

Chapter 2

A Case Study of an English Learner Speech Community

As we started to study older adults' thoughts and feelings about their experiences as second language learners, we understood we were entering a large field of research. For several decades, linguists, sociologists, and educators have made efforts to answer key questions about the development of second language proficiency, but less has been done to study how learning experiences are related to community spaces, or how language acquisition is shaped by identity work, the process by which people weave together biographical and interactional strategies to develop a learning-self. This book's foray into the subjective lives of a Hispanic older adult immigrant community offered a way to study the role of place and identity in SLA.

Social scientists have adopted various approaches in the study of SLA. And while research has examined the cognitive, psycho-social, and cultural dimensions of SLA, few researchers have chosen to explore the identity formation of language learners from within the social spaces of a community or to observe this identity work as process over time. The relative absence of longitudinal research on a community of older adult learners led us to assume that there was much to be gained by capturing their stories and experiences. Consistent with a qualitative framework, we have considered the relationship between investigators and community as important to the research process. We therefore kept in mind the significance of not only the types of questions that were formulated, but argued for using sensitizing methods for in-depth interviewing about personal topics related to late language learning, such as acculturation, social stigma, and role conflicts. Our methodological choices are relevant to those researchers and social service actors who seek to communicate and work with immigrant community members.

We hope that this project offers insights that may assist others in their own research and clinical work with second language learners, particularly those in an immigrant context. Because the way in which qualitative in-depth interviewing is done impacts data analysis, researchers can benefit from reviewing the methodological decisions we made and issues that emerged from our research. Both quantitative and qualitative researchers seeking to create survey and interview questions may want to consider how the points we raise can inform their project

development. From a clinical perspective, social service providers may also find new opportunities to talk in-depth with community members about their needs, concerns, and resources in an immigrant context. The value of our methodology will be more evident when we focus on specific issues important to researchers and professionals studying and working with older adult immigrant communities.

We also emphasize in this chapter the interconnections that exist among various levels of the research process—namely, a study’s purpose, data collection process (such as formulating the focus group interview guide and ways to recruit and secure participants), and data analysis. What follows is a discussion of the theoretical and methodological considerations that help to contextualize our overall research design and the substantive techniques used to carry out our project. We present the specifics that guided our data collection and analytic processes. We also explain the way in which we worked to capture and represent the voices of our participants in light of current literature on SLA and aging.

How (Older Adult) Second Language Learners Have Been Studied

Most SLA research has focused on the role of “the age factor” and the idea of a critical period (Hernandez et al. 2005) in native language acquisition. As Hernandez, Ping, and MacWhinney point out (2005), “the idea of a biologically determined critical period plays a pivotal role not just in linguistic theory, but in cognitive science as a whole” (p. 220). A penchant for cognitive and neurobiological approaches to SLA emphasize the effects of processes interacting in the development of language proficiency and the declarative/procedural dimensions widely acknowledged in cognitive science (Paradis 2004; Ullman 2001). The development of fluency is understood as a sequence, wherein initial declarative knowledge (the knowing of facts) is transformed into procedural knowledge (the knowing of how to perform something). In this way, knowledge of language rules is processed in an automatic fashion and language operation occurs progressively more quickly. The classic example is that of driving a car, where the procedures that first monopolized consciousness become more routinized and minimized in importance over time.

This approach is often referred to as the “information-processing model” since it describes inputs mediated by various cognitive, psychological, and social factors to produce a language output. The critical period hypothesis draws upon the assumption of an “implicit linguistic competence” (Paradis 2004, p. 59). Decline in procedural memory for language leads late second language learners to rely on a cognitive system that is different from that which conventionally supports native language learning. Some studies suggest that the biological plasticity of procedural memory for language gradually decreases with age, with some estimating particular cut-off ages (Skehan 1998; Paradis 2004). Other scientists argue for a continuous

decline, rather than a specific cut-off point (Hakuta et al. 2003). In either case, aging is understood to weaken procedural memory in older adult learners and increase the reliance on conscious declarative memory for learning in general and learning language in particular. The critical period hypothesis claims that natural language acquisition is available to young children but limited in older adults. While a more thorough theoretical discussion of this debate is forthcoming in Chaps. 4 and 5, a cursory methodological review of the literature is instructive here as it contextualizes how and why second language learners have been studied with particular methodologies in mind. It also informs the sampling, data collection, and analytic choices we made in our research design.

