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Comunicando emociones: Language preferences for Hispanics in the Rio Grande Valley

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COMUNICANDO EMOCIONES: LANGUAGE PREFERENCES

FOR HISPANICS IN THE RIO GRANDE VALLEY

A Thesis

by

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ABSTRACT

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According to the U.S Census Bureau, more than one million Hispanic or Latino individuals live in the southernmost area of Texas called The Rio Grande Valley (RGV). However, being Hispanic in the RGV does not mean you speak Spanish. In fact, most of the population speaks English and/or Spanish or "Spanglish" (Tex-Mex). As a result, individuals face code-switching (switching back and forth in two languages) when they communicate with one another. Which language do they prefer to express their emotions in? The study posed a research question along this line. Nine college students who met the research criteria were interviewed to determine whether they preferred to use their first or second language to express their emotions. The study found that regardless of participants' first language, their language preference was highly dependent on which emotion they were communicating and to whom.

DEDICATION

Dedico esta tesis a mis padres, quienes han sido el pilar de mi formación como persona y como profesionista. Les agradezco mucho el apoyo que me han dado para realizar la maestria en Estados Unidos. Ustedes saben lo mucho que significan para mí. También quiero dedicar este trabajo a mis hermanos Paty, Guille, Chio y Juan quienes siempre han estado junto a mí para ayudarme. Muchas gracias a todos ustedes por no dejarme solo en esta odisea. Quiero decirles que la distancia no ha sido impedimento para estar siempre cerca de ustedes.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

ABSTRACT ………………………………………………………………………………… iii

DEDICATION …………………………………………………………………………… iv

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ……………………………………………………………… v

TABLE OF CONTENTS ………………………………………………………………… vi

CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION ………………………………………………………… 1

CHAPTER II. LITERATURE REVIEW …..…………………………………………… 4

Communicating Emotions ……………………………………………………… 4

Languages and Emotions ……………………………………………………… 6

Bilingualism …………………………………………………………… 6

Code-switching ……………………………………………………….... 10

CHAPTER III. METHODOLOGY AND FINDINGS ………………………………….. 13

Sample ……………………………………………………………………………… 14

Procedure ………………………………………………………………………… 15

Language Preference when Communicating Emotions …………………………. 16

My language choice depends on the emotion
I want to express. ……………………………………………………… 17

My language choice depends on whom I am
talking to. ……………………………………………………………… 20

My language choice depends on how fluent
I am in expressing the emotion. ……………………………………….. 22

My language choice depends on the setting
or context. ………………………………………………………………….. 23

I scarcely use language to express some emotions. ……………………… 24

Sometimes, I switch languages to express an emotion. ..………………… 25

CHAPTER IV. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION ……………………………………. 31

Limitations and Future Research ………………………………………………… 33

REFERENCES ……………………………………………………………………... 35

APPENDIX …………………………………………………………………………… 38

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH …………………………………………………………. 43

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In human relations, communication is vital regardless of the way it is performed. It may be verbal or non-verbal communication. Every day, we may use one or all of these ways to get our messages across. Language is one means of communication that not only affects the way we communicate, but also the way we think and experience emotions. Harré (1986) remarks that language, social practices, and other elements of an individual's culture play an important role in the formation of emotions. An individual may develop his/her emotions based on what he/she is exposed to and experience, either directly or indirectly.

Moreover, emotions make us feel more human. They remind us that we are alive and drive us to perform certain actions. People, as emotional beings, move through emotions, relate to others, and empathize when they communicate certain emotions. Hence, language is related to emotional expression because words allow both senders and receivers to articulate, suppress, or discuss feelings.

But what happens when an individual speaks two or more languages? According to Ervin-Tripp (n.d.) when a person speaks more than one language, he/she has two languages to express emotions. In other words, he/she can communicate personal and cultural experiences using both or either language. Pavlenko (2002) also suggests that "when a second language is learned after puberty, the two languages may differ in their emotional impact, with the first being the language of personal involvement and the second the language of distance and detachment, or at least the language of lesser emotional hold on the individual" (p. 47).

Additionally, when a bilingual individual starts a conversation and then he/she starts speaking another language, and again shifts to the initial language, this individual is code-switching. Code-switching is "the discourse in which words originating in two different language systems are used side-by-side" by bilingual and other multiple language speakers (Backus, 2005, p. 307).

In the United States, because of the high rates of immigration, code-switching happens in areas where the use of a second language other than English is prominent, especially in areas like South Texas where a large Hispanic population exists. Here, code-switching happens more often for English and Spanish speakers, especially as the area is very close to Mexico. In fact, people in the area are said to speak "Tex-Mex" (Texan and Mexican) or "Spanglish."

Even though verbal language is a vital means of communication, if not the primary means of communication, very few studies in the current literature have examined how bilingual individuals use either their first or second language to communicate emotions. Therefore, this exploratory study contributed to the existing literature by examining how Spanish-English bilingual college students of Hispanic origin communicate their emotions (sadness, happiness, anger, and fear) in South Texas. The following research question was proposed: How do Spanish-English bilingual college students from the Rio Grande Valley of Hispanic origin communicate their emotions?

Whether the language choice in Spanish-English bilingual college students was their first or second language, or the mix of both "Spanglish" when communicating happiness, sadness, anger, and fear, this phenomenon seemed to be part of their Hispanic identity. In general, "Spanglish" played an important factor in the use of language to express emotions among college students of Hispanic origins who live in the Rio Grande Valley, Texas.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Communicating Emotions

Interpersonal communication is an active process where two or more people interact and influence each other, since what one has expressed affects the response of the other. The quality of this process depends, among other factors, on the mutual and precise understanding of the partner's intended messages (Trommsdorff & John, 1992). Altrov (2013) suggests that this accurate recognition of the emotional intentions of another contributes to the effectiveness of communication, permitting better prediction and interpretation of the behavior and emotional states of others.

