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Non-Native English Speakers and their Experience in College: a Study Based on Interview Conducted with International Students at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst

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**Non-Native English Speakers and Their Experience in College: A Study
Based on Interview Conducted with International Students at the
University of Massachusetts in Amherst**

A Master's Thesis Presented

by

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the experiences of international students within their learning environment and the community at large from the vantage point of being second, third, or fourth language speakers of English. Six undergraduate participants (three male and three female) were selected from five disciplines and one undeclared major at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. A phenomenological interviewing process was used to explore the experiences of the non-native English speakers. Three sixty-minute interviews were conducted with each of the participants and later transcribed. The study explores the educational and social experiences of the participants in college, and also their experiences of English language acquisition in preschool through high school and before they entered college. Material is presented in the form of profiles using the interview transcripts and topical issues generated from views expressed by participants.

The study revealed obstacles participants confront and the sources of support they sought. Participants draw on a variety of resources in order to overcome the obstacles they face. Within their educational environment, participants faced specific problems related to spoken English, accent, proficiency, non-existent or minimal support services, and the need to meet institutional standards in speaking and writing.

Conclusions were that socio-linguistic difficulties of non-native speakers of English can be enhanced by utilizing institution wide support mechanisms specific to both individual and group requirements, making personal endeavors aimed at improving oral speech and writing. The traditional attitude of non-acceptance and intolerance shown by native users of English towards non-native English speakers regarding issues, such as

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CHAPTER ONE

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

In the fall of 2003, while taking a course in in-depth interviewing and issues in qualitative research, I became exposed to in-depth interviewing as a single-handed methodology in qualitative research. To fulfill the course requirement, I conducted a pilot study on the experiences of an international graduate student from China. The study identified my participant's difficulties with English. In narrating her experiences, she often dwelled upon her difficulties with communicating in English. In regards to the language difficulties as a non-native English speaker¹, the central issues that my study identified were: little or no comprehension of American English, and oral communication difficulty.

As a result of these issues, I raised more questions at the conclusion of my pilot study.

- Does the University help international students to overcome their language difficulties?
- In what ways can any such help be channeled to the students?
- Do individual academic programs provide any such support to students?

¹ This research will focus on students who speak English as a second language (ESL). For this study, they are referred to as non-native English speakers (NNES). Hence, the acronym, NNES is used interchangeably to refer to the students who are participants of this research.

fear of speaking out. For instance, for fear of not being misunderstood or being asked many “what” questions, I do not participate in class discussion as actively or frequently as I would like to².

Linguistically, Liberia stands out from the other Anglophone countries in Africa in that it is the only black African state where English is spoken as a mother tongue by a major part of the population. Approximately 5% of the population use English as their first language – i.e. mother or native or first language (Gorlach, 2002, p. 4, 60; US CIA Report, 2000). English is the official language of Liberia, and because of the country’s history and political ties to the US, it is modeled on American English. This was not originally the case in the other African English-speaking countries. Hancock (1974) identified 6 different varieties of Liberian English: Standard Liberian English, Vernacular Liberian English, Nonnative Vernacular Liberian English, Liberian Pidgin English, Soldier English, and Kru Pidgin English. Even though Hancock makes these distinctions, it is advisable to exercise caution because it is questionable whether these distinctions really hold at all. It will be inaccurate to regard each variety as discrete forms with clearly definable boundaries, since all of the varieties are constitutive parts of what is regarded as Liberian English (Singer, 1984; this remains the most authoritative studies on LE). What is important, and the point to be made here is that, whatever form it contains, Liberian English exerts more or less influence upon Liberians, with the normalizing effect of standard English being affected (i.e. mainly English speaking ability).

Within the educational arena, the use of Standard English (i.e. proficiency, eloquence and oral communication) is distinguished by parental background or ethnic affiliation.

² Some educators and scholars have conducted critical studies on how race, ethnicity, class, culture and gender issues influence the quality and quantity of learning and teaching in schools (see works by Lippi-Green, 1997; Delpit, 1995, Delpit et al, 2002; Howard, 1999; Wiley, 1996; & Tse, 2001).

point of being second, third or fourth language speakers of English, through a phenomenological interviewing process.

It is worth noting that the effort of speaking or learning English as an additional language is spread worldwide. In the United States, the practice can be best described as English as a language or ESL. This embraces the international character of English and underscores the fact that English is increasingly being learned or spoken as a third or fourth language, not just a second language. To understand this requires the insider's view – i.e. not the view that looks at it, but rather the view that looks from it. Hence, the primary focus of this research is on the actual experience of the non-native English speakers who were interviewed for the study.

Undoubtedly, international students who are non-native speakers of English face constraints and difficulties. Some of the major interrelated predicaments considered by the study are: What are the obstacles that face non-native English speakers? What sustains students in their academic studies? What are some recommendations that may aid institutions of higher education in their efforts to help non-native English speakers?

Relevance of the Study

The study is relevant because it has both policy and practical implications. In terms of policy, this study is relevant because the information compiled herein will inform the university policymakers who have the task or responsibility of adapting current educational policies to meet the social and academic needs of an ever-expanding population of non-native English speakers or immigrant students. Practically speaking, the study is relevant because it will alert professors of higher education as to the need to

The final significant limitation of my study is my being an international student and non-native English speaker as well. As a researcher, I am well aware of my own personal biases and identification with the student group I interviewed. To begin with, as a Liberian male who speak World English (i.e. Liberian English), I can readily empathize with the participants of my study, who, being non-native English speakers, find themselves in an educational environment dominated by English, and its native speakers at that. But, I realized that if I have to be true to the purpose of my study, I have to abandon any preconceived notions or assumptions so as not to invalidate the integrity and becloud or distort the outcome of my study. I also tried to resist the temptation to “color” or augment views that are close to my own experiences. I exercised great care in not subsuming the experiences of my participants as “one and the same”.

Research Relating to World English

The evolution of different varieties of English has created a challenge and with it, left some to conceive models that are useful to the understanding of the spread of English and issues of intelligibility. This is especially true for non-native English speaking students, since a good grasp of a worldwide perspective can improve their achievement, dealing with them, and supporting their success in life.

