

## **Abstract**

Foreign students' adaptation and linguistic awareness process is important in order to comprehend their needs as students. This reflection article aims to comprehend the acculturation and linguistic awareness process of a foreign student who studies a B.A in foreign language teaching. A qualitative approach through narratives was used as a data collection tool. This article found that not being socially accepted and xenophobia can negatively impact a foreign student's adaptation. Whereas linguistic awareness is achieved only with the act of teaching. It is recommended to implement specific classes for students who have higher English skills.

La adaptación y la conciencia lingüística de los estudiantes extranjeros es importante para poder entender las necesidades que tienen como estudiantes. Este artículo de reflexión apunta a comprender la aculturación y el proceso de conciencia lingüística de un estudiante extranjero que estudia licenciatura en lenguas extranjeras. Un enfoque cualitativo hecho a través de narrativas fue implementado como herramienta de recolección de datos. Este artículo encontró que el no ser socialmente aceptado y la xenofobia pueden tener efectos negativos en cuanto a la adaptación del estudiante extranjero. Mientras que la conciencia lingüística es lograda solamente a través del acto de enseñar. Es recomendado implementar clases específicas para aquellos estudiantes que tienen un nivel alto en inglés.

keywords: Acculturation process, adaptation process, linguistic awareness, foreign student, B.A in foreign language teaching.

## **Introduction**

Not only in recent years but from the very beginning of humanity, migration has been part of our existence, and it is often considered a critical global issue with implications in many fields, including education. The purpose of migration is powered by many factors such as poverty, war, the search for new and better opportunities; in terms of work, education, security and freedom, among others.

Understanding migration processes and their impact on different educational contexts is of great value because these processes affect all of us. In a way, we are where we are due to our ancestors' migratory journeys. For example many Venezuelans have had to leave their country because of poverty and they have been reconstructing their lives here in Colombia, their future generations will be Colombians, and this is due to their ancestors decision to migrate to Colombia.

For instance, migration impacted and changed my life because I went from living in my home country to living in a country that, at that time, was foreign to me, but then became my home and then I had to migrate back to my birthplace. So, to be able to comprehend the adaptation and linguistic awareness process of foreign students we must acknowledge migration as an important stage in their lives.

### **Conceptual references**

Human migration is the act of moving from one place to another with the purpose of establishing themselves permanently or temporarily in a new location. As stated before, some migrate strictly for educational intentions, for instance international students. While others migrate for diverse reasons apart from education. Thus, individuals who decide to study after migrating are identified as foreign students. This concept is of great importance as I identify as a student who migrated both times for different reasons apart from educational purposes.

Therefore, this reflection article focuses on how I became linguistically aware and how I adapted myself coming back to my birth country.

According to Morais and Gelder (1995) linguistic awareness is the capacity that one has to reflect upon structural characteristics of a spoken language. This concept is important to understand as it is one of the two main focuses of this reflection article. The second concept is adaptation which marks the path where I was able to accustom myself to a new environment and language, Berry (1992) describes adaptation as the term used to state the strategies that individuals implement and their outcome. A term that goes hand in hand with adaptation is acculturation according to Redfield as cited in Berry (1992) acculturation is the cultural change a person goes through when they experience in real life two different cultural contexts.

Research such as Nada and Araújo (2018), indicate that students who successfully adapt themselves into a new culture must have a strong social bond and be proficient in the language that is spoken in that specific country. Similarly, Yeh and Inose (2003) established that students who had social connectedness and social support had less acculturative stress. As for Galchenko, and Van de Vijver, (2007) their findings proved their hypothesis correct. Students who had a bigger cultural difference seemed to have difficulties when adapting to their new context. In other words, those students who had a larger cultural distance had less social and psychological adaptation. Moreover, Gill (2007) found that students sustain stress when managing the responsibility of school. This is due to the lack of preparation when going to a new country and having false expectations Gill (2007). Correspondingly, (Martinez, Mera, Amutio, Castañeda, Felt & Nicolae, 2017) explored the impact of psychological variables of 132 foreign students in Spain. They sustain that home dissonance impacted their academic well-being. They reinsured themselves on why cultural disparity is said to hinder social-cultural naturalization. Ultimately, language barriers alter students' academic practice, such as

participation and cultural insight (Baklashova & Kazakov, 2016). With this in mind social-acclimatization depends on a wide range of variables, such as social support, psychological well-being, academic and social groundwork. As well as support from friends, family and the academic institute. As far as the Colombian context, many articles and studies may be found regarding non-natives adaptation processes when studying a new language. Nonetheless, to my knowledge there are no local articles or studies done upon foreign students in Colombia.