Soto and Levenson (2009) further say that emotions are important parts of our interpersonal lives since the interpretation we assign to the emotional signals carry clear advantages for predicting behavior, as well as creating and preserving social bonds. Emotions, therefore, play an important role in human communication and can be analyzed from different perspectives. But how are emotions defined? According to Scherer (2004) emotions are processes of causally-linked mental (appraisal, action tendency, subjective experience) and behavioral (physiological reactions, facial and vocal expression) elements.

Thoits (1989) also proposes that emotions involve four components: “(a) Appraisals of a situational stimulus or context, (b) changes in physiological or bodily sensations, (c) the free or inhibited display of expressive gestures, and (d) a cultural label applied to specific constellations of one or more of the first three components" (p. 318).

Emotions can also be explained from the socio-cultural perspective. From this standpoint, emotions are the products of societies and cultures, and individuals acquired or learned them through experience. Harré (1986) remarks that language, social practices, and other elements of an individual's culture play an important role in the formation of emotions; an individual may develop his/her emotions based on what he/she is exposed to and experience, either directly or indirectly.

Various scholars further classified emotions into different categories to distinguish one from another. For instance, Ekman, Sorenson, and Friesen's (1969) study suggests that there are six basic emotions: anger, disgust, fear, happiness, sadness, and surprise. These basic emotions have different characteristics that allow them to be expressed in different degrees. Secondary emotions encompass the rest of the emotions that have been culturally taught rather than biologically (Sauter, 2010).

Tomkins (1962) also proposes a classification of emotions, which determines that there are eight basic emotions: surprise, interest, joy, rage, fear, disgust, shame and anguish. Lastly, Izard (1993) proposes a classification of emotion through his differential emotion scale (*DES IV-A*) where he labels emotions as: interest, joy, surprise, sadness, anger, disgust, contempt, self-hostility, fear, shame, shyness, and guilt.

To sum up, communicating emotions involves being clear on what emotions we feel, what emotions we want to communicate, and what others will feel when we convey the message. Emotions play a key role in our personal and professional lives, in our way of thinking and behaving. Language is one means through which we communicate emotions, thus, it is examined in the following section of this paper.

Languages and Emotions

Both verbal and nonverbal communication are practiced in interpersonal interaction. Unlike nonverbal communication, verbal communication requires the use of words in the interaction between humans. Language is one means of communication that not only affects the way we communicate, but also the way we think and experience emotions. Though language is considered to be verbal and nonverbal communication, for the purposes of this paper, language meant the verbal part.

Language is related to emotional expression because words allow both senders and receivers to articulate, suppress, or discuss feelings. Thus, the language a person chooses to express his/her emotional state, or discuss emotional situations, can influence the emotional state of another. When individuals are capable of communicating their thoughts and feelings in a language other than their mother tongue, they become bilingual. An explanation of bilingualism is presented below.

Bilingualism

When an individual knows and speaks fluently two languages, he/she becomes bilingual. However, a bilingual person is not necessarily somebody who grows up with two languages. The individual is bilingual if he/she can speak comfortably in two languages. A bilingual person has two emotional sources both of the languages he/she speaks help him/her to integrate or separate personal and cultural experiences (Ervin-Tripp, n. d.).

Pavlenko (2002) also suggests that “when a second language is learned after puberty the two languages may differ in their emotional impact, with the first being the language of personal involvement and the second the language of distance and detachment, or at least the language of lesser emotional hold on the individual” (p. 47).

Some bilingual individuals prefer using their first language to communicate their emotions, whereas for other bilingual individuals additional languages offer them a choice to perform a different emotional self (Dewaele & Pavlenko, 2002; Kellman, 2000). Gumperz (1982) and Zentella’s (1997) studies concur with previous scholars that speakers may switch into their first language to express emotions and to their second language to describe emotions in a detached way.

Because first language is learned in a natural environment, it becomes integrated into the limbic system (a part of our brain) that is responsible for emotions, drives, desires and motivation among other things (Lamendella, 1977; Paradis, 1994). Along these lines, Pavlenko (2004) adds that in the process of first language socialization, words and phrases in the first language acquire affective connotations that become loaded with emotional memories. Additionally, she highlights that if the second language is learned in adulthood, despite the natural environment, an individual experiences less arousal in response to words and expressions in the second language.

In a study done by Anooshian and Hertel (1994), Spanish-English and English-Spanish bilinguals who acquired their second language after the age of 8 remembered emotion-laden words (i.e. *mother* or *church*) more frequently than neutral words (i.e. *table* or *chair*). However, in Pavlenko’s (2004) study about the role of emotion-related factors in language choice in bi- and multilingual families, the results suggested that the first language was not always the language of emotions for bilingual parents. An adult's second language socialization in the family stratum may make other languages seem equally –if not more- emotional than the first. An example of this is expressing "I love you" in one language and "Go clean your room!" in another.

Koven's (2004) study also explored the cross-linguistic expression of affect by comparing an individual's case of affection display in her two languages (French and Portuguese). Koven (2004) demonstrated that this person performed affect differently in narratives of personal experiences. According to the findings, the differences found in his study lay in the repertoire of personas to which Linda (the person the study focused on) had access in each language.

Altrov (2013) also addresses cultural influence in the recognition of moderately expressed emotions in a second language and foreign speech. His study focused on whether Russians who live in Estonia and whose second language is Estonian recognize emotions expressed in Estonian and whether Russians living in Estonia recognize emotions the same way as Estonians or Russians who live in Russia. Three different groups of people were examined: Estonians with Estonian as their mother tongue, highly educated Russians living in Estonia who have Russian as their mother tongue and Estonian as their second language and, finally, highly educated Russians living in Russian with no knowledge of Estonian. The results drawn from this study suggested that understanding emotions was dependent on cultural factors and social interactions, confirming that cultural norms are mastered through interactions.

Another study that addressed cross-linguistic differences is the one done by Marian and Kaushanskaya (2008) where 47 Russian-English bilinguals were asked to recount their immigration experiences either in Russian or English. This research concluded that when speaking about immigration, bilinguals used more emotion words overall in their second language and used more negative words than positive emotion words.

