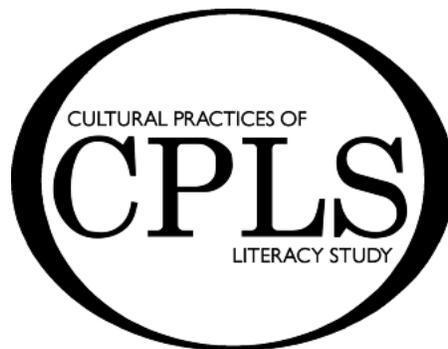


Literacy Practices in a Foreign Language: Two Cuban Immigrants

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Introduction

This is a case study of the literacy practices of two adults--Lara and Enrique¹--who both came to the U.S. as refugees from Cuba seeking a better life. Lara arrived with her husband and two small children in 1997; Enrique arrived in 2002, only a year and a half before the data collection for this study. Both were able to come to the “promised land” because they won immigration visas in a lottery set up by the Cuban and U.S. government in 1994. This lottery is the result of a treaty that was signed as a part of efforts to end the “boat exodus”, a series of desperate and often tragic attempts of hundreds of Cubans to get to the U.S. shores on shaky rafts (U.S. Department of State, 2000). Every year, the lottery raises hopes for 20,000 Cubans who wish to qualify for the U.S. immigration visas.

My goal with this research was to explore the ways in which literacy and language intersect and are negotiated by immigrants such as Lara and Enrique. Through semi-structured interviews and observations, I tried to capture a portrait of their lives in the U.S. in a different language and culture, and implications of their past and current life situations for their personal literacy practices. Both participants in the case study received five years of university education in Cuba and are literate in their native language--Spanish. When they came to the U.S., they had to start their lives over in a language foreign to both.

Researcher Location and Context

I first met Lara at a monthly gathering of local teachers and international educators, which I attend. The group was discussing refugee issues and Lara was invited to visit to speak about her experiences when she first came to the United States as a refugee. She delivered a

passionate speech describing the oppressive political situation in Cuba that drove her away, the challenges of starting a new life in a new language and culture, and the language barriers that prevent many university-educated Cubans from fully using their potential and escaping the trap of unqualified, low paying jobs in the U.S. As she was painting the harsh reality of Cuba and lives of crushed hopes, fear, and dual morality, I began traveling back in time to the communist Czechoslovakia where I grew up. Her words strongly resonated with my memories of the communist hypocrisy, in which I lived for over 15 years, and I began to grow curious about this woman, about her views, and the socio-political and educational context within which they took shape.

When I decided that the Cuban immigrant experience was worthwhile to explore in a study of literacy practices, I wanted to hear at least one other voice besides Lara's. That voice belongs to Enrique, a 33-year-old Cuban soccer teacher who had only arrived in the U.S. one and a half years previously. A friend of mine met Enrique and his friends in a bar one night when he overheard their Spanish and joined them in a conversation, eager to practice his own Spanish and to make new friends noticeably different from the usual crowd of college students.

My inquiry sought to explore Lara's and Enrique's past and present literacy practices, paying particular attention to the ways both participants negotiate their uses of English and Spanish in their new country. Over the fall of 2003, Enrique and I met regularly once a week in English tutoring sessions that I started giving him. Lara and I met on six different occasions, during which I conducted four semi-structured interviews to elicit information about Lara's use of English and its place in the kinds of readings and writing Lara performs.

Communism and Education in Cuba

I was curious to hear what these two people would tell me about their lives in Cuba, their school experiences, and their literacy practices that accompanied their childhood and adulthood. I expected that they would attribute a great deal of their reading and writing habits to their education and the socio-political context, in which they both spent considerable chunks of their lives. I vividly remember Czechoslovakia during the communist times and the effects the political regime had on people's minds. The oppressive environment of omnipresent surveillance in a society where only certain kinds of knowledge were allowed drove people into various forms of escapism. Many found self-actualization through work on their weekend cottages and gardens in the countryside; some submerged themselves into a world of books that provided information otherwise difficult to access. I remember the long lines in front of bookstores every Thursday when new publications, usually in limited numbers of copies, arrived on the store shelves. People were hungry especially for translations of classic world literature and contemporary Western suspense novels that offered a view of envied modernity absent in the communist world.