It is a well-known fact that migration has always existed, yet in the past few years Colombia has received thousands of immigrants from nearby countries such as Venezuela. This brings up a question: what are the adaptation processes foreign students who migrate running away from poverty or other circumstances endure? However, there is a lack of information regarding possible answers of the already stated question. In Colombia and more specifically in *El Oriente Antioqueño* there is a need for data regarding the adaptation process of foreign students. In fact, there is a shortage of information, thus a necessity to understand and analyze the particular experiences that students of foreign language teaching withstand at a private University in Colombia.

The intention of this article was to explore the complex acculturation process foreign students encountered while being emerged in a bachelor's degree in foreign language teaching. As far as acculturation goes, this qualitative study was going to focus on the social and linguistic adjustment and growth of each participant. However, this study experienced a decisive change due to the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak. As a consequence of being quarantined, participants had other priorities and personal issues therefore this study was left with no participants. Despite not having the chance to collect data the decision was made to transform this research study into a reflection article. Consequently, this study will focus on my reflection upon my acculturation process and linguistic awareness as a foreign student in

B.A In foreign languages teaching being that I am a foreign student who studies a B.A in foreign languages.

A lot of people claim that learning how to teach English when you come from an English-speaking country comes very easily and with few difficulties. I strongly do not believe these types of statements. As opposed to natives, non-natives who learn how to speak and teach a foreign language have been immersed in an educational process throughout years in order to learn how to be proficient and become linguistically aware of the language they want to teach. Whereas, natives usually are never linguistically aware of what they say, read or write, thus they have a harder time to explain the why's of rules in a language. Expressed differently, I come from an English-speaking country and I learned both English and Spanish simultaneously. Nevertheless, since I was in school and in a country where most spoke English, I was more proficient in the English language than in Spanish.

I never academically learned another language until I was 18 years old. Therefore, when my peers would ask me questions like: why is *beer*, *bear* and *beard* pronounced differently? Why do you say *I am* and not *I is*? I never really had the answer to these questions and just replied *well because, that's just how it is*. After at least 2 years as a student in a foreign language teaching program, I started to become linguistically aware and finally had the response to most of the questions I was asked.

I aspired to be able to understand the experiences of my peers so hopefully I can deepen my understanding on my experiences. In addition, I wanted this article to be useful to my University if they decided to develop better strategies to accommodate foreign students. Perhaps this article can be helpful to the University when updating the homologation processes that native English speakers withhold.

Comprehending the acculturation process that participants experienced could have contributed to the University in several ways. For example, the way they approach and manage the educational process of future foreign students. Likewise, failures in the accreditation process could be found and thus updated.

Although the research study did not go as planned this reflection article may still contribute all these positive aspects to the University. Considering that as the author I too have been a foreign student of the University for the last four plus years. As for myself as the writer of this article it helped me understand not only my process but also figure out how I can now help others that come along the way with similar backgrounds, challenges and needs as I did.

Originally, the study had to be done specifically with foreign students coursing the foreign language teaching program and not all students of the overall University. Due to the transition this article went through, the information will be strictly coming out of my personal experience and perspective. If the study had gone through its original course, it could not have been held with all the foreign students of the University because the purpose of the study would have changed completely. The article is focused on the linguistic awareness one acquires when learning how to teach their native language (L1). Yet participants were chosen according to their immigration status, in other words they must have been foreign students. Participants must have lived in a foreign country where Spanish was not the main language; they have had to be active or former students of bachelors' degree in foreign language teaching. Therefore, it is reasonable for me to take part in this reflection article as I check all the requirements.

Students of foreign language teaching, pre-service teachers, teachers and University directors could utilize this study. When a teacher understands the educational process of their students they can work on their needs and develop objectives that are realistic to them. This article can serve as an example of the process in which foreign students learn how to teach their

L1, whereas also supporting future foreign language teachers that undergo a social and linguistic adaptation process.

Primarily the research question of this article addressed the diverse acculturation experiences that foreign students of bachelors' degree of foreign languages had while studying at a private University in Colombia. However, now the question of this reflection article targets my personal experience regarding my adaptation and linguistic awareness process as a foreign student in bachelor's degree in foreign language teaching.

In the following sections, I present the literature review that supports my article, the methodology that pathed the way of my study. Followed by ethical considerations, data collection tools, and a narrative of my personal experience. Next, an examination and interpretation of that experience and a sum up of my thoughts. I will also present conclusions and the limitations of the study, possible implications and ultimately recommendations for further research/ reflection articles.

### **Literature review**

This reflection involves a description and an analysis of my acculturation and linguistic awareness processes as a foreign student in a B.A in foreign language teaching at a private University in Colombia. Additionally, it aims at providing some insights on my experience as an undergraduate student doing research.