The previous study brings us to the topic regarding the use of *emotion words* while communicating emotions. Pavlenko's (2008) study defines and differentiates emotion words, emotion-related words, and emotion-laden words. She argues that:

> Emotion words are seen as words that directly refer to particular affective states ("happy", "angry") or processes ("to worry", "to rage"), and function to either describe ("she is sad") or express them ("I feel sad").
>
> Emotion-related words describe behaviors related to particular emotions without naming the actual emotions ("tears", "tantrum", "to scream").
>
> Emotion-laden words are words that do not refer to emotions directly but instead express ("jerk", "loser") or elicit emotions from the interlocutors ("cancer", "malignancy") (p.148).

Different studies have been done along the lines of using emotion words in a multilingual context. For instance, Altarriba, Bauer, and Benvenuto's (1999) study revealed that monolingual English-speakers rated emotion words as less concrete and lower in context availability than both abstract and concrete words. The authors concluded that all the three word types were significantly different from one another. Emotion words had the highest average number of associations, followed by abstract words, and then by concrete words.

In another study, Altarriba (2003) asked Spanish-English bilinguals to rate Spanish words on one of three dimensions: concreteness, imageability, or context-availability. Findings from this study supported her previous research and suggested two important points: (1) concrete, abstract, and emotion words are represented in similar ways across languages in terms of concreteness and imageability; and (2) emotion words in Spanish, for Spanish-English bilinguals are more readily contextualized to a specific episode than the corresponding words in English, for English speakers.

In bilingual performance while recalling neutral and emotion words, the research done by Anooshian and Hertel (1994) found that both emotion and emotion-laden words are better recalled by bilingual speakers in Spanish and English but only in their first language regardless of whether it was Spanish or English. This finding suggests that emotion provides a basis for language specificity in bilingual memory.

To conclude, research conducted on how bilingual people communicate their emotions suggests that bilinguals often express their emotions using emotion words depending on the language they speak all the time, and the topic they are talking about. It also appears that the first language is used more when it comes to expressing emotions, rather than the second language. In addition to using a first or a second language to communicate emotions, bilingual people may move back and forth between the two languages they speak in a conversational context. This situation is called code-switching. An explanation of code-switching is presented below.

Code-switching

When a bilingual individual starts a conversation and then *empieza a hablar español u otro idioma* and shifts back to the initial language, *podemos decir que* he/she is code-switching (translation: When a bilingual individual starts a conversation and then he/she starts speaking Spanish and/or other language, and again he/she shifts to the initial language, we can say that he/she is code-switching). This former sentence is an example of what in linguistics is known as code-switching “the discourse in which words originating in two different language system are used side-by-side” by bilingual speakers (Backus, 2005, p. 307).

The most common type of code-switching happens when speakers switch back and forth between two languages as the example given previously. Another form of code-switching involves translating words from one language to another. Bilinguals may face this issue when they cannot find the appropriate word for what they mean in one language or they simply do not know (Moreno, Federmeier, & Kutas, 2002). Code-switching among Hispanics in the U.S. is often attributed to illiteracy or poor linguistic skills (Montes-Alcalá, 2015).

Based on the research done on code-switching, Toribio (2002) proposes that code-switching has taken place in two distinct traditions: “*the syntactic*, providing insights into the linguistic principles that underlie the form that code-switched speech takes, and *the sociolinguistic*, which relates linguistic form to function in specific social contexts” (p. 89).

To date, some studies about code-switching have focused on Latino literature (Montes-Alcalá, 2015; Torres, 2007), commercial greeting cards as a cultural practice (Potowski, 2011), ad persuasiveness (Luna & Peraccio, 2005), and consumer behavior (Callow & McDonald, 2005), but little importance has given to the role of communicating emotions in a bilingual bicultural society.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2010), the Hispanic population of the United States is 50.5 million (16% of the total population). Hispanics are located mostly in the southern states especially in California, Florida and Texas. For the purposes of this research, the Hispanic population from the state of Texas, specifically the Hispanic community of the Rio Grande Valley was investigated in this study.

Due to the large number of immigrants from Mexico, “The Valley” as it is popularly known, is a border area that works as a blend of two cultures where people from two countries (Mexico and the United States) mingle to create a different subculture. The population in this area is concentrated in small cities in four counties -Starr County, Hidalgo County, Willacy County, and Cameron County.

The U. S. Census Bureau (2014) estimates that 62,995 Hispanic or Latino individuals live in Starr County, representing 95.8% of the total population. In Hidalgo County, out of the 831,073 individuals 91.2% are Hispanic or Latino. Cameron County’s population is about 420,392 individuals of who 88.7% are Hispanic or Latinos. Lastly, Willacy County, the smallest county, has about 21,903 people, of which 87.7% are Hispanic or Latino population.

Summing up, the environment for language development in the Rio Grande Valley has contributed to the issue of the use of English as an official language and Spanish as the language spoken at home. This is why “Spanglish,” or the blend of these two languages, is accepted as a means of communication among Hispanics in the area. Differences in culture may be shown through the use of some emotional words while expressing emotions since the Rio Grande Valley functions as a door to experience both cultures: The Mexican and the American culture.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY AND FINDINGS

Based on the necessity to use language as a means to communicate emotions in the Hispanic population, the purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of Spanish-English bilingual college students communicating their emotions (sadness, happiness, anger, and fear) in South Texas. A research question was posed along these lines: How do Spanish-English bilingual college students from the Rio Grande Valley of Hispanic origin communicate their emotions?

To answer the research question, this study followed a qualitative method. According to Patton (1990), qualitative methods “are ways of finding out what people do, know, think, and feel by observing, interviewing and analyzing documents” (p.94). Qualitative methods can also be used to examine areas about which little is known. According to Lindlof and Taylor (2002), “qualitative researchers seek to preserve and analyze the situated form, content, and experience social action, rather than subject it to mathematical or other formal transformations” (p. 18).

