

Language Lessons on Immigrant Identity, Food Culture, and the Search for Home

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The concept of transnationalism in many disciplines has deepened appreciation for stories of immigrant adaptation in today's globalizing world—stories that reveal shifting conceptualizations of "home," the everyday practices (e.g., cooking) that help families establish meaningful connections to home, as well as the struggles to maintain those connections. Adult English as a second language (ESL) learners' story, however, has been overlooked in transnational research, despite the great potential that the ESL classroom holds for documenting the relationship between identity, changing traditions, and learners' perceptions about home. This article highlights an interdisciplinary partnership between adult ESL and public health that explored the power of learners' stories of home and the implications for ESL teaching and improved immigrant health. Using a classroom-based ethnographic approach, we found that learners' interpretations of health-related texts can promote language learning and critical engagement around texts. Moreover, the learners' talk about stories of home provides evidence that ESL classrooms are valuable sites for the expression of transnational identity and critical dialogue on the challenges of staying healthy in the United States.

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“Home” is not just a symbol, but a powerful force in the lives of the immigrants who carry with them “the memories of childhood” and the “lasting power of attachments to birth-places.” . . . Home is an anchor for the transnational migrant composed of an influential set of forces acting in their lives—and in the lives of the family at home. (Grieshop, 2006, p. 401)

To grasp what “home” represents to adult English as a second language (ESL) learners requires not only an appreciation of the physical journeys learners take to migrate across borders and oceans, but also an understanding of the complex emotions and distinct memories that link learners to the places, traditions, and people they associate with home. The anchor metaphor in Grieshop’s (2006) quotation provides a powerful frame for understanding the significance of transnational practices in the lives of adult ESL learners: What places represent anchors to these learners? What social and cultural practices create links to anchors for them and their families? How might conversations in our ESL classrooms—specifically those that give learners the opportunity to discuss their hopes and struggles to “avoid homelessness”—serve as a process by which learners strengthen or rekindle their anchorage to home? In response to these questions, this article explores the significance of learners’ stories about home and the classroom conversations that enable learners to connect their individual stories to broader discussions about the immigrant experience in the United States.

In this article, we merge perspectives from two fields—adult ESL and public health—and because of this cross-disciplinary approach, we first need to explain briefly who we are. Over the past several years, the first two authors, Maricel (an adult literacy researcher) and Jeff (an ESL practitioner), worked with Gail Weinstein, guest editor of this Special Issue, to collect learner stories about home—stories about leaving home, finding a new home, and struggling to feel at home in the United States—and then used these stories as the basis for ESL curriculum development. Our guiding assumption has always been that the act of telling stories about home enables immigrant learners to understand their own immigration experience and themselves. Rarely are the stories of beginning-level adult ESL learners included in public discussions

about the meaning of home and connecting practices in their everyday lives, despite the fact that the ESL classroom represents an ideal environment for documenting what immigrant adults think and feel about transitioning to life in the United States.

In 2008 Maricel met Margaret (third author and a public health epidemiologist) at a public health conference, and their conversations about the power of immigrant stories laid the groundwork for a collaborative project, the Familias Sin Plomo (Families Without Lead) ESL Curriculum Project. At the time, Margaret had been investigating an outbreak of lead poisoning cases in a Seaside, California, immigrant community that was linked to the consumption of certain home-prepared foods sent from Oaxaca, Mexico (Handley et al., 2007). For example, Margaret's epidemiological team found that *chapulines* (a popular fried grasshopper snack) contained nearly 400 times the federal recommended level of lead for children under 6 years old (Handley et al., 2007). An elaborate cottage industry of *envios* (shipments) facilitates the movement of goods, predominantly food, such as pumpkin seeds, tortillas (*tlayudas*), and *chapulines*, from Mexico into California (Grieshop, 2006). Families in Oaxaca were using the *envios* system to send care packages of home-prepared food to their relatives in Seaside, unaware that some of the food items were contaminated with lead (Handley et al., 2007). This epidemiological discovery has placed Oaxacan communities on both sides of the border in dilemma: While the sending and receiving of foods has taken on sociocultural and economic significance, the practice is linked to risk factors associated with serious mental and physical health problems that are particularly damaging to young children and pregnant women (Handley et al., 2007).

In response to this dilemma, we developed the Familias Sin Plomo curriculum to promote awareness of these new sources of lead while simultaneously affirming the benefits of maintaining ethnic and cultural connections to home countries (for more details about the curriculum, see Handley, Santos, & McClelland, 2009). In 2009, in response to learner interests in preventive health themes, we expanded our curricular collaborations beyond lead poisoning prevention to include a focus on child nutrition. In this article, we highlight what we learned from ESL classroom conversations when we gave learners the opportunity to interpret stories of home and

share their own stories about their efforts to stay healthy and connected to home. Through this cross-disciplinary collaboration, we have affirmed our commitment to celebrating learners' stories of home: These stories help to structure conversations in ESL classrooms and reveal relationships between immigrant identity, language learning, and beliefs about health, as well as the relationship between immigrant identity and strategies to improve health outcomes.