The search for these different studies were done throughout websites like dialnet, google scholar, sciELO, ERIC, sciencedirect and google. In order to successfully find studies that were associated with my research, I used key concepts such as: *profesores nativos*, international students, migration and education, migration in Colombia, foreign students and acculturation in foreign students.

In favor of understanding the connection between migration and education in 2018 Nada and Araujo conducted a narrative research whose purpose was to comprehend the complex experiences that foreign students endured during their first stage after arriving in a new environment. They wanted to know the role that social support withheld in their adaptation process.

The study was done with twelve high education foreign students in Portugal. The participants were chosen based on the maximum variation sampling technique to create diversity in participants. The author stated that the data was not simply accumulated but it was built. This was done by the interaction between participants and researchers. The participants would reconstruct their narrative after writing it and then were invited once more to a second interview “to discuss the text in depth” (Nada & Araujo, 2018, p. 312)

The findings of this study indicated the importance of social support in foreign students' lives. Students expressed that without a support network they felt emotionally stripped. Researchers concluded that the various experiences were by virtue of different past experiences that foreign students had. Nonetheless, participants all needed encouragement from their community to have a successful adaptation process.

In a similar study in Russia, Baklashova and Kazakov (2016) wanted to know what were the “academic, social and cultural difficulties of international students”, and what type of help was needed to overcome those difficulties. The researchers developed a qualitative case – study with ten participants of undergraduate and graduate programs at a University.

Data for this study was collected throughout semi-structured interviews which were recorded or videotaped. The analysis of the data was done inductively, and the findings suggest that foreign students underwent certain obstacles related to academic, social and cultural aspects while studying in Russia. Baklashova and Kazakov concluded that there was a need of



Russian language programs aiming at helping foreign students cope with the host-country's language. Researchers also found negative effects regarding language barriers in foreign student's communication and in their social understanding process.

Furthermore, in Spain Martinez-Taboada et al., (2017) aimed at identifying psychosocial variables and their impact in academic accomplishments in first generation immigrants in Spain. Their evidence came from one-hundred and thirty-two teens in four different public schools. The participants were chosen throughout convenience sampling.

Data was collected through questionnaires, and in order to comply with the legal framework, from the start, parents were given a consent form, and participants were told about the goals and their anonymity. Their findings confirmed that psychosocial processes were involved in students' academic performances. They also found that if immigrant students feel like they are not properly treated by their peers and teachers this creates a negative influence affecting their academic development. (Martinez-Taboada et al., 2017).

Similarly, Gill (2007) developed over a year a study aimed to know the social-cultural process students sustained and their learnings as individuals. This was a qualitative research done with Chinese postgraduate students who studied at a British university. Gill (2007) used ethnographic and narratives methods as well as interviews, observations; reflections. As for ethical considerations Gill (2007) was clear when stating to all his participants his goal and objective. As to the findings the researcher found the following: stress and anxiety in overseas students was caused by the lack of preparation regarding cultural knowledge of the host country. Also, adaptation was seen as a *must* for students, meaning they had to meet the expectations of those already in the host-country.

Although the previous studies showed that social support is a big factor that impacts students' acculturation process, the role of a teacher can impact students' adaptation process.

The following study was accomplished by Musanti (2017). The purpose of the study was to understand a novice teacher's experiences and how she managed being a bilingual teacher in South Texas and what her job involved her to do. It is important to state that most of the students in South Texas are hispanic, and many are English language learners (ELL's).

This was a qualitative case study, where the teacher herself was the participant of the study. Data was collected throughout semi-structured interviews, observations, debriefing conversations as well as pictures during the course of one year. The data analysis was done through an inductive process. The teacher approved and signed an IRB *consent form*. Findings demonstrated that during the course of one year the teacher found out that when she learned the needs of her students, she could start to implement different strategies that were connected to her students desires.

Mustanti's research is of great impact in my research project because it verifies the importance of teachers' knowledge upon their students' needs, desires and background. This demonstrates that my research study can be the first step a teacher can take to understand the real-life situations of their foreign students. The upcoming section presents the methodology of my study.

### **Methodology**

In the following lines, I will present the methodological underpinnings that guided this research, namely the research paradigm, the type of research, the data collection methods; and why these are suitable for this reflection article. The intention of this article was to reflect upon my own acculturation and linguistic awareness process while being immersed in a bachelor's degree in foreign language teaching.

In the early stages, this reflection article started off as a systematization of experiences, but it quickly drifted into a narrative. Narratives would have allowed me to explore the experiences of the participants of my study in a profound way.