Thus, this study sought descriptive data using in-depth, open-ended interviews. Interviews are part of an interaction between interviewer and interviewee, where the interviewer asks open-ended questions to encourage others (the interviewees) in order to obtain information on specific topics/situations (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). The aim is to learn more about people, their experiences and perspectives on events, in their own words.

Interviews also provide an opportunity "to retrieve experiences from the past, to gain expert insight or information, to obtain descriptions of events or scenes that are normally unavailable… or to understand a sensitive or intimate relationship, or to analyze certain kinds of discourse" (Lindlof, 1995, p. 5). For qualitative research, in-depth interviews are modeled on a conversation between equals (both the interviewer and the interviewee), rather than a formal exchange of questions and answers. However, an interview guide is always needed to lead the interview (See Appendix A).

Sample

The population for this study was college students of Hispanic origin who spoke English and Spanish fluently. However, due to the high predominance of Hispanics in the southernmost part of Texas, and since everybody in the population cannot be studied, only a sample of nine students was used in this research. This was a small sample, but the beauty of qualitative methods often comes from a small number of case studies that can provide rich data to understand a special situation in depth (Patton, 1990). The sample was recruited using the snowball sampling method whereby the researcher identified two individuals from a large university in the Rio Grande Valley who met the following criteria:

- Students should be 18 years or older, either female or male.
- Students should be enrolled in the current term.
- Students should have Hispanic origins.
- Students should be English-Spanish bilingual.
- Students should speak either English or Spanish as First Language and Spanish or English as Second Language.

Procedure

After obtaining approval from the Institutional Review Board at The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley, I found six participants using the snowball sampling technique. When the six could not provide any contacts who wanted to participate in the research, I had to start the snowball sampling again and three more people participated in the study. In all, nine college students (four females and five males) in a South Texas university were recruited and interviewed.

All the participants met the criteria required for this study. They self-identified as Hispanics who spoke both English and Spanish fluently. Their age varied from 19 to 23 years old. They came from diverse backgrounds and were studying nursing, communication, engineering, computer science, among other majors. Although their ages and places of birth could be reported, the researcher promised not to use their real names in the study. Therefore, pseudonyms were used.

Before the interviews began, the participants received a consent form. Participants were also given an audio-release form. Upon getting consent, the interview was conducted (See Appendix B).

The interviews were conducted in February 2016. The interviews were conducted in a study room at the library in the college campus, and were tape-recorded. Once the information was collected from the nine students, the interviews were transcribed and the audio file was kept in an encrypted flash drive.

The information gathered from the nine interviews was examined line by line in order to find repeated key terms within the data that would lead to categories or themes. After reviewing and classifying the information gathered, I defined and named six themes to present the findings from this research. The following section reviews this information.

Language Preference when Communicating Emotions

Since pseudonyms were used to identify the participants in the study, here is the list to recognize them throughout the study:

1. Joshua, 23, born in the United States. Spoke English as first language.
2. Sapphire, 21, born in the United States. Spoke English as first language.
3. Monica, 21, born in the United States. Spoke English as first language.
4. Eli, 19, born in the United States. Spoke Spanish as first language.
5. Jesse, 21, born in the United States. Spoke Spanish as first language.
6. Kimberly, 22, born in the United States. Spoke Spanish as first language.
7. Gerardo, 22, born in Mexico. Spoke Spanish as first language.
8. Jasmine, 20, born in Mexico. Spoke Spanish as first language.
9. Ricardo, 22, born in Mexico. Spoke Spanish as first language.

Once the participants introduced themselves and I shared with them what the study was about, they were asked to define the concept of emotions and the four emotions that were involved in this study: happiness, sadness, anger, and fear. All the participants agreed that emotions had to do with feelings and were ways of expressing feelings with one's self or others. For some, emotions were thoughts. For instance, "Joshua" said:

> *Emotions are the full range of what a human being can experience, from happiness, sadness… those are the main ones, there are so many others… but as far as what emotions are to me… something that I do not do often…[laughs].*

“Kimberly” added:

Emotions is a way of expressing what you feel inside, whether it is happiness, sadness, anger, disturb, or disgust. Anything that you want to express or you are feeling at the moment. Something… other than not being normal, I guess [laughs]…

Next, the participants talked more specifically about the emotions examined in the study – happiness, sadness, anger, and fear and how they have a preferred language to communicate these emotions. The findings from the participants led to the following themes: 1) My language choice depends on the emotion I want to express, 2) My language choice depends on whom I am talking to, 3) My language choice depends on how fluent I am in expressing the emotion, 4) My language choice depends on the setting or context, 5) I scarcely use language to express some emotions, and 6) Sometimes, I switch languages to express an emotion.

My language choice depends on the emotion I want to express.

To determine the language used to express emotions, I asked the participants to tell me what language they preferred to express the emotions used in this study. All the participants said their language choice depended on the emotion they wanted to express. For instance, when it came to expressing happiness, those participants who spoke English as their first language and Spanish as their second language, said English was the preferred language. According to “Joshua,”

Preferably, when I am excited or happy about something, I express it in English, because I think it is something I have been studying on going… in an ongoing manner. I am always looking up new words to use, phrases, idioms. I would say English is what I prefer.

He added:

It has to do with how comfortable I am with the language. How I can maneuver through it, how I can express myself. If I were to say… for example, I have some friends who only talk Spanish, so if I had to express myself with them, I would stumble along the way trying to, but I would do the best I can. More than likely they would understand, but it would not be the same as if they knew English and I were able to say it.

Similarly, when it came to language preferences for communicating happiness, Spanish-as-first-language speakers "Eli," "Gerardo," and "Jesse" said Spanish was the language they used to express happiness. "Eli" particularly felt "more comfortable" expressing happiness in Spanish

For "Gerardo," Spanish was "without a doubt" the language he used to communicate happy moments with others because,

I feel more comfortable, because I am more fluent, because I know more words… if someone does not understand me or if someone does not get my point, I know that I know more words to use when I am describing my happiness. And we both know that Spanish has a lot of synonyms so we have a very vast vocabulary to use… and I think Spanish is beautiful…

The findings showed that the participants liked to express happiness in their first language mostly because they felt more comfortable. Interestingly, when it came to expressing anger, the participants' language preference changed.

