston, as the site of the university for which this thesis was written, was the obvious choice of location for the study. As it happens, the city's ESOL population is rapidly growing: "In 2005, the Massachusetts Department of Education reported that more than 18,000 residents were on waiting lists for ESL classes; the average wait is six months to two years."⁷³ Through my personal connection as a volunteer

⁷² *Ibid* 250.

⁷³ Amy Beeler and Julie Murray, "Improving Immigrant Workers' Economic Prospects: A Review of the Literature" in *Securing the Future: US Immigrant Integration Policy*, ed. Michael Fix. (Migration Policy Institute, 2007) 115; Martinez and Wang 2007, 14.

with the Service Employees International Union Local 615, permission was granted to interview students in the SEIU ESOL classes held in downtown Boston. María DiChiappari at the Boston College Neighborhood Center was very helpful in securing the support of several other organizations in the Allston/Brighton Adult Literacy Coalition, namely the Gardner Extended Services School and The Literacy Connection. With the assistance of director Valerie Vigoda, interviews were conducted at the Allston-based Gardner School, and Sister Pat Andrews facilitated interviews with Brighton's Literacy Connection. Sr. Andrews then introduced me to Sr. Nancy Braceland, coordinator of the ESOL program at Roslindale-based Casserly House. Professor Debbie Rusch, of Boston College, recommended Lisa Perry, a teacher at the Guild School in East Boston, who arranged for me to speak with students in their ESOL program. The final site, Federated Dorchester Neighborhood Housing, was contacted via email, and Mila Monteiros generously agreed to allow me to interview her students. In an attempt to expand the geographical diversity of the sample, a bevy of other organizations were contacted, including: The central branch of the Boston Public Library, Allston-based Jackson/Mann Community Center, the Brookline Adult and Community Education Program, East Boston Ecumenical City Council, East Boston Harborside Community School, ABCD North End ESOL Program, Dorchester's Mujeres Unidas, and the Greater Boston Neighborhood of Affordable Housing. Many times, email and phone inquiries did not meet with a response; of the organizations that did contact me, several expressed concerns for student privacy, a desire to limit interruption during class time, and/or a student population primarily composed of non-Hispanic immigrants.

Students were pulled on an individual, or in some cases, dual, basis for a ten to fifteen minute interview generally held during class time. Although it would have

been preferable to arrange meetings prior to and after class in order to limit learning disruption, many students were fitting these English classes into already tight schedules, and in most all of the institutions, organizers felt it better to sacrifice actual class time. In the case of students whose English level permitted it, interviews were conducted in English so as to maximize opportunities to practice the target language. In the case of Level 1 and Level 2 learners, or those who were less comfortable with their English, the interview was conducted in Spanish, which I speak fluently. Interviews were not taped; as both sample studies by Fenno and Whyte proposed that audiotaping negatively affected results, it was determined that a careful orthographic transcription of the subject's statements would better encourage unbiased results.⁷⁴

One of the biggest advantages to an interview as opposed to a survey is the possibility for the interviewer to direct the flow of conversation, explaining in detail a question to the interview subject, obtaining additional clarification on an ambiguous answer, and posing relevant follow-up questions. In order to provide structure to the results, the following questions were asked of each participating student; many times, however, I made additional queries or refined a question in the course of the ensuing conversation. Two of the questions were specifically asked in order to provide insight into the issue at hand: whether adult Latino ESOL students have integrative or instrumental motivations for learning English. Other questions established a demographic profile for the sample set, allowing me to suggest motivational trends among people with a similar profile. Still more questions tested what effect the deterring factors to ESOL participation, as mentioned in Chapter Two, had on this sample. By collecting a wide set of data, I am able to provide a

⁷⁴ Fenno 2003.

demographical profile of Boston-area ESOL students, analyze the effect of perceived deterrents to English acquisition, and look for patterns in motivations. The expansive collection of data also enables other researchers or ESOL institutions themselves to test a specific hypothesis relevant to their own interests.

The standard survey questions are as follows:

1. Name (first only)
2. Age
3. Country of Origin
4. When did you arrive in US, and why did you emigrate?
5. How long did you go to school in your home country? Did you know English before arriving?
6. Where do you live (neighborhood), and do mostly Spanish-speaking people live in your community? Do you need to use English in your daily life?
7. When was the first time you took an English class in the US? What did you want to achieve by taking that class? Why did you stop?
8. How did you learn about this institution? When did you begin to take classes?
9. What are the main things you are hoping to get out of taking these English classes? (suggestions provided: Find a job that pays more, Find a job you like better, Be able to help children with school life, Talk to healthcare professionals, landlords, bosses, etc., Have more American friends, Be able to get around more easily in Boston, Feel more confident when speaking English, Take citizenship test, Enjoy learning a new language)

It is important to note that the student's English level (on a scale of 1-5, when institutions evaluated students on such a scale, and a level assigned by the interviewer, for students at Literacy Connection, Casserly House, and Guild School) was also recorded.

Questions one through five establish a demographic profile that will be used in Chapter Six to suggest motivations trends.

Questions five through seven are helpful in verifying the extent to which this group has overcome the perceived deterrents, outlined in the previous chapter, to attend ESOL classes.

Question eight helps to establish the manner in which immigrants select an ESOL program, and whether their selection is based on geographical convenience, schedule, the strength of the program itself, or other factors.

Part of question seven deals with initial motivations at the commencement of ESOL study. When initially composing this study, I wanted to test the pattern of changing motivations over the course of ESOL study. During a conversation with Julia Finkelstein, a teacher and volunteer coordinator at the SEIU 615, she observed that students new to ESOL classes often felt that English was the singular key to a better future in the United States. As they advanced with their English and found that it didn't reap the unrealistic rewards they had expected, many students either dropped out or altered their motivation to reflect a more tangible goal, i.e. helping students with homework. Although I continue to feel that this is a fascinating topic for study, it would obviously be better explored in a longitudinal study, as asking students about their motivations at a past point in time is extremely difficult. Thus, the part of question seven that asks, "what did you want to achieve by taking that class" was only asked of several students before I looked at their blank faces and realized that collecting data on this topic was not going to be feasible.

Question nine, then, is obviously the crucial question in determining motivation. I initially asked the question without giving examples; if a student seemed puzzled, or gave a generic response such as "learning English is important for everything," I then showed or read to them the examples and asked them to pick the ones they found most important. Through the course of conversation, if the student assigned several motivations to be "very important", as discussed in Chapter Six, I tried to determine which one of the listed motivations they found to be the most important.

As with any participant research endeavor, this model has its limitations. The sampling of instructional institutions is not random; given a very limited time in which to complete this study, they were selected for geographical convenience and ability to quickly gain permission to interview students. As previously mentioned, a longitudinal study, in which the motivations of beginning English students are tracked for a number of years while they attain English proficiency, would logically be ideal, as relying on student self-reporting of motivations at a past time is prone to error. Also, the assessment of English level on a scale as broad as 1-5 clearly fails to assess students' command of the language with a high degree of accuracy; two level-four students may differ widely in ability. The alternative, administering an English skills test, would be time-consuming and unnecessary, given that the main objective of this study is not to test how much English students have learned (though it is certainly an important variable) but rather what they are seeking to achieve with improved English skills. As previously noted, interviewer bias is a factor in all participant research studies: in this survey, it is felt that interviewer bias could be attributed to the interviewer's distinctly Anglo appearance and non-native Spanish accent. It is certainly possible that Latinos, not wanting to offend a natural-born citizen of their adopted country, changed their responses to reflect a more pro-American viewpoint.

In order to fully appreciate the results and understand the variety of institutions at which ESOL courses are offered, it will be helpful to have a brief introduction to each of the survey sites. Although this study was of course limited by the willingness of each site to participate, I believe that these organizations impressively demonstrate the variety of free ESOL instruction that students can receive, from large group classes to individual tutoring. Their diverse geographical

locations – Allston, Brighton, Central Boston, Dorchester, East Boston, and Roslindale -- draw students from many of Boston's neighborhoods, including some of the areas where Spanish predominates.

The Gardner Extended Services School, in North Allston, holds biweekly evening classes in the multistory brick building of Gardner Elementary School. When I arrived early for the 6:30 pm class time, the after school program was still in session, and shouts of children rang through the empty hallways. Class levels 1-5 are taught by volunteer instructors; the school has a total student enrollment of 78 for the 2007-2008 program year. The majority of students are Latinos, although Brazilian students are also fairly common, a statistic reflecting the high Brazilian population in the Allston-Brighton area. I visited Gardner on March 6, 2008 and had the opportunity to speak with nine students. Pulling one or two students at a time from class, we had conversations while sitting in child-sized blue plastic chairs in the second floor hallway. Simple sentences, written in an unsteady hand on bold sheets of construction paper, covered the walls. Many of the students I talked to had children attending Gardner, and had learned of the ESOL program from them.

The Literacy Connection is a Brighton-based individualized tutoring program run by the Sisters of St. Joseph. The program has four branches in the regional area with a total current enrollment of 150, 61 of whom are Latino. Coordinator Sister Pat Andrews cited a waitlist of 195 students, 47 of whom self-reported to be of Latin American origin. I visited the Brighton branch of the Literacy Connection, housed in the basement of the Sisters' motherhouse, on March 12 and March 14 to speak with two students and their tutors. The labyrinth of small rooms in the lower floor of the residence is the setting for both ESOL classes and a popular citizenship course, and a small library and computer area provides English and career resources for students.