Since the 1980s, there has been a call to researchers to explore the age factor in SLA. This has meant looking into older adults' ultimate attainment of language, the differences between early and late-start language programs, and whether native proficiency is accessible to second language learners after a presumed critical age period. Most research has sought to assess the relative strength of the age factor in the context of SLA. The early and seminal work of Johnson and Newport (1989), for example, used grammaticality judgment tests to evaluate speech fluency. Today, many studies go beyond the traditional grammatical approach and incorporate a variety of methodologies and data collection strategies, yet still retain a focus on evaluating the effect of age in language learning. A large number of studies adopt a quantitative framework that combines experimental methods, formal tests of competence, and measures of performance. Research using these and other data, for example, has used late speech samples of late SLA learners to compare native to nonnative older adult speakers.

In an experimental study, Marinova-Todd (2003) examined the profiles of 30 post-puberty learners of English from 25 countries and speaking 18 languages. These second language learners were compared to a control group of 30 native speakers with similar academic backgrounds. Other scholars have conducted similar research with English as a foreign language population and looked at factors such as education in the host environment, length of exposure to English, and age upon arrival (Urponen 2004). Data were collected with the use of formal tests and a narrative task to demonstrate oral and written proficiency. Formal tasks included a range of standardized tests on vocabulary, reading, and speech. These experimental studies have done much to document some of the factors that support second language attainment, such as having more years of study of the second language before age of arrival to the host environment (in these case studies it was mainly the United States) and more years of general education, more years of reading, and more focus on accuracy and communication skills (Bongaerts et al. 1997; Urponen 2004). However, the quantitative and experimental structure these studies use makes it difficult to reveal the social psychological processes implicated in SLA. How learners perceive and express themselves in light of biographical characteristics, such as their age, culture, and gender are important. Positivist-based studies are ill-equipped to uncover how individuals construct and assign meaning to their various experiences.

Recent focus group studies and qualitative interviews have begun to supplement experimental research and build on our understanding of the social psychology of SLA (Marinova-Todd 2003; Moyer 2004; Nikolov 2000). These qualitative studies, still guided largely by an interest in the age factor and ultimate language acquisition, have contributed to our understanding of the role of motivation, self-esteem, self-confidence, and emotions. They have also shed light on the ways individuals make sense of and negotiate their self-beliefs and intentions in SLA.

Researchers have attempted to triangulate their data by applying a mixed methods approach. Their studies utilize interview data and self-assessments, along with performance measures (Bongaerts 1999; Bongaerts et al. 1997; Moyer 2004; Nikolov 2000; Urponen 2004). In two parallel studies conducted on late language starters, data on participants' background was collected using structured interviews, narrative tasks asking participants to describe different emotional moments in their life, and speech tasks in the target language (Nikolov 2000). Emergent from these studies is the interaction between speech behavior (false starts, paraphrasing, and hesitation) and the social psychology of second language learners. Self-confidence and notions of self-esteem play a role in the SLA of nonnative speakers. Moyer's (2004) study explored the language attainment of 25 well-educated immigrants to Germany from multiple countries. The study adopted a mix of survey-questionnaires on social psychological experiences, controlled and semi-controlled experiments on production tasks, and semi-structured interviews. Findings suggest that age of arrival and length of residence in the host environment had a similar influence on ultimate attainment, whereas psychological factors (personal interest in fluency and satisfaction with attainment) accounted for a majority of the variance in attainment. Moyer's study emphasizes the context of SLA and the effect of age relative to other social psychological factors that impact language learning. It also documents that successful language learners share a motivation in the target language and a particular self-consciousness of their development and achievements leading them to find opportunities for language socialization.