The concept of “World English” is associated closely with Kachru (1986). This concept, as espoused by him and others has challenged conventional wisdom regarding the primacy of a linguistic standard that is applicable to all English speakers worldwide (Kachru, 1986; Conklin & Lourie, 1983; Bailey & Gortlach, 1982). Relying on socio-linguistic data gathered from post-colonial societies in Asia, Africa, Pacific and Caribbean Islands, Kachru and others have convincingly demonstrated that local and national groups of non-English descent have developed their own peculiar linguistic forms, socio-cultural usages, and meanings that differed markedly from their British or American parent languages (Gortlach, 2002; Schneider, 1997; Kachru, 1996; Kachru, 1992 & 1990; Cheshire, 1991; Conklin & Lourie, 1983). As a result, English used around the world has acquired its own legitimacy as language independent of the norms and uses imposed by regulatory bodies overseeing the “purity” of the English language. Nevertheless, there is ongoing debate among linguists centered on “whether efforts should be made to maintain a central standard of English or whether the different varieties of English should be acknowledged as legitimate forms in their own right” (Pennycook, 1994, p.10).

social stratification, and differing influences from Great Britain (Ferguson and Heath, 1981, pp. 4-5).

- One observer notes that the English of the American colonies failed to undergo “dialect leveling” or homogenization, principally, because of new geographical and social determinants. One example is the African American population. Due to the direct result of communicative needs engendered by long and extended contact between White plantation owners, overseers, and African slaves a distinct form of American English arose among African Americans, which academics today refer to as the Black English or Black English Vernacular (Labov, 1972a, p.36; Dillard, 1992, p. 60-92; Ferguson & Heath, 1981, p.44).
- Variation in linguistic behavior is a norm. It combines the concepts of “a language” and “a group or community” to engender the acts of identity which people make within themselves and with each other (Le Page & Tabouret-Keller, 1985, pp. 1-2).
- The term “different” or “variety” does not mean “right” or “wrong”. There are no linguistic criteria by which a given variety of the English language or a dialect of it can be proven “more wrong” than another. Nevertheless, there is a criterion for selecting and using one form or type in a given situation. That criterion is “appropriateness” (Feigenbaum, 1970, p.87).

Although all of the thoughts gathered from the various scholastic camps may fall under the heading of Standard and Nonstandard English, it is evident that there is an acknowledgement of the different varieties of English, which are recognized by linguistic

ranges from standard to nonstandard English. Moreover, each variety that has emerged serves its own function or purpose. Secondly, as a result of their large number, non-native users of English are also developing their own norms, which are not necessarily identical to norms prescribed by native users. All in all, given the complexities involved when it comes to the function of English across cultures and language, both native and non-native users must employ realism and supportive attitudes in this regard.

Research Relating to Methodology and Data as Personal Documents

In-depth phenomenological interviewing is a specialized form of qualitative method, which focuses on collecting data in the form of people's own words, utterances, gestures, and behavior, and is often grounded in phenomenology. To this end, researchers have gone at great length to underscore the importance and usefulness of working with information gathered in in-depth phenomenological study. Particular attention has been focused on how to categorize data derived from the use of a phenomenological process. Hence, researchers are of similar mind in recognizing such data as information whose sources are rooted in the views or perceptions of individuals (Cottle, 1977; Bogdan & Taylor, 1975; Marshall, 1981; Richardson et al, 1965; & Tagg, 1985).

As for Bogdan and Taylor (1975), a phenomenological study yields a set of descriptive data, which falls under a data category they called "personal documents". The authors define personal documents as "materials in which people reveal in their own words their view of their entire life, or a part of it, or some other aspect about themselves" (p.96). Moreover, Bogdan and his colleagues describe personal documents

related issue concerning the degree to which the data itself is shaped by elements already existing in the researcher's mind.

The question of how research with personal documents shapes or is shaped by theory is a concern to social science researchers (Allport, 1942; Gottschalk et al, 1945 & Polanyi, 1958). Allport (1942) considers this problem as one of locating a spot on a continuum of choices that fall between illustration and induction. Near to illustration at one end of the continuum are personal documents, which are not a source of knowledge but rather an object to theories conceived in other forums. At the other end of the continuum, where there is induction, interpretation grows entirely out of the documents themselves. Allport notes that there is no single correct location on the continuum, but states that it is unlikely that any interpretation can be considered completely inductive. To a large extent the issue is defined by the organizational problems faced by the researcher who, to present the material, has to reduce it and order it in some way. But ordering is not an objective process. Instead, it is a process in which at least some degree of interpretation on the part of the researcher is applied.

Erickson (1985) alludes to the problem of individuals, groups and social theories and holds out the hope that the general can be created out of the specific. He visualizes individual meaning contexts as the first elements in a progression of building blocks that will define social theories and permit cross-cultural comparisons.

Speaking on the same subject, Schuman (1982) states that his work "reflects a conscious effort to move from the singular to the collective" (p.120). He notes, however, that research based on the experience of individual human beings forces an acceptance of multiple truths, since social policy must be judged by its effect on individuals he is

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH DESIGN

Selection of Research Participants

One of the important initial considerations of this study was the development of a suitable basis for selecting participants. The goal was to choose participants who would give the greatest breadth possible to a small study but who would also share sufficient similarities in their experience to give rise to common themes. Non-native English speaking experience is characterized by a diversity that makes it difficult to find this kind of balance.

This diversity is created first of all by a fundamental division in language that separates those who learn and speak in situations where English is the primary language of the larger society from those who don't. Beyond this initial distinction, there are divisions in using English that describe the level at which comprehension and speech take place to facilitate communication. The diversity that characterizes non-native English speakers does not necessarily fall along predictable lines. For example, non-native speakers of English have different languages, different alphabets, different educational backgrounds, and different oral and spoken competencies.

For this reason it would have been unsuitable for participants to be selected on the basis of a particular language group. Moreover, such a selection would not have achieved real homogeneity. Linguistic homogeneity may mask cultural diversity. Let me elaborate

Other Factors Considered in Participant Selection

The selection of a single educational institution and one group of students provided a unifying basis that permitted the study to include diverse elements of international students. However, not every element of diversity was included. Therefore, in utilizing the University of Massachusetts in Amherst, the research did not aim to become a study of an educational institution or to present interview material in an institutional framework. The concerns raised by the participant of the pilot project had both a personal aspect but also a broader institutional and societal aspect. Interview material in this study has been reported in terms of the linkages that seem inherent to the material itself. Material was not limited to that which related to campus-wide issues or was it segmented according to majors or the program levels at which participants were enrolled.

Once a decision for selecting participants was established it became necessary to be able to actually contact individual students and ask them to participate in the study. In the present study it was possible to gain access to NNES without seeking the intervention of intermediary gatekeepers (Rallis & Rossman, 1998, p. 23). The most helpful source of participants was the Brett and Lewis Residence Halls on the University of Massachusetts Amherst campus. Both residence halls have many international undergraduate students and served as an effective site to reach to potential participants. In addition, as Assistant Residence Director in Residence Life, assigned in Brett/Brooks Cluster it was fairly easy to contact students directly. It was also possible to establish contact with students through flyers posted in the residence halls. I had no prior acquaintance with any participants of the study.

communication; one male was senior, majored in economics; one male was freshman, majored in pre-nursing, and one female was sophomore, majored in biology. They were readily accessible to the researcher. Since interviews were conducted on one-to-one basis, contact and interview with participants were relatively convenient for the researcher.