The strong bonds formed between tutors (all nuns) and their students is obvious: on one day, the tutor dropped off both her student and myself at our doorsteps at the end of the session; on the other, I left as the tutor and student prepared to breakfast in one of their favorite restaurants. Both students enjoyed the one-on-one tutoring style of the institution, as well as its convenient location.

The Service Employees International Union Chapter 615 has its headquarters in downtown Boston, a block from Downtown Crossing and within sight of the Common. Class sessions run all day Saturday, taking place in a large room with each ability level having class in a separate corner. The SEIU counts around 125 students split among 11 classes at the central Boston site; all are members of the union, which represents custodial workers in the Boston area. Four satellite sites in the greater Massachusetts area attract an additional 50 students. Roughly 98% of students in the Boston classes are Spanish-speaking; the remainder speak Portuguese. All classes are conducted on Saturdays, due to the janitors' long workweek, and the students interviewed attended classes in the 10:45-1 block on Saturday afternoons. I spoke with two students on March 8, and an additional two students the following week. As the teacher preferred that they not be pulled out of class; interviews were conducted before and after class, limiting the pool of potential students to only those who arrived early or could stay a little late without compromising their plans. As all students are members of the union, many times thematic classes combine grammar and vocabulary with information about union rights. The SEIU was the only interview site not located in the students' neighborhood; rather than attracting students on a geographical basis, it promotes its English classes through the union.

I visited Casserly House twice: on April 1 and April 8. The activities at the house are primarily coordinated by Sister Nancy Braceland, who lives on the second

story of the Roslindale building. The first floor of the home has been converted to classrooms and a small computer lab where ESOL students as well as area youth congregate daily. ESOL classes are held Mondays through Fridays from 9 to 11.30; students may attend however many days they want, but they must attend at least once weekly in order to maintain their student status. Consequently, Sr. Nancy never knows who will be at class on any given day; attendance fluctuates as students work or care for their families. On April 1, I arrived to find not a single Latino student. When I returned a week later, however, I was able to speak with four students. Casserly had the most diverse population of all of the sites I visited, drawing students from Africa, Eastern Europe, Southeast Asia, and the Caribbean in addition to Latin America. In February, Sr. Nancy recorded 39 students from 19 different countries, 7 of which were in Latin America. All of the students that I interviewed lived close to the interview site, including one whose apartment was on the same street, and several cited friends who encouraged them to take classes at the school.

Federated Dorchester Neighborhood Housing runs the Log School, located in the Fields Corner neighborhood of Dorchester. A converted multistory house, the organization offers a variety of resources for the community, including early education, GED preparation, computer instruction, and ESOL courses. These courses take place at either the Log School itself or a nearby offsite location, and are held three times a week from 9am – 1 pm; students are assigned based on level of ability. I was unable to get precise numbers on the population and demographics of Log School ESOL classes, but noted that the greatest proportion of Log School students are Cape Verdean, as evidenced by the many Cape Verde maps and posters lining the walls. When I visited on April 11, however, I was able to speak with four Latinos, all in the level 2 class. Again, most all lived in the neighborhood, although

one woman who recently relocated to Roxbury from Dorchester continued to commute for classes. Many had heard about the free classes from a friend.

The Curtis Guild School, the final interview site, is located a short walk from the Orient Heights T stop in East Boston. It is an elementary school servicing some 200 children; to get to the adult ESOL classroom, I walked through a raucous cafeteria and hallways decorated with bright posters. Classes at Guild are held on Wednesdays and Fridays; the morning session from 9-12 is for beginning English learners, with more advanced students studying from 12.30 to 3. Interviews were conducted on the morning of April 9 and the afternoon of April 11; in total I interviewed ten students, pulling folding chairs into the hallway to speak with students individually. Demographic information was not available, but all of the approximately 20 students that I observed in the two class sessions were female, and all but one were Latina. The majority of the students had children in the elementary school; a cordoned-off section of the ESOL classroom provided on-site daycare for those who were mothers of even younger children. All but one lived in East Boston, the remaining student resided in Revere and learned about the free ESOL course from the basement of the post office.

One student interviewed was not currently a part of any program. María Dichiappari, of the Boston College Neighborhood Center, recommended Miriam as a former student who she knew to be very active in the ESOL community. We met for coffee on March 12 at a small café in Brighton, right down the street for her apartment. During the span of 30 or so minutes, Miriam described her experiences taking classes in Dorchester, Brighton High, ABCD, the Literacy Connection, Jackson Mann, and finally winning a scholarship to study at Harvard Extension. Her current work schedule leaves little time for English classes, but she remains determined to

continue studying whenever possible. After our coffee, Miriam accompanied me to my next appointment at Gardner – she knew Sister Pat and wanted to say hello.

As I previously noted, the setup of this study is not perfect, and a researcher seeking to replicate the investigation would do well to make changes to broaden the sample, eliminate bias, and devote more time to the collection of data, possibly even in the form of a longitudinal study. However, with the assistance of the coordinators of the six survey sites, I have taken pains to construct a sample of students that is, at the very least, representative of Latino ESOL students in the Boston area. The statistically significant nature of this sample signifies an ability that, while not predictive of exact demographics of ESOL students in other communities, can at the very least suggest trends that may be expanded to other populations.

Chapter Four:
A Statistical Profile of Boston ESOL Students –
This is Who Learns English

“I want to learn English for my future, to have a good job, with my kids. They ask me, ‘Papa, can you help me?’ with their homework. It’s necessary for us. We are living here. I have to devote myself to the American lifestyle ... I want to be more important before the eyes of the world.”⁷⁵

The first part of this chapter explores the basic demographic information that was collected from the 34 students I interviewed for this project: gender, age, country of origin, level of English, years of education in the native country, age at immigration, years in the United States, years after immigration that the first English class was taken, and years of English. Chart 1 of the appendix also summarizes these findings. Taken together, this data constructs a portrait of the students that enroll in Boston-area ESOL classes, and, when possible, I contrast this snapshot with the Latino immigrant population as a whole. In the second part, I

⁷⁵ The author’s interview with Denny, 40, student at Gardner, on 6 March 2008.

compare the deterring factors cited in chapter two (ethnic neighborhood, ties to country of origin, low levels of education, and barriers to ESOL class participation) with specific data collected in the interviews to discuss the saliency of each deterring factor for the current sample.

Of the 34 total students interviewed, ten were males and 24 were females. While the majority of interview sites were split approximately 50-50 between sexes, the ten students interviewed at Guild were all female, as were the two from Literacy Connection. I spoke with three females and one male at Log School, and two males and two females at Casserly House. Since I visited all these sites during normal working hours, this would seem to suggest that males have less desire to take English classes during the day, probably due to work-related reasons. Supporting this hypothesis, several of the students at Guild commented that they were stay-at-home mothers while their husbands worked; other women spoke about scheduling babysitting, cleaning, or hairdressing jobs around class times. The average age of the aggregate population was 35.2, although this ranged from 17 to 65. The median age was also 35, suggesting that, despite the variation, the sample was fairly balanced between both ends of the spectrum. Age, unlike gender, was fairly consistent across all interview sites, with students in their twenties frequently sharing classes with other immigrants two decades older than them.

All of the students interviewed were first generation immigrants to the United States, an unsurprising statistic given the body of research suggesting second-generation and later immigrants will speak English fluently.⁷⁶ Nine students were from Guatemala, seven from Mexico, seven from El Salvador, four from Honduras, and two from the Dominican Republic. The remaining students hailed from Chile,

⁷⁶ Alba and Nee 2003

Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, and Puerto Rico. It was interesting to observe the country of origin breakdown by site: Of the four students interviewed at the SEIU, all were Salvadorean. All of the Mexican students were enrolled in classes at the Guild School; all of the Guatemalans took classes at Gardner. The Log School had the greatest geographical diversity: of the four students interviewed, each cited a different country of origin. As class populations predominantly hailed from the area surrounding each school, these figures suggest heavy regional concentrations among Latinos of the same country of origin. Furthermore, there seems to be considerable diversity among the countries represented. While over 60% of the Latino population in the United States is of Mexican origin,⁷⁷ only 21% of interviewees came from that country. In this sample, 79% of respondents came from Central America, with 12% from South America and only 3 students, or 9%, from the Caribbean. The predominantly Central American origin of the sample is consistent with the foreign-born population of Latinos by sub-region of birth, as calculated by the U.S. Census Bureau in 2004. According to their statistics, 71%, or 13,000,000 of the roughly 18,000,000 total immigrants, were of Central American origin. 18% came from the Caribbean, with the remaining 11% from South America⁷⁸. Thus, the surveyed population of Latinos taking ESOL courses in Boston appears to be skewed toward non-Mexican Central Americans. After comparing the demographics of this sample with the nationwide Latino population, it is also interesting to contrast it with the Latino population in Boston. An examination of 2000 US Census data for Boston found 26% of Latinos to be Puerto Rican, 14% Dominican, 10% Guatemalan, 11%

⁷⁷ Pew Hispanic 2006, 5

⁷⁸ US Bureau of Census, *Foreign-Born Population from Latin America by Sex, Age, and Sub-region of Birth: 2004* <www.census.gov/population>. Accessed 10 April 2008.

Salvadorean, and only 5% Mexican⁷⁹. Thus, it appears that this sample of students, as compared with the Latino population of Boston, is heavily dominated by Central Americans. Further investigation would be necessary to determine the reason for this variation specific national population taking English classes, or whether the population shift is merely the result of a non-randomized sample.

