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Linguistics 392: Nature of Language and Language Acquisition

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At first Juana and I did not who to interview, but then I told her if she would be fine with us interviewing and analyzing my cousin Julissa. She gladly accepted the proposal and we began to interview my cousin. Juana and I did our project on my cousin Pilar Julissa Ruiz. Since Julissa is my cousin I was the one that interviewed her and I chose different questions to ask her and told her to elaborate on her answers instead of giving me just one-word answer.

Julissa was born and raised in Michoacán, Mexico. Her native language is Spanish and she did not learn any English while living in Mexico. The only phrases she knew in English were: Hello, how are you and bye. She was not taught the English language while living in Mexico but she always dreamed of coming to the United States. Her older sister came to the U.S. before Julissa did and after two years of being separate the whole family came.

Julissa, as stated before, was born in Mexico and had never been in the United States. Her father lived in the U.S. alone for over 10 years, but later Julissa's older sister came to live with him. After ten years, my uncle finally brought his wife and daughter, Julissa, over to the U.S. to live together. She came to the United States in November of 2015 and entered middle school right away as an eighth grader. She was enrolled in two English classes because she did not speak it and needed help. After almost finishing middle school in Hayward, she came over to Salinas and enrolled to Harden Middle School. She finished her Middle School here in Salinas and went to North Salinas High School.

When we first met her and began speaking to her she only spoke in Spanish. However, after finishing her freshman year at North Salinas High School she started speaking more English and began to converse with us in English. I am surprised at how rapid she learned the language. As for now, she is a sophomore in North Salinas High School and is still taking ELD (English Language Development) classes to help her improve more. She has improved so much in these

last couple of months. Everyone in our family noticed it and we are all proud of her. Now, when

we speak to her, she talks both in English and Spanish in one sentence. You can barely tell she

has only been here for two years. This is why I decided to interview her for the analysis language

project. With only 2 years of learning the language, it was fascinating to see her growth and her

determination to learn the language and adapt herself to a new life and country.

<div align="center">Interview</div>

AP: What hobby would you get into if time and money weren't an issue?

#1**:** Uh…I would like to do gymnastics because it's a very fun sport.

AP: If you didn't have to sleep, what would you do with the extra time?

#2: I would probably clean my room more often and sports, maybe, cause **I don't really do**

sports.

AP: Do you play any sports?

#3: No but I'm trying to play soccer cause it looks very fun.

AP: What fictional place would you most like to go?

#4: Neverland because it sounds funny and you can fly.

AP: What job would you be terrible at?

#5: A math related one because I am not that good at math.

AP: When was the last time you climbed a tree?

#6: It was last **Sunday.**

[s∂ndeɪ]

#7: I was trying to climb it but it didn't go that well.

AP: If you could turn any activity into an Olympic sport, what would you have a good chance at

winning a medal for?

#8: Maybe sleeping cause I love to sleep.

AP: What is the most annoying habit that other people have?

#9: Chewing their nails. #10: I don't like that at all. #11: I can't handle that.

AP: What job do you think you'd be really good at?

#12: **Maybe sleeping job.** #13: No, that's not a job. #14: **Maybe a science job** cause I like to

…(laugh) … I like science and biology.

AP: What skill would you like to master?

#16: Does math count as a skill? My math skills I would like to master so I can be better.

AP: What would be the most amazing adventure to go on?

#17: Go to Asia by myself. #18: I feel like that would be very cool and scary.

AP: If you had unlimited funds to build a house that you would live in for the rest of your life,

what would the finished house be like?

#19: I feel like it wouldn't be **that** big cause then I would **get** crazy in it and like you know

[dæd]

to have everything close so I don't have to walk all the way around to get the things.

AP: What's your favorite drink?

#20: My favorite drink might be Apple juice because I really like apples and it's really good

when it's sweet.

AP: What state or country do you want to go?

#21: I would like to go to hmm maybe Japan. #22 It looks very nice from pictures and I love

anime.

[ænImɛ]

AP: What songs have you completely memorized?

#23: Look what you made me do from Taylor **<u>Swift</u>**.

[swif]

#24: I just **<u>learn</u>** it.

AP: What game or movie universe would you most like to live in?

#25: I **<u>like</u>** to live in Neverland.

Analysis

The interview with Julissa went well. She answered the questions with a great answer that we can easily analyze. The area she had more mistakes was in the phonology part. The one she had no errors as to what I analyzed was semantics. In my opinion, most people who are just learning a new language always struggle with the pronunciation. After hearing and trying to analyze my 25 sentences I tried hearing with caution all of the phonological errors she had. At times it was hard to hear and pin point if it was really a mispronunciation or not. Interviewing her, I learned how she acquired the language and how rapidly she learned.

After examining and hearing the interview, I noticed there are were no errors in the area of semantics, rules for assigning meaning, and syntax, rules for combining words into phrases and phrases into sentences. She spoke clearly, which made everything go well. In the area of syntax, how words are combined to make phrases and sentences, she had a few mistakes. An example of an error in syntax can be seen in sentence #2: I would probably clean my room more often and sports, maybe, cause I don't really do sports. The last part, "I don't really do sports," is not syntactically correct. The correct way would be to use *play* instead of *do*. Another example is in sentence #12: Maybe sleeping job and sentence #14: Maybe a science job cause I like to …(laugh) … I like science and biology. In sentence #12 she is missing an *a* to complete the sentence syntactically. In sentence #14, it does not sound syntactically correct unless added

related in which the end result would be, "Maybe a science *related* job." The last syntax error I found was in sentence #19: I feel like it wouldn't be that big cause then I would get crazy in it. Instead of get it should be go that way the sentence flows syntactically right, "I would go crazy in it." These are the only sentences I found on the first 25 that had errors in the area of syntax.

In addition, Julissa did great overall in the semantics and syntax area. She had no errors in the semantics and a few in syntax. Moving on to the area of morphology, the study of word formation, Julissa did not show many errors in that area. One of the errors I found was in sentence #24: I just learn it. She did not say the verb *learn* in the correct tense. She should have added the bound morpheme –ed, therefore the sentence would be correct. The sentence should have been, "I just learned it," but it was still understandable and I knew what she was trying to say. This was the only error I found in the morphology area.

The last area to analyze was the phonology area, this is where she showed more mistakes and it was her greatest weakness. Although this was her greatest weakness it did not affect her use of the English language. In sentence #19 and #23 she had more errors in the consonant part. Sentence #19 the word 'that' was pronounced as [dæd]. The last /t/ was pronounced as a /d/. The /t/ was soften at the end and she did not pronounce it as a hard /t/. The other phonetic error in the consonant area was in sentence #23 the Swift was phonetically wrong. She did not pronounce the /t/ at the end. Julissa said [swif] instead of [swIft]. These are the areas that she mispronounced in the consonant area.

In addition, she had some vowel mistakes as well. In sentence #6 and #22 she had errors in the first and last vowel phonemes. In sentence #6 she said [s∂ndeɪ] instead of [sʌndeɪ]. The /u/ in Sunday was pronounced as a shwa. As for sentence #22 the word anime [ænIme] was pronounced as [ænImɛ]. Furthermore, the last /e/ was pronounced as a [ɛ] instead of an [e].

To conclude, the use of her English language had little to no errors. Besides her only living in the United States for two years it is impressing how fast she learned the English language. It is astonishing how she learned a lot to hold a conversation and be fluent in the language. Her weakness, phonology, is the one that I believe most people struggle with learning a new language. Although, she did not have that many errors in semantics, syntax, morphology and phonology. Overall, Julissa's acquisition of her second language (English) demonstrated her fluency in the language.