I interviewed six students ranging in age from 19 to 24 years old. All of the six participants speak English as second language. They were three females and three males. Apart from one, all of the participants were born outside the United States in Ghana, Haiti, India, Korea, and Nigeria. The US born participant comes from Pakistan where she grew up from age few months to eighteen. Hence, one female Indian and one female Pakistani and one male Korean comprised the Asian participants. Similarly, one female Ghanaian and one male Nigerian comprised the African participants, and one male Haitian from the Caribbean rounded out the six.

To ensure participants' confidentiality, I have used pseudonyms for all their names, and likewise all other persons who appear in the study. I have retained the names of places, which participants mentioned during the interviews. By retaining the real names of the places mentioned by participants, my intention was to give semblance of the locale where students actually grew up, lived or attended school.

Structure of the Research

The interview structure of this research was not designed to create or test hypothesis. Nor was it designed to contribute to or illustrate general theories of the social sciences. The interviews of the present study were not shaped by a question and answer format.

of a group of related experience that were rooted in the concrete experiential details of the participants' lives and educational environment.

The interviews in this study focused on individuals. The goal was to obtain information from the point of view of individual students. This focus therefore explored the individuality of the student's experience, its history, its details and its meaning. In the presentation of the interview material the experience of individuals was expanded through connection that were made with the experience of other individuals who were also non-native English speakers. Thus, in this sense the research was a study of individuals and the linkages between individuals who shared their common experience.

The structure of phenomenological, in-depth interviewing requires for its success a sense of equity between interview and participant. This does means sense of fairness and justice and a commitment to honor both the experience of the participant and the research itself (Seidman, 1998). Building a sense of equity can contribute to the ease that participants feel in speaking in a private rather than a public voice. The private voice best reveals the concrete details of experience and the subjective reflection on meaning that is sought in the interviews.

Methods of Data Interpretation

The interviews done for this study was tape-recorded and a transcript of the recording was made. Material was interpreted on the basis of the written record. It is in the interpretation of the material that the researcher acts most clearly as a filter of the interview experience, since it is the researcher's role to search the material for important

each person's story holds together as a unit. Secondly, the selection of the participants as a group and the way in which their stories connect to one another helped to shape the study. Thirdly, the study has been influenced by what the researcher has brought into it in terms of personal interest and relationships established to other literature in the field. Finally, as always, the study has been influenced by a desire to share with the reader material that is likely to be meaningful. What is often most meaningful in a study such as this one is the opportunity that the reader has to make direct contact with the words of the participants. The following chapter makes that possible through the presentation of profiles of three of the study participants.

The Research Design and My Role as Researcher

Noting that there are obvious overlaps between the various research traditions and that procedures are often shared among them, the research design that I employed in this study was that of a phenomenological study. According to several authors (Seidman, 1998; Creswell, 1998, p.51; Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p.112), a phenomenological study describes the meaning of the lived experiences for several individuals about a concept or the phenomenon. In the case of the participants of this study, this approach allowed me to interpret the nature and reality of their experiences as non-native English speakers, and better comprehend the academic and social challenges they faced in college.

From the perspective of a phenomenological study, I understood that a study of this kind was interactive process, shaped by my own personal story, and those of the people

CHAPTER FOUR

PROFILES OF THE PARTICIPANTS

Introduction

This section contains the profiles of three participants. The profiles have been constructed in the words of the participants. The individual profiles enable the reader to get a sense of how a person's story develops within a life context. Seeing several profiles together helps the reader to follow issues that appear in the stories of more than one individual. The profiles presented here foreshadow some of the themes in chapter five on topical issues. A theme may appear in a single profile or in a number of them.

One theme, which is present to some degree in all the profiles, is the complexity of the participants' experiences, which constitute the nature of the challenges they face. In the profiles that follow, participants express feelings of dissatisfaction as well as feelings of success for confronting challenges. Different aspects of participants' lives interact with their academic study. The stresses of grappling with appropriate communication or speaking in English appear throughout the profiles. The personal difficulties encountered are reflected in comments about the surroundings in which some of the participants lived and studied. One participant, Shirley Tower, talks about her teasing in a middle school [Boston Area in US] and her feeling of being hurt. One reason she is hurt is because she is made to feel that she is not good enough to do certain things. In another profile, Nina Rabin talks about how she, too, gets confused/bemused when speaking to native speakers

Therefore, I profiled the stories of three as vivid representations of major themes that flowed through the lived experiences shared by all six students.

Profile of Shirley Tower

[At the time of the interview Shirley Tower was a sophomore student in Commonwealth College. She was majoring in Communication with triple minors in Psychology, Spanish and Music. She completed middle school in the U.S. and graduated from high school in the USA as well. In addition to English, Shirley speaks Twi and Fanti, two major languages spoken in Ghana, West Africa.]

I was born in Ghana. In Ghana we try to learn English as we learn our native tongue. We learn English from school, from kindergarten . . . throughout. We learn to write it, to speak it, and to read it. From my personal experience, by 7th grade my teacher in Ghana will teach in English. We were encouraged to speak English on campus. And then, we also spoke our native languages. So, back there [it] was okay. The teachers spoke in English. We were able to understand and learn from it. We took notes. But sometimes they would teach in the native languages, because you cannot keep it in English for so long [prolonged laughter]. However, in preschool to 3rd grade, the language of instruction was my mother tongue [Fanti]. For the rest of my primary school years, English was taught as a subject. It continued as the dominant language of instruction in 7th through 12th grade along side one local language of choice.

So I came to the US...in the middle of 2nd semester, I believe in the 7th grade.... That's when for me, having English as a second language became quite a problem. It was very difficult for me to pick up what the teacher spoke. And my most difficult class was actually math [laughter]. I had an American teacher, who to me, then spoke very fast. I didn't really understand what she was saying. So, as a result, I did poorly in math. I

people are like, . . . what did you say? I am sorry, [it] is your accent. In an offensive manner, you know. I remember [laughter] one thing I learned from this guy [12 grade math teacher.] “He said that, in high school, he had a very interesting accent. And . . . people were often asking him why do you have an accent? Or, they would say, you have an accent. And his response would be, of course [in deep voice], I have an accent. I speak 3 languages”. So, you have to allow for that, because he spoke English; he spoke French; he spoke Spanish. So, he had a combination of accent, which I will admit sometimes was difficult to understand.