While the above studies integrate a more qualitative dimension to the research process and have helped to expand knowledge of SLA, they have their own set of limitations. Many fail to account for the interactional nature of SLA and how subjective experiences take place within a dynamic social context. A body of language socialization literature has been developed to address this deficiency. A central feature of the language socialization paradigm is a focus on how speakers are socialized through language and interactions to become competent members of a specific speech community (Englebreton 2007; McEwan-Fujita 2010). What is critical here is that through interactions sociocultural information is generated that serves to help interlocutors manage speech behavior with others. The thrust of the language socialization perspective is that language development (if not all development) occurs through a "peer-based social control" process, since it is within social interaction that persons assign, learn, and negotiate meanings related to language competence (Goodwin and Kyrizis 2012, p. 381). Efforts have been made to understand language learning from within its formative social milieu. A number

of studies have used focus group interviewing and ethnographic methods to uncover the intricate ways language socialization occurs in literacy-focused contexts—most notably, classrooms (Menard-Warwick 2005; Soto-Gordon 2010; Wrigley 2007). The qualitative approach of Soto-Gordon (2010) on a multilevel ESL classroom shows speech competence is a cooperative venture tied to emotive positioning, impression management, and social capital distribution.

The range of survey, experimental, and qualitative research on SLA has provided us with insights that have informed our methodology. On the one hand, research has increasingly moved to problematize an overly cognitive and neurobiological view of SLA. Even factors such as aging are conditioned by the social environment of language learners and are tied to the ways in which individuals give meaning to themselves and their surroundings. In this way, our work is part of what in later chapters is referred to as the “social turn in SLA” (Block 2003), which adopts a constructivist approach. Previous studies, however, have been limited in their methods to address key questions in language socialization literature.

First, studies have highlighted the importance of viewing the learning process as a trajectory, marked by the learner’s personal history (Delgado-Gaitan 2001). This is particularly the case for Hispanic immigrant communities because of the range of sociopolitical factors, such as immigration laws, citizenship status, and access to education, employment, and government resources, which have individual and generational effects. Using an ESL classroom as a sampling site, our study uniquely follows the same Hispanic community, and in several cases the same family unit, for over 4 years. There is a paucity of longitudinal case studies of this type that document the trajectories of immigrant language learners through time. Moreover, working with and within the community over time allowed us to investigate the important role of *place* in shaping SLA learners’ social identity, social-cultural resources, and speech community development.

Second, while language socialization is understood as a life-long and social process, research has tended to focus on children or adult learners, with less attention to elderly language learners (Bayley and Schecter 2003). As was mentioned in Chap. 1, the population of older adult Hispanic immigrants in the United States is growing, but in-depth studies are lacking that examine the formative process of identity work among this group within their local (e.g., family) and larger (e.g., community) environments. With this in mind, we sampled Hispanic older adult immigrants so as to gauge the unique experiences of this population with respect to the broad array of language acquisition resources and interactional opportunities deemed critical for language development.

Finally, while studies seek to explore fully the complexity of the conceptual or empirical terrain associated with language learners’ social identity, they tend to adopt conventional qualitative strategies that are limited. To the extent that socio-cultural and language socialization approaches do not see language learning as a simple accommodation to target language norms, data collection must be sensitive to how communicative competence is marked by a process directed by forces of interaction over time—namely, meaning making, negotiation, and power. This means attending to the dual and interrelated dynamic of biography and social

environment. To this end, our study employs an active interviewing data collection strategy in order to capture the individual and social movement action endemic to language socialization. The following section takes a closer look at the details of our sampling and data collection procedures.

Study Sample

Several theoretical and practical considerations informed our sampling of Hispanic older adults. Language socialization scholars have noted the mismatch between Hispanic immigrant learners' motivation and expectations regarding SLA, as well as the structural challenges confronting second language learners (McEwan-Fujita 2010). Older adult language socialization is complex and often includes a renegotiation of a learner's self- and social identity. Multiple social spheres (family, workplace, community) are implicated. Our study examined this issue through the perspectives and experiences of a community of older adult immigrants.

We wanted a sample of second language learners that were not too far removed from the time when they first immigrated to the United States. We wanted to ensure that we had the opportunity to talk with them about their immigration experience and how being an older adult impacts language resocialization within this context. We reasoned that this group would provide us with insights about the "immigrant effect" among Hispanics, particularly how enclave communities promote functioning in old age but also complicate language resocialization (Hill et al. 2012). Our participants would be able to share about a wide range of community relationships, including the transitional experiences and turning points in their lives that involved their language identities. It would also offer opportunities to uncover the dual dynamic of how older adults reinvent and modify their SLA *identity* as they encounter language socialization experiences in various *places* (at home, in their community, and in the classroom).