As was previously noted, the student's level of English was also recorded. Obviously, reducing ability in a foreign language to a 1-5 scale is simplistic at best, but in lieu of administering all students a precise test of the English language, it is the only measure of ability available. At sites where students were separated into classes by levels, the English skills of each student often differed widely; at the SEIU, for example, levels 3 and 4 are grouped into the same class and while some students have good command of past tense verbs, others struggle to conjugate the present tense. Many of the SEIU and Gardner students were placed into classes by way of a diagnostic exam; when assigning a level to students in mixed classes, however, I used my prior experience with ESOL learners and the previously interviewed students to gauge the interviewee's ability. Analyzing the language in which the student answered questions, however, signals that the level assignments are generally accurate. After being informed that the interview could be conducted in the language of their choice, all 11 of the levels 4 or 5 students spoke only English or a mix of Spanish and English. 13 of 14 levels 1 and 2 students chose to speak in Spanish, with the remaining woman, a student at the Log School, speaking a mix of the two languages. The 10 level three students split fairly evenly among the two languages or a combination thereof. Logically, students with a higher level of English ability would

⁷⁹ Mandira Kala and Carlos Jones, "Boston" *The Mario Gastón Institute for Latino Community Development and Public Policy*, 2006.

feel comfortable conversing in English; this suggests that the assigned levels were generally accurate. Therefore, I feel that although the measuring scale initially might appear imprecise, level of English can be used as a reliable variable against which to judge other collected data. The average level of English was 2-high in the aggregate population⁸⁰.

The level of education in the immigrant's native country differed widely, from 2 to 18 years, with the average falling at 9.2 years. Of participants in the 2006 Pew Hispanic Center survey, 34% of foreign-born Latinos had less than a ninth grade education.⁸¹ Since half of the students I spoke to had achieved less than a ninth grade education, it appears that the individuals in this sample were less educated than average Latinos in the United States. The current sample is, however, remarkably consistent with US Census data on LEP (limited English proficiency) students that finds that half have less than a ninth grade education in their native country.⁸² No one school attracted a disproportionate amount of less-educated students, although the two students at Literacy Connection were more educated than average, at 15 and 16 years. Most of the interviewed learners reported having taken mandatory classes in basic English before arriving in the United States, but as one Guild student noted, "the only thing I remember learning was to say 'door', 'window.' I never even learned my colors." Blanca, a Guild student from Mexico, noted that her English class was easy and so she paid little attention – "I never think I come to the US" she said. No student expressed having had extensive English training in his or her home country.

⁸⁰ When averaging the level of English of a subset of students, the result oftentimes is not a whole number. Thus, rather than approximating to the nearest tenth, which would not indicate any meaningful level of English, I will differentiate each level 1-5 into "low", "mid", and "high". If the average falls between 1.0 and 1.3, it will be 1-low, between 1.4 and 1.6 it will be 1-mid, and between 1.7 and 1.9 it will be 1-high. This allows for a more precise recording of English levels while still preserving a meaningful unit of measure.

⁸¹ Pew Hispanic Center 2006, 24

⁸² Martinez 2007, 12.

For the students interviewed, the average amount of time in the US ranged from 2 weeks to 24 years. The average was 9.3 years, but the median was 7 years, suggesting that most students were fairly recent arrivals to this country. Casserly attracted some of the newest immigrants, both the student who had arrived 2 weeks prior to the interview and a student who arrived less than a year ago. In contrast, the four SEIU students had been in the United States 13.5 years on average. Reflecting the years in the US subtracted from the current age, the average student was nearly 26 at the time of immigration. The youngest was 14, and the oldest 49.

The average student enrolled in their first English class (though not necessarily at the same institution at which they were interviewed) 5.2 years after immigrating. This average has been slightly skewed, however, by 9 students waiting a decade or more to enroll in classes; half of the sample waited 3.5 years or less to begin learning English in a formal setting. Although many students have continued to study at the institution where they began classes, a handful first enrolled at institutions in other areas. Hector, currently studying at Gardner, first enrolled in English classes at the Harvard Extension school, then did not continue due to the high cost. He was the only student who mentioned having previously paid for ESOL courses. Students have been formally learning English for 4.1 years on average, though the median is slightly lower at 2.5 years. I spoke with several students in their first week or month of classes, and one student at Gardner first started taking English courses 23 years ago. It is important to note that students do not necessarily continuously learn English; many students mentioned having left and rejoined classes as they changed jobs and schedules, had children, or experienced medical problems. As obtaining the precise number of months that a student has been attending class would be difficult, “years learning English” is merely the year the student first attended class subtracted from

the current year.⁸³

“As the number of Latino Americans rises, the pressures to learn English may fall. The Spanish language is now so common throughout the United States that it is relatively painless for a member of that community to progress through life without ever learning English.”⁸⁴ This quote, from J. Harvie Wilkinson, outlines the argument made in Chapter Two, that it is “relatively painless” for certain segments of the Latino community, namely those living in ethnic neighborhoods, maintaining close ties to the native country, possessing low levels of education, or encountering many barriers to ESOL class participation, to live in the United States without speaking English. The data collected in this sample, however, suggest otherwise. Many of the participants fall into the exact deterrent categories that were discussed in Chapter Two: a woman planning to return to her native country after accumulating sufficient savings, a man with only two years of education, a woman living in East Boston and speaking very little English on a day-to-day basis. Yet, they have chosen to disregard these deterrents to take English classes, deciding that the benefit of learning English was greater than the perceived cost. This section analyzes the number of students falling into each deterrent category who have chosen to take ESOL courses. Their enrollment in these courses suggests the strength of their motivations, which will be discussed in the coming chapter.

As discussed, the majority of participants lived in the approximate neighborhood of their ESOL institution. However, because the daily routine of two people living in the same general neighborhood can differ widely, I asked each

⁸³ Although the ($r=.44$) correlation between length of time since initial English class and English level is only a moderate level of correlation by statistical measures, the number of years since a student began formal English instruction was a better predictor of English level than any other variable measured in this study.

⁸⁴ Wilkinson 1995,161.

student, in question #6, how much English they needed to use on a daily basis. If the respondent indicated that they used little or no English, or only in very specific situations (at the hospital, for example), I rated them as a member of an ethnic neighborhood. In total, 20 of the 34 interviewed students indicated that they lived in an ethnic neighborhood. This included 9/10 of the students at Guild, the only school located in the Latino-dominated East Boston. The tenth Guild student lived in Revere. All of the Casserly and SEIU students indicated that they lived in an ethnic neighborhood, while 8/9 Gardner students felt that they spoke a great deal of English in their daily lives. When I averaged the levels of English ability, the students living in ethnic enclaves had an average level of 2-mid, lower than the aggregate average of 2-high, but not significantly so. On average, they tended to wait 5.6 years after immigration before beginning English classes as compared with 5.2 years for the aggregate sample. Once again, this is a negligible difference. Although it has been proven that ethnic neighborhoods lower the economic opportunity cost of not speaking English⁸⁵, these results suggest that despite the low economic cost of minority language dominance, there exists another, higher cost, perhaps in terms of emotional or psychological needs, that causes residents of ethnic neighborhoods to enroll in English classes. Many students living in ethnic neighborhoods cited trips to the doctor or their child's school as the only times they would use English; as we will see in the coming chapter, both confidence (possibly achieved through a trip to the doctor without use of a translator) and a desire to help one's children (achieved through trips to the child's school) are strong motivations for learning English. Thus, both of these motivations may inspire Latinos living in ethnic neighborhoods to begin taking ESOL classes.

⁸⁵ Jasso and Rosenzweig 1990, 319

Another perceived deterrent mentioned in Chapter Two is the proximity of the immigrant's country of origin causing the transition to the United States to be seen as less permanent. I spoke of the widespread belief among immigrants that after two years in the United States they would be able to return to their native country with resources to live a vastly improved life, and paraphrased Elizabeth Hayes to conclude that, "these continued connections with an immigrant's country of origin likely contribute to a negative perception of long-range language-learning."⁸⁶ While none of the questions I asked specifically dealt with the strength of a student's connection to his or her native country, in the course of our ten-minute conversation, they would often offer clues to their desire to either stay in the United States or return to their native country. Many students suggested an expectation to remain in this country long-term. Leonel, a 65-year-old student at Casserly, said, "I have my residency, I'm a resident, in one or two more years I'm going to be a citizen." 50-year-old Mayram, a student at Gardner, has already passed her citizenship class and feels English is important to understand "who is the good candidate in elections." Four students, however, anticipated returning to their home countries. "I'm going to make money first and then I'm leaving," said Wendy, a 21-year-old student at Casserly. María Elena, a 30-year-old student at Guild, said that life in the United States has been hard for her husband, a doctor in Mexico but a construction worker in the US, and they are considering a return to their native country. Blanca, a 36-year-old student at Guild who immigrated to the US in 1997 to be with her husband, expressed her dislike for the United States and her desire to return to Mexico. Carlos, 25 and a student at Casserly, was a teacher in his native Guatemala. "When I return that's what I'm going to do," he said of his former profession. The most important

⁸⁶ Hayes 1989, 48.

aspect of their responses is not whether they will ultimately stay in the United States or return to their native countries, but rather the *expectation* of a return. According to the research compiled in Chapter Two, this expectation should serve as a deterrent to English classes. For these four students, however, the benefit accorded to speaking English in the United States outweighed the cost of an investment in an English-language education that might serve useless upon a return to their native countries.