So, those experiences of being teased, and not feeling comfortable, and feeling that I was not able to express or articulate myself clearly enough for people to understand made me hesitant to volunteer to speak up in class, and a bit more nervous than I should be when I was to present in the classroom. I was mostly known in middle school and the first half of high school, which is the first 2 years as a quiet person. Which was not really true [laughter], because in the home environment I am louder and I speak more often. But, what helped me was my excellence in academic work. Because I may not be able to . . . speak with an American accent, but I could speak the English. I could write it. So, I found myself . . . being able to express myself in writing more than in speaking . . . I was an “A” student in high school. And, you know, getting those grades in different subjects boosted my confidence. And, eventually I could try to speak out more in class, because my teacher trusted me and had faith in me . . . Nevertheless, I could construct what I had to say very much ahead of time before I spoke. Even then, the fact that I had to speak was . . . [laughter] . . . just nerve-racking. So . . . when I came to college it wasn’t too much of an issue. The thing is; my American friends tend to say I have a bit of an accent, which I

I am in the Honors Program [in] Commonwealth College. I took the Dean's Book . . . You have to present to the whole class. The Dean Book is a one-credit course for honors students. So, what you do is, you read the book and you discuss in class. And you write a review of the book. There are 2 ingredients: a review of the book that we write, and, then we have a project. You pick a theme on which we have to present in class. Then there is the oral presentation, a discussion. You only have to take 3 of it. I have taken 2 so far. [For] my first Dean's Book course I was absolutely nervous. Then, as a communication major, especially this year [2004], I had a presentation [for] every examination or quiz in my Introduction to Debate and Argument Class. You presented a speech. We had presentation, where you . . . had a partner. You listened to your partner's argument. And right after that, you got up and refuted the argument without prior preparation . . . that trained me, and helped me to be more elaborate in speaking, and just helped my speaking skills . . . the Dean's Book and the class [communication] I am taking now, and just, also throughout high school and college, [have] made me a better speaker, because in every class in English I have had the opportunity to stand up and present. You know, you have to sit there, and think about what you're going to say. You have to write it. But, then sometimes you don't write it. Sometimes it is just across the board, and you have to present to people. So, definitely, I feel that my [majoring] in communication has been instrumental in my ability to speak more clearly, articulate myself better, than I will say my counterparts who are not in the major [communication].

Just practice, you know. The more you're around people that you have to speak [to]; you just get better. It is just like any other thing. [For example], . . . the more you . . . practice piano the better you get out of it. But, definitely, in the initial stages [of] . . . my

pronunciations are not the sameI mean, in that very class, I had a person tell me I can't understand you because of your accent [laughter]. And that can be very annoying sometimes. And actually made me angry.... But, what can you say. Because I know that if they were to go to Ghana, they will actually have to go through the same thing because people won't understand [them] so much per se . . . but they fail to have compassion. People fail to see that in this place. They speak as if the American English, the American accent is the only right way. They tend to distinguish between, you know, within a US accent, a southern accent or a New England accent as opposed to an African accent, which is dramatically different. My being an honors student, definitely gives me more confidence, because I know that if I can be accepted in the Honors Program at the university, then there is almost nothing I can't do....

I am still not 100% . . . I still tend to speak in my accent for the sake of the people whom I am speaking to. I do tend to switch accent depending on the people that I am around. When I am with my African friends, I have a Ghanaian accent. But when I am with my American friends . . . it [Ghanaian accent] slips in. I will never have a 100% American accent. It is a combination of the accent and attitude. There is this arrogance, you know. You don't treat a person like that. Like what are you are saying or speak slowly or I don't get what you're saying. That's what [why] I am saying they fail to have compassion; put themselves, in that place [same situation]. That if you were to go somewhere else, you won't like to be treated that way. So, that's what hurts me. And that's what makes me angry, because to act as if the American way of speaking is the standard and you should know how to speak it, is mere arrogance. And when I am faced with that, you know, that can be upsetting. But, then, that's an attitude that goes

6th grade to 9th grade. Some schools do Creole. Most schools use French, the official language along with other languages. Like the books I had were in French. French is the official medium of communication in the country. It is taught right in the beginning from First grade. I started taking English in 6th grade as well in secondary school.

They have English professors [teachers]. They try to write vocabulary on the board, so that you learn the meaning in French, and you . . . try to learn them by heart.... Then they will probably ask you to recite . . . and [give] . . . the meaning. Sometimes they will have conversation with you so that you can listen to what people are talking in English. Sometimes, they ask other students to speak with one another. The professors [teachers] also encourage you to speak in English so that you can learn the words and listen. I learned English in 7th, 8th and 9th grades. I studied it for 3 yrs. I could write little bit [in] English. I could understand a little bit. But, once I got in 9th grade, when the professor [teacher] gave assignments, I realized I needed to learn more about English. I didn't really know lots of words or vocabularies, and how to write sentences. So, I had to learn how to do that in high school....

I did half of my 9th grade [studies] in Haiti, and the second half here [in US]. Here [UMASS Amherst] it is different for me, probably from other people because [in] my high school they had the bilingual program. Half of the professors [teachers] were Haitian. When I first got to learn English, my professors [teachers] spoke Creole with us because they were bilingual. It was almost the same thing in my country. But the professors [teachers] also spoke English sometimes. It was easier to learn English and to communicate with my teachers. But, in other schools some of the students like my brother . . . didn't have bilingual program. He had to speak English; otherwise, the

or understand the words. Sometimes they asked us to write it down so they can read it. And also, another English teacher will come in and ask us to speak in English. Then he could explain or convey whatever we wanted to say. I did not participate a lot. I have to think about the words and try to translate into French or Creole before I try to speak to the professors [teachers] or ask any questions. I did the same thing throughout my high school years. I couldn't just speak in English without first processing it in French or Creole.

Most of my friends were Haitian people. All of the classes were mostly Haitians. We couldn't speak English. So, we weren't good in English classes. [Since] most of us were Haitian ... we spoke Haitian [Creole] to one another, and when the community is together we speak it. But, sometimes when we had large classes, like when we go to the gym, and we have a gym class, we will see . . . English people and other people who speak English. Sometimes they will ask us something. We won't understand what they would ask us. So we have problem communicating with them. That's why we didn't make friends with English people.

My professors in college are supportive. They understand we are non-native speakers of English. They have office hours. We have plenty time with them. [Our] fellow students were so unsympathetic. They cracked jokes. They mocked. At first, they used foul language that we don't understand. They had attitude problem. I went into Economics so as to avoid taking many English classes.