Reading was a popular pastime activity, also, because it did not have to compete with TV or other possibilities of leisure activities such as movies or video games. Television had only two channels, few people had VCRs, and movie theaters would play one movie every week. Books were irresistibly cheap and other forms of entertainment did not appear as overwhelming as they are now² in the endless possibilities of choices they offer.

Communist regimes generally took pride in their education systems, which were also admired by many Western researchers. This admiration was arguably deserved, at least as regards universal access to education, high literacy rates and relatively high achievement that

students from former socialist/communist nations showed in international comparative studies. Cuban education in particular has been praised lately. In 1997, UNESCO conducted a comparative study of 3rd and 4th graders in 11 Latin American countries. Cuban students in 100 randomly selected elementary schools outperformed their international peers by 2 standard deviations (UNESCO Regional Office for Education in Latin America and the Caribbean, 1998).

My conversations with Lara and Enrique naturally touched upon schooling and politics, but these themes surfaced only occasionally. From my experience, political context does have some effect on what people read and write in terms of what is made accessible as well as what is denied. Additionally, schooling always plays an important role in the development of reading and writing skills (Purcell-Gates, Jacobson, & Degener, in press). However, Lara and Enrique's responses to questions about their school literacy practices (see Introduction) did not reflect their particular Cuban political and educational experiences in any clear-cut way. What did emerge from their reflections was the role that family literacy practices, including texts, values, and beliefs (Barton & Hamilton, 1998) played in shaping their current literacy lives. For the remainder of this chapter, I explore this theme, and the ways in which Lara and Enrique's literacy practices intersect with their lives in a new society dominated by English. It became clear that the complex issues of language, text, textual access, social and cultural domains, and power relations (Luke, 2003) all transact to contribute to a pattern of gains and losses for these immigrants who crossed linguistic and political borders in efforts to improve their lives.

Lara

Lara and her husband won the Cuban visa lottery and arrived in the U.S. in 1997 with an 8-year-old son and a daughter of 11 months³. Eight years later, the family had adjusted well to the local urban lifestyle and culture of the U.S. Midwest. Lara is an intensely active person who

always seemed to manage several different activities at a time. She used to own a Cuban restaurant in this small Midwestern city, but Carpal Tunnel Syndrome and Raynaud's disease in her hands⁴ made it difficult for her to carry heavy dishes and continue running the restaurant. Eventually, Lara decided to give up her business and focused her energy elsewhere. At the time of the study, she worked in a modeling agency, gave Latin dance lessons, and taught Spanish to elementary school children. She also managed to rehearse with her band in the evenings, and remain a devoted wife and a mother.

Literacy and Language in Lara's Family

While the English language was a great challenge for Lara's husband, it had never been a problem for her. Lara explained that foreign languages had always played a role in her life, even as a little girl growing up in Cuba. This was due to the varied influences of her family, particularly her father and her godfather. As Laura told it, one of her talents and hobbies that she inherited from her father was singing. As a child, she wanted to sing songs from parts of the world other than Cuba, and her father insisted that she make attempts to go beyond trained repetition of foreign sounds and search for the meaning behind the words she learned to pronounce. "You have to understand what you are singing," he would say to her. So she did. She learned some Portuguese, Italian, English and French, depending on the origin of the song she tried to learn. Lara's godfather also played a role in her interest in other languages. He was a veterinarian and originally from Poland. He also had many "off-beat" hobbies such as wine making and Morse code. He spoke "many" languages and he was the first one to introduce Lara to English and French:

I would read in Spanish or English. And then, I would read in French or Italian, it depends. What they taught me when I was a child was: you read the writer in his own

language. My godfather taught me that, who was Polish.... He made me very researchful. I was always investigating. I wanted to know the etymology of words all the time, so that I could figure better....

Lara grew up in an environment where books and knowledge were highly valued and respected. As a result, she claims, she acquired a passion for books and yearnings for more knowledge. According to Lara, her father loved informative, educational and historical readings. Her mother enjoyed mystery novels and fiction of various kinds, although there existed within the family a hierarchy of good books and not-so-good books.