CONTEXT OF OUR WORK

The work presented here is part of a larger project we carried out in 2008–2009 in two family literacy programs in urban areas of Northern California: the Lawson family literacy program and the Bolivar family literacy program (pseudonyms). As shown in Table 1, these two programs served learners who shared some background characteristics. The majority were immigrant mothers with school-age children and with less than a high school education in their home countries. The learners in the Lawson program were predominantly

TABLE 1. Summary of Study Context and Learner Demographics

	Lawson Family Literacy Program	Bolivar Family Literacy Program
<i>Number of students who enrolled during the year (including program leavers)</i>	60–80 students	30–40 students
<i>Average daily attendance</i>	15–25 students	15–18 students
<i>Countries of origin</i>	Mexico (50–60), El Salvador (4–8), Guatemala (4–8), Yemen (4)	Mexico (15–20), Yemen (6–8), China (3), El Salvador (2–3), Guatemala (2–3), South Korea (1), Vietnam (1)
<i>Gender</i>	All female, except 1 male	All female
<i>Age range</i>	20–50 years	30–40 years
<i>Years of schooling (range)</i>	4–8 years	4–8 years
<i>Years of U.S. residence (range)</i>	0–15 years	0–15 years
<i>Percentage of learners with young children*</i>	80–90	80–90

*All learners in the two study settings were parents.

from Mexico, whereas the learners who most frequently attended the Bolivar program were from Mexico, Yemen, and China.

Jeff was an adult ESL teacher in both programs and collaborated with Maricel and Margaret to facilitate a series of classroom activities related to the health themes of lead poisoning prevention and child nutrition.¹ Central to these classroom activities was the learners' discussion of two texts, which we chose because we felt they captured compelling stories of home. In "The Clay Pot Story," a young Latina mother talks about her struggles to convince her husband that they should not eat food cooked in traditional clay pots because of the potential of lead poisoning. In "The Pozole Story," another young Latina mother recalls childhood memories of hunger in Mexico and talks about the way those memories shaped her family's eating habits in the United States (see the Appendix for the full text of these stories). As we will discuss, our analysis of classroom ethnographic data yielded two themes related to the adult ESL learners' transnational experiences and perspectives: (1) the gendered responsibilities associated with learners' efforts to maintain connections to home and (2) the cultural stigmatization the learners question when they come to understand that health risks are associated with familiar cultural practices.

We hope that the learners' voices in this study prompt adult ESL teachers to see their classrooms through a transnational lens. By giving ESL learners opportunities to share perspectives on home and to describe the anchors at work in their own lives, teachers make it possible for adult ESL learners to share their wisdom about the realities of transnational life. In so doing, we contend that a broader range of resources related to culture, traditions, and identity can be harnessed for language learning and community engagement.

¹Jeff, the teacher in both ESL classes, is a White man with a master's degree in TESOL and more than 8 years of experience teaching adult ESL. At the time of the study, he had been teaching in the Lawson family literacy program for nearly 2 years, and in the Bolivar family literacy program for almost as long. Over the course of the project, Maricel, a Filipina American, worked closely with Jeff to develop the classroom materials and was present for all data collection sessions, taking field notes, managing the audiotaping, and assisting with class activities. Margaret, a White woman, facilitated several discussions about lead poisoning with the Lawson learners and helped interpret learner responses within a public health context.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The focus on adult ESL learners as transnational beings and adult ESL classrooms as sites for the expression of transnational identity finds grounding in poststructuralist and sociocultural theories in second language learning that conceptualize learner identity as multilayered, complex, and ever evolving (Kanno & Norton, 2003; Kramsch, 2000; Menard-Warwick, 2005; Norton, 1997). Viewed from these two theoretical perspectives, the ESL learners' transnational self is shaped by the dynamic interplay of social, cultural, ethnic, and linguistic factors as well as membership in *imagined communities*, defined by Kanno and Norton as "groups of people, not immediately tangible and accessible, with whom we connect through the power of the imagination" (p. 241; see also Andersen, 1983). This view on transnational identity as socially constructed enables us to reject acculturation models that tend to locate culture in the individual and treat cultural traits, like food customs, as inherent to a particular group (Gibson, 2001; Koehn & Swick, 2006; Kramsch, 1993; Levitt, 2004; Padilla, 2006; Risager, 2007).