Education is another perceived deterrent to English acquisition. For students with low levels of education in the native country, it is more intellectually and emotionally challenging to learn English, and their proficiency in English confers a limited economic benefit. As mentioned, the average level of education for the immigrants interviewed was 9.2 years, the years of English instruction 4.1, and the average level of English 2-high. If we take into consideration those students with eight years or less of education, the average level of English drops to 2-low and the average years of English instruction rises slightly to 4.6. Thus, consistent with the effects observed by Jasso and Rosenzweig,⁸⁷ low levels of native country education do appear to have a negative effect on the language acquisition ability of Latino immigrants. Several students noted the difficulty of learning English with low levels of education. On her first day of ESOL class Wendy, a student at Casserly with 6 years of education in Honduras, said, “I didn’t understand anything and so I bolted.” María, a student at Guild with 6 years of schooling, remarked, “here was very hard study English because I study six grade my mind is closed. I think when I start learning English was very hard work. I start at zero. I try to learn.” The fact that a low level of education is acknowledged as a barrier does not seem to impact the students’ desire to learn English. 16 of the 34 students I interviewed had fewer than eight years

⁸⁷ Jasso and Rosenzweig 1990, 329.

of education; thus, it appears that nearly half the sample has decided that the intellectual and emotional challenge that English presents to less-educated immigrants was not a deterrent.

The previous three deterrents – immigrant enclaves, proximity to countries of origin, and low level of education – are most likely to affect the perceived utility of learning English and thus, the *desire* on the part of immigrants to enroll in ESOL courses. The fourth deterrent mentioned in Chapter Two deals with the difficulties that students who desire to learn English might face in translating this desire into ESOL class participation. In question seven, I asked, “when was the first time you took an English class in the US? What did you want to achieve by taking that class? Why did you stop?” If the student indicated having spent a good deal of time in the United States prior to class enrollment, I often asked why they waited so long. Many students cited the difficulty of balancing ESOL classes with raising children. Mayram, 50, said, “I started taking classes in 1985, but it was too difficult with kids. Now I try to continue”. She began taking classes at Gardner in 2007. María, 41, took her first English class in 1998 but stopped when her husband died, telling me that her mind wasn’t in the right place to continue her studies at that time. Marían, her classmate, cited another common difficulty: she worked two jobs, and had no time to devote to English classes. When she changed jobs in 2006, she was finally able to begin courses at the SEIU. “Many people say [that taking English] is in their plans, but they have excuses. They say it’s important. Most likely, they want to, but it’s not that easy,” explained Ana, 25, a Guild student who began taking classes shortly after immigrating from Mexico. Thus, in addition to overcoming the barriers seen to impede the viewed utility of English, immigrants must also find the time and the mental willpower to enroll in ESOL courses.

As we have seen in this section, several strong deterrents exist that affect both the perceived utility and the ability to take ESOL courses. Yet, I interviewed students who fell into every category of deterrent: Those living in ethnic enclaves, those planning an eventual return to their native country, those with low levels of education, and those with barriers affecting their ability to enroll in ESOL courses. The upshot is that these students are all presently taking English classes. More than anything, the number of barriers that many overcame to reach this point speaks to the strength of their motivations to learn English; these motivations will be discussed in the subsequent chapters.

Chapter Five: The Stories of Eight ESOL Students – Why they Learn English

The stories of these eight students are representative of conversations I had with many of the 34 students in this study. One student held off on taking English classes for years, clinging to her husband's insistence that they would one day return to Mexico. Another feels that his English has already led to economic improvement, and continues attending classes to increase his confidence. Two mothers cite the importance of knowing the culture into which their children will grow. In these stories, as well as in the direct quotations that head each chapter and are found throughout this paper, I made every effort to retain the authenticity of the student's words. When interviews were conducted entirely in Spanish, I carefully translated their thoughts into English. If a student spoke English, I generally left their words as they were spoken without correcting for errors. The grammatical inconsistencies and vernacular language attest to the difficulties of mastering the English language and the progress that many students have made on this front.

Despite their diversity of age, country of origin, years in the US, language skills, and educational level, each student shared impressive insight into an experience that unites them all: that of being a Latino learning English in the United States.

Nogly, 30 – “I feel more integrated now”.

“When I come to this country, I say, I want to speak English. Maybe I get my degree, diploma, better job. My first job was cleaning bathrooms. I say, I want something better for myself.” Nogly has been studying since 1998 after emigrating from Guatemala to the United States in 1997. A level four student at the Gardner school, he contorts his frame into a small chair in the hallway to tell me about his experiences while learning English. He feels that the decade he has spent studying English has caused a marked improvement in his life. “I have a good job, I feel like I raise,” he says. Wanting to increase his level of confidence is Nogly’s primary motivation for continuing classes. “It’s hard when you’re trying to speak it with somebody, they trying to communicate with you. I feel more integrated now, you have to speak English”. Living in the diverse neighborhood of Brighton, he has a chance to practice his English on the streets or at the market, a sharp contrast from his first home in East Boston where, “they answer you in Spanish”. He started at Gardner in 2007; he had picked up a lot of English on the street since his first class nearly a decade earlier, but wanted to improve his grammar. Gardner is located in his community and fits well with his schedule. He leans forward earnestly, emphasizing that he feels more comfortable speaking English than Spanish while out and about in Brighton. “There is a better life here. Everything you want, if you working hard, you get it.”

Yesica, 19 – “It’s nice hablar inglés”

Samuel, 17 – “If I understand more people life is going to be easier”

“When did you come to the U.S.?” I ask Yesica.

“2006,” she says.

“So, two years ago?”

“No, maybe 2004”.

“Are you sure?”

“I don’t remember. I came when I was 14”. Sitting in the computer room of Casserly House, she shrugs. We eventually determine that she emigrated from her native Honduras in July, 2003, after six years of school during which she learned a little English. Her limited language skills help her navigate around her neighborhood of Roslindale, and in her job at a restaurant. She began to take English courses at Casserly in March 2007. “I want to be a hostess”, she says in Spanish, pronouncing “hostess” in English but with an accent so heavy I have to ask her to repeat it. Yesica currently works busing tables in a restaurant where her coworkers are all American. “It’s nice hablar ingles [speak English]” she says, “I want to dejar [drop] el Spanish no good speak Spanish.”

Her brother Samuel, 17, emigrated from Honduras two weeks ago to join her in the pursuit of the American dream. He accompanies her to class, and I speak with him as well. In a blue and white striped shirt, he restlessly bounces his knee against the folding table, clearly nervous to be talking to an American. I ask him his impressions of the importance of English in the US, and he responds, “if I understand more people life is going to be easier.” I then ask why he decided to come to classes. “Che, a aprender ingles” he says, in disbelief that I would ask such a simple question. “To learn English”.

Leticia, 30 – “We are in a country that doesn’t belong to us.”

Leticia’s life is defined by her three-year-old daughter. She was a civil engineer in Mexico, having studied for 18 of her 32 years, the longest of any student I

interviewed. Six years ago, she abandoned her profession and her country to follow her husband who had emigrated the previous year. Leticia lives in East Boston, and although her level four English enables her to easily communicate with me, she speaks it only when attending twice-weekly classes at Guild. “My English is bad, I don’t want to confuse pronunciation for my daughter,” she explains, blushing to match her peach shirt. “It’s hard to learn a language for me. I like math.” Prior to beginning classes in 2005, she studied books and dictionaries in her home, resulting in an impressive vocabulary. “Can I speak in Spanish?” she asks. “We are in a country that doesn’t belong to us, we have to learn. [If we don’t] it’s disrespectful to the people, to the country. If someone comes to my country and they don’t speak Spanish, it’s disrespectful.” She is adamant that her only daughter, for whom she stays home to care, learn English. “It’s good to conserve one’s own culture. But we have to understand that our children are from this country and we have to respect their culture.” As I speak with her in the hallway, her daughter is inside in the on-site daycare program, a rare amenity among free English programs and one that enables Leticia to attend classes. It’s not that Latinos don’t desire to learn English, in her view, but rather that it’s difficult because of the time commitment and a lack of programs. “I think the majority have the intention,” she says, her round face reflecting solemnity, “when you don’t know the motivations of someone it’s difficult to judge.” Leticia views cultural integration as a two-way street, “we have to integrate with the culture. But the influence of other cultures enriches this country.”

Olga, 41 – “We have to speak what is spoken here.”

“One Sunday we decided that we wanted Chinese food. I told my spouse, ‘I want to order it.’ So I picked up the phone, dialed the number. I read off the menu

what we wanted, I pronounced it all wrong, but the Chinese man was patient and tried to understand. I gave him our address. And I hung up the phone and ran to my husband and pumped my fist and said ‘yes! I did it!’” Olga smiles at the memory. In her native Colombia, she attended only seven years of school before leaving her studies to work. She loved her English class, soaking up each new English word, but “I didn’t have the opportunity to learn more.” And when Olga came to the United States, in 2002, fear kept her English at bay, she tells me as we sit in the basement hallway of the Guild School in East Boston. Her English is limited and so we speak in Spanish, her lilting Colombian accent echoing off the tile walls. Shortly after arriving in this country, she began taking an English class in Dorchester; they spent a year reading texts, never speaking. A year and a half ago, she began attending the twice-weekly classes at Guild at the suggestion of her son’s teacher; Guild classes are predominantly populated by the parents of elementary students. English isn’t necessary for her daily life; living in East Boston, “you speak the language you want, if the other person doesn’t speak the same language, they’ll find you someone who does.” But it has restricted other opportunities. “It makes me sad, I’ve lost a lot of jobs for not being able to speak English,” Olga says, “we must, must learn, it’s very difficult, we get depressed. But if we live in this country, we have to speak what is spoken here. It’s necessary and important. If I go somewhere where there’s no Spanish speakers and try to communicate with someone, we’re both going to feel bad because we don’t understand each other.” She wants to be able to attend a school meeting and follow what is being said without the help of a translator, or to speak freely with the other parents at her son’s soccer matches. She feels that the hesitancy of many Latinos toward speaking English reflects “the fear that we feel more than the ability that we have,” and, leaning forward in her folding chair, is so emphatic about

the necessity to speak English that I underline it twice in my notes. “You know, when we were in Colombia, they never told us that they spoke another language [in the United States],” she says slowly, “only that we were going to work, to be able to improve the quality of life. They never told us that for the good jobs, you have to speak English.”