The language choice for expressing anger could be Spanish, English or both, regardless of whether English or Spanish was the first language. "Joshua" said that he used a mix of English and Spanish, but stressed his preference for English. He said:

I have caught myself… You know, sometimes it would be 'Tex-Mex'…You are merging both languages, but more often I do not… Road rage English, at home Spanish… But I think I use the mix of both languages when it comes to that emotion. Even though it is profanity, but I know both languages well. I think that is why… going back always to your comfort thing…

"Monica" also said that she used a mix of both languages when it came to communicating anger orally regardless of whom she was speaking to.

When it comes to anger, I will say it is a mix of both as well. I am just trying to put my feelings across and I do not really care whom I am talking to. So I will interchange it every once in a while. I do not know why or how, it just happens to where I am saying one word in English and other in Spanish."

"Eli" preferred Spanish since it was his first language. "Jesse" said, "I will always use Spanish when I am angry, because in English… I do not know… You can say more things in Spanish… you can throw them out there." Lastly, "Kimberly" also preferred Spanish because the language "richly" allowed her to describe and express her anger. She shared an example of one such situation and even while describing it, she switched to Spanish during the interview.

This weekend I was doing errands. I was tired already. This car was going so slow… I was supposed to go 55, I was going at 40. There must be something wrong with this car. So my anger was coming out thinking why I was following that car, you know, sometimes you get lost and you kind of follow the limits they are going… so I passed it, and I got closer to it, and I see this lady doing her makeup… OMG!… I was so angry. But I controlled my anger/ If I did not control my anger, I would have been honking… "Idiota ¿qué estás haciendo?… estás poniendo en peligro la vida de todos… [You idiot, what are *you doing? You are risking everybody's life… It disturbs me a lot that people would do that… [Grrr]*

But when it came to fear, like happiness, the participants said they preferred their first language. The participants pointed out that fear was an emotion they rarely talked about. When they did, most preferred to do so in their first language. "Joshua" shared that fear was an emotion that had an "adrenaline kick" that made him "think of English." But "Kimberly", whose first language was Spanish, said she used both languages – one mentally and the other physically.

For fear… God… that is a good one… I think it would be more Spanish. Or not… I may think it in Spanish, but I would say it in English… Mmmm… Fear is usually about my family… When I worry about them… I am scared that something can happen to them… That is a tricky one… I think it is a mix of both. Can I say that?

Overall, these responses show that language choices for expressing emotions depended on the emotion that was being expressed, as well as a person's comfort level and fluency in a language. For those who spoke Spanish as a first language, Spanish added color to their expression of anger.

My language choice depends on whom I am talking to.

A second theme that arose from the data was that the participants' language choice depended on whom they talked to regarding their emotions. They felt more comfortable using either English or Spanish with their friends or family, but that choice also depended on the language the person spoke. If the person was bilingual, the participants' fluency and relationship determined if they used Spanish or English to express an emotion. Take "Eli" for instance, *If I am with a friend of mine who does not speak Spanish, and I feel so anxious to tell somebody something, I am going to have to say it in English to him. The concept is the same. It is the language, the one… it varies. But it depends on whom I am with.*

"Jesse," who also spoke Spanish as his first language added:

If I hear someone talking in Spanish, I am going to [talk to] him or her in Spanish, because I already know. If I notice that person do not speak Spanish, I will start in English, and then if I learn that he or she talks Spanish, I will talk to them in Spanish.

For "Jasmine" the times she talked to her boyfriend would be in Spanish,

With my boyfriend I talk in Spanish, everything is in Spanish, only when I am ranting I do it in English. But then, when I talk to my friends about the conversations I had with him, sometimes I translate them into English and my friends ask me: "do you speak to him in English? I go, no, in Spanish. Then they are surprised because I always talk to him in Spanish and talk about him in English.

Interestingly, almost all the participants said they were very comfortable expressing their emotions to their mothers in Spanish because their mothers understood Spanish more.

For "Gerardo,"

I cannot talk to my mom in English because she does not speak English. Ninety percent of the times I speak Spanish at home. My siblings speak Spanish too. They are bilingual. But when I am with my mom… Only Spanish. When I am with my family from her side, only *Spanish because most of them are from Mexico.*

"Ricardo" commented,

Yes! It always depends… for instance… if it is my parents, well my mom, I use Spanish; with my grandma, of course I have to use Spanish since she is not very fluent in English. I *guess the only time I would speak English is here on campus and it depends on the person, though.*

But "Monica," who said that she uses a mix of both languages, added that there were times when she expressed happiness to her mother in English. In those moments, English came out naturally and speaking in Spanish did not have the same impact. She said:

When it comes to my mom, she barely understands English, but there is times where I am expressing myself in English, so she wants me to repeat it again and I am like: 'Mom, the moment is gone, it is not the same.' [Laughs] It just happens…

"Gerardo" affirmed that he speaks Spanish with his friends as well, even though they are bilingual. He said:

Most of my friends are bilingual… I do not really have a friend who only speaks English… Most of them or the majority of them are bilingual. So most of the time, I speak Spanish too with them.

Overall, the participants said their language preference for expressing happiness, sadness, anger, and fear depended on whom they were talking to.

My language choice depends on how fluent I am in expressing the emotion.

For some participants, their language preference depended on how fluent they were in that language to express certain emotion. "Jesse" for instance, said it was easier for him to communicate his emotions in Spanish because,

The choice of words in Spanish I could use is bigger. In English, I limit myself, because I need to think what I will say, and in what order. Sometimes, I take more time and it is not that authentic as it would be in Spanish.

"Joshua" whose first language is English said: "Even though I mentioned earlier with happiness that I rather express it in English, I may not be as fluent to express sadness in it. These times I express myself in Spanish."