The identity literature in language education also suggests that a learner's transnational self is negotiated, as Ros i. Solé (2007) points out: "It is through the appropriation of the language and the voices of the target language around her/him, the conversations that s/he takes part in, that the language learner can construct his/her subjectivity" (p. 204). For this reason, it was important to our methodology to provide learners with opportunities to participate in classroom conversations that drew out their aspirations and struggles about health and home, and invited them to examine their views relative to public health messages about major health issues in their community, such as lead contamination and child nutrition.

Pedagogically, our goal was to position these adult ESL learners as "expert interpreters" (cf. Wallace, 2006) of the health stories presented to them. Our classroom activities included a range of vocabulary, grammar, and choral reading activities typical of many ESL classrooms, but we emphasized to the learners that their own perspectives on staying healthy were integral to our collective understanding of the textual meaning. We viewed learners' engagement with the texts as a necessary first step in a larger social struggle to improve their access to preventive health care systems

and to be included in public discussions about immigrant health (cf. Auerbach, 1992; Morgan, 1998; Wallerstein, 1983; Weinstein, 1999). Our ultimate hope was that, as a result of critical engagement with stories of home in the classroom, learners would affirm their own capacity outside the classroom to question public health messages, such as mandates to avoid food sent from Mexico in order to prevent lead contamination. In addition, we anticipated that the textual engagement in the classroom would enable us to look for empirical evidence of ESL learners' "flexibility, resourcefulness, and creativity" that Grieshop (2006, p. 405) observed in his work on transnational identity. The evidence seems particularly valuable given that the contributions and intellectual resources of beginning-level English language learners often tend to be minimized in mainstream discussions about immigrant education and health.

INTERPRETING STORIES OF HOME: CLASSROOM TOOLS AND METHODS

Each health unit was organized around a class discussion of a health-related text and a series of interactive activities related to the themes in the text (e.g., vocabulary study, echo reading, Venn diagramming, role-plays). To create the classroom texts, we analyzed transcripts of focus group data from two qualitative studies. For the lead poisoning text, we chose an excerpt drawn from interviews that Margaret conducted in 2002 with Oaxacan community members in Seaside, California, who had at least one family member with a recent history of lead poisoning (see Handley et al., 2007). In this text ("The Clay Pot Story"), the speaker (a wife) talks about a conversation with her husband in which she asks him to refrain from eating/cooking out of clay pots (*chirmolera*) because of concerns she has about lead contamination from the foods prepared with this cookware. We provided the Lawson adult ESL learners with a bilingual text because we had access to the original Spanish transcript as well as the English translation. For "The Pozole Story," we chose an excerpt from a focus group conducted by Crawford et al. (2004) to explore Latina mothers' views on childhood weight issues. In this text, two mothers (Maria and Rosalia) are talking to the focus group facilitator about their childhood memories and current challenges around child-feeding

practices. We had the English translation of the data, so we used an English-only version in the classroom.

We viewed these stories as *codes* (Freire, 1970/1993; Wallerstein, 1983; Weinstein, 1999) that could trigger personal and affective responses from learners concerning the complexities and tensions involved in staying healthy while preserving food traditions. For example, we anticipated that “The Clay Pot Story” could be decoded in many ways: Learners could examine the wife’s intentions to minimize risk, the husband’s defense of the clay pot tradition, or the emotional struggle to make the “right” decision. Similarly, “The Pozole Story” could be decoded along several points of contrast: the nostalgia associated with home-cooked *pozole* (a traditional stew made with meat, hominy, spices, and assorted vegetable garnishes) versus concerns about its nutritional value, childhood memories about poverty and hunger in Mexico versus the relative abundance of food in the United States, or the need to encourage children to eat fresh vegetables versus the cultural belief that vegetables are “food for cows.” In this regard, we hoped that these stories would serve as “open texts [that] presupposed an interplay of possible interpretations” (Wallace, 2006, p. 80).² Through our analysis of these “open text” discussions, we posit that the learners’ collective sharing of ideas, including their differences of opinion, served an important function in transnational identity expression: to help them communicate their individual, everyday struggles to feel anchored (to use Grieshop’s term) and see their decisions about health and home as actively defining the transnational experience.

THEME 1: GENDERED INTERPRETATIONS OF TRANSNATIONAL PRACTICES

We are the ones we cook. We have the responsible!
—Lucia, Lawson family literacy program

Classroom discussions demonstrated the influence of gender on the learners’ perspectives on health, connections to home, and their

²See Handley et al. (2009) for more background on the learners-as-data-interpreters model. Building on the work of Ada (1988), Wallace (2006), and Wallerstein (1983), this model seeks to position adult ESL learners as expert interpreters of health-related texts, with the ultimate goal of supporting their engagement as advocates for improved immigrant health.

expectations regarding the preservation of home traditions. Their perspectives were tied to their perceived domestic responsibilities, a trend that was evident in the Lawson ESL learners' reactions to "The Clay Pot Story," in which the wife featured in the story says:

When I am talking to my husband and I tell him not to feed this type of food to our child because it will harm him. And he says, "What harm? We were all raised like that, eating out of clay pots."