We didn't read pink⁵ novels, or soap opera novels. It was serious reading. Either history, or educational, or informational books or magazines, depending on my age. I was given books: by my godfather, by my dad and by my mom.

The habits learned at home held strong in Lara's life. She claimed to be a faithful reader who will read anything that she considers of value. However, some types of texts enjoy more prominence in her life than others. When asked what she enjoys the most, without hesitation, she replies, "forensics"; "I read forensics for entertainment – it's my hobby. My father was a forensic investigator. It takes a lot of intelligence and awareness." Lara likes to read texts related to forensics, detective stories, or watch TV documentaries about the FBI, but she enjoys other genres. Usually, two or three books at a time lay on her bedside table. She will read a bit from one, then switch to another. English and Spanish blend, but if she is looking to read for entertainment and pleasure, she will try to find a way to get books in Spanish.

Since Lara began her job with a modeling agency, she has begun reading different types of texts related to this position, and these texts are all written in English. They include such things as handouts, manuals, brochures, and information leaflets. Lara experienced this reading

practice as purely functional, required by her work to develop an understanding of studio photography, lighting, colors, and make-up.

All work-related readings for Lara were generally bound to English. English may not be the dominant language at home but it certainly is everywhere else. Although Lara's English appeared quite fluent, it still remains a foreign language to her. When she moves outside of the work domain to pursue her personal interests and look for reading for entertainment, she deliberately turns to texts in Spanish:

I don't want to read in English. I refuse to read in English because I spend most of my day speaking and reading in English. So for my enjoyment I'd like to do it in Spanish.

It's just like a matter of coming back to the basics. When you spend all day speaking in a language that is not yours, you want to go back home and say, "I am at home."

Lara makes similarly strong distinctions in language choices when writing is called for. All job-related notes in her daily planner are in English, but when it comes to written reminders that relate to home, the language switches to Spanish. A shopping list of supplies for her office would be in English, a shopping list for home in Spanish.

Lara only realized this when I asked her about her language preferences in keeping ordinary daily notes. Initially, she wanted to say that all her notes are in Spanish but then she hesitated, began to wonder about it, and eventually peeked into her daily planner to discover, much to her surprise, that most notes were in fact in English. Through living in the U.S., English has become her strongest foreign language and she has no difficulties expressing herself in it, whether verbally or in a written form.

Writing, just like reading, is an inherent and important part of her life. As she declared, she cannot imagine life without it, whether it is writing for self-expression or communicating

with her children by leaving messages on their doors, or doing a homework assignment for parents, sent home by Lara's daughter's teacher every week asking the parents to read with their child and fill out a form corresponding to this assignment. She describes herself as always with a pen, scribbling notes on the margins of newspapers or any writeable surfaces to comment on points she notices in the texts, or to emphasize remarkable ideas. Writing for self-expression can take the form of a short story, a poem, or a conference paper, but poetry triumphs. Previously, Lara was writing poetry exclusively in Spanish but with recent prospects for an English-speaking audience, she had begun translating her poems into English.

No Spanglish Allowed

Lara did not restrict the deliberate switching between English and Spanish, and the drawing of boundaries between the two languages to note-keeping and book selection. She expressed a strong belief that each language represents a unique culture, and must be preserved in its original form. Cuban and American cultures are distinct and they should not be muddled by language hybridizations. According to her, it is crucial to know one's own mother language and know it well. It is also crucial to be proficient and fully competent in the dominant language of the host culture. But more importantly, it is essential to develop awareness of the two languages and cultures as separate and distinct, each with their own rules.

Lara asserts that mixing is unacceptable to her as a form of hybridization that lowers the status of each language and culture:

Mixing, that's one of the things that I loathe the most, with cultures that come with inventing new words that are not necessary. Our language has a lot of words already; we don't need to invent any words. We need to preserve what we have even when languages are alive and they change, we don't need to prostitute them. And that's what I feel when I

see this “I am going to *la marketa*.” NO, *el mercado*, there is a word, you don’t need to invent a stupid word that is not English or Spanish. Doesn’t make any sense to me.