Narratives were proper at the time because they are based on a qualitative approach directly connected to hermeneutics. Put differently, this was an interpretive study done in light of hermeneutics. According to Creswell (2007) as stated by Pinnegar and Daynes (2006) narratives can be the method and the phenomena of the study. Using narratives to construct this study was appropriate because narratives are used for “capturing the detailed stories or life experiences of a single life or the lives of a small number of individuals” Creswell (2007).

The study had three participants each with similar real-life experiences and with the willingness to convey their journeys throughout narratives. This information is important to include and highlight in view that this research was primarily intended to interpret other people's experiences and situations and was only adapted and converted as a result of a global issue that affected everybody and created a sidetrack for many students like myself.

Participants were chosen throughout convenience sampling due to the criteria needed to be considered a participant. For instance, all participants must have lived most of their life in a country where Spanish was not the main language spoken and have had to be former students of a B.A. in foreign language teaching or currently studying it. Neither age nor gender was considered pertinent to choose participants. Thus, participants were chosen because they were available and easy to access, making the study more personal in terms of contact between the researcher and participants.

Nevertheless, due to the circumstances given by the outbreak, it was transformed and adapted into a reflection article of my personal experiences as a foreign student whose mother tongue is English and was part of a bachelor's degree aimed to build competent English teachers.

### **Ethical considerations**

Each participant received a consent form stating the objectives, purpose and, a detailed statement explaining that they were not going to be rewarded for participating in the study. It also specified that they were going to remain anonymous and could withdraw from the study at any given time. In spite of receiving the consent form the participants did not send it back. In fact, one of the participants never appeared, and I was not able to get back in touch with them. The other participant explained that due to pandemic he/she no longer had the time to partake in the study. Therefore the justification on why this narrative approach had to be transformed into my own reflection article. Put differently, I was left with no participants.

### **Data collection**

The tools that were going to be used to collect data were narratives, and semi-structured interviews. Narratives would have incorporated deep and personal thoughts, feelings and experiences of the writer, making this method a valuable tool that to my knowledge no other student in the program has implemented and later published. Jalongo and Isenberg (1995) suggests that narratives are written or spoken material documenting lived experiences in the classroom, and that narratives promote the reflection and the connection between what is valued and what is believed. I used Jalongo and Isenberg (1995) framework to ask three participants to describe their experience starting from the moment they immigrated to the foreign country and including their positive and negative experiences when using the language in the different academic settings they've gone through. To do this, I wrote my own narrative, and included headings to illustrate the elements I included. I created and shared a document in google docs with clear instructions and narrative frames "a written story template consisting of a series of incomplete sentences and blank spaces of varying lengths" (Barkhuizen, 2011, p. 402).

Interviews were a proper tool to be carried out in the study as they allow participants who are more comfortable expressing themselves orally to voice out their story and go into detail on their personal experience. Yin (2003) states that interviews are an important source of information and that they should resemble a guided conversation. I wanted to audio record the semi-structured interviews with each of the three participants (Burns, 1999). In my study, the participants were going to be interviewed after they had completed their narratives; I wanted them to provide some details, possibly missing in their narratives, and gain better understanding of their experiences.

## **Findings**

I did not have the opportunity to collect data for my research study because one of the participants went missing and the others had other priorities and difficulties due to the COVID-19 pandemic. It is essential to remember that when the participants received the consent form it was set clear that they could withdraw from the study at any given time without repercussions. Meaning that participants had the right to no longer want to partake in the study. Despite the issue of being left with no participants, my own narrative exemplifies how I wanted to carry out this section of my study. In the following lines, I recount my experiences as an immigrant in different educational contexts.

### **First years of life.**

I was born in the year 1998 in the city of Medellin, in Colombia. When I was eleven months both my parents decided to immigrate to the United States in search of better and brighter opportunities. My dad flew to Florida, while my mom stayed in Rhode Island. Months later my parents came back to Colombia to pick up my older sister and I, and later relocated ourselves as a family in the city of Miami in Florida. During the time my parents were away in

the USA my sister and I stayed with my maternal grandmother and thanks to her I learned my first Spanish words: amañiño (Yellow), la rumbia (the party ), se ababo (there's none left), si (yes), no, and a couple of curse words my grandma taught me thinking it was very amusing. However, my lexical was not very broad and as illustrated above I had very few words that I was able to pronounce properly.

### **Starting school in The USA.**

It wasn't until I started Elementary school in Miami that I had access to a vaster number of words to communicate properly in Spanish, although, gradually I started to feel more comfortable and fluent speaking English than Spanish. I was enrolled in a school where only English was spoken, and Spanish class was only taught for one hour a week. However, in my household the golden rule was to only speak Spanish, Yet, my sister and I constantly broke that rule. From the start of my academic life I was never considered an ESOL student (English for speakers of other languages) nonetheless, according to my academic reports from kindergarten my teachers did use ESOL strategies as a last resource tool to encourage me to meet my expected goals.