Presently, I do experience challenges as someone that English is not first language [mother tongue] for. In some of my current classes, the professors are really strict on languages like how to write papers with a minimum of 35 pages and grammatical errors.

participate well in group activity. I can ask questions when I do not understand, unlike in the beginning. I think some ways to work at the problem is making lots of friends and conversing with them often. Another way is to go to the writing center [in Bartlett] to seek help in grammar corrections and writing essays and term paper writing. I also think, it is good when reading, you read aloud to monitor your pronunciation of words and your accent. Make the dictionary your friend. You should always make the effort to look up meaning of words and their grammatical form. Try to speak to the professor about questions or issues you have right after the class.

Profile of Nina Rabin

[At the time of the interviews Nina Rabin was a junior student in Biology and Psychology. Nina was born in the U.S. but grew up in Pakistan. She attended and finished preschool through high school in Pakistan. Upon completion of high school, Nina returned to the U.S. to pursue college education. She speaks Urdu, Punjabi and Hindi.]

I was born in the United States, but moved to Pakistan when I was just a few months old. And that is where I spent most of my life. My mom said I was very fond of going to school. So I went to some preschool when I was 2 and half, and I started school at 3 in Montessori Prep and 1-11 [Grade 11]. I studied in the British School System. We had our GCSC, "O" Levels and "A" Levels. Grades 9, 10, and 11 were "O" levels. Grades 12 and 13 were "A" levels. I went to the High Grammar School, which was an all girl English medium school. . . . We did English, Urdu, math, Pakistani studies, history, geography, social studies, science, biochemistry, physics, computer, [and] economics. Every thing we did was in English, except Urdu. Urdu language was in Urdu and Islamia [Islamic]. Our religious studies were up to Grade 7 and were in Urdu. Then, it swapped to English

Urdu. And everybody [Pakistani] understands that. All my friends understood it always. And, another thing I will do, I will think in Urdu and translate to English. So, some of the things I say just end up sounding really funny because you know, you have like local, how do you call them, idioms and phrases and metaphors and they sound really good in one language, and like if you try to turn them in another language, they sound crazy and funny. And a lot of people over here think I am funny because I will do all these translations of things but I am being serious. So, I moved here [US] when I was 18. I am 21 now. I did not come to school straight away. I came here in 2000³. My father said that I should take a year and just integrate in the society and work, just so I get more acclimatized with the surrounding and the environment. He lives here [US]. So, I was in Birmingham, Alabama for all of 2001. And I worked a couple of jobs there as a waitress, dry cleaning, and as a hostess. I used to work 18 hours a week. All of my friends over there were Americans. So, nobody spoke any language except for English. My father's wife is also American. She is white. And so, English was predominantly spoken in our house. So, I got into the habit of, and by being a waitress, a hostess, and understanding different accents and everything, and all of that.

Then I came to UMASS in 2002 January. Well, I have always had an accent. I can never get rid of my accent. When I went to England, I developed a British accent for a while, just because at age 10, you know, you really pick things up. And I was there for 6 months. When I came back my Pakistani friends would make fun of me, so I changed it back to my Pakistani accent. Now, like over here, some people will say I have Pakistani

³ Nina Rabin was born to a Pakistani father and mother in the US. She identifies herself both as a Pakistani and an US citizen. Her biological mother raised her in Pakistan. Then she returned to the US in 2000. Presently, Nina is a part of a bi-racial household, because her Pakistani father is married to a Caucasian American woman – her stepmother.

the [this] tape recorder is on now, and I know I have to keep on talking, I will like have these complete lapses, where no English words come to my head.

And I don't know why it happens to me like that. . . . I know my English is better than anybody who is not a non-native speaker. Most Pakistani people who have not grown up over here [US], I know my English is equal to them or sometimes better than theirs. But with the native speakers . . . they have been so submerged in English, and just, you know, how . . . more than one language also confuses you and throws you off track. Like I am thinking of all these words in Urdu right now. I am completely thinking in Urdu right now and translating. Is that not crazy? So, native speakers don't have that distraction in their head. Like if I was speaking to Serena, you know her? I will speak a mixture of English and Urdu. And if you call her and we have a conversation, you wouldn't be able to understand, because we will speak a lot of English. But whenever something [appropriate word] is missing, we will slip in an Urdu word, a Hindu word or something, and it is okay. But if I know I cannot speak in any other language, just because I am so used to the mixture, it puts me under extra pressure of making sure every word is correct or used properly. I feel . . . they are not going to understand if I use something else. In college it is not such a big deal . . . because you can get away with the use of things like "whatever", "like", "yeah", and "stuff", just because most of the students aren't so bright. So you can just have these gaps and get away with things. But, if I am talking to someone smart like a professor, a grad student, then you cannot do something like that. You have to use proper words to make yourself understood. It is also a respect thing, I think, because what good are you if you don't know a language.

have to have this flowing English. I make a conscious effort to speak slowly. But generally, I speak really fast to eat few words. I don't have problem understanding course materials. I never have a problem with students or teachers asking questions. I don't have problem. What I do have problem with is understanding the use of and meanings of idioms, slangs, jokes or localisms in general. I can't figure out the use of sarcastic remarks. I have all these little silly things. . . .

I don't talk that much in class, because I have very large classes, and there is not much chance to talk. And not only that; I usually understand everything, and I don't have any questions. If I do have questions, I prefer to go after class to the professor and talk one-on-one. Most of the time, very seldom will I talk in class. I am taking an English writing class right now. I am okay with that. We are reading things. And I am pretty good in it. My tenses are okay. My hyphens are okay. But my professor thinks that my punctuation is really bad. Anyway I mess up spelling sometimes, so I don't know. My professor is really mad at me. She thinks I have no idea of writing composition, which is strange because I have seen myself as English person. The phrase: 'beat around the bush' usually comes out in my writing. I will beat around, around; give lot of explanations....

With professors, most of the time I don't have problem understanding course materials. If they have an accent, I have the worst time. I cannot understand a lot of accents. It takes a while to get an accent. I had to live in the South for a while to understand that accent and the special things that go with the accent. And it's taken me a while, but now I can sort of get Northeastern accent. With friends, usually, I think I talk exactly the way I am talking over here like little slow, sometimes thinking and then really fast paced. I keep my mouth shut a lot now. I used to be very talkative. I don't talk as

slowly, we can have our processing time, translate it into English, correct the grammar and then say it. But then, the people on the side don't have patience for you.

Summary

The chapters that follow are thematically organized. In these chapters excerpts in the words of the participants are frequently used. In some cases those excerpts will be from the participants who have been profiled in this chapter. Of course, in similar cases, excerpts will be from participants who have not been profiled here.