Clearly, Lara was making very conscious language choices. Her definition of literacy suggests her underlying values and beliefs that seemed to be related to these choices. In her own words, literacy is “education, empowerment, and cultural awareness.”

Education, for Lara, occurs to a high degree at home, although schooling was also acknowledged as important. In Cuba, she told me, people talk about “*educación desde la cuna*” (education from the cradle). Lara’s mother apparently did not have a lot of formal schooling, but, as Lara described her, she was well-educated:

My mom was able to get only to 6th grade but she had better spelling than many doctors because she read a lot. She did a lot of puzzles ... She came to Havana after the revolution and she started alphabetizing people (teaching people to read) who knew less than her. She has always been reading. My daughter is like her; she will read anything, like for example the labels on the bottle because it’s fun for her to do....[for my mother] it was like a challenge to her. She was like “OK, I only achieved 6 grades but I want to know.” My mom would talk about anything. If she was interested about Afghanistan, she would go find a book, and go into the dictionary, ask questions, and she would know what she was talking about.

Empowerment, according to Lara, comes with knowledge and cultural awareness. In Lara’s case as an immigrant, what counted for her as invaluable knowledge were her excellent English skills. It was through them that she gained access to the host culture, and developed essential understandings of how the U.S. culture works. Lara believed that without fluent English skills, she and her family would have been marginalized, unable to live as fully as they do. The

language skills gave her access to the host culture and made it possible for her to learn about many of its unwritten cultural rules and taboos. She began to make sense of the local etiquette, and to comprehend more than words. This is what she meant by cultural awareness and consequent empowerment. Everybody needs to learn, and this learning can happen through explicit instruction, she asserted. She emphasized, that at the same time, this cultural awareness must not only target the host culture. Her children need to learn about their own heritage as well:

How do people get in the mainstream without acculturating... Most of these people [foreigners who come to live in the U.S.], what they do is that they show their children into the new culture and have them forget about their own heritage because they have to be in the mainstream. No, you don't need to do that. And I am a living proof. My children are all 100% Cuban but they can be 100% American too. And they have both etiquettes because I took my time to teach them both. It takes long, it's difficult, it's excruciating pain sometimes, because they don't understand: "Why do I have to ..."? "Well, it has to be this way." Sometimes they understand; sometimes they don't. They have adapted very well. My daughter speaks Spanish with a gringo accent and gringo with no accent. And she speaks Spanglish sometime. That's another thing that I am always correcting them. You either speak one language, you don't speak Spanglish with me. You speak either Spanish or English.

Lara, herself, attributes most of her own literacy practices to her upbringing, and tries to raise her own children in a way that she experienced herself, inspiring them to develop cultural awareness and love for books. As her godfather used to say, "Books are like windows. If you want to open the window to Egypt, you read a book about Egypt." Lara treasures what her parents and her godfather gave her and she wishes to do the same for her own children:

Children need to see that as a natural thing in their environment for them to do this thing. There is nothing that you can force on people. My daughter likes to read because she sees me reading and studying and she knows it's important. She knows that I enjoy it. My son, the same. It's not a genetic thing, it might be. My husband is also a writer. He is always studying, always with a book in his hand. If they see you in front of a TV flipping a remote control, that's what they are gonna learn. Unless, they have some other influence outside of their house, which is very difficult in this country because everything is so expensive.

Enrique

Enrique's situation is rather different. Like Lara, he received five years of university education in Cuba. He studied to be a physical education teacher, which he did for nine years. Neither Lara's nor Enrique's credential counts in the U.S., but Lara has managed to find various ways to do things she truly enjoys doing and that are fulfilling to her. She believes that this is because she has mastered English. For Enrique, English was still a great challenge. He had arrived in the U.S. only a year and a half before we met. Single, with roommates and friends who are all Cuban, he reported that he was receiving only a limited exposure to English. But he appeared determined to learn as much as his circumstances would allow. However, with two jobs as a dishwasher and cleaner totaling 80 hours a week, it was very difficult. Despite his obvious lack of time, he found ways to slip bits of English learning into his days. He noted down new words that he would look up in the dictionary when he came home from work. He also would try to learn from his English-speaking co-workers, according to his account. Nevertheless, all those learning situations related to survival skills and English vocabulary only. Enrique never learned anything about English grammar, and he developed a way of communicating in English that is

mostly comprehensible, but clearly signals lack of any language education. At the time of the data collection, Enrique was in the process of waiting for a green card. Then, he believed, he will be able to make more thought-out choices about what to do with his life.