Lastly, "Sapphire's" testimony regarding her language choice depending on her fluency to communicate emotions involved the times she would talk to her mother, sister, and friends:

> *Compared from my mom to my sister, it would have a difference where I would use some different words with my mom [in Spanish], but when it comes to my sister, I would probably use some more modern English, and the same thing with my friends, we speak more English than Spanish.*

Whether the participants do not have a large vocabulary that could be used to express certain emotions in the other language or they simply did not feel very fluent to communicate them with other, the conclusion is that their preferences depended on and how fluent that person was in the language used.

My language choice depends on the setting or context.

Another theme that arose from the data was that the participants' language choice or preference for communicating emotions depended on the environment or context they found themselves. For example, "Sapphire" said: "If I am angry at work… our general manager, she is from Arizona, so she does not know any Spanish… then, I will use probably Spanish [laughs]…"

"Kimberly" added,

> *If it is someone from college, and I am super happy, I will say it in English. But at home… si estoy feliz, le digo a mi mamá: pasé el examen, agarré noventa!... Ay gracias a Dios! [If I am happy I tell my mom: I passed the exam, I got ninety! Thank god!] So it*

depends on where I am. If I am in the house, I will speak more Spanish. Here in school I speak more English. I guess, happiness will depend on where I am happy at.

For "Jasmine,"

All these three feelings [fear, anger, and sadness] are connected. With anger I am ranting and when I rant, English comes naturally. With sadness and fear it is Spanish. And sometimes, it is odd, because right now, here [in the Valley], I think in English, and sometimes when I go back home [to Mexico], I am still thinking in English, but I talk in Spanish, so it is weird to say what you are thinking when the language you are thinking is different from the one you are speaking.

In conclusion, these participants reported that their language choice, when communicating emotions, depended on the place they would be at when this encounter took place.

I scarcely use language to express some emotions.

A few participants also said that there were times when they had great difficulty expressing some emotions verbally. Sadness was described at the emotion that was hardly spoken. "Jasmine" said she almost does not express sadness, but if she had to, she used Spanish. "Jesse" and "Ricardo" said fear was not even an emotion they talked about. "Ricardo" especially pointed out that sadness was an emotion he kept to himself,

I talk to nobody. I tend to not to talk about my fears nor sadness. My family has trouble getting these feelings out of me, because I am the type of person that does not like to talk about some emotions or how feel. Yes, my mother would ask every now and then the reason why I am upset or sad, but I just tend to lock myself up. It will just go away…

"Gerardo" said he did not like to voice his fears to people because "*sometimes people may take advantage of your fears… They see you as weak and sometimes if something comes, they can use it against you."* "Joshua" explained that sadness:

> *…It is not something I express so much, but I think that the times that I have, for some reason, have been in Spanish… it is so weird! So, whomever I am comfortable with, speaking about that matter or emotion, where I feel I can talk to them about it, I would say Spanish.*

For "Kimberly" if she was feeling sad within her family, said she might express this emotion in Spanish as well. But she added that "sadness does not come much around. Usually sadness would have to be dealing with the family, something that happens within my family, so sadness I would express it more in Spanish."

Fear was another emotion less expressed verbally. When discussing their language choice for communicating fear, "Gerardo," for example, said: "I try, I try not to express fear… I try to be serious about not to express fear."

To sum up, participants reported sadness and fear as the two main emotions they did not regularly use verbal language to communicate with others.

Sometimes, I switch languages to express an emotion.

Finally, the last theme drawn from the interviews showed that there were times when the participants switched languages while expressing an emotion. This is called code-switching. As the literature showed, people who are bilingual can speak the two languages aide by side. Since all the participants in this study were bilingual, code-switching was expected. previously shown, sometimes they used one or the other to express certain emotions.

"Joshua" said he code-switches. However:

Lately, I have been trying to avoid, because you are disgracing both languages when trying to merge them together… I guess because of the area, I feel comfortable doing *that, but personally, I am trying to split them both, trying to use only English words… I am now thinking of 'parkear' (to park), the Spanish speaking words merging English. You are bringing English into Spanish. That is what usually happens here, and I have caught myself and other people like: 'what am I saying?'. I am trying to avoid it, but it happens.*

On the other hand, for "Sapphire" and "Monica," code-switching happened to be a "normal practice in their daily lives." "Sapphire" said if she communicates with other Hispanics, she absolutely engages in code-switching talk. But when "communicating with a Latino, "Spanglish" always came out naturally. "Monica" shared that whenever she was talking and did not recall a word in English, she used the Spanish word automatically:

An example is, the other day I was looking for a tool. In Spanish I know them as 'pinzas' [pliers]. In English everybody was taking it as 'tweezers'… Not tweezers… They told me: the word is 'pliers'… [laughs]… I was like: 'No, I do not think is pliers' I think it is something else. For sure I knew in Spanish we called them 'pinzas… Ok alguien tiene unas pinzas por ahi? [Does anybody happen to have some pliers?]

To a certain extent, speaking "Spanglish" had become a regular thing that may be characterized as a part of their identity as Hispanic members of the RGV. Along these lines "Joshua" remarked:

I think it is a good area to be if you are proud of both heritages. A lot of people here around my age, their parents came here, or before that, and so they have that as part of themselves, plus they have the American culture that comes to living here in the U.S.

Sometimes you may feel ashamed because of the 'Tex-Mex' thing, but that also makes us unique. So, I would say it is a pretty great thing.

However, the participants who spoke Spanish as their first language said they preferred not to engage in code-switching situations, except when it was necessary. For instance, "Eli" said that he would not mix languages within his family. However, the situation changed when he talked to his friends: "I have a lot of friends that only speak English. I have a lot of friends that only speak Spanish. Although the majority of them speak both." As a result, "Eli" said when he talks to his friends, he code-switches. "I have to say that sometimes I have used the term 'Pochear.' To speak in both languages at the same time. So, I use one word in English combined with one in Spanish sentences." He said he sometimes used more English words when speaking Spanish than the other way around. The transition from English to Spanish was definitely a recurring situation.