Leonel, 65 – “It inspires me to be in the United States”

“It was beautiful. We would catch fish in our hands, eat them, just like that,” Leonel demonstrates, grinning. At 65, he is the oldest student I spoke with. He looks much younger, which he attributes to hard work, a healthy lifestyle, and maintaining his Catholic faith. He emigrated from his native Chile in 1992, first living in the New York City borough of Queens. He never took English classes there; he says the neighborhood was too dangerous. But after moving to Roslindale, he began taking English classes at Casserly House, which is located on the same block as the apartment he shares with his two daughters. He uses “a little English, I have a job and they speak to me in English, I’m not at such a low level that I don’t understand anything.” He attended 8 years of school in the south of Chile before moving north to become a construction contractor; it is his goal to learn enough English to work in the same position in the United States. “I want to be someone else, and learning English, I am someone else,” Leonel says. “People who speak English are taken into more consideration, it changes the system of communication.” “I have my residency, I’m a resident, in one or two years more I’m going to be a citizen,” he says proudly, “it inspires me to be in the United States.”

Ana, 25 – “I feel like I’m not exist”

Ana came late to her class at the Guild school, missing the introduction of my project. As she follows me into the hall, I explain that I’m studying why Latino immigrants feel it’s important to study English. Before we even sit down, she rattles off a list of reasons. “For me is important for help our children, for progress myself, for doing job or to take a better job, to speak with people and to understand people.” She emigrated from Mexico in 2004 when pregnant with her daughter, wanting to give the unborn child “a better life, better education, better future.” She studied for ten years, and learned basic English, but emphasizes that studying English is a huge step for immigrants with limited education. She moved to the US in August and began classes a week later. Aside from studying twice weekly at Guild, she and her husband take evening classes at Umana/Barnes, another school in East Boston; they were on the waiting list a year before being given a spot in the class. “My daughter speak English but we ask us ‘what she say?’” Ana says with a laugh. When first beginning classes, she was shy, “I don’t know nothing. I practice with my daughter or with myself, I ask me, I answer me. I wanted to learn English because when somebody speak to you in English, I feel so bad because I don’t know what to answer. I feel like I’m not exist, I don’t know to talk, how you say, me siento en las sombras [I feel in the shadows]. Now I feel more confident.” She feels English is important to defend herself, understand the laws, and because “people is angry” when someone can’t speak English. She sometimes requires an interpreter at the doctor, but “I don’t want to need help. When I go to store, cashier asks me a question, I just say yes, yes, I don’t know what to say. I think it’s important also because when you have conversations with other Americans, I think it adds more confidence you know more things of the culture.” Ana switches to Spanish, “It’s good to have friendships to feel

more part of society. You're going to adapt to the culture. One has to adapt to the culture here. Our children are going to grow up knowing these cultures."

María, 42 – "I start at zero. I try to learn."

"I was staying home, my husband said you don't need to study English, stay home one day we go back. Two years [ago] my friend told me 'I go school we have good teacher and you only need to go.' I not tell my husband I just go. When come back I remember he said where you been. I say I go to English, he say no you don't. He didn't talk me for two days. I told my friend she say don't listen him. I went back. Now he happy I study English." María, 42, attended school in her native Mexico for only six years "because my fathers not have money for go to other school. I stay home. I don't like stay home." She notes that beginning to study English so many years later was difficult, "I study six grade my mind is closed. I start at zero. I try to learn." She has been in the United States for fifteen years, and the question of returning to Mexico is no longer on the horizon for María, "I was thinking go back but now no, I live more comfortable, we have money and work." She tries to convince her husband, who speaks little English, to take classes, but he tells her he doesn't have time. She says, "find the time." When she first began classes, she attended for only a few months before having surgery and staying at home two months while she recovered. Although she lives in the heavily-Latino East Boston, where she has managed during the last decade and a half while only speaking Spanish, María recalls when people would approach her as she traveled to other parts of the city. "When my children were in the stroller the persons said something to me, I just say yes, yes, I not understand." Now, her English is strong enough that when someone asks her for

directions, she can answer. "I think it very important in US learn English. For me, it's the first thing."

Chapter Six:

An Analysis of Reported Motivations for ESOL Acquisition and Their Significance – Evidence of Latino Assimilation

As established in the first chapter, the main purpose of this study is to determine whether Latino immigrants enrolled in ESOL classes in the Boston area have integrative or instrumental motivations. Integrative motivations, loosely defined as a desire to interact with members of the target language community, would, I argued, suggest a desire on the part of Latino immigrants to assimilate to US society. If students exhibited instrumental, or pragmatic, motivations – getting a higher-paying job, for example – this might suggest a mode of assimilation halted at acculturation (specifically, language acquisition) only; students would want to reap financial benefits from English acquisition without necessarily desiring to become part of the English-speaking host community. The following analysis of the top five most common reported motivations, as well as their frequency and the percentage of respondents who cited each as a primary motivation, gives insight into the myriad reasons why Latino students enroll in ESOL classes. By examining each motivation under the lens of age, gender, or level of education, we are able to predict which immigrants will likely have an integrative or instrumental motivation.

In accordance with this data, the most pertinent question asked of the students was #9, “What are the main things you are hoping to get out of taking these English classes?” If the student had trouble articulating a response, I offered the following suggestions by showing them a sheet on which was written: “Find a job that pays more, Find a job you like better, Be able to help children with school life,

Talk to healthcare professionals, landlords, bosses, etc., Have more American friends, Be able to get around more easily in Boston, Feel more confident when speaking English, Take citizenship test, Enjoy learning a new language”.

To best analyze the responses to this question, I recorded all of the motivations a student listed, and specifically marked the motivation that I felt was the strongest. Many responses were similar to that of Marían, a student at the SEIU, who said “I like them all” before indicating “a job I like better, help children, and feel more confident” when I asked her to indicate which she felt were her strongest motivations for wanting to learn English. She went on to say, “I would like to speak very well English because I would like to have a better job, make a lot of money, and work less hard.” Thus, I highlighted “work-related reasons” when recording her results; it was reasonably clear that despite her initial vacillation, the potential for career improvement was her primary motivating factor. Some students, like Samuel, another SEIU interviewee, did not indicated a clear motivation; he alternately talked about his philosophy to “always try to improve to get better job,” the fact that, “it’s the language in this country,” and that he wants to be able to communicate with medical professionals. Since he did not seem to value one perceived consequence of improved English over another, I did not record a principal motivating factor. Conversely, other students signaled two strongly motivating factors, and I recorded both. Following are the five most-cited reasons for wanting to learn English.

“The most important thing is looking for a better job.” Miriam, 44, unaffiliated student.

The motivating factor most cited by students was to “get a better/higher-paying job”, which 25 of the 34 mentioned. David, a 25 year-old student at Gardner, uses English daily with customers in his job. “The only motivation I think is for a better job,” he said, acknowledging that enough people speak Spanish in the United States that it’s possible to experience a reasonable standard of living without speaking English. When Miriam emigrated from Guatemala 5 years ago, her husband, who had been in the U.S. since 1997, told her, “please please you have to learn English, you deserve a good job. If you invest your time studying every year you make more money.” She has spent time at many different language institutions trying to perfect her English, and her primary motivation is clear: “the most important thing is looking for a better job. I would like to improve my job.” Carlos, a Guatemalan student at Log School, speaks of the benefits of improved communication and the cultural integration that comes from speaking English, but emphasizes he takes English classes in order to communicate with his Chinese boss at work. He plans on returning to his former position as an elementary school teacher in Guatemala eventually, and is excited about the prospect of teaching his students English.

Interestingly, though 25 students cited career reasons as a motivating factor, only 6, including David, Carlos, and Miriam found it to be the most important. Wendy, a young Honduran student at Casserly, says of her residence in the U.S. “I’m going to make money first and then I’m leaving”. Despite this, she doesn’t signal expanded career opportunities as the primary reason for enrolling in English courses. “There are times they ask for English in a job, but more than that, one is in this country,” she says. Carmen, a Honduran student at the Log School, wants to use English “when shopping, at the doctor, wherever I go, in work, at school.” Her

overarching motivation, however, is that “this is the language of America. When I speak English I feel American.”

Of the six students in the subset who displayed a primary motivation of finding/improving a job, the average age was 27.5, some eight years younger than the aggregate average, the level of schooling was 9 years, and the average number of years spent in the United States was only 3.7. Four of the six were male. The proportion of males citing this as their strongest motivation (66%) was much higher than the overall percentage of males in the study (29%). In my estimation, this finding is probably related to the increased probability that a male immigrates to the United States solely for economic reasons. Women, on the other hand, often answered that they came to the United States to join a spouse: Miriam, Dina, Olga, Blanca, María, and Leticia all fell into this category. The two-year myth, introduced in Chapter Two, likely has particular relevance in this situation: young males come to the United States solely for economic reasons and expect to return to their native countries. This inference is supported by the average age of the four males: 22, as compared with an average age of 33 for the total population of ten males surveyed. Returning to the original motivational group of 25 students who cited work as a motivating factor, it is worth noting that all but one of the 11 males are included in this sample; in other words, nearly every male interviewed for this study felt that career factors were a motivation for learning English. Among young males especially, who may have fewer family ties (none of the four in the work-related motivation subset mentioned learning English to aid children being an additional motivation for learning English), it appears that instrumental motivations are the most powerful.