In most of the preceding profiles the participants conveyed the feeling that they faced realities that are challenging and useful. They indicated that they felt they have been able to acquire language skills that are genuinely needed. The participants did not cope simply with components of the immediate disadvantages related to non-native speakers but to the broad situations in which they are expected to use English. This sense of responding to real needs situated within individual and cultural contexts are a pervasive theme among participants and are the general topics of the next chapter.

Most of the participants in this study indicated an awareness of the powerful forces of culture. This awareness was often implicit rather than explicit in the things they said. The profiles make it evident that the participants were not a monolithic group who expressed a single version of any theme. They were a collection of people with individual life stories whose common thread is that they are basically non-native English speakers or international students at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. Out of their lives and out of their studies a number of issues arose that connected them to each other. These issues are treated in the thematic chapters that follow.

In this chapter I will look and recount the discourses of participants with respect to their experiences as non-native users of English. These discourses will provide an avenue that enables participants to make statements in line with particular topics generated from their own stories.

How Participants First Learned or Acquired English

Participants learned English primarily in school in their respective countries. Later on, they began to get exposed to other facets of the language (i.e. oral, different varieties, written) in school, from friends and social groups in their homelands and now, here in the United States. Parents, friends and relatives played a role in participants' English language acquisition. They supplemented classroom instruction and filled in gaps. Participants' whose parents spoke English at home enhanced their English knowledge easily than those whose parents spoke only the native language or English as foreign language.

Accent as Handicap

Accent as "handicap" rather than as "ingredient" is another powerful discourse that circulates in the midst of the speech community. According to socio-linguistic writer and scholar Rosina Lippi-Green "accent-as-problem" rather than "accent-as-ingredient" is Americans' dominant orientation (1997, p. 69). Treatment of accent is often a focus on non-native speakers of English and second language programs. Unlike the oral aspect,

accented speech. The “impoverished” speech perception is either consciously or unconsciously used by many native speakers of English to de-legitimize the identities and lived experiences of non-native users of English and to instill in them feeling of inadequacy regarding their life chances and possibilities.

Sometimes they do not see me as non-native speaker of English. Rather they judge me as Pakistani or Muslim. A lot of people will say, oh, you are from Pakistan. Your English is very good. It is like they expect me to speak really low and really bad. And they are like encouraging me. Like sometimes I don't remember who that was, I said I make mistakes; blab, blab. And the person said, “oh, no. Your English is excellent for someone like you, and stuff”. That was rude actually, to me, because for saying someone like you. I mean, even if they are right. Why are they assuming I will speak any less?

Nina Rabin

The comments of Nina Rabin are indicative of how accent appeared as a thorny issue in non-native English speaking. In fact, in addition to occupying the minds of non-native users of English, accent somewhat determined how to and the extent of association with respect to mainly non-native and native, but also non-native and non-native. Shirley Tower noted this point in the following comments. “...My American friends tend to say I have a bit of an accent, which I do. But, then when I am with my Ghanaian and African friends, they tend to say I don't have an accent. They feel I speak more in the American accent. I still tend to speak in my accent for the sake of the people whom I am speaking to. I do tend to switch accent depending on the people that I am around. When I am with my African friends, I have a Ghanaian accent. But when I am with my American friends . . . it [Ghanaian accent] slips in. I will never have a 100% American accent. It is a combination of the accent and attitude”....

Poor Speaking versus Intelligence

Another interrelated facet of the language-as-deficit perspective is the tendency of many Standard American English (SAE) speakers to prejudicially associate the “impoverished” speech of non-native English speakers with a low level of intelligence (Crawford, 1992, p. 207). What such deficit-minded advocates really mean is that poor language skills are the product of poor cognition or intelligence. Of course, such utterance is far-fetched and does not find favor with many contemporary educators, much less with Nina Rabin and Shirley Tower whose views, though shared from two different angles, nonetheless, discount the poor speaking equals poor intelligence notion.

One thing I have definitely noticed is that I am comfortable speaking to Pakistani, Indians, [and] non-native English speakers.... I am comfortable speaking with you. When I start talking to someone whose first language is English, white people mostly, I get messed up, somehow or the other. Even though I was at the top of my class always in school. I was always very good in English. I got excellent grades, and all those things. But I get just a little messed up or a little nervous. Or, I will talk too fast or I will talk too slow or something over there. I have noticed this overtime. Non-native speakers I am fine. As soon as they are native speakers, I get a little messed up, just a few things. And another thing is, and I don't like if this is just because of English or it just happens.

Nina Rabin

So, those experiences of being teased, and not feeling comfortable, and feeling that I was not able to express or articulate myself clearly enough for people to understand made me hesitant to volunteer to speak up in class, and a bit more nervous than I should be when I was to present in the classroom. I was mostly known in middle school and the first half of high school, which is the first 2 years as a quiet person. Which was not really true [laughter], because in the home environment I am louder and I speak more often.

Shirley Tower

that they are totally ignorant, although I try and educate them about [or] from my perspective. But if I want a friend, I want them to have some prior knowledge, you know, have broader perspective.

Jasmine Strickland

If literacy is defined solely as the ability to read, write, and perform simple computational tasks, then this assumption is true. However, while some advocates preach the virtues of skill acquisition (i.e. vocabulary, spelling, grammar, listening, reading, and writing), others advocate language values that are connected to the learners' social and cultural realities, that is, their lived experiences. The view of the latter advocates is well borne by the testimony of Robert Jones in the narrative presented herein below on how he was helped to reinforce his knowledge in English while acquiring other skills as well. Robert moved to the U.S. where he continued schooling and eventually finished high school before entering college.

Here [in UMASS Amherst] it is different for me, probably from other people because [in] my high school they have the bilingual program. Half of the professors [teachers] were Haitian. When I first got to learn English, my professors [teachers] spoke Creole with us because they were bilingual. It was almost the same thing in my country. But the professors [teachers] also speak English sometimes. It was easier to learn English and to communicate with my teachers. But, in other schools . . . like my brother, he didn't have bilingual class. He had to speak English; otherwise, the teacher won't understand him. So, they have to learn that way. But, as for me, I can [could] speak Creole to the teachers if I don't [didn't] understand what they are [were] saying. And they can [could] speak Creole to translate or explain what they say [said], or if I didn't understand what they were saying, because my school was for Haitian people who did not speak English. So, they had the bilingual program for them.