Several learners initially noted that the husband's comment reflects his ignorance about the potential dangers of eating out of clay pots, while others speculated that the husband is concerned about preserving the tradition of eating out of clay pots. When Jeff asked the learners why the husband might be more worried about tradition than the wife, several students shouted, "¡Es machismo!" which provoked much laughter in the classroom.

The learners perceived that the wife was in a better position to decide whether the family should continue the clay pot tradition, as illustrated in Lucia's spirited declaration, "We are the ones who cook. We have the responsible!" and Rosa's subsequent remark, "They say yes it [tradition] is important but it depend on the tradition. My child's health is more important than tradition." As part of a follow-up oral exercise, the learners were asked to imagine what might happen next in the conversation between the wife and husband, and then to write and perform a short role-play. Fernando (the only man enrolled in the class) and Lucia's role-play positioned the wife as more informed, more authoritative than the husband:

Excerpt 1

At home in the kitchen

Wife: You should go to the doctor.

Husband: It is not necessary.

Wife: If the lead goes into the blood, don't blame me . . .

Husband: Do you think I can get sick from lead?

Wife: Yes, I think so.

Husband: I need to go to the doctor to take the test.

Another role-play, this one by Esperanza and Maricruz, demonstrated the wife's ability to influence her husband's thinking.

Excerpt 2

At home

Wife: Can we go together and ask the doctor?

Husband: I'm not sure.

Wife: But this is for our children's health. Tu-lu-lu-lu . . .

Husband: OK.

The Lawson learners explained that the onomatopoeic phrase "tu-lu-lu-lu" signaled that the wife was offering intimacy with her husband in exchange for his compliance, which generated much laughter and cheers of approval in the room.

The discussion of "The Claypot Story," as well as the role-play activity, encouraged the learners to articulate multiple, and conflicting, gendered perspectives on the clay pot tradition; in the role-plays particularly, learners were encouraged to use their language resources in creative ways to represent the different pragmatic intentions of the husband and wife in the text. As reflected in the role-plays, the women's choice of English expressions (e.g., "If the lead goes into the blood, don't blame me," "Can we go together and ask the doctor?") reveals their interpretation of the marital conflict portrayed in the text as well as their own marital experiences, which shaped their views on how the conflict could be resolved. In this regard, akin to Morgan's (1998) analysis of the ways that learners' language reflects their own social agency, we were also struck by how learners' commentary about the text and their role-plays were interpreted in light of their own household cooking responsibilities: The women seemed to feel that they had the prerogative to preside over the family's connectedness to home traditions, a function that they would not expect the husband in the text nor their own husbands to fulfill. Their interpretive exchange about "The Clay Pot Story" seemed to focus on the sensible choice the wife made to minimize the lead risks in her home. In addition, the learners interpreted the husband's question "What harm?" as a possible sign of his macho loyalty to home traditions, which prevents him from accepting the reality of a serious health risk. These findings echo other work (e.g., Gordon, 2004; Menard-Warwick, 2005) showing that immigrant women are able to increase their decision-making powers in their homes because, relative to their husbands, they experience better access to information and services in the United States.

The preceding examples suggest an ethnic and gendered solidarity and the learners' confidence in their ability to challenge their husbands on behalf of their children's health. In contrast, the learners also expressed uncertainties both toward themselves and toward other mothers. For example, the Bolivar ESL learners focused on the culpability mothers should accept if their children don't follow healthy eating habits. Clara was the most outspoken on this issue. The issue arose in response to a segment of the text in which the speaker, Maria, explains why many Latino people seem to resist eating vegetables:

For us Latinos it is our custom. It is like a chain. Sometimes our countries do not have the tradition of eating vegetables, or you don't have a way to buy them. Sometimes they think vegetables are strange.

In response, Clara questioned whether Maria was proactively trying to address the problem by asking, "Maria is comfortable with this problem?" which led to the following exchange:

Excerpt 3

- 1077 Clara: Because sometimes the mother no good mother.
1078 Sometimes the parents no good parents.
1079 Alicia: Mm-hm.
1080 Clara: No no no no— how do you say? No love your kids
1081 good.
1082 Jeff: Mm-hm.
1083 Clara: No importa ((It doesn't matter))
1084 (inaudible)
1085 Clara: Uh-huh no has problems, no has problems. And
1086 sometimes the mother eating fruits and vegetables,
1087 and the kids eating bread, eating candies o sea ((I mean))
1088 Amanda: Cookies . . .
1089 Clara: Yeah, no problem— only the mother healthy, and the
1090 kids oooh! [student laughter] Pobres. ((poor kids))
1091 Alicia: O sea, the culpa es de nosotros. ((I mean, it's our fault))
1092 Students: Sí. ((yes))
1093 (inaudible)
1094 Clara: Understand? Sometimes the mother eating good, and
1095 the kids— no problem! The kids— cookies, candies. . .
1096 Alicia: How do you say, la culpa es de nosotros?
1097 Amanda: Chips . . .
1098 Jeff: How do you say that?
1099 Alicia: La culpa es de . . .
1100 Jeff: You could just say—we are to blame.