### **Remembering skills that came easy to me and others I had difficulties learning.**

At the end of elementary and at the start of middle school I was considered a student who excelled in language arts & writing, so when I started 6<sup>th</sup> grade I was placed in an 8<sup>th</sup> grade writing class. While reminiscing my past I am amazed I was acknowledged as a good writer because when I started to learn how to write I had difficulties spelling words that start with "wh" and "wi" like: with, witch, white ,and which. I carried on with these difficulties for quite some time, until someday I just knew how to correctly spell them and distinguish them.

### **Moving back to my birth country.**

After 10 years living in the USA my parents had to make a very difficult decision regarding our migration status, they agreed on returning to our mother land, Colombia. By this time, I was already a teenager who was fluent and comfortable in everything English related. I was accustomed to the US traditions, culture, language and style of living. I found it to be normal to have three cars in our driveway, a house and a farm full of horses and other animals, I thought everyone else in the world spoke many languages and could afford everything my parents could afford. Yet, I was wrong, returning to Colombia was a shocking experience. Many people did not have a bike yet a car, not everyone could afford to live in a gated community. I would ask myself “Why can’t we go out for dinner as usual?” or “Why is there a dirty man walking with no shoes on the street?” “Why do people speak Spanish so differently from back home?”.

A couple of years went by and I would still ask myself those questions, I did not understand why this new world was so weird and different to me, if I was Colombian anyways? Why did my country feel so foreign to me? The answers to these questions took quite a few years for me to discover.

### **My first school experience in Colombia.**

I was in the middle of 6<sup>th</sup> grade when I moved back to Colombia, my parents enrolled both my sister and I into a private institution next door to our home. That Institution is bilingual, so my parents agreed on enlisting us in that school in order to help us feel comfortable while adjusting to our new environment. My classmates were very excited to have a *gringa* in class, so they had so many questions, making me feel special due to all the attention I got. In that school classes were supposed to be mostly in English and even though some of them were, not all of them were taught in English making it very frustrating and difficult for me to understand class topics and concepts.

By that time, I spoke and understood Spanish pretty well, but I had little to no reading comprehension and very little writing skills. Therefore, when I was faced to write a dictation, I would feel lost and helpless because while my classmates understood what had to be written I didn't even know we were supposed to be writing. During dictations I would take twice the time my peers did and when the teacher would say *coma* meaning comma (,) I was not aware that that meant a punctuation sign so I would literally write the word *comma* instead of drawing the sign. Academically I was struggling but socially I adjusted well thanks to my friends, so well that that's where I met my best friend. Sadly, I was only there for almost a year, meaning I finished 6<sup>th</sup> grade there and started 7<sup>th</sup>, yet again my family decided to move, but this time to a small town almost two hours away from Medellin.

### **Moving again into a new school and new home.**

Consequently, this act had an even bigger impact on me. Mind you, I was a teenager that went from living in the US blindly thinking everybody had the same opportunities and things I had, to moving to my home country that didn't even feel like home, and when I thought I was finally getting accustomed to this new life we abruptly move in to an old farmhouse in the countryside of a small town! In my immature mind my life was over. This time there was no money for a private school and my sister had already graduated high school so I was literally alone and had to face a new school, filled with new people and no friends, and even worse, I was a 7<sup>th</sup> grader who barely knew how to write in Spanish.

The impact I felt in that school was very different from my other school in Medellin. Instead of smiles, hugs and questions I was just stared at. Classes were only in Spanish and I no longer had nineteen classmates but forty-nine of them, so I knew I had to teach myself to be like them in order to fit in. During that whole school year, I taught myself how to read and write in Spanish, I would pay close attention to how words were said and written and how my



teachers would read. I took extra time to become conscious when I read, so, I could not only understand what I was reading but also read pretty enough to not get laughed at in class. Soon enough I read, wrote, spoke and understood Spanish just as great as my classmates did.

### **Consequences of not being socially accepted**

As time passed by I was competent enough to excel in classes, but I was not socially accepted. I was perceived as an arrogant person, classmates, teachers and school directors had biased thoughts against me. They believed I thought I was better than them and they thought I was rich by the sole fact that I would be taken to school in a truck and that I came from a different country. I was never laughed at or bullied, because I was perceived as a person who had a tough character, however there was a lot of gossip about me, people made up lies and tried to damage my reputation. This Xenophobia led me into constant physical and verbal fights and on to being suspended from school.