Robert Jones

It has been noted by Schneider (1997b, p. 229; also see Cheshire, 1991, p. 13) that the separation of reading, spelling and writing domains from the medium of culture can undoubtedly have implications for the socio-linguistic or literacy development of non-

Support Sought and Utilized

Their own qualities of awareness and consciousness of finding self-support were important characteristics of the study participants. They demonstrated resolve that helped them to realize a need for support mechanisms and focused on them. For the participants self-support mechanism awareness was prompted and encouraged by their encounters with their fellow high school or college students and teachers or professors. For the participants, also, it was rooted in experiences of socio-linguistic discontinuity that had occurred in their lives. Jasmine Strickland talked about on how she exhibited such awareness and high degree of personal efforts in her academic study in high school. She was a participant whose parents lived and worked in the Ivory Coast and English had been a second language in her home. She also had to deal with a third language, French throughout her years of study in high school. She was aware of connections between her experience then and that of her ability to cope with her experiences in college.

My father got a job in Ivory Coast in West Africa. We moved there from [New] Delhi... it was 1997, I think.... Abidjan is the capital city. And there was a school there. It is called the International Community School of Abidjan. It was originally built for the children of American Diplomats, and people working in the American Embassy and British Embassy.... And it allowed people from the African Development Bank, where my father works.... It was based on the American curriculum.... It offered second languages like French and Spanish. Taking French was mandatory, because Ivory Coast is, of course, a French speaking country.... I joined the school from 8th [grade], and I graduated from that school.

In the beginning I had the accent. I think it was pretty heavy.... I took lots of time adjusting, and getting the sound of words right.... [It was] the period I had to learn to adjust life.... There were words that I have never heard of, like curse words.... I never knew what they meant. I would be always clueless when people would say ...words like that.... In the beginning I did not even know how to write

awareness of what it entailed for non-native speaker of English to take personal steps to tackle socio-linguistic problems, having experienced it himself.

In searching for support and using it, the participants often felt encouraged or nurtured in various ways. Most participants sought and received some sort of support, but attitudes towards their individual endeavors varied and included dislike and displeasure. How be it, for the participants a nurturing attitude seemed an important and inseparable element of that which was needed to heal them. The students in this study spoke about difficulties in their encounters with English speaking natives or Americans or their relationships with people in general in their educational environment. Some of the behavior had primarily an informative content and some of it had an emotional content, but all of it has been viewed as encouraging and nurturing.

Encouragement or nurturing was frequently regarded as personal matter to grapple with, as Robert Jones has commented in his account on interaction with his teachers and student peers, which influenced his decision on selecting his academic major in college.

When I first got to learn English, my professors [teachers] spoke Creole with us because they were bilingual. It was almost the same thing in my country. Looking back now it affected me, because I didn't have much practice in English as much as I would have liked to or as in other schools.... People get better in speaking because they speak English in school and have more practice. Professors are supportive. They understand we are non-native speakers of English. They have office hours. You spend plenty time with them. [Our] fellow students were not so sympathetic. They cracked jokes. They mocked. At first, they used foul language that we didn't understand. They had attitude problem. I went into Economics so as to avoid taking many English classes.

Robert Jones

I think professors have been very good. And, especially when you tell them that you are an international student. They will be very supporting. They like to know what your experiences will be. My English Professor was great. For my college writing, he was very supportive. I think most of them are quite nice. I think, the

Participants sometimes saw socio-linguistic hardships as part of a personal commitment to better their world academically and socially. Sometimes their perception was translated in more concrete undertakings. Ken Urey, for example made it a point to participate more in class and connect better with his schoolmates.

During last summer [2003] I was in school. I did a lot. I decided to do a lot of participation in class during the regular semester. So, I took business and economics classes. Because of my preparatory efforts in the summer, I participated well in the economic class I took during the fall semester. At the end of the class, the professor whom I took the class with thanked me. He loved my participation. I tried it because I knew I had problem. Another thing is that I participate in Christian Bible Study. I do presentations and lead discussions on scriptural topics. I interact a lot with my American student friends in my academic program and in the dorm. We make weeklong trips to other parts of the country [US]. These efforts have really helped me to overcome my fear due to my accent, as well as improve my speaking ability and build my self-confidence.

Ken Urey

Understandably, the experience of Ken Urey is a common thread that runs through the individual stories of each participant, because personal initiatives were crucial to their coping strategies. Each participant pursued and achieved success in various ways through meetings, conversations, social activities, and serious personal studies.

Closing Thoughts

The participants in this study show courage and determination in order to successfully respond to their own needs as non-native users of English: an engagement with professors and fellow students, a willingness to take practical initiatives in the process of confronting socio-linguistic issues, and seeking and utilizing resources in order to meet their real and immediate needs. The qualities of identifying resources and acting

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

Introduction

In the two preceding chapters I have presented the experiences of six college students who are non-native English speakers. I have looked at three constitutive parts of their experiences: past, present, and meaning of the past and present. I have analyzed and interpreted participants' socio-linguistic experiences particularly, especially what their experiences constitute and how they build upon them. I have viewed the interviewing process with the participants as both an empowering and enabling experience.

The thoughts participants shared with me reflected the meaning they created of their lives, or stories of their lives. In as much as I asked them to make sense of their own stories, I have taken on that task myself as analyzer, interpreter, and writer of their experiences. What I have provided here are glimpses of students' experiences, as they had provided me with glimpses of their lives. I have listened, read, and carefully chosen words from their stories, which I thought best represented who the participants were, the essence of their experiences. I have tried to present their experiences in a way that best reflected what the participants themselves felt most strongly about: speaking, writing, accent, attitude, peers, professors, schooling, their native countries, the United States, life, and themselves.

This study has sought to understand the experience of college students who are non-native speakers of English from their vantage point. It has been done so in the belief that

accompanies it, listening and caring and exercising a behavior that nurtures a degree of positive attitude between native and nonnative speakers.

In view of the unique developments and functions of the non-native varieties of English, the native speakers' attitude toward such development and known varieties has traditionally not been one of acceptance or recognition. In fact, non-native varieties are often considered deficient models of language acquisition. This attitude is not only restricted to speech performance, but extends to other spheres such as lexical and collocational items. The failure to accord such acceptance is usually tied to qualities or skills that, in this environment, connote power: expertise and specialization. In spite of this, the experience of the participants revealed that their behavior was frequently characterized by qualities that are associated with expertise, specialization or power. One example of this is that the participants often did not appear as students who performed poorly academically or failed to employ learning abilities available to those who are native speakers specializing in courses with them. Rather they acted as students who were capable of being in specialized academic areas themselves and who were able to draw upon any resource available to enhance their language difficulties. They adapted an approach to their studies that enabled them to interweave daily experiences within their educational environment with academic studies.