1101 Alicia: We are to blame . . .
 1102 Jeff: Yeah, so she says, Alicia says that– Do you– and
 1103 actually, what do you mean by we? Do you mean all
 1104 mothers? Do you mean immigrant mothers? Do you
 1105 mean Mexican mothers? Do you mean the students?
 1106 Alicia: Bueno, por– sí, por mi es Mexican mothers [student
 1107 laughter] no sé por las demás. ((Well, bec– yes, for me,
 1108 it is Mexican mothers. I don't know about the rest.))

As in the discussion of pozole mentioned earlier, Clara's language seems to convey an oppositional stance toward the text in questioning Maria's commitment to feeding her child healthy food. Clara then extends this disapproval toward other mothers who take a lax approach, and sets herself apart: "And I don't have this problem because my son and my daughter– I like vegetables– every day." Whereas Clara seems to analyze the problem in terms of individual characteristics (good mothers versus bad mothers), Alicia suggests that the children's resistance to eating healthy food was a collective failing (or problem) on the part of Mexican mothers, signaled by her use of "we" in the phrase "la culpa es de nosotros" (*we are to blame*) and her reference to the plural "Mexican mothers." She later offered a reason for why Mexican women, as a group, bear some responsibility: "Por no pressure of the kids are eating, eating, eating the vegetables," but she also recognized that the stress of children's tantrums can make it difficult to make good food choices, "Pero sometimes es crying, crying, crying the kids." Rosa, a learner in the Lawson class, pointed to an important sociohistorical context that shapes Mexican mothers' views on feeding their children:

Because in Mexico, you life in Mexico . . . you eating the same in the country. Is different country, you– you kids watch the, maybe something is eating f– uh, fast food, [and they say] "I like it." . . . Maybe is because watch other people. "I like it."

Rosa's interpretations echo two trends documented in the health literature. First, some immigrant mothers may indulge their children in the United States with snack food to compensate for the lack of good food choices in the neighborhoods of their home countries (Larson, Story, & Nelson, 2009). Second, in the United States many immigrant mothers are forced to compete with the

pervasive fast-food images that distract children from healthier food choices (Duerksen et al., 2007).

The diversity of the learners' interpretations—which included a focus on the individual (Clara), the collective (Alicia), and the historical (Rosa)—affirms the call in public health for more nuanced sociocultural descriptions of immigrant expectations regarding living healthy and eating healthy. With respect to ESL pedagogy, it is important to note that “The Pozole Story” included references to “us Latinos” and “our countries,” which likely triggered Clara, Alicia, and Rosa’s personal interpretations. We posit that the open treatment (Wallace, 2006) of this story motivated learners to read the text for their own purposes, with no apparent fixation on finding the “right” interpretation, instead generating interpretations that were rich with personal relevance and social commentary.

Alicia’s request for help in English (“How do you say, *la culpa es de nosotros?*”) provides an example of the way that classroom language opportunities structure how learners’ ideas about ethnic identity are communicated in public conversations (Morgan, 1998). In this light, we do not view the learners’ interpretations as unchallengeable and conclusive; indeed, during these discussions we wondered whether learners would take exception to Clara’s seemingly overgeneralized view on “bad mothers” or Alicia’s reference to “Mexican mothers” as a single unit. We also recognize that Rosa’s ideas (regarding prior food insecurity in Mexico and the current allure of U.S. fast-food culture) represent a valuable classroom resource, ripe for further examination by learners regarding the sociohistorical forces that limit or widen their food choices.

Although the unit ended before we were able to make use of these teachable moments, we pose several questions that extend from Wallace’s fundamental question “What are texts for?” (p. 76): How can these stories of home support or limit learners’ examination of ethnic identity and their expectations about what it means to live and eat healthy in the United States? How can learners’ appropriation of labels (e.g., “Mexican mothers”) reify damaging stereotypes? Alternatively, might the learners’ use of these labels signal a desire for collective ownership of health concerns, and how might this ownership in the ESL classroom pave the way for community action?

THEME 2: LEARNER RESISTANCE TO PERCEIVED STIGMATIZATION OF TRANSNATIONAL PRACTICES

This is a contradiction because she said [Mexicans] no like the vegetables and the pozole has vegetables. No understand this point.