### **My first homologation process.**

Forgetting English never crossed my mind, and when asked about it I would just say that I didn't practice it because I didn't have anyone to speak with, but I knew I would never forget it. Once I passed the 7<sup>th</sup> grade and went on to 8<sup>th</sup> grade I was presented the opportunity to homologate English class. In order to do so I had to pass an exam designed by the English teachers of the school, I later did the test and was informed I passed it and would graduate high school without the need to attend that class.

### **First memory of my linguistic awareness process.**

Throughout all my high school journey I was constantly asked by others to help them with English workshops and homework. I remember that I was asked a lot about "verb to be" friends would say "Luisa can you help me with this workshop it seems easy it's about verb to

be” and I would look at them baffled because I had no idea what verb to be was, I had never even heard about it. I would look at their homework and say, “this word goes here, and that word goes there, and that’s that.” Most would be pleased with my help while others would ask me questions such as: “why is it *I am* and not *I is* ” or “why after he and she goes *is* and not *are*” my answer would always be *just because that is how it is*. I never had a proper grammatical answer to that question. I never learned English with rules, I just learned it as it is.

### **The start of high education.**

In 2015 I graduated high school and I immediately enrolled at a private University to study bachelor’s degree in foreign language teaching. Once again, I had the opportunity to accredit my English, this time it was with an English proficiency test from the British council called APTIS. I passed the test and therefore I was exempted of the five and only English levels taught in the program. I was told that no one could be exempted of the last level of English but there was going to be an exception done for me and another colleague that has also lived in the US for many years. When told this I felt very relieved because I knew I was going to save up a lot of money, time and effort for something that at the time I thought was completely unnecessary.

### **The start of becoming linguistically aware.**

I have always been a very diligent student; I take school very seriously and responsibly and this type of attitude was quickly picked up by my teachers and the directors of the program. On account of that, I was offered many opportunities ahead of time, for instance; I was recommended by my university to work for a non-profit organization and be the interpreter for a well-recognized Oncologist from Cincinnati Ohio. I was also given the honor to be a monitor in the University which meant I was a teacher at the University for students of different programs who were about to graduate but had not accredited their English level.

This opportunity was a big eye opener for me, I knew I had to take that job seriously and I was honored to be seen as the person that was capable of doing so. Once I was assigned my student, I was faced with the reality that I had no idea what I was supposed to teach. I knew that my English level was great, but I have never been taught to teach English, and I have literally never been in an EFL class (English as a foreign language). By that time, I had already spent two years in my career, but I still didn't know how to teach English, yet I was expected to know how to do so.

I felt embarrassed to ask for help or to admit that I had no idea what was the first topic I was supposed to teach, and I was in fear of being asked a question I didn't know how to answer. Because by that time I knew I could not keep on answering "It's like that because it just is. So, I sat down and thought, what was the first thing I was taught when little? I then logged in to my computer and typed *how to teach the alphabet* and realized that was a topic for children. I then went back to where I started and remembered "verb to be" ! That's it! I typed in the verb *to be*, and *how to teach the verb to be*, and I gradually taught myself step by step what and how I was supposed to teach. I then realized that one topic leads to another and so on and so forth.

I slowly became aware of so many things I had no idea of, for instance the articles "a" and "an" without a doubt I knew I had to say "a pen" and not "an pen" but I didn't know why I was supposed to say it that way, I later found myself teaching that topic and understood that the article "a" is used before a noun that starts with a consonant but "an" is used before a noun that starts with a vowel. I also became aware that English is full of exceptions, and an exception to that rule for instance is the word *unicorn*, you are supposed to say *a unicorn* and not *an unicorn*. I can now confidently explain that this exception is due to the fact that the letter U in Unicorn is considered to have a consonant sound rather than a vowel sound.

## **Taking other perspectives into account.**

Considering that my sister is a fluent English speaker and is now an American Citizen as well as my brother in law I took the time to ask them some questions to see how linguistically aware they were. I told them to think about how they would explain the use of (this, that, these, those) to a person who was learning English.

Galvis said that *this* is “talking about something you can show”, *that* is “talking about something you can name”. While, *these* are “*multiples you can show*” and *those* are “*multiples you can name*”. On the other hand, Jaramillo said that *this* is “*singular when you refer to something, this is nearby*”. And that *that* “is far”. While *these* is the “plural to this” and *those* is the “plural to that”

While thinking on how to explain the use of the words, Jaramillo expressed that it was a difficult exercise to think of stating the following ideas: “this is hard” “never thought about this” “you never really think about stuff like that”. His last quote helps me justify what I have been through, because truly as a native speaker of any language you never really stop to think about why you speak the way you do, nor do you doubt on how you do so.