To improve the inclusion of this group, we used both purposive and theoretical sampling strategies, which select participants by using conceptual criteria, and recruited individuals in various ways. Our discussion is based on our core sample of 40 Hispanic older adults. Because our primary goal was to gather theoretical and empirical knowledge about older adult immigrants' subjective experiences as language learners, we did not seek to use a random sample. Instead, our data collection concluded when interviews did not offer any additional conceptual data. This approach was consistent with designing an in-depth qualitative study, as it "permit [ed] the deep, case-oriented analysis that is the *raison d'être* of qualitative inquiry" (Sandelowski 1995, p. 179).

We used selective site sampling not with the intention of establishing the basis for examining statistical differences among profiles but to ensure that we could get to know members of a specific community, in-depth, and over time. Our study sample site was a multilevel ESL family literacy program. The ESL family literacy program was organized, funded, and managed through the literacy outreach

department at the Hampton-Illinois branch of the Dallas Public Library. As university professors who developed a service-learning project with our undergraduate students, we took a leadership role in teaching and planning activities for two adult language classes in the public library. In a separate part of the library, free childcare was provided for the children and grandchildren of enrolled ESL students. Our own subjective experiences as second language learners guided our commitment to developing the family literacy program and informed our sensitivity to the role of identity and place in language acquisition. Two of the authors are second language learners of English, and one is a second language learner of Spanish. From our own personal experiences, we could appreciate how language resocialization is tied up with one's identity and the places that (de)capitalize a sense of self. In this way, our own biographical characteristics served as theoretical tools for the development of our research questions and the data collection site.

All interviews were conducted between April 2011 and May 2015. We audio-taped focus group interviews and conducted 36 weeks of participant observations with our sample of 40 Hispanic older adult ESL students. Participants were recruited through a face-to-face announcement in our ESL family literacy program located in a predominantly Hispanic community in Dallas, Texas. In terms of ethnic composition, our sample participants were from Mexico ($n = 34$), El Salvador ($n = 3$), Honduras ($n = 2$), and Guatemala ($n = 1$). The majority of the Mexican participants had emigrated from the Western states of Guanajuato, Jalisco, and Michoacán, though a third of the participants had left their homes in San Luis Potosí, Zacatecas, Guerrero, and even the Eastern state of Tamaulipas. Our participants consisted of 26 women and 14 men. Participant ages ranged from being in their early 50s to early 70s. The reason for including participants under 65-years-old was to theoretically sample individuals who were nearing the age of 65 and held a self-conception of themselves as an older adult learner. Interviewees were employed in a range of low-wage occupations that included automotive services and technicians, carpentry, construction, housekeeping, and caregiving. Others held office positions as administrative assistants. The interviews primarily focused on Hispanic older adults' second language acquisition and the turning points in their identity relative to their relationships both inside and outside the ESL classroom. At times, we reference the voices of our ESL teachers and younger ESL students to further contextualize classroom experiences. Interviews were transcribed from Spanish to English by the researchers and we used the constant comparative method that emphasizes an iterative process of data analysis by comparing incident with incident, category with incident, and category with category. Our study is consistent with a grounded theory approach, which includes conducting simultaneously data collection and analysis. Immediately after conducting each interview, the researchers prepared extensive theoretical, methodological, and personal memos. Below is a discussion of the theoretical assumptions that guided our interviewing.

Interviewing Strategies

Our study utilizes the approach to interviewing described by Holstein and Gubrium (1995) as “active interviewing.” Using active interviewing was a means to focus attention on Hispanic older adults’ situated identity work. In particular, active interviewing fosters a view of the interview as a dialogical, discursive, and active process. In addition, active interviewing can provide insight into how intersectional biographical characteristics (e.g., age, gender, race, culture, and other dimensions) are negotiated and produce older adult learners’ sense of self in community. As Holstein and Gubrium (1995) note, interviewees are “multivocal,” in that they hold multiple positions and perspectives. This recognition is used to uncover the multiple layers of experience that intersectional analysis suggests exists for Hispanic older adults. In all, active interviewing challenges the supposed “passive role” of the interviewee (and interviewer) and we viewed this approach as a useful way to delineate the active identity work of Hispanic older adults. A brief overview of this perspective is given in this section, with special attention to its differences from so-called “traditional” interviewing and its benefits for studying how older adults socially construct their attitudes, emotions, and behaviors relative to second language acquisition.

