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Volume 17

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# Aging in a Second Language

A Case Study of Aging, Immigration,  
and an English Learner Speech Community

 Springer

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# Preface

The baby-boom generation began turning 65 in 2011 and by 2030 they will all be aged 65 or older. By 2050, approximately 83 million Americans will be 65 or older (U.S. Census Bureau 2007). At the same time, the United States is projected to become more racially and ethnically diverse in the years to come. The Hispanic population is projected to be one of the fastest growing groups, increasing from 55 million in 2014 to 119 million in 2060 (U.S. Census Bureau 2014). By 2060, almost 30 percent of the United States is projected to be Hispanic (U.S. Census Bureau 2014). Similarly, the rate of growth of foreign-born individuals is expected to outpace that of natives, particularly among those 65 and older. Acknowledging these demographic changes is important, especially when one considers how the coming nexus of aging and diversity will require a greater degree of attention and analysis in order to provide policy solutions for this group in the United States.

Those who pay attention to Hispanic older adults have done so in part because they want to improve the quality of life of older adults, reduce racial and ethnic disparities in society, enhance accessibility to social institutions, or help minority elders to be empowered in their own aging. These motivations are what guided our own research agenda and were instrumental in the development of a multi-year family literacy program in the public library system. The stories and experiences gathered from this program are the basis of our book and allow us to explore the relationship between aging, immigration, and second language learning. With *Aging in a Second Language: A Case Study of Aging, Immigration, and an English Learner Speech Community*, we seek to inform public conversations about minority aging and shape how both public and private initiatives are framed with older adults in mind so as to promote successful language resocialization. Our title highlights two important themes: the intersectional character of aging which includes issues of race, ethnicity, and immigration, as well as our focus on capturing the voices of minority elders about their journey to learning a new language. Many older adult immigrants face real challenges in accessing material and social resources critical for second language acquisition. And yet we know that a more diverse aging population will mean more complex and multifaceted challenges and opportunities. The exponential growth of the Hispanic population and cyclical nature of migration

suggest a need to identify processes that play a role in the second language acquisition of older adult immigrants. In the coming decades, it will be important to gain a better understanding of how aging and immigration intersect to impact language disparities in our older population.

Central to understanding these processes will be to place into context the everyday experiences of elder minority immigrants and identify the protective and risk factors that create different language development outcomes. We relate this research focus to a unique set of in-depth interviews we conducted with Hispanic older adult immigrants enrolled in a multi-level English second language (ESL) program. Over the course of 4 years, we gathered their voices and now share their experiences on a range of issues on how language learning shapes family relationships, the workplace setting, and notions of self-identity. Most important, we show how ESL classroom socialization helps older adults to create strategies, networks, and capital resources that facilitate target language learning. By creating a sense of *place* in the literacy program, our ESL older adults demonstrate the everyday challenges and affordances to learning a second language in old age.

Our book's goal to center the life stories of minority elders comes at a historical period when demographic and cultural changes are capturing the attention of academics, policymakers, social activists, and the general public. In these changing times, millions of individuals will find themselves in need of institutions and services that are responsive to them in old age. This is particularly the case for non-English speaking older adults who will have to find ways to successfully communicate with healthcare practitioners, social service workers, and other professionals. Bringing to light how older adults can learn a second language in a more effective and meaningful way has significant implications for how we as a society care for our elderly.

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This book is the product of the active collaboration with city partners engaged in a Dallas Public Library family literacy program. We are particularly grateful to our library friends. Thomas Finley, adult services manager at the Frisco library, first introduced us to the opportunity to start a family literacy program. We are especially thankful to Ann Beaver and Pauline Stacchini, who as managers of the Hampton-Illinois branch library prepared and trained staff to assist in the practical management of the program in one of the busiest branch libraries in the city of Dallas. Their continual support made it possible to offer a family literacy program in Southern Dallas by providing personnel and classroom resources. Additionally, we appreciate the work and financial support of the Dallas Public Library. Jasmine Africawala, the Community Engagement Administrator, and Cynthia Perez, ESL coordinator, included our family literacy program in a city-wide initiative to offer literacy programs for adults and children. Their efforts provided classroom equipment, instructional materials, and evaluations tools.

We also recognize our community partners. As board member of the Oak Cliff Foundation, Brian McKay helped to spearhead a successful fundraising campaign at the Texas Theater. Ana Rodrigues of the Hispanic 100 Foundation also made a generous donation. Both funds were used to develop classroom instruction materials for students and teachers.

This project would not be possible without the many volunteers who assisted in teaching ESL classes. We are thankful to our University of North Texas at Dallas student volunteers, many of whom are undergraduates majoring in teacher education and sociology. Their passion, compassion, and dedication made the family literacy program a reality.

Finally, we would also like to recognize the guidance of Janice Stern, Senior Editor, along with Jason Powell and Sheying Chen, Series Editors at Springer. Their peer review and feedback were instrumental in keeping the book focused and us on track.

# Contents

<b>1 Introduction: Aging, Immigration, and Second Language Learning in the Hispanic Population</b> . . . . .	1
<b>2 A Case Study of an English Learner Speech Community</b> . . . . .	17
<b>3 Minority Aging in an Immigrant Context</b> . . . . .	31
<b>4 Late-Life Second Language Acquisition: Cognitive and Psycholinguistic Changes, Challenges, and Opportunities</b> . . . . .	47
<b>5 Social Constructivism and the Role of Place for Immigrant Language Learners</b> . . . . .	69
<b>6 Building Emotions for Self-Identity and Learning</b> . . . . .	87
<b>7 Practicing Safe Language Socialization in Private and Public Spaces</b> . . . . .	105
<b>8 Language Resocialization and Gender Allies</b> . . . . .	119
<b>9 Conclusion: Aging, Second Language Acquisition, and Health</b> . . . . .	135
<b>Index</b> . . . . .	149