## **Current Issues**

In the last year I have been finding myself to constantly doubt on how I express myself. I have been continually listening to my peers learn how to express themselves in English for more than 4 years, and thus I have been accustomed to listening to constant errors in the language. Before continuing I feel it is imperative to make clear that in no way I want to offend my peers or their learning process. I completely understand and respect that they are going through a completely different journey from me.

Yet, this is an opportunity for me to reflect and exhibit my experience as a foreign student. This idea is extremely important to me as I am presently going through it. I have been

noticing that when reading a simple word like purpose, for instance, I can't help but think in the back of my mind that it is said "pur-pus". I of course know how it is properly pronounced, but in my mind I have stuck the pronunciation I have been constantly listening to.

Another example can be the word "accuracy". This word has been an ongoing topic in school lately, when thinking about the word or before expressing it, in my mind I have to make sure I am going to properly say "accuracy" again, not because I don't know how to say it, but because I regularly listen to it pronounced wrong. This to me is another way of becoming linguistically aware and over-thinking how I say certain words, however this has not been a positive outcome in my process. This causes me a lot of anxiety and is honestly embarrassing because I sometimes feel that instead of progressing I am going backwards.

Furthermore, this journey of reflecting about my past and process has allowed me to understand that this too will be a passing phase. Hopefully, once I graduate from school I will overcome this issue and go back to being confident about how I speak and express myself.

### **Remembering my adaptation process as a teen in my birth country.**

Per contra, to continue with my process of understanding how I socially adjusted. I must go back to when I started 7th grade in my new school. I can think back on how lonely and bad I felt for being a victim of xenophobia. As time went by, I was able to make a few acquaintances that to this day I can say they were never friends; they were just people I spent time with. Due to this, I had troublesome teen years. I never felt adapted in my birth country, in fact when asked how I felt I would always say that I have come to terms that I must live here, but in no way was I content.

### **Adaptation process when starting higher education.**

When transitioning to higher education, I finally was able to showcase my English, and able to speak to professors and students who knew English. This allowed me to not feel like an outcast anymore, it made me feel special and included. Xenophobia was not a thing at my University because students saw foreigners as inspiration and not as a threat. Remarkably, what favored me into adjusting to my birthplace after living there for almost eight years was having the opportunity to go back to the United States as a volunteer for three months. Coming back from that program I felt re-energized and with the understanding that I didn't have to belong to just one place. I accepted that home wasn't necessarily the place I was born in. I knew I didn't have to force myself to fit into just one place.

### **Reflection upon my process.**

I am now comfortable believing I am from more than just one place, and home to me is not just El Carmen de Viboral in Colombia, but also Miami Florida. Now that I understand I don't fit into one specific mold, I am free to embody myself as a Colombian American even though I am just a Colombian citizen. After ten years I can say I have completely adapted to living in Colombia.

### **Discussions and conclusions**

The intention of this article was to explore the complex acculturation process foreign students encountered while being emerged in a bachelor's degree in foreign language teaching. Consequently, this study will focus on my reflection upon my acculturation process and linguistic awareness as a foreign student in B.A in foreign language teaching being that I am a foreign student who studies a B.A in foreign languages.

Therefore my reflection pointed out the following results: As for my acculturation process I found that due to not being socially accepted as a teenager it was impossible for me

to become adjusted to a new environment. Language was not the main problem, because I was able to teach myself how to read and write. What interrupted my acculturation process was not feeling welcomed, not by family, not by teachers, or classmates. The lack of being socially accepted in school pushed me into teaching myself how to fit in and properly learn Spanish. It was not until I was an adult and was able to leave the country that I was able to feel good and feel accepted. The university was a change of environment. I was no longer in a school where I suffered from xenophobic classmates, teachers and directors, I was now in an atmosphere where I was acknowledged as one of their own. I was taken seriously, and I was taken as an important individual within the community.

As for my linguistic awareness process my reflection reveals that University subjects did not help me construct the language awareness I needed in order to be a successful teacher. The experiences that guided me into becoming mindful of my language use, was the opportunity to teach others. This act encouraged me to be conscious within the language, and, to finally have answers to the questions I was being asked for many years.

To illustrate the results in my narrative, you may find where I state that I was not socially accepted and this damaged my opportunity to adjust to my new environment. “I was not socially accepted. I was perceived as an arrogant person, classmates, teachers and school directors had biased thoughts against me. ” and “I was perceived as a person who had a tough character, however there was a lot of gossip about me, people made up lies and tried to damage my reputation. This Xenophobia leads me into constant physical and verbal fights and on to being suspended from school.”