"Jesse" also shared that, even though he is surrounded by friends who are bilingual, he does not mix the languages, unless he is joking around with them. He said:

One of my friends mostly speaks English… He understands Spanish and sometimes he would say some things in Spanish, but I would always talk to him in Spanish… He answers in Spanish, maybe a mixture because of his family, but I do not tend to mix English and Spanish… maybe if I am joking around, but I do not go like: "look at my casa" [look at my house]… I do not say those things… Maybe… maybe if I forget a word… but I do not do it intentionally… I think it is weird to mix both languages.

He added:

Because I do not think it should be mixed. You either know Spanish or you know English… I do not know… it comes to my mind the 'cholos' people who mix the *languages to express themselves (no offense) … I just do not think it is the proper way to speak.*

Both "Eli" and "Jesse" brought up two different terms regarding the code-switching technique: *"Pochear"*- the way some people refers to the action of code-mixing, and *"Cholos",* the people who actually engage in conversation of this type on their daily basis.

For "Jasmine" code-switching happened more often with her best friend who is also bilingual:

It is really weird because we both speak Spanish and English, so sometimes we are talking in Spanish and we are saying something like: "Oh my mom told me this gossip girl or whatever" and we are talking in Spanish, and then I say something like: "Oh es que es she is una witch" [she is a witch] and there is when it switches, and we start speaking in English, and she says something like: "No es que…" [No, it is…] in Spanish… and we start again in Spanish… we go back and forth…

"Jasmine" added that when it came to her family:

I talk in Spanish to my mom and my dad and my brother. Sometimes when we are shopping in here, I talk in English to the lady who is helping us because I am used to it. Sometimes my brother asks: 'Why are you talking in English if you know Spanish, and she knows Spanish?' I reply: 'I am just used to it…' [laughs]… It has a lot to do that we are here by the border and I am getting my education in English, but I have always had my bilingual education, so we have been exposed to both languages all the time.

For "Ricardo" the code-switch practices depended on the setting, more specifically inside the classroom:

I have encountered some experiences when I am in class and some students whom their main language is Spanish, and sometimes I help them out to understand some concepts that the professor is trying to explain. I guess, that is the one time I would transition from English to Spanish or back and forth.

But outside the classroom,

These friends who are outside, I usually speak to them a lot since right now I am trying to become a tutor, they tell me all these positive things, however, sometimes it transitions to some issues regarding the school and I get aggravated, then is when I switch over to Spanish. I just go with Spanish. To me, it is more like an aggressive language, it sounds more "agresivo" [aggressive].

But for "Gerardo", code-switching caused confusion:

If I am going to speak Spanish, just Spanish! We have Spanglish… No offense, but I hate it. I really hate it. [R: Why?] I do not know. If someone is speaking Spanish… ¿Qué pedo, wey? [What's up, dude?] Or English… If I am talking to you right now y después te digo *que… [and after I tell you that…] I want to mix the languages and then you try to understand everything… It is confusing… I think it is confusing."*

Nevertheless, "Kimberly" said she engaged in conversations where code-switching takes place, since expressing her emotions were full of moments where she code-switched constantly. She saw code-switching as very normal and did it all the time.

In conclusion, the findings showed that the atmosphere where college students engage in code-switching talks seemed to be unavoidable. The practice of "Spanglish" becomes a natural thing when people from the RGV communicate with each other in their daily basis. Despite liking or disliking, whether agreeing or disagreeing in using "Spanglish" to express happiness, sadness, anger and fear, college students are immersed in this habit that other residents use to communicate with each other. "Spanglish" is both used in a school setting with friends, and at home with some family members, people who code-switch have in consideration that both, senders and receivers know, or at least understand both languages to get their message across.

CHAPTER IV

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This study sought to explore how Spanish-English bilingual college students communicate their emotions (happiness, sadness, anger, and fear) in South Texas. The study's only question asked, how do Spanish-English bilingual college students from the Rio Grande Valley of Hispanic origin communicate their emotions? To answer this question, nine participants fluent in both English and Spanish were interviewed.

The results drawn from this study concurred with other research conducted on how bilingual people communicate their emotions. Bilingual individuals often express their emotions depending on the language they speak all the time, and on their first language whether it be English or Spanish.

The study found that individuals who spoke English as their first language and Spanish as second language preferred to use English communicate emotions, especially happiness and fear. These participants communicated emotions like sadness and anger with, sometimes a mix of, both languages. Whom they talked to also determined their language choice. For instance, sadness was an emotion barely spoken, but if it ever happened, a mix of language occurred due to the strong bond with their mothers, and with friends the ease of expressing their thought would make them speak English. Anger was an emotion where English would come out naturally since it was their first language.

For the Spanish-as-first language participants, Spanish was the dominant language to express all the emotions studied. The reason was that since Spanish was their first language, it would come out naturally. However, if they needed to express any emotion in English, they needed to adjust to the circumstance and accommodate their language to have their message across.

Spanish words had a stronger meaning or impact to the participants who self-identified as Spanish speakers. But one participant said she liked to use English to express happiness because it was a very straight-forward language whereas Spanish seemed to be more embellished.

This study also supported Pavlenko's (2004) findings that individuals who acquire a second language during adulthood will experience less arousal in response to words and expressions learned in the second language. Therefore, participants for who English was their second language preferred to communicate their emotions in Spanish due to the stronger connotation that the words had in their first language.

Regarding the code-switching practice, the participants unquestionably engaged in a code-switch talk. For the participants who spoke Spanish as his/her first language and English as his/her second language, code-switching happened during the whole interview, showing how naturally "Spanglish" was a normal practice for them.

Support was also found for the second form of code-switching Moreno, Federmeier, and Kutas, (2002) proposed. Bilingual individuals easily translated words from one language to another (English to Spanish). This situation was mostly shown in participants who spoke either English or Spanish as first language.

Lastly, “Spanglish” caused confusion when talking to others for some of the participants who spoke Spanish as first language. Another reason was simply that they did not think it was the proper way to speak.