Literacy in Enrique's Family

Enrique was the only person in his family who went to a university. He grew up in a small town in western Cuba in a family of 6 children, with parents who had received very limited schooling. Consequently, according to him, he did not see much reading or writing take place in his home. In his broken, but comprehensible, English, he explains:

My father, if you give one paper, he no write nothing. He go to the school for only three or four year. Only work work work work.

[Does he know how to read and write?]

A little bit. My mother write a little bit more than my father. She has problems in her eyes. She like listen music, news and *novelas* on the radio. In my family, little people, little family go to the school 40 or 50 year ago. Everybody go to work. In Cuba, everybody had 5 or 6 children and need to work work work. Not have time for a study.

The only exception to this was his uncle who came to live in the house with Enrique's family in early 1990s after he returned from Germany where he spent four years as a construction worker. The German work experience rewarded him with a new kind of life. His savings from Germany, and the electronics and clothes that he brought back to Cuba to sell, provided him with enough money to retire and live without a job. It also gave him the time to start doing things he otherwise would not have been able to do such as extensive reading.

Enrique remembers him as always with a book or a newspaper.

In Cuba the life is very poor and when he come back to Cuba, he bring back a lot of clothes and he sell a lot, T-shirt, TV, and never more, he say, never more I work. All time he only in Cuba listen radio and music and read a book.

However, this memory is only from Enrique's adult life when he was already in his 20s. Prior to the German endeavor, Enrique's uncle, similar to Enrique's father, worked manually, in construction. Enrique and his uncle both read from an extensive shared library of books. Enrique's favorite readings included stories about ancient Egypt and its pyramids, Mesopotamia, and Babylonia. But his true passion was soccer which came much earlier than his exposure to books and won over everything else. He discovered the sport as a 12-year old boy and determined to never let it go.

I play with my friend. Always in front of my home. Play without shoes. All day, very hot weather. And after, in my high school. The championship. Every week, I play with other school. And in my college, all day, every day, Monday through Friday, after 3:30pm, I play. That was one specialization. Every day. Sometime I feel very sick, but if you don't play, you don't pass to other years. You may have trouble.

Enrique's Education

The passion for sports led Enrique to university to study physical education. Getting accepted was not easy. He had to take many tests in different sport disciplines such as athletics, swimming, and ball games. The entrance examinations also included a test in biology, mathematics and Spanish. As Enrique explained, out of some 200 students at his high school, only a handful was accepted into a university. He was one of the only two admitted to study physical education. Several other students were accepted into a medical school and yet another few into humanities.

Enrique's drive to study was also motivated by the desire to better himself. "Always when I see the other people [with university education] talk and talk, I see the communication different [and I think] I need to learn, I need to learn. I need to go to school."

During the five years at university, Enrique read extensively and took notes in preparation for exams although he did not feel too strong about his writing skills. Direct face-to-face communication allowed him to express himself better so he always chose to take his exams orally. He successfully finished the studies and got a job as a physical education teacher in his home province where he had taught for 9 years prior to coming to the U.S. Teachers in Cuba generally make very little money and, as Enrique explained to me, many leave the profession. But he was happy because he was doing what he loved to do.

Sometime, teacher say I no work more in the school because if I sell bananas in the street, I make more money. Forget about my specialization. If you go to Cuba, you see in the street, the doctor or maybe the teacher sell bananas, candy, peach, whatever.

[What is university good for?]

When you finish university, you have one job. You don't need looking for job. You have guarantee. In your province or in another province but always you have job.

Life in English

Enrique's credentials from Cuba had no use in the U.S., and the fact that his English skills were limited did not help. He was caught in two manual jobs with little time to work on his English. But he still tried. Street signs, ATM machines, bills, letters from the insurance company, all of these textual forms and purposes provided opportunities for his learning of English. He had a dictionary at home and when he would come from work and inspect his mail, the dictionary

was a great aid in helping him understand written English. It was also tremendously useful when he needed to write checks and spell English numerals, Enrique reported.