Before moving into an exploration of the active interview approach, it is important to clarify why a theoretical discussion of this data collection technique is part of our study’s methodology. After all, is not interviewing more of a methodological consideration? It is important to note that Holstein and Gubrium (1995) discuss “the active interview” primarily as a perspective and not simply as a methodological tool. In short, active interviewing makes epistemological comments on the interview process itself.

This book presents a perspective (an implicit theory of interviewing) and not just an inventory of methods. Thus, active interviews are more than a distinctive research tool; instead, we use the term to emphasize that all interviews are reality-constructing and sites where interpretive work is being done. In this section, we present a social constructionist approach to interviewing that “considers the process of meaning production to be as important for social research as the meaning that is produced” (Holstein and Gubrium 1995, p. 4). As will be discussed, active interviewing focuses our attention on both the substantive features of meaning making (what is being constructed), and on interpretive work (how meaning is made). This provides an interview approach that attends to the “whats” and “hows” of meaning making.

The interview as a means of knowing (i.e., to describe, interrogate, assist, test, evaluate) is so pervasive that it is practically a “universal mode of systematic inquiry” (Holstein and Gubrium 1995, p. 1). Qualitative researcher, however, now see interviews as more than neutral tools for gathering data; they are fundamentally active interactions between two (or more) people wherein information and meaning are negotiated and constructed (Holstein and Gubrium 1995). Increasingly, the focus of interviews is not just on the traditional whats (substantive descriptions of

everyday life) but also the *hows* (the active work to make meaning and order in everyday life) (Gubrium and Holstein 1997; Holstein and Gubrium 1995; Silverman 1997).

According to Holstein and Gubrium (1995), the conventional image used to describe interviews is that of a “search-and-discovery mission, with the interviewer bent on finding what is already there inside variably cooperative respondents” (p. 2). The primary challenge of the interviewer is to extract information as directly as possible. This conception of interviewing is distinctly positivistic, in that research is assumed to begin with an empirical referent (the interviewee). This point of departure is supposed to represent the so-called “real world” embodied in the subject-respondent, as opposed to particular standpoint(s) being articulated.

To begin a study in this manner, interpretive judgments must be excluded as much as possible from the interview process. Although researchers are only supposed to “reflect nature,” perceptual errors are always possible. Thus while a key methodological approach in the social sciences is observation, it is only after rigorous training that perception can be trusted to discover truth through interviewing. Because the interviewer and interviewee may be unreliable, the interpreter of data must be trained to analyze data in a particular way. It is the very fact that interviews represent “conversations” that they are also “framed as a potential source of bias, error, misunderstanding, or misdirection, a persistent set of problems to be minimized” (Holstein and Gubrium 1995, p. 3). This issue has often been described as emerging from human errors, such as “response effects” or “nonsampling errors” (Bradburn 1983). For example, error in the data may result when the respondent has faulty memory or deliberately tries to please the interviewer by providing a “socially desirable” response; these factors can prevent the researcher from learning something from the respondent (Bradburn 1983, p. 291). According to this conventional view of interviewing, the researcher must learn to counter the effects of situational exigencies in order to enhance the prospects for discovering knowledge from respondents.

Due to this requirement, data collection in interviews becomes highly instrumental. Logistical refinements are thought to lead to a more a “natural” generation of data. As Holstein and Gubrium (1995) note, “the literature on interview strategy and technique remains primarily concerned with maximizing the flow of valid, reliable information while minimizing distortions of what the respondent knows” (p. 3). One response to this problem has been to increase methodological sophistication so as to neutralize the interview process. To the extent that the interview process is understood as a “pipeline for transmitting knowledge,” various techniques are introduced to standardize the conversation and ensure the study is not replete with bias (Holstein and Gubrium 1995, p. 3).