The most common example of an instrumental motivation in the many studies on language motivation by Gardner and others is finding or improving one's

job. Thus, the six students in this subset display a clearly instrumental motivation for learning English; they see the language as a practical means to a particular end.

“I need English when my daughter arrives with homework” Ana, 26,
student at Gardner

The second most popular motivation that students in this study cited was related to assisting children at school; this was reported by 15 students. Humberto, a Salvadorean student at the SEIU, began classes in 2003 “for my family, communicate with kids, go to school he [my son] speaking only English.” Blanca, both of whose children studied at her ESOL class site of Guild, says, “my kids speak both. I help my children with their homework, even though I don’t speak English outside the house.” She speaks of the advantages that her learning-disabled daughter has in the United States, and is motivated to study English in order to communicate with the girl’s doctors and teachers, as well as to help both children with their homework. The demographics of the 15 students in the child motivational group were, on the whole, quite similar to the figures of the group as a whole, although they had been in the US a year longer than average. One notable exception was time elapsed between immigration and first English class. On the average, this group waited 7.5 years to begin taking formal English classes, the highest of any motivational group and 2.3 years longer than the aggregate average. Probably as a consequence of this, they had spent only 2.9 years learning English as compared with an aggregate average of 4.1. Slightly more than half (eight) of the 15 students citing child-related motivations were students at either Gardner or Guild, the two

elementary schools that oftentimes drew adult ESOL learners from the population of student's parents.

An examination of the subset, composed of five students who felt assisting their children to be their strongest motivating factor, reveals even more deviant data. Their average wait before beginning English classes was nine years; although they had been in the United States for 11.2 years, nearly two more years than the aggregate average, they had studied English only 2.2 years. I did not ask how old the student's children were; however, many, like Ana, mentioned that their child arriving with homework spurred their desire to enroll in ESOL classes. Denny, 40 and a student at Guild, came to the US in 1999 but began English only three years ago. "They ask, 'Papa can you help me?'" he says of his elementary school-aged children. Taken together, this data and anecdotal evidence suggest that the need to "guide, protect, and educate their children"⁸⁸ causes Latino adults to enroll in English classes only when their children begin to have more exposure to the English-speaking world, many times when entering grade school.

Of these five students in the child motivation subset, 2 were males. At 40 and 43 years of age, they are much older than the males who cited strong work-related motivations, suggesting that once males establish themselves in the United States through having children, work-related motivations become secondary. Four of the five members of the subset were enrolled in classes at the school their child attended (Gardner or Guild), the final student took classes at the SEIU.

Assessing whether the desire to help one's children through school and American life is an instrumental or integrative motivation is more difficult than discerning the obviously instrumental nature that job-related motivations.

⁸⁸ Martinez 2007, 7

Obviously, a desire to help one's child at school reflects acceptance of English as key to educational success. Yet, referring to Gardner's definition of an instrumental motivation as the "pragmatic reasons for language study,"⁸⁹ I conclude that the motivation exhibited by ESOL students wishing to aid their children is primarily instrumental. They desire to help their children with English-language schoolwork so that they can succeed academically, which in turn may bring further financial or social success. It is a means to a definite end. The fact that the average student in this motivational group waited nearly a decade to begin classes suggests that they might not have taken steps to learn English had they not a clear benefit to doing so; in this case, children of school age.

"Estamos en este país. We should learn the language". Lucero, 28 year-old student at Guild

Fourteen of the students interviewed expressed the motivation that titles this thesis, "estamos en este país," or "we are in this country." Three males and eleven females were of this opinion; four students, all female, felt it to be their most important motivating factor. When I asked "why is it important for you to learn English?" I consistently heard a familiar refrain; in the following samples I left portions in Spanish in order to demonstrate the consistency of their response:

Olga: "estamos en este país. We should learn the language. It's important ... if we live in this country we must speak what is spoken here."

Leticia: "estamos en un país that doesn't belong to us, we have to learn."

Ana: "[I learn English] to better myself and to adapt, because estamos en este país."

⁸⁹ Gardner 1985, 172

Lucero: “En este país it’s the language.”

Dina: “If we came to este país we have to speak the language. If we want to better ourselves, we need to speak it.”

Denny: “We are living here.”

Wendy: “There are times they ask for English in a job, but more than that, one is in este país.”

María: “We live in the US the first language here is English and we need to learn.”

Carlos: “Because I’m here and it’s the language that’s spoken.”

Carmen: “Because in America it’s the first language. This is the language of America.”

This motivational group of 14 had an average age and level of education consistent with the group as a whole. They tended to be slightly younger at immigration (25.7 versus 26 years), and to have spent 2.5 fewer years in the US than average. Most tellingly, these students waited an average of 4.2 years after arriving in the United States to begin taking English classes; the aggregate average was 5.2. This figure, however, is skewed by one woman who waited 19 years and another who waited thirteen to begin classes; the median is only 1 year (median for the aggregate group is 3.5). This suggests that these students who reported feeling “estamos en este país” as a major motivation acted on their beliefs, and began taking English classes sooner after immigration than average.

Four students reported this as their major motivation. Of these, two students, Wendy and Carmen, began to take English courses within one year of arrival to the United States. One woman waited three years, with the last student who reported “estamos en este país” as her strongest motivation only beginning English classes after living in this country for thirteen years. This student is María, the 42-year-old Mexican immigrant at Guild who is profiled in Chapter Five. In the interview, she

explained how the insistence of her husband that they would one day return to Mexico impeded her from taking English classes. Thus, I feel she can be disregarded in this sample. Removing María's data reveals an average 1-year period between immigration and the commencement of English classes for the remaining three members of this subset. Their average age at immigration is 22.7, slightly more than three years younger than the aggregate average. Their average current age is 25.7, nearly a decade younger than the aggregate average, and the three women have spent an average of three years in the United States. The average of 10.7 years of education is the highest of any motivational group or subset in this study. Taken together, the examination of both the motivational group and subset suggest that young, well-educated, relatively recent arrivals to the United States (and especially those who are female) view it as an obligation to speak English.

Speaking English does not seem to confer a benefit on the student who believes it a necessary part of living in the United States, ruling out this as an instrumental motivation. Nor does it appear especially integrative, or reflective of a desire to "learn about, interact with, or become closer to the second language community."⁹⁰ Students did not say "we are in this country and must learn English to be a part of society" but rather "English is the first language and we need to learn". Thus, I feel that "estamos en este país" is perhaps indicative of a third type of motivation, an obligatory motivation. Gardner makes no reference to such a motivation; since the majority of his research focuses on students learning in a foreign (language not widely spoken in the country of study) rather than a secondary (language widely spoken in country of study) language context, it is probable that he never encountered this dimension. Further research would do well in identifying the

⁹⁰ Gardner 1985, 54.

sociocultural root of this sense of obligation, and whether immigrants feel compelled to learn English in the United States prior to or only after arrival in this country.

“You feel stupid, not being able to express yourself” Amelia, 48, a Peruvian student at the Literacy Connection

Thirteen students signaled increased confidence in their English-speaking ability as a primary motivation. “It’s hard when you’re trying to speak it with somebody, they trying to communicate with you [and you don’t understand]” Nogly, a 30-year-old studying at Gardner explained. “I feel like I’m not exist, I don’t know how to talk. I felt in the shadows. Now I feel more confident” said Ana, 25. María, a 41-year-old student at the SEIU, said, “you feel frustrated when you can’t defend yourself.” The demographic characteristics of this group were generally consistent with those of the group as a whole, with two exceptions. Firstly, their level of English was 3-low as compared with an average of 2-high. This is not a great deal of difference, but it is the highest among all motivational groups studied: the students most wishing to attain confidence when speaking English are those who, paradoxically, seem to speak the best English. The second exception was their average age: 37.8, with a median of 41, as compared with an aggregate average of 35.2. This suggests that older immigrants are more concerned with learning English to feel confident in their environment.

Four students, including Ana and Nogly, counted increased confidence as their primary motivation. In this subset, the average level of English was the highest of all motivational groups and subsets in this study: 3-high. As we have previously noted the correlation between years of studying English and level of English, it

follows that this group would also have spent the highest average number of years enrolled in English courses⁹¹: 5.25. They had more formal schooling in the home country than average, but so did the members of the “este país” subcategory, whose English level was far lower. Their average number of years in the US, age at immigration, and years after immigration that they began English were roughly consistent with the aggregate average. Thus, these results suggest that seeking confidence is a highly motivating factor in English acquisition.

Again, the challenge exists in determining which type of motivating factor increased confidence would be. Although wanting to improve one’s confidence in English speaking ability implies the acceptance of English as an integrative means of communication, I feel that desiring to improve confidence lies more along the pragmatic lines of an instrumental motivation. The benefit conferred upon successful execution (learning English) is not tangible, as finding a job would be, but does directly affect the learner in terms of emotional well-being. Thus, the desire to achieve a certain end causes “confidence” to be placed in the instrumental category.