Likewise not having a perfect use of the Spanish language did not obstruct my adaptation process, my narrative shows that I was able to overcome it myself. It was the fact that I was not treated as an equal that affected that process. This can be seen when I stated “ I

taught myself how to read and write in Spanish, I would pay close attention to how words were said and written and how my teachers would read.”

Moreover my narrative demonstrates as a result that it was transitioning from highschool to high education that allowed me to socially adjust, expressing “Xenophobia was not a thing at my University because students saw foreigners as inspiration and not as a threat.” and “ I finally was able to showcase my English, and able to speak to professors and students who knew English. This allowed me to not feel like an outcast anymore, it made me feel special and included. ”

On the other hand, my narrative shows that it was not my high education that allowed me to become linguistically aware it was various teaching experiences as declared when I was explaining how I became aware of a grammar rule “ I later found myself teaching that topic and understood that the article “a” is used before a noun that starts with a consonant but “an” is used before a noun that starts with a vowel. ” School subjects taught me many things but, to be linguistically aware was not one of them, to illustrate when first faced to teach I realized the following: “By that time, I had already spent two years in my career, but I still didn’t know how to teach English, yet I was expected to know how to do so.”

In that manner, I can thank my teaching experience to be the reason why I am conscious of how I speak, write and express my ideas in English. My narrative presents the following statement, “I can now confidently explain that this exception is due to the fact that the letter U in Unicorn is considered to have a consonant sound rather than a vowel sound.” Just like in that explanation I have plenty of other explanations to other questions I have been asked before, linguistically speaking.

Contrary to my results Baklashova and Kazakov (2016) carried out a research done in Russia where their findings stated negative effects in reference to language barriers,



communication and the social understanding process of foreign students. My findings show the opposite because I did not have these negative effects due to my ability to quickly acquire the language, so I did not have those language barriers. Nevertheless Baklashova and Kazakov (2016) concluded there was a need for language programs so foreign students can cope better with the host country's language. I agree with their conclusion because I too would find this very helpful if the University implemented a class dedicated to foreign students or to students who have an advanced level of English. A class that can strive to accomplish linguistic awareness.

Martinez-Taboada et al., (2017) found that students who felt like they were not treated properly did not do well in their social adjustment process, this finding is similar to mine. You find in the narrative when I express that in the first school I was enrolled in I felt accepted and even though I really did not know how to read or write and I didn't understand topics thoroughly I strived socially because I was accepted. Whereas in the second school I was enrolled in I was not socially accepted at all, and even though at that time I was now able to read and write and be competent, socially I was not doing as well. This shows that we have similar findings.

To conclude, being socially accepted greatly impacts the way a foreign student adjusts to their new environment. Xenophobia is an obstacle that pulls back students' opportunity for success. Likewise, in order for a foreign student to be a fruitful teacher they must become linguistically aware and by experience this is obtained by immersing yourself into teaching. As I come to the end of my studies I find that indeed no subject or teacher will teach one to become mindful of their own mother tongue. Rather it must be one's own curiosity and exploration that takes them to become apprehensive on their language and how they teach it. However, for a foreign student to completely homologate their language level and not have to take any classes

that might potentially boost their linguistic awareness, it can be more of a negative effect than a positive one.

A strength that can be mentioned about this text is the fact that it is a reflection article. An article that goes deep into a foreign student experiences thoughts and reflections. Which up to today and to my knowledge no one has published. The fact that it is a reflection allows others to read, interpret and understand the different positions and experiences that foreign students might go through.

When reading about the findings and conclusions of previous studies such as Baklashova and Kazakov, the results of my article seemed to be almost obvious that they were going to be similar. However, above it was shown the differences between the findings of other articles and this one. Said this, not all the findings of the article were expected. Some were very unexpected like not agreeing with the homologation process I went through. Or, the fact that the term *xenophobia* was going to appear. In my mind, I knew that I was a victim of xenophobia for many years, but I never verbally expressed it or at least not in an explicit manner. It was not until I sat down to write my narrative and then reflect upon it that I explicitly realized that xenophobia made a huge impact in social adjustment. Other findings were a bit expected, but I was open to find completely different results.

Since this reflection article was strictly about my perceptions and journey it limited the voice and experiences of others. If this article would have resumed its original course it would have integrated the journeys and voices of other foreign students. Thus, the findings, conclusions, information and even the limitations of this study would be completely divergent. Put differently, what can not be concluded from this article is the experiences of others or their take on linguistic awareness.

For future researchers who wish to study foreign students' linguistic awareness and their adaptation process in a new environment, I would highly encourage them to have native participants. To research, interview, talk and listen to natives who are not necessarily students, as they bring excellent insight to linguistic awareness in general. In addition, I hope to inspire other foreign students to also write about their journey.

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