In structured interviews, the interviewer asks all respondents the same series of pre-established questions with a limited set of response categories. There is usually little room for variation in the responses, except where open-ended questions (which are usually infrequent) are asked. Moreover, the interviewer records responses according to coding schemes already developed by the project director. By heavily controlling the pace of the interview, standardizing both questions and

answers, and repeating these processes for all interviews, the interview context is supposed to allow the interviewer to play a neutral role. In behaviorist fashion, the structured interview proceeds under a stimulus-response format that assumes that the respondent will truthfully answer questions previously determined to reveal satisfactory indicators of the variable in question. Subjects are considered essentially passive in this scenario, representing “vessels-of-answers.” Survey and conventional interview instruments tend to be structured in this manner.

Because conversations take place largely in the situational everyday worlds of societal members, interviews should reflect this type of contingency and spontaneity to better capture the way the world actually works (Douglas 1985). For this reason, we argue against “how-to” guidelines in conducting interviews, suggesting that interviewing and interviewers must be “creative” by adapting themselves to the ever-changing situations they encounter. Standard survey and structured questions create an overly detached interviewer and present an almost nonhuman subject to respondents; this approach usually only touches the surface of experience and is unable to tap into the “emotional wellsprings” underneath. “Creative interviewing,” on the other hand, establishes a climate of mutual disclosure in which the interviewers’ deep disclosure elicits reciprocal actions on the part of respondents. Getting respondents to share deep feelings and emotions requires more than simply “probing” them, since mutual understanding requires that the “researcher...know thyself” (Douglas 1985, p. 51).

We sought to adopt a more dynamic view of the interview process, one that goes further than a neo-positivistic stance. While it is important to move beyond traditional formulae guiding interviews, it is also important to question the positivistic idea of respondents constituting a pure empirical referent that the researcher need only access. While interviews do require “99% perspiration” in the form of developing mutual disclosure, care must also be taken to not assume subjects contain “wellsprings” of experience and researchers act as prospectors who tap into this rich resource. “Thus the subject behind [the] respondent remains an essentially passive, if creatively emotional, fount of experience” (Holstein and Gubrium 1995, p. 13). As Holstein and Gubrium (1995) point out, discussions of interviews often center on “the characteristics and aims of the interview process, with little attention paid to how interviews differ as occasion for knowledge production” (p. 7). What is missing, in other words, is the recognition that interviews, or conversations, construct data, as much as they are a source of information.

Because of the penchant for methodological sophistication, researchers ignore the most basic of epistemological questions in the interview process: “Where does this knowledge come from, and how is it derived?” (Holstein and Gubrium 1995, p. 2). For no matter what form the interview takes, whether highly structured, standardized, quantitatively oriented, or free-flowing exchange and creative, “all interviews are interactional events ... constructed in situ ... [and] a product of the talk between interview participants” (Holstein and Gubrium 1995, p. 2). This contrasts with the traditional “vessel-of-answers” approach which assumes that the subject behind the respondent is passive. In other words, respondents are viewed as merely “containers” that hold information that can be extracted by the researcher in

an unbiased manner so long as certain measures are taken (Holstein and Gubrium 1995, p. 8).

The typical “vessel-of-answers” approach fails to recognize that both the interviewer and interviewee are always and unavoidably active; each is involved in “meaning making work” during the interview. The point is that meaning is not simply extracted by “asking the right questions” because meaning is constructed through the actual interview. The interviewer and interviewee are collaborators that assemble knowledge together. Interview data are unavoidably collaborative and thus attempts to strip interviews of their interactional ingredients will be futile. Instead of adding to the long list of methodological constraints under which interviews should be conducted, Holstein and Gubrium (1995) “[propose] an orientation whereby researchers acknowledge interviewers’ and respondents’ constitutive contributions and consciously and conscientiously incorporate them into the production and analysis of interview data” (p. 4). In this way, active interviewing represents a “theoretical stance toward data collection and analysis” (Holstein and Gubrium 1995, p. 73).