—Clara, Bolivar family literacy program

The ESL learners in our study took their families' health and nutrition quite seriously. They were excited to talk about the connections between the texts and their own experiences, even when the learners disagreed about the messages in the text. We sought to help the learners move from understanding the new vocabulary and themes in the stories to relating the thematic content to their own life experiences and then to see these personal experiences as part of broader discussions about key social issues, such as public debates about immigrant health promotion and stereotypes of immigrant health risks.

One of the most telling examples in our data of these multilayered discussions in the Bolivar program focuses on Clara and her strong reaction to "The Pozole Story" in which the speaker, Maria, refers to pozole (which can be rich in meat and fat) to make a point about why some Mexicans may resist eating vegetables. Part of the text reads:

You don't think about vegetables because you never ate enough meat in your country. You think that the best and most delicious thing is to prepare a very delicious pozole.

The focus group segment ends in laughter, which also made the learners in the Bolivar ESL class laugh when they read the reference to pozole. Several Latina learners signaled their familiarity with this nostalgic dish by calling out in English, "Meat . . . and meat!" which signaled to Bahiya, the Yemeni learner, and Jiao, the Chinese learner, what kind of dish pozole was. Although the rest of the class seemed to accept that pozole was a meat-based dish, Clara did not:

Excerpt 4

702 Clara: The pozole has vegetables in the top . . . the pozole

703 has good vegetables on the top.

704 Jeff: Is this a question or-?

705 Clara: No, no, no. No, *I* say.

706 Jeff: OK.

Clara stressed the word *I* in her response to Jeff's query, making it clear she did not agree with the textual representation of pozole. When Jeff prompted the learners to examine the speakers' intentions and asked, "Why does Maria talk about pozole? Why does she use pozole as her example?" Jiao quickly replied, "Because it's only meat inside, only meat." Jiao had eaten pozole that Clara had made for a class potluck and recalled, "It was good." Instead of responding to Jiao, Clara turned to her Latina classmates and said, "Yes! Lo que pasa es que ya no la puso. ¡Verdad que sí traje!" (*Yes! What happened is that she didn't put on [the vegetables]. I definitely brought them [the vegetables].*) Clara seemed to question the "authenticity" of Jiao's experience with pozole because Jiao had not assembled her bowl in the traditional manner (for further discussion of links between food "authenticity," cultural representation, and identity, see Grieshop, 2006; Lu & Fine, 1995). Another learner, Amanda, also appeared to question the legitimacy of Jiao's comments: "Yo le dije que no cocinaba pozole." (*I told her [Jiao] that she didn't cook pozole.*) Other Latina learners weighed in, most of them agreeing with the interpretation that pozole consisted of "carne y hueso" (*meat and bones*).

In Excerpt 5, which provides an interesting example of learner-learner code-switching behavior, Clara directly challenged Alicia's claim that there were no vegetables in pozole.

Excerpt 5

814 Alicia: No- eso no es vegetables because the- is only a little
815 cabbage or lettuce or the radishes poquito.

816 Clara: ¿Pero qué son entonces? ((But then what are those?))

817 Alicia: Si, es vegetables- no es same to eat the broccoli or
818 cauliflower-

819 Clara: Pero es vegetales, what's the different?

820 Alicia: Espinache ((spinach)) es different. Vegetables, for me,

821 it's different. Es- no sé. ((It's- I don't know.))

Given that Clara and Alicia are both native speakers of Spanish, we are intrigued by the possibility that the struggle to agree on pozole's characteristics prompted their use of English and Spanish, with their switches to English revealing their desires (conscious or unconscious) to determine how pozole should be portrayed in public (see Auer, 1998; Ellwood, 2008). A deficit orientation on this classroom interaction might view their use of Spanish here as

evidence that these beginning-level ESL learners were struggling to communicate their thoughts in English and thus defaulted to Spanish. In contrast, in line with more recent views on *translanguaging*, defined as the normative practice of using multiple languages without distinction of diglossic function (Baker, 2003; Creese & Blackledge, 2010; García & Baetens Beardsmore, 2008), we posit that the learners demonstrated a resourceful deployment of their linguistic resources in both the native language and target language. In other words, if we recognize that both languages are needed to convey what Alicia and Clara knew and wanted to say about pozole, we are able to imagine new possibilities for the role of the native language in adult ESL classrooms. Because we were not able to confirm our interpretations of the language moves with Alicia or Clara, our conclusions about their translanguaging remain only tentative. Nevertheless, we are optimistic that, with respect to the manifestation of transnational identity in ESL classrooms, we have discovered evidence perhaps of what *transnational voices* sound like in ESL classrooms. These interactions around pozole suggest that cooking and eating traditional foods can be viewed as identity work (Lu & Fine, 1995) but also that the learners' code choices (Scotton, 1983) used to represent those traditions are acts of transnational identity.