“You can communicate with people” Francisca, 47, student at Log School

Twelve students cited an improved ability to communicate with English-speakers as a motivation for learning English. “If I understand more people life is going to be easier,” Samuel, 17, a student at Casserly, said. “[English] changes the system of conversation,” Leonel, a 65-year-old classmate of Samuel’s, explained. This motivational group, composed of three males and nine females, had the lowest

⁹¹ Once again, this does not signal continuous enrollment, merely the year when a student reported first having taken an English course subtracted from the current year.

average level of English, 2-low as opposed to an aggregate average of 2-high. They were 1.6 years older than the average at immigration, and had studied English for 3.5 years, .6 less than the average. Their desire for communication did not extend to a particular segment of the American population, but rather to the country as a whole. “When I came, I was incapable of entering a store to buy something,” noted Amelia, 48, a student at Literacy Connection. The desire for an increased ability to communicate is similar to the desires for more self-confidence and independence (a motivation mentioned by ten students), two other motivations that were reported in this study. In trying to discern which motivation each student exhibited, I tried to look for key words or concepts. If a student expressed his or her frustrations or feelings of invisibility after a failed attempt at communication, I categorized them as being motivated by a desire to improve self-confidence. A student like Norma, a Guild student who said “you can express yourself better wherever you go,” is clearly motivated more by a positive desire to express herself rather than negative feelings of self-worth that low confidence or a lack of independence would cause.

The subset for the communication-seeking population was the largest in the study. Six students, or 50% of the motivational group, felt communication to be their most important motivating factor. Of these, Samuel and Leonel, as quoted above, were the only males. The average level of English of the subset was 2, the lowest of all motivational groups and subsets. They were also the oldest, 30.5, at immigration, leading to the conclusion that among Latinos older at immigration and with a low level of English, communication will likely be a major motivating factor.

This motivation seems to be fairly integrative. Communication implies an acceptance of the fact that English is necessary in the United States and that conversing with English-speakers is both desirable and necessary. Paraphrasing

Gardner, these students are motivated to improve their language skills by a desire to become closer to the majority language community.

Other motivations mentioned, and the number of students citing each, were: to be more independent (10, with 2 citing it as most important) the ambiguous “for my future” (10, again cited by 2 as the strongest motivating factor), to make more friends (8), because I enjoy learning a language (6), to get a GED/citizenship/continue education (6, with 1 signaling it as most important), and to reduce discrimination (6). As less than a third of the aggregate sample mentioned each motivation, it seems fruitless to construct the profiles of the motivation groups; their profiles would likely not be statistically significant in the least.

Taken together, these five motivations along with the demographic characteristics of students who cited them suggest several profiles of ESOL students with distinctive motivations. The results of this study indicate that a young male who arrived to the US fairly recently is likely instrumentally motivated by the desire to learn English for job-related ends. A young, well-educated female who recently arrived, however, will be more likely to view English acquisition as a necessary part of living in the United States, experiencing an obligatory motivation that has heretofore been unexplored in language acquisition research. If a Latino has spent a decade or more in the United States but did not enroll in English classes until relatively recently, this sample suggests that he or she may be instrumentally motivated by a desire to help children with schoolwork. Slightly older students who speak a high level of English, were fairly well-educated in their home countries and have studied English for a number of years are likely to continue attending classes to improve their confidence in the language. Finally, immigrants who were older than

average at the time of immigration and speak a low level of English will desire to improve their communication skills.

Overall, fifteen students, or 44% of the sample, indicated a primary motivation that I classified as instrumental. Six of the 34, or 18%, had a primarily integrative motivation. The remaining 38% were either motivated by a sense of obligation, did not express a primary motivation, or were motivated by one of the seven factors that were not widespread enough to justify an analysis. This statistic would suggest that the greatest proportion of adult Latino ESOL students in the Boston area are instrumentally motivated. Further exploration of the motivational groupings, however, reveals apparent disparities in the strength of motivation. The job-motivated subgroup, with 25 members, is obviously the largest, yet only 6, or 24% of these members, found it to be the strongest motivating factor. Only 31% of students signifying increased confidence as a motivation selected it as their primary motivation. In contrast, 50% of the 12 students in the communication subgroup felt that the desire to communicate was their strongest motivation for attending ESOL classes. Thus, while fewer students expressed the integrative motivation for improved communication, those who signaled as part of this motivational subgroup were more likely to select communication as a primary motivation. Those who feel an integrative motivation appear to feel it more strongly.

Chapter Seven:

Conclusion – “Estamos en este país”

This study applied the lenses of integrative and instrumental motivation to attempt to distinguish a desire on the part of Latino immigrants to assimilate to the culture of their adopted country, the United States. While I feel that this unprecedented method of analysis is innovative and worthy of further investigation, it no doubt has its difficulties, many of which are inherent to any survey of language motivations.

Firstly, a primary motivating factor is rare. The most common initial response I heard was “I need to learn English for everything.” Students want to learn English for the instrumental purposes of helping a child and getting a better job but also for the integrative purposes of making more friends and feeling a part of American society. A primary motivation may also change regularly as students search for and find jobs, as the need to help their school-aged children with homework increases, and as they are exposed to new people with whom they would like to converse. Secondly, the classification of a motivation into such broad categories as “integrative” and “instrumental” ignores the nuances that these motivations may have. Gardner’s research of foreign-language students and their motivations may not necessarily translate to second-language students, for whom the economic and emotional rewards for learning the target language are undoubtedly much higher. Learning English to feel more comfortable when conversing with Anglophone members of society may be a pragmatic means to a particular end of increased self-confidence, but it also implies the integrative realization that it is necessary to speak

English to feel more connected with the society. Furthermore, integration may many times be a fringe benefit of an instrumental motivation, such as when learning English leads to a better job with more English-speaking coworkers. Although the student did not set out to feel more integrated with Americans, this is obviously a byproduct of English acquisition, and it is difficult to say whether at a certain point, the motivation changes from seeking a better job to communicating with coworkers. This is the case typified by Nogly, the Gardner student who initially took English to get a better job, but continues to study in order to communicate. In sum, viewing motivations for language acquisition as either integrative or instrumental ignores the many nuances of the subject.

Despite the inherent difficulties of the study framework, I feel that the results demonstrate a predictable pattern in the process of English acquisition by Latino immigrants. As noted in Chapter Four, I had initially set out to research changing motivations throughout the course of ESOL study. While not able to draw conclusive results on this aspect of second language acquisition without the use of a longitudinal study, the fact that the motivational groups were so diversified in terms of demographic characteristics firmly suggests a pattern of changes in student motivations. Students with two or fewer years of English were most motivated by the pursuit of a better job and/or the mindset of “estamos in este país.” Many times, these motivations seemed to shift to the desire to help children, as immigrants aged and continued to study English. The oldest students, who were also those who had studied the most years of English, signaled confidence as the primary motivating factor. Thus, by examining age and amount of time in the United States, these results suggest that one might be able to discern a likely motivation for English acquisition. This finding has definitive implications for ESOL coordinators, who, when seeing

that a class is full of older learners, may presume that these students wish to gain confidence in English and plan lessons full of role-playing scenarios. Similarly, classes with younger students, especially if there is a high proportion of males, can focus on job-related vocabulary and development. The idea that motivations change in a predictable way throughout the course of ESOL study is, in my opinion, one of the most important results of this study, as it invites further investigation into a specific area of language acquisition that has heretofore been largely ignored.

More than to establish a pattern of changing motivations for ESOL acquisition, however, this study was constructed to test whether the assimilative process of Latino immigrants learning English can be expected to stall in acculturation-only or to continue to full assimilation, or the state where cultural and social boundaries between different peoples are dissolved. In the last chapter, the results of the interviews were synthesized to conclude that while a plurality of the students interviewed in this study seemed to be primarily instrumentally motivated to learn English, those who felt an integrative motivation appeared to feel it more strongly. Thus, this measure was somewhat inconclusive in discerning whether immigrants learn English merely as a means to an end or whether their learning is based on a desire to feel closer to the host society. Perhaps a stronger measure of the assimilative path of Latino immigrants comes from the expected behavior of the second generation.

As noted, fifteen students signaled that they were motivated to learn English by a desire to assist their children, particularly at school. I categorized this as an instrumental motivation, due to its pragmatic and quantifiable ends. Comments made by several of the students, however, indicated an expected cultural shift among their children. "One has to adapt to the culture here. Our children are going to grow

up knowing these cultures,” Ana, a student at Guild, told me. Other students also recognized the integration that comes with growing up in the United States. Altagracia, at the Log School, said her daughter, “speak English pero [but] for me is confuse. She no know nothing Dominicana. She says US is my country not Dominica.” Leticia also offers a split view of the benefits of assimilation, “it’s good to conserve one’s own culture. But we have to understand that our children are from this country and we have to respect their culture.” As discussed in Chapter Two, the linguistic shift across generations of Latino immigrants has followed, albeit more slowly, the assimilative pattern of other waves of immigrants. Even if the first generation is primarily instrumentally motivated to learn English, this study suggests that their children will still grow with a desire for integration into the American culture. Leticia and Ana both live in an ethnic neighborhood, which Huntington argues impedes integration into US society;⁹² despite this, however, both women feel that their children are part of the American culture. The implications of this are clear: even for Latino first-generation immigrants who might never assimilate beyond basic acculturation, the expectation that their children will take on American cultural characteristics demonstrates a process of assimilation for later generations. Indeed, as the comments by Leticia and Altagracia indicated, the worry becomes whether immigrant children will lose their native culture. As Pat Buchanan said, “many of the Latinos coming in now, they’re patriotic Mexicans, they want to keep their Spanish language and culture and music. When that happens over a period of time — and the numbers are so enormous, and there’s no melting pot ideology anymore in America, what you’re going to have is two languages, two

⁹² Huntington 2004b, 43

cultures, and eventually two countries.”⁹³ These comments by Leticia, Ana, and Altagracia indicate that the melting pot is indeed functioning, and perhaps functioning too well, as children become so American that they lose touch with their native culture.