Limitations and Future Research

This study was not without its limitations. First, the sample size may not be representative of bilingual students from a Hispanic background (which is not the goal of qualitative research). Second, the situation faced after recruiting the initial six subjects through the snowball sampling method, led to some difficulty finding more students willing to participate in the study. Some students did not show any interest, and others said they would contact me through text or email and never did.

Another important constraint was the time. Since this study was conducted during a limited time, the researcher had to make sure that both the data collection and the data analysis were feasible during this term.

Nevertheless, there are other ways in which future research can be done in this area.

Although this study focused on college students, the sample age range (24 years old and older) may give a different perspective on whom they communicate their emotions with, depending on their marital status. For instance, instead of having a parental bond, their spouse could be or could not be the person they may feel more comfortable to communicate their feelings. And whether or not the spouse happens to be a both Spanish and English speaker.

The heritage generation gap would be another element to take into consideration for further studies. This generation gap would play a factor in the students’ response since language is an element that is passed from generation to generation. Further research could explore the differences between individuals from first generation and individuals from third or older generations to know their language practices among families and friends.

Another element to consider in further studies would be the bond between parents and children, especially mothers and their children, and how that affects their language choices in expressing emotions. This study found that parents' language choices may heavily influence the way children communicate their emotions with them and others. Many of the participants happened to have a strong bond with their mothers. Their mothers mainly spoke Spanish, and therefore most participants had to communicate with them in Spanish when expressing their emotions.

Finally, further studies are needed on the impact of language on emotions in cultures and languages. As the United States continues to grow in the number of immigrants who are teaching their U.S.-born children their language, will the same results be found? For instance, how would a Korean-American who is bilingual express his/her emotions? Which language would he or she use? Will similar experiences be found in other bilingual groups?

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APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW GUIDELINE

1. Tell me about yourself (Who are you? Where you live? What you study? Etc.)
2. What are emotions for you?
3. In general, how do you express your emotions?
4. How do you define (happiness, sadness, anger and fear)?
5. Can you please give me some examples of situations where you experience happiness, sadness, anger and fear?
6. Can you please describe any stories when you express happiness, sadness, anger and fear?
7. When you express happiness orally, what language do you prefer to use? Why? Do you choose the language depending on whom you are talking to?
8. When you express sadness orally, what language do you prefer to use? Why? Do you choose the language depending on whom you are talking to?
9. When you express anger orally, what language do you prefer to use? Why? Do you choose the language depending on whom you are talking to?
10. When you express fear orally, what language do you prefer to use? Why? Do you choose the language depending on whom you are talking to?
11. Finally, how different do you communicate those feelings with (family and/or friends)?

APPENDIX B

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley

Informed Consent Form

COMUNICANDO EMOCIONES: LANGUAGE PREFERENCES FOR HISPANICS IN THE RIO GRANDE VALLEY

Primary Investigator: Elim Hernandez
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We are conducting a research study as a partial fulfillment of a Master's degree for Elim Hernandez under the supervision of Dr. Aje-Ori Agbese. This study is focused on language preferences for Hispanics in the Rio Grande Valley when they communicate their emotions. You have been selected because you have met the following criteria: You are an 18-year-old UTRGV student with Hispanic origins enrolled in the current term. You are an English-Spanish speaker with either English or Spanish as First Language and Spanish or English as Second Language. Please read this form carefully and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to take part in the study.

The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of Spanish-English bilingual college students communicating their emotions (sadness, happiness, anger, and fear) in South Texas. Specifically, the study will examine how college students of Hispanic descent use language to communicate emotion.

If you agree to be in this study, you will be interviewed and the interview will take around 30-45 minutes. This interview will be tape-recorded. You should not give your name or any identifying information throughout the interview time. Data will be reported anonymously and you will be given a pseudonym in the study. If you refuse to answer any questions, you may withdraw from the study at anytime without penalty. The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report we make public, we will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you. Research records will be kept in a locked file and only the researcher will have access to the records. Aside from this, you will be asked to sign a separate consent form regarding the audio tape permission to be audio recorded.

There may be some social risks associated with the study. Since you may be asked to give or share the primary investigator's contact information to another person who meets the criteria, this may be an uncomfortable situation you may face.

The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley
IRB APPROVED
IRB# 2015-270-12
Expires: 01/26/2017

IRB APPROVED UTRGV

The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley

Informed Consent Form

This study provides no direct benefit to the participants. However, the information from this study may benefit English-Spanish speakers in the future when it comes to communicate their emotions.

Taking part in this study is completely voluntary. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time. If you have questions, the researcher conducting this study will be glad to help you. Please ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact Elim Hernandez (elim.hernandez01@utrgv.edu) at 956-638-0540, or the faculty advisor Dr. Aje-Ori Agbese (ajeori.agbese@utrgv.edu) at 956-665-2543.

This research has been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board for Human Subjects Protection (IRB). If you have any questions about your rights as a participant, or if you feel that your rights as a participant were not adequately met by the researcher, please contact the IRB at 956-665-2889 or irb@utrgv.edu.

By signing below, you indicate that you are voluntarily agreeing to participate in this study and that the procedures involved have been described to your satisfaction. The researcher will provide you with a copy of this form for your own reference.

______________________________ ____/____/____

Participant's Signature Date

The researcher will keep this consent form for at least three years beyond the end of the study.

The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley
IRB APPROVED
IRB# 2015-270-12
Expires: 01/26/2017

IRB APPROVED UTRGV

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Elim Hernandez was born in Mexico City, Mexico in 1983. He received his Bachelor of Arts degree from Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM) in Mexico City, in 2012. He majored in Communication, and graduated with honors. After completing his Bachelor's degree, he worked as a Public Relations coordinator at Compañía Mexicana de Exploraciones in Mexico City and other cities within the country.

In the fall of 2013, he relocated to Edinburg, Texas where he enrolled at the University of Texas-Pan American. He earned a Master's Certificate in Media Relations and Strategic Communication in 2015. He obtained his Master of Arts in Communication from the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley in 2016. Elim can be contacted by email at: hdezse@gmail.com.