What motivated Clara to question the text's portrayal of pozole? Perhaps she felt personally attacked because the class focused on the pozole she had made for the class potluck. Of significance to this study is the possibility that Clara defended pozole because she sensed that the dish was being judged as unhealthy in the text and by her peers (i.e., the dish is overtly missing vegetables, the socially desirable ingredient), and therefore, by cultural association, she risked being labeled as unhealthy too. Thus, whereas the learners' discussion, on the surface, debated the ingredients in pozole, the interaction in fact reveals a powerful subtext about the impact of perceived cultural stigmatization on transnational identity and practices (Villalobos et al., 2009). Clara's insistence that pozole contained vegetables could be viewed as an expression of her "ethnic loyalties," defined as an individual's "preferences regarding language, other forms of cultural expression, leisure activities, and friendships" (Padilla,

2006, p. 480). Her assertive comments can be appreciated as efforts to transmit her loyalty to home and home traditions, not merely as a stubborn preoccupation with passing on cultural facts about pozole to her peers.

With respect to critical discourse practices (Auerbach, 2001; Kumaravadivelu, 1999; Morgan, 1998; Wallace, 2006), Clara's resistance to the text's message about pozole and her peers' interpretations prompted several episodes of learner-initiated and learner-sustained talk. In particular, Clara's authoritative stance ("This is a contradiction because she said [Mexicans] no like the vegetables and the pozole has vegetables. No understand this point.") illustrates her ability to question the text, in terms of both its language and its content (Wallace, 2006). Clara demonstrated a wide array of speech acts in English (e.g., disagreeing, justifying, questioning, defending), an impressive display of pragmatic competence for a high-beginning-level ESL learner. She modeled for her peers how an ESL learner could effectively challenge a text in English. We find that, in addition to Jeff's facilitation, Clara's pragmatic performance, especially her questioning of the criteria used to define "vegetables" in Excerpt 5, laid the groundwork for ESL learners to interpret pozole in multiple ways—emotionally, historically, literally, symbolically (Morgan's terms). This dynamic interaction, in turn, enables the class to imagine "a number of possible social meanings and consequences" (Morgan, 1998, p. 123) that may facilitate their own approach to public debates about cultural traditions and transnational identity. The learners also are presented with the possibilities around discovering a collective transnational identity in their ESL classroom.

FINAL REFLECTIONS

We have come to view participation in ESL programs as a kind of anchoring process (Grieshop, 2006) by which immigrant adults find opportunities to articulate their own personal histories, expectations, and struggles associated with the search for "home." Stories of home serve as starting points to broader critiques of social, political, and historical systems that shape immigration and adaptation pathways. Although Morgan (1998) does not explicitly

mention transnational issues, he speaks to the role of adult ESL classrooms in expanding our understanding of the nature of transnational identity and the development of connecting practices:

Our ESL classroom [provides] learners with an opportunity to share their personal difficulties, evaluate them against the experiences of others, and begin to recognize them as socially constructed and potentially transformed through social action. We might see this process, and its active facilitation in our classes, as a primary means by which *new solidarities and traditions are developed within immigrant communities*. (pp. 81–82, emphasis added)

In this study, the processes of critical dialogue enabled learners to experience *textual re-authoring* (Wallace, 2006). We believe this process provides learners with opportunities to situate their personal stories of home against broader contexts and, as a consequence, name the social forces (e.g., public health messages, family relationships, limited access to healthy foods) that may constrain their efforts to live healthy lives and preserve connections to home. It is our understanding that this naming process is a critical step in the development of connecting practices, which can be applied to creating more resonant health messages. Additionally, the naming process can engage learners in a variety of critical issues affected by social forces surrounding their lives. Although we credit the success of the classroom lessons in part to the thematic richness in the texts, ultimately the greater value lay in learners' textual re-authoring (Wallace, 2006) or activation of their own transnational knowledge to fill in the "unwritten parts" (Iser, 1978, p. 276) of the texts (e.g., whether the husband will agree not to eat out of clay pots, whether pozole is predominantly a meat dish).