The conclusions based on the comments by these three women are purely incidental, having arisen in the course of our conversation. I did not ask all of the students whether they felt their children were assimilating to US culture, though a future study would do well to explore this question. Of particular interest would be the children of immigrants who appear to have a strong instrumental motivation, such as David, who said, “the only motivation I think is for a better job.” Would he pass these values on to his children, encouraging them to speak Spanish and shy away from integration into American culture, using English only to achieve a certain end, or would his children be unable to resist the assimilative pull of American culture? An exploration of this topic might be the most demonstrative in asserting whether, as Wilkinson writes, “second-generation youths may acculturate slowly, retaining their parental language as primary and acquiring only a limited command of English; second, they may become bilingual but maintain primary allegiance to foreign languages.”⁹⁴

I continued to volunteer weekly at the SEIU during the production of this thesis. One Saturday, the class discussed the difficulties in coming to the United States. “I left my daughter when she was eight months old,” said one woman. “She’s 21 now. I haven’t seen her since.” “Nadie viene por gusto,” emphasized Margarita, a Colombian woman with tears in her eyes after listening to her classmate’s story.

⁹³ Media Matters 2008

⁹⁴ Wilkinson 1995, 116.

“Nobody comes because they want to.” This sentiment was echoed by many of the students I interviewed. “Immigrants left behind the most important things in their lives,” said Argeni, a 20-year-old student at Gardner, leaning forward earnestly, “everyone comes out of necessity.” “People leave their countries to come here and look for a new opportunity,” observed Marcelina, 47, a student at Gardner. In the end, a version of “estamos en este país” seems to be the strongest motivating factor to learn English. Most students seemed to see learning English as part of the imaginary pact they signed when leaving their native countries in pursuit of a better life in the United States. English, then, is a key to a better future, though which door it is seen to open – that of a better job, more confidence, helping children be successful in the United States, or making more American friends – is determined by each student. Regardless of whether a student seems to be motivated by integrative or instrumental reasons to study English, this study concludes that all see it as key to a better future, and suggests that, although the assimilative process of some first-generation immigrants may stall in acculturation-only, future generations of Latinos can and will assimilate to life in the United States.

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Table 1: Recorded Demographic Data of the 34 Student Participants

Name	Gender	Country	School	Level	Age	Years of Education in Native Country
Altagracia	f	DR	Log	2	40	12
Amelia	f	PERU	Literacy C	3	48	16
Ana	f	MEX	Guild	4	25	10
Ana	f	ELS	Gardner	1	26	5
Argeni	m	GT	Gardner	1	20	3
Asuncion	f	GT	Gardner	4	41	5
Blanca	f	MEX	Guild	3	36	11
Carlos	m	GUA	Log	2	25	12
Carmen	f	HON	Log	2	24	8
David	m	GT	Gardner	4	25	12
Denny	m	GT	Gardner	3	40	9
Dina	f	ELS	Guild	1	30	8
Francisca	f	PR	Log	2	47	12
Hector	m	GT	Gardner	5	21	12
Humberto	m	ELS	SEIU	3	43	12
Leonel	m	CHILE	Casserly	2	65	8
Leticia	f	MEX	Guild	4	32	18
Lucero	f	MEX	Guild	1	28	8
Marcelina	f	DR	Gardner	3	47	6
María	f	ELS	Guild	1	46	12
María	f	MEX	Guild	4	42	6
María	f	ELS	SEIU	3	41	4
Maria Elena	f	MEX	Guild	3	30	13
Marian	f	ELS	SEIU	4	34	9
Mayram	f	GT	Gardner	5	50	8
Miriam	f	GT	unaffiliated	5	44	12
Nogly	m	GT	Gardner	4	30	10
Norma	f	MEX	Guild	3	26	9
Olga	f	COL	Guild	2	41	7
Samuel	m	HON	Casserly	1	17	6
Samuel	m	ELS	SEIU	4	44	2
Vilma	f	ECU	Literacy C	3	50	15
Wendy	f	HON	Casserly	1	21	6
Yésica	f	HON	Casserly	1	19	6
Average	10 male			2.76	35.24	9.18
Median				3	35	9

Table 1 continued

Name	Years in US	Interview Language	Age at Migration	Year of Migration	First English Class	Years Between Migration & 1 st English Class	Years of English
Altagracia	9	mix	31	1999	2004	5	4
Amelia	5	spanish	43	2003	2003	0	5
Ana	4	mix	21	2004	2004	0	4
Ana	11	spanish	15	1997	2007	10	1
Argeni	1	spanish	19	2007	2008	1	0
Asuncion	19	english	22	1989	2006	17	2
Blanca	11	mix	25	1997	2006	9	2
Carlos	6	spanish	19	2002	2006	4	2
Carmen	2	spanish	22	2006	2006	0	2
David	2	english	23	2006	2007	1	1
Denny	9	spanish	31	1999	2005	6	3
Dina	2	spanish	28	2006	2007	1	1
Francisca	15	spanish	32	1993	2005	12	3
Hector	2	english	19	2006	2006	0	2
Humberto	19	english	24	1989	2003	14	5
Leonel	16	spanish	49	1992	1993	1	15
Leticia	6	mix	26	2002	2005	3	3
Lucero	6	spanish	22	2002	2008	6	0
Marcelina	24	spanish	23	1984	2003	19	5
María	17	spanish	29	1991	2001	10	7
María	15	english	27	1993	2006	13	2
María	20	spanish	21	1988	1998	10	10
Maria Elena	3	mix	27	2005	2007	2	1
Marian	8	english	26	2000	2006	6	2
Mayram	23	english	27	1985	1985	0	23
Miriam	5	english	39	2003	2003	0	5
Nogly	11	english	19	1997	1998	1	10
Norma	7	mixed	19	2001	2006	5	2
Olga	6	spanish	35	2002	2003	1	5
Samuel	0	spanish	17	2008	2008	0	0
Samuel	7	english	37	2001	2003	2	5
Vilma	18	english	32	1990	2004	14	4
Wendy	1	spanish	20	2007	2007	0	1
Yésica	5	spanish	14	2003	2007	4	1
Average	9.26		25.08			5.21	4.06
Median	7		24.5			3.5	2.5

Table 2: All Reported Motivations of Student Participants
(top motivation indicated by *)

Name	Gender	Estamos en este país	Job-related	Child-related	For my Future	To Make Friends
Altagracia	f		x	x		
Amelia	f	x	x			
Ana (25)	f	x	x	x	x	x
Ana (26)	f			*	x	
Argeni	m		*		x	
Asuncion	f		x	x		x
Blanca	f			*	x	
Carlos	m	x	*			
Carmen	f	*	x	x	x	
David	m		*			x
Denny	m	x	x	*	x	
Dina	f	x	x		x	
Francisca	f		x	x		
Hector	m		x			x
Humberto	m		x	*		x
Leonel	m		x			
Leticia	f	*		x		
Lucero	f	x		*		
Marcelina	f	x		x	*	
Maria	f					
Maria (41)	f		*	x		
Maria (42)	f	*	x			
Maria (46)	f		x			
Maria Elena	f		x			
Marian	f	x	*	x		
Mayram	f					
Nogly	m				x	
Norma	f		x	x	*	
Olga	f					
Overall total		13	25	15	10	8
Samuel (17)	m		*			x
Samuel (44)	m	x	x			
Vilma	f		x			
Wendy	f	*	x			x
Yesica	f		x			x
Top motivation total		4	6	5	2	0

Table 2 continued

Name	Enjoy learning	Independence	GED/citizenship	Confidence	Avoid Discrimination	Communicate
Altagracia					x	x
Amelia		x	x	*		*
Ana (25)		*		*	x	
Ana (26)		x			x	*
Argeni						
Asuncion	x			*		
Blanca		x	x			
Carlos						
Carmen						
David						x
Denny				x		
Dina						
Francisca						*
Hector	x					
Humberto			x	x		
Leonel			x			*
Leticia					x	
Lucero				x		
Marcelina						x
Maria		x		x		
Maria (41)						
Maria (42)						
Maria (46)			*			
Maria Elena	x		x		x	*
Marian				x		
Mayram		*	x			
Nogly				*		
Norma				x		x
Olga		x		x		
Overall total	4	10	7	13	6	12
Samuel (17)						*
Samuel (44)	x	x		x		
Vilma		x		x		x
Wendy		x				x
Yesica					x	
Top motivation total	0	2	1	4	0	6

Table 3: Comparison of Indicated Motivational Groups and Subgroups

Motivation Group	Gender	Level of English	Age	Education in Native Country	Years in US	Age at Migration	Years bet. Migration & 1 st English	Years of English
Overall	10 male	high-2	35.2	9.2	9.3	26	5.2	4.1
Este país Subgroup	3/14 male	mid-2	32.4	9.2	6.7	25.7	4.2	2.5
	0/4 male	low-2	25.7	10.7	3	22.7	1	2
Job Subgroup	9/25 male	high-2	34.7	9.4	7.88	26.8	4.72	3.16
	4/6 male	high-2	27.5	9	3.7	23.8	2	1.7
Children Subgroup	2/15 male	high-2	35.5	9.7	10.3	25.2	7.5	2.9
	2/5 male	low-2	34.6	9	11.2	23.4	9	2.2
Communicate Subgroup	3/12 male	low-2	36.8	10	9.3	27.6	5.8	3.5
	2/6 male	low-2	38.8	10	8.3	30.5	4.2	4.2
Confidence Subgroup	4/13 male	low-3	37.8	8.9	10.7	27	6.3	4.4
	1 of 4 male	high-3	36	10.3	9.8	26.3	4.5	5.25

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