Enrique also found some assistance at work. Many of his co-workers were Cuban, but in his meat-packaging job, he had an American co-worker who taught him new words and sentences every day. Usually, he said, he would write them down on a sheet of wrapping paper that Enrique takes home and spreads on the wall or on the table to memorize the phrases.

Place Figure 1 about here

In Cuba, Enrique liked to read the newspaper, and occasionally history books and suspense novels. In the U.S., with 80 hours of work a week, there was no room for these literacy practices. Sometimes, he reported, he tried to read the newspaper, but it was a learning endeavor rather than the reading for information he would do in Cuba, since a good deal of the written text was not clearly comprehensible to him yet. He would appreciate a newspaper in Spanish, he said, but he had not yet found one⁶.

However, there was one thing that Enrique loved in Cuba and that he could also do in the U.S. He could listen to music, and now he could even understand some English lyrics that made no sense to him before. Once in a while, he told me, when he had a free evening, he would go with his friends to a karaoke bar where he could read the lyrics and sing along.

Movies offered yet another opportunity for both entertainment and language learning. He possessed a collection of videotapes of mostly action movies, all but one in English. He explained that what he sees on the screen helps him understand what his ear does not catch. Enrique dreamt that one day when he spoke fluent English, he would be able to find a better job

in an office, or perhaps even go back to school and study towards a teaching certificate that would allow him to teach sports again.

Conclusion

Through this case study I had hoped to increase my understanding of immigrants' literacy practices in a new language, and the way that the new language intersects with native language literacy practices. By literacy practice, I mean not only reading and writing habits but the broader social and cultural context (Street, 1993) that provides for such habits to develop, to be sustained and to flourish even in a new linguistic environment. Lara's and Enrique's accounts point to the suggestion that their immigrant experiences as regards their English literacy practices vary and appear to be influenced heavily by family literacy practices in their native countries. These practices influenced predilections, values, attitudes and language knowledge of the participants – both in their native country and in their new country--and they intersect with the social, political, and cultural contexts in which both participants live.

Family Influences on Literacy Practices

Strong family influence is explicit in Lara's accounts of home, describing her parents' and her godfather's encouragement to read, to learn foreign languages, and to educate herself. Knowledge and books surrounded Lara's childhood and continued to play an important role in Lara's adult life, regardless of the language she used. Furthermore, what Lara also carried into her adult life from home was a strong political consciousness. Even in a supposedly classless and egalitarian society such as Cuba, education and intellectualism function as symbols that indicate one's social status⁷. As Lara watched her mother do crossword puzzles, read and educate herself in order to be able to participate in conversations with people who had received more formal schooling than she, she learned that literacy is empowering.

Enrique was also aware that print literacy comes with social rewards. In part, the reason he wanted to study at a university was to be able to “talk like educated people”, as he told me. But unlike Lara, he seemed to have acquired reading and writing skills as a secondary discourse, outside of his family environment (Gee, 1993).

Print literacy practices were not in the center of his family’s pastime activities and they did not accompany Enrique’s childhood as they did Lara’s. Enrique acquired the respective reading and writing skills through his many years of schooling, and he utilized them to his needs. As compared to Lara, his use of reading and writing can be described as more functional--a means to an end. In university he read to pass his tests, in his private life he read to obtain information he was looking for. Newspapers were fun to read because they had sports sections, which provided the information Enrique appreciated in his job as a physical education teacher. Enrique’s definition of literacy as “reading and writing for information, history, culture, and sport” suggests practical use of print literacies different from Lara’s notion of literacy where reading and writing is understood more as a form of fundamental self-actualization as well as a political tool that can help one to gain particular social goods (Gee, 1989).