Learners' perspectives about their everyday food practices, evolving food traditions, and healthy eating choices in the United States help to make explicit the "adaptation narratives" (Portes, Guarnizo, & Landolt, 1999, p. 227) unfolding in the home, a relatively private space, around routine family activities such as cooking and eating, which outsiders are not typically privileged to observe. In our study, learners' interpretations provided insights into the transnational realities of everyday life, which affirms Rumbaut's (1997)

claim that “the family is perhaps *the* strategic research site for understanding the dynamics of immigration flows . . . and of immigrant adaptation processes as well as long-term consequences for sending and especially for receiving countries” (p. 4). Our work with stories of home suggests that learners, in their roles as immigrants, parents, and heads of households, direct these transnational processes of flow and adaptation by having to resolve conflicts between public messages (like lead poisoning warnings) and family traditions; they also assume responsibility for the preservation of old memories and the creation of new ones. Furthermore, we contend that the excerpts of classroom talk in this article provide evidence of the shared transnational expertise that ESL learners possess but often do not have opportunities to express, and that this shared expertise is beneficial because it enables these learners to explore roles and social positions that might be less accessible to them in their extant social networks. Thus, to extend Rumbaut’s claims, we assert that the ESL classroom represents another strategic research site for exploring the evolution and expression of new social networks that emerge around immigrant learners’ common search to find home. In turn, active engagement with learners in our ESL classrooms around issues that matter to them provides a valuable avenue for community engagement with these social networks that may be applied to improving health as well as many other areas of civic life.

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APPENDIX

TEXT #1. STORY ABOUT CLAY POTS

(Read and discussed by the learners at the Lawson family literacy program)

Original Spanish transcription	English translation
<i>Yo estoy platicando con mi esposo, dice que sabes que no le des comida de ésta al niño, porque le hace daño y el dice “¿Que daño? Si todo nosotros crecemos comiendo de casuela de barro.”</i>	I am talking to my husband, and I tell him not to feed this type of food to our child because it will harm him. And he says, “What harm? We were all raised like that, eating out of clay pots.”
<i>Pero yo pienso que también verdad hay que llegar también a entender verdad como yo acabo de decir, eso nosotros antes no sabíamos todo eso. Pero ahora la gente, los doctores han encontrado y han estudiado todo.</i>	But I think that even you, you have to get to an understanding, like I just said, that we did not know these things before. All of this. But now the people, the doctors have found, and have studied all of them.

TEXT #2. CONVERSATION ABOUT PICKY EATERS

(Read and discussed by the learners in the Bolivar family literacy program)

Speaker	Text
<i>Mary, the researcher</i>	And what did you do when you were a little girl?
<i>Rosalia</i>	When I was a girl I had two pairs of pants and one pair of socks. I had to wash again to wear them on the weekends. I tell my daughter, "Over there I did not have the luxuries that you have." Well, at least our dad had enough to buy us beans, and we ate them <i>gracias a dios</i> . But here, they say, "I don't like that, I don't want it." But over there we didn't have that choice.
<i>Mary, the researcher</i>	Do you have more variety of foods here?
<i>Rosalia</i>	Ah! Of course! Of course we have more variety. If we ate <i>caldo</i> once a month, it was delicious, right? Here, if you want to buy meat every day, well, you eat meat every day. Every week my dad brought home some cookies for us—half a kilogram for seven of us in our family, including my mom and my dad. The half a kilo of cookies lasted barely for the week, and my mom gave us a little cup of black coffee with two animal cookies. And we were happy! Here, the children say, "I don't like that," and they don't eat it. My oldest boy, if he sees the <i>platanos</i> with little black spots, he won't eat the <i>platano</i> . The skin has to be very yellow, without any spots. My husband says, "I hope that my children will never be hungry. When I was growing up I lost my mother and father. And I didn't eat just the <i>platano</i> , I also ate the skin." Really, there are so many experiences that we went through, right? You don't want your kids to go through something like that, do you?
<i>Maria</i>	The problem is finding a way to make the children like the vegetables and fruits. Eating is a problem.
<i>Mary, the researcher</i>	And do you think that it is a common problem?
<i>Maria</i>	With Hispanics, yes.
<i>Rosalia</i>	I have problems with my three boys. Well, they eat fruit, but not the vegetables. They don't like to eat vegetables.

TEXT 2. Continued

Maria

For us Hispanics it is our custom. It is like a chain. Sometimes our countries do not have the tradition of eating vegetables, or you don't have a way to buy them. People think vegetables, like lettuce, are strange.

Sometimes the ignorance is incredible. People think, "Why should I eat that? I am not a cow! I am not a donkey!" [*laughs*] Yes, it is true! And you grow up with the idea that the vegetables are for animals, and you come to this country and don't change.

You don't think about vegetables because you never ate enough meat in your country. You think that the best and most delicious thing is to prepare a very delicious pozole. [*laughs*]

Rosalia

Yes, that is what you have learned, right?

Maria

Yes, you have to teach the children when they are young. You have to feed the kids vegetables, but that is part of our same culture. We have to teach our kids, not force them to eat pumpkin or chayote. There are so many different things here that are delicious.

Mary, the researcher

And how can we teach the community?

Maria

I think that is important. We have to talk to people. Maybe an idea would be to introduce the theme of our countries, of the foods we had there. Maybe to focus on our culture. We have to feed our children better things.