Consistent with language socialization research, an active interviewing approach is well-suited to address the “social turn” in studying language learning. Knowledge can never be collected in a disinterested manner, since “knowledge itself is a product of interaction ... [and] is created from the action taken to obtain it” (Holstein and Gubrium 1995, p. 3). Given the epistemological stance by language socialization researchers, the traditional methodological image of the interview situation is ill-equipped because it obscures the basic fact that “interviews fundamentally, not incidentally, shape the form and content of what is said” (Holstein and Gubrium 1995, p. 3). This approach to interviewing informs our study of Hispanic older adult learners in a number of ways.

Active Interviewing with Hispanic Older Adult Second Language Learners

First, treating respondents as a “passive vessel of answers” denies their active involvement in the production and maintenance of social reality. Consistent with our theoretical frames discussed in Chap. 1, interviewers must be cognizant that language learners do not possess a static set of meanings (e.g., motivations, attitudes, emotions, behaviors) about SLA, but rather they construct themselves through interpretive actions within language socialization. In this vein, active interviewing reaffirms the idea presented in contemporary SLA literature that older adult learners’ identities are fundamentally interactional constructs and reflect the dynamic interplay between selves and their context. Traditional interviewing techniques and analyses amount to systematically grouping and summarizing descriptions and offering a coherent framework to explain these details of the social world. Put differently, the “objective whats overwhelm the hows” (Holstein and

Gubrium 1995, p. 79). In contrast, “active interview data [is gathered and] analyzed to show the dynamic interrelatedness of the what and the how” (Holstein and Gubrium 1995, p. 9). Consequently, in presenting findings the goal is to reveal what identities are present and how they are constructed. In practice, researchers should focus on dialogue or how conversation establishes meaning about the self as learner. Certainly a better understanding of the formative development of second language learners’ identity involves examining the ways they talk about themselves, their ideas, and relationships with others during language resocialization.

Second, active interviewing offers a means of capturing the role of intersectional and biographical issues. A primary goal in active interviewing is to cultivate the respondent’s narrative activity: “this means that the respondent’s positional shifts, linkages, and horizons of meanings take precedence over the tacit linkages and horizons of the predesigned questions that the interviewer is prepared to ask” (Holstein and Gubrium 1995, pp. 76–77). In this sense, the interviewer may want to promote multivocality and shifts in narrative positions to expose the potentially multifaceted answers of respondents. For example, we asked study participants to move from the position of parental authority figure to a classroom student and to consider how age factors in their language socialization across multiple settings. Multivocality allows for the possibility of “narrative linkages,” which illustrate the multiple ways respondents are connected to one another and even to their own selves (Holstein and Gubrium 1995, p. 69). Fostering multivocality is useful for revealing the various dimensions of experience and attending to intersectionality.

And third, active interviewing alerted us to “narrative linkages” that “demonstrate the reach of the political into areas typically assumed to be personal” (Reinharz 1992, pp. 249–250). Consistent with Smith’s (1987) idea of “institutional ethnography,” the goal is to reveal the relationship between personal experiences and larger social structures. A theme of central interest to us is the relationship between language learning, power, and inequality. While early SLA research tended to treat cognition and other learning factors as independent of interactional context, indicators of interpersonal relationships (such as economic and social resources) are main determinants in language learning. Research suggests that SLA is fundamentally shaped by social relationships and the sociopolitical dynamics that result from these interpersonal and larger interactions (Dewaele 2005; O’Grady 2005). An important finding relates to how the social status and position of learners influence ultimate language attainment (Moyer 2004). DeVault (1999) writes that “[i]nstitutional ethnography is always concerned with institutional connections, with relations across and among various sites of activity, and with the coordination of these sites with ruling regimes” (p. 49). Active interviewing can provide a way to show “relations of ruling,” wherein cultural and social prestige shape SLA learners’ consciousness of their achievement, work on their language proficiency, and access to extensive opportunities for communicating in the target language.

The goal of our research design is to offer researchers and social service providers a sensitized view of the individuals they study and with whom they work. Both in theory and practice, the way we develop research agendas, construct study and interview questions, how we approach the data collection process, and who we

are all impact the research event. From our read of the epistemological and methodological shifts in SLA literature, we understood our methods as being well-suited to appreciate the fundamentally social character of second language learning. The in-depth and longitudinal nature of our investigation led us to suspect that we would acquire novel and socially relevant conceptual and empirical knowledge of Hispanic older adults' learning of a second language.

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