Old Literacy Practices Intersect with New Environments

The literacy practices brought by both participants from their native countries intersect with the literacy practices they engage with in their new linguistic environment, although these appear to be somewhat modified due to different life circumstances. Lara still pursues the kind of knowledge that she is hungry for, although not entirely through reading. “In Cuba, I read more because the books were there.” Not only that, the books were also accessible, affordable, and--more importantly--all in Spanish. Spanish books are not difficult to find in the U.S. but one must look for them, and books in general are not inexpensive. However, there are alternatives to

books. Access to the Internet and e-mail is widespread in the U.S. and Lara has been using it extensively. The Internet is where she reads the news, checks the weather forecast to see what clothes her kids may need to wear to school, shops, and seeks information relevant to her interests--all of which she could not do in Cuba. With a number of different channels, she can also find interesting programs to watch on TV such as the Discovery Channel or Animal Planet. I would argue that these literacy practices are not completely new. Instead, they present variations of activities that satisfy the same interests and that go along with Lara's values and beliefs.

For Enrique, the acquisition of English as a secondary discourse has been more problematic. He came unprepared for a second language study with no prior foreign language instruction. He was not able to establish closer ties with host culture members who could help him access the local culture and reach proficiency in the new discourse. Instead, Enrique's closest personal as well as work environment is comprised of other Spanish speakers who similarly have stayed marginalized from the dominant discourse. His broken English has been sufficient for his survival, but attempts to improve his English skills have not been very successful so far. This is because there are not many situations which would require Enrique to use a different kind of English from the one he has already grown accustomed to using.

Street (1993) points out that literacies are situated and embedded in the broader social and cultural contexts. Enrique's case provides us with examples of this assertion.. As a physical education teacher in Cuba, Enrique routinely read and wrote to keep up to date with relevant sport information and his job duties. In the U.S., in his job as a dishwasher, there is virtually no purpose for reading or writing, and he does none related to his new job. However, there are other situations outside of his job in which Enrique needs to read and write, and within these contexts, he does read and write in English: he reads and acts upon an official letter from the insurance

company; he write a check for a service; he withdraws money from an ATM machine; and he fills out requisite forms. In addition, Enrique's basic predilections and beliefs, first emerging in Cuba, remain and continue to influence his literacy practices in English. Enrique always loved music and movies, and he continues enjoying both. In the United States, he subscribed to a music club and now receives CDs in the mail--CDs that provide lyrics in English for him to learn from. In karaoke bars, he enjoys many of his favorite songs and sings along. Movies are also more accessible than in Cuba. Enrique purchased a VCR and a TV and watches as many movies as the time allows, both enjoying them as entertainment and concurrently learning more English. His passion for sports now takes a spectator form as he watches soccer games on the TV. Enrique understands that better English skills would open more doors, but he finds himself in a vicious circle. Without English proficiency, he cannot find a better job, but with the two jobs that he worked at the time of the study, there was no time to intensively work on his English or do much of anything else. Moreover, none of the jobs required that his English skills improved, nor provided many opportunities to practice more sophisticated English. Spanish continues to be the dominant language in Enrique's life, and English is a functional language that helps him to survive.

“Language and literacy are acquired and used, gained and lost,” according to Luke (2003, p. 138). In this case study, there is some evidence for both losses and gains with respect to particular uses of literacy practices. But more importantly, this case study also suggests that literacy practices do not miraculously appear and disappear when one enters a new linguistic environment, but they seem to be closely linked to the social, cultural and political contexts in which they developed and as well as those of the new context in which they are modified and sustained.

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Footnotes

¹ Both names used in this report are pseudonyms.

² Communism fell in 1989 and the country was free to turn to democracy based on a market economy. In 1993, Czechoslovakia experienced yet another change, a peaceful political divorce that resulted in the creation of two sovereign nation-states, the Czech Republic, and the Slovak Republic.

³ Lara's eldest son from her first marriage stayed in Cuba where he is married, with children.

⁴ Carpal tunnel syndrome is a condition characterized by pain and numbing in the hands. Raynaud's disease is an auto-immune circulatory disorder caused by insufficient blood supply to the hands, resulting in numbness and pain.

⁵ Pink literature refers to paperback romance literature.

⁶ There are four bi-lingual newspapers in the region but they seem to target primarily Mexican immigrants and migrant workers, and thus do not appeal to wider Latino audiences.

⁷ In the Cuban context, social status is no indicator of economic status. Regardless of education levels attained, people do not differ as much in terms of their income levels.

Figure Captions

Figure 1. Wrapping sheet of paper with new vocabulary for the day.