The students who participated in this study were individuals who approached socio-linguistic hardships based on experiences that were part of their whole lives, not something that occurred simply in the context of the academic course they took. Such approaches could permit non-native users of English to integrate their experiences in second or additional language usage in a way that ensures self-confidence and enhances

The experiences of the participants in this study indicate the importance of using personal synthesis or constitutive domains to inform ways in which available means can be utilized to cope with challenges. One way in which personal synthesis could inform use of resources or support mechanisms would be by a change in attitude, behavior and way in which native English speaking students and instructors treat non-native speakers.

Awareness and knowledge of linguistic and cultural diversity are imperative. Be it now or in the long run, native users of English must learn to integrate socially and academically every diversity, because school environments are getting more and more diverse every year⁴. This is most definitely beneficial to students, faculties, and the educational institutions to which they belong. How so? As one of the participants, Nina Rabin puts it, "I think we all [non-native and native] need to take cultural differences and values into account. That is, different meanings of words impact one's language or thinking" (see Profile of Nina Rabin p. 48-49 of this text). Additional values results from recognition and acceptance of cultural differences between native and non-native English users. The risks of less appreciation and lack of self-confidence are likely to evaporate in non-school and school settings, thereby proving rewarding, not just for non-native English speakers but also for natives as well.

In an increasingly diverse community, colleges and universities need to build bridges in order to maintain an all-inclusive learning community. This can be done in several ways. First, linguistic and cultural knowledge or skills of non-native users of English should be deliberately cultivated and integrated to form part of their academic

⁴ In fact, there are voices in favor of the use of non-standard English in K-12 schools. These scholars do not only argue that cultural diversity is inevitable and legitimate in American schools, but provides information on how and what should be done to improve teaching and learning, particularly for non-native English users or ESL students (see Delpit, 1995; Howard, 1999; Krashen, 1998; & Tse, 2001). Native users of English at the college level have to buy into this, since college students are products of the K-12 schools.

Sources of Strength in Coping with Challenges

The students who participated in this study faced obstacles and non-acceptance. On the other hand, they were supported by a substantial source of strength. They were reinforced by the sense that they needed to respond to their own critical needs. Not only were they rewarded by their sense of dealing with things that were vital and tangible, they also gained great pleasure out of the resources upon which they drew in order to meet those needs. The strength that participants exhibited in responding to their own needs is significant. Without awareness and utilization of this source of strength the students will not be able to cope or protect themselves against difficulties that may affect their academic performance. To this end, there is a positive side to the challenges posed to students of non-native English speaking. That is, being able to deal with the many facets of obstacles that come their way.

Final Thoughts and Recommendations

It seems appropriate to summarize some final thoughts about the predicaments of the study participants by drawing upon images from language. Language is a force that both shapes and is shaped by the relationships that people have with the world around them (Ellis, 1987). With their linguistic varieties, the non-native English speakers in this study are engaged in shaping and being shaped by their surrounding world. Their primary focus has been on efforts to shape themselves in order to deal with the problems encountered in their learning environment. This has been a worthwhile endeavor.

Through this study, it became clear that many of the factors that affect the interaction of both non-native speakers and native speakers also impact non-native speakers

5. Non-native English Speakers should play an active role in existing student organizations on campus that exists to promote a sense of community for them. In addition, NNES should establish 'bridge' with international non-native English speaking faculty members on campus. This may include periodic exchange of information, advising, hosting discussion and social-get-togethers.

Suggestion for Research

There is need for a more elaborate research design with a larger and more varied sample of participants to arrive at a more complex analysis and policy recommendation. Qualitative research methods can be utilized in order to do this and the methodology of this study would be useful in such additional research.

Data gathered from the participants point to how language is closely interconnected to issues of diversity on campus. One of such issue is the existing problem of the expanding diversity among the student body. For example, some NNES maybe bilingual or multilingual but have had negligible or no experience of socio-linguistic difficulty. On the other hand, this may prove to be just the opposite for others. Seemingly, NNES are also enrolled in a range of academic fields. Here too, in regard to language (i.e. English) consideration, how this affects NNES in selection of their academic majors is worthy of investigation in future research. In addition, there is the gender dimension – i.e. female and male NNES, which was not explored by this study. Hence, these different facets are relevant ingredients that could be examined in further study. Undoubtedly, such study will greatly enrich the language diversity or continuum fraught with a broad spectrum of

APPENDIX A

INFORMED CONSENT

Dear Participant:

My name is Amadou Kamara. I come from Liberia in West Africa. I am a graduate student in the School of Education at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst, Massachusetts. Presently, I am in the Child and Family Studies Program. My areas of concentration are youth and family at-risk. I am undertaking this study to complete the final requirement for the Master's Degree in International Education at the Center for International Education (CIE). I am asking you to participate in this study, which will provide the material for my master's thesis. The focus of my research is on the experiences of non-native English speakers who are college students attending the University of Massachusetts in Amherst.

In this study I want to learn about the experiences of non-native English speaking college students who have had English prior to enrollment at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, their experiences as students in their respective disciplines and the meaning that they make of these experiences. The information gathered from the experiences shared by participants will shed light on the meaning they make of their experiences, and serve as a vital source of information for people who want a better understanding of the lived experiences of college students who are non-native users of English vis-à-vis their educational environment and social and academic lives.

I am asking you to take part in this study. In carrying out this study, I will conduct three interviews with you. Interviews will be held at intervals of about two days to four days, and will take up to sixty minutes. All interview sessions will orbit around the central question: **As a non-native English speaker, what is it like to pursue college education at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst?** For the first interview, I will explore your experience as it relates to the historical or biographical context of becoming a college student at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst. The second interview will focus on the details of your present experiences as it relates to your social and academic life as a student in college. In the third interview, I will ask you to reflect on the meaning that you make of these experiences. Although these questions will provide the structure of the interview, I will not use the interviews to evaluate your academic performance as a student. However, I will use the interviews to stimulate discussion of your stories as well as to focus on your experiences.

The interviews will be audio taped on a cassette recorder and transcribed with the aid of a standard transcriber machine. A written version of the interviews will be produced in Microsoft Word Program. The information compiled from the interviews will be used for the following purposes: (a) my master's thesis, (b) publications in

APPENDIX B

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION

Total Number of Participants	6
Females	3
Males	3

Age

Nineteen	2
Twenty-one	2
Twenty-two	1
Twenty-four	1

Academic Major of Participants

Biology	2
Civil Engineering	1
Communication	1
Economics	1
Pre-Nursing	1

Country Affiliation

Ghana	1
Haiti	1
India	1
Korea	1
Nigeria	1
Pakistan/USA	1

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