

### **One Language-One Nation. Linguistic, Social, and Political Borders in Two Cases of Latin American Migration to the United Kingdom**

### **Una lengua, una nación. Fronteras lingüísticas, sociales y políticas en dos casos de la migración latinoamericana al Reino Unido**

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#### ABSTRACT

This article explores one nation-one language ideology, which holds that a language is the glue and marker of an identity that fosters national unity and linguistic assimilation ideologies in the context of Latin-American migration to the United Kingdom. From ethnographic and sociocognitive approaches within critical discourse studies, the linguistic experiences of two Latin American immigrant mothers seeking health services and legal advice are analyzed. The study of their linguistic experiences sheds light on the social and political effects that language ideologies have by bringing about such consequences as physical aggression and family separation in underexplored institutions articulated by neoliberal policies. In this context, a nationalist ideology emerges that constructs borders and marginal social identities.

*Keywords:* 1. ideologies, 2. discourse, 3. neoliberalism, 4. Latin American migration, 5. England.

#### RESUMEN

Este artículo explora tanto ideologías lingüísticas de una lengua, una nación, que sostiene que un idioma es el aglutinante y marcador de una identidad que fomenta la unidad nacional, como ideologías de asimilación lingüística en el contexto de la migración latinoamericana al Reino Unido. A partir de un enfoque etnográfico y sociocognitivo tomado de los estudios críticos del discurso, se analizan las experiencias lingüísticas de dos madres latinoamericanas en su búsqueda de servicios de salud y de asesoría legal, pues el estudio de sus experiencias lingüísticas arroja luz sobre los efectos sociales y políticos, al tener consecuencias como la agresión física o la separación familiar en instituciones poco exploradas y articuladas por políticas neoliberales. Es en este contexto donde surge una ideología nacionalista que construye fronteras e identidades sociales marginales.

*Palabras clave:* 1. ideologías, 2. discurso, 3. neoliberalismo, 4. migración latinoamericana, 5. Inglaterra.

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## INTRODUCTION

This article comes from the need to study, from a sociolinguistic perspective, the experiences and linguistic needs of Latin American immigrants residing in the United Kingdom, whose presence has increased in recent decades. By the year 2013, more than 250,000 people of Latin American origin were registered in the country, and approximately 145,000 were residing in the city of London, where the majority are concentrated (McIlwaine & Bunge, 2016). Latin American immigrants have called themselves the Latin American community (LC), and it's made up mostly of Brazilians (37%), Colombians (23%), and Ecuadorians (8.6%), as well as Peruvians (4%), Venezuelans (4.6%), Mexicans (4.5%), Bolivians (3.2%), and Chileans (3.5%), among other nationalities (McIlwaine & Bunge, 2016). The LC gained recognition as an ethnic group in several London boroughs where they have gained access to services, as well as political participation and representation (CLAUK, 2015). However, McIlwaine (2015) points out that groups such as Ecuadorians, Bolivians, Colombians, and Brazilians often find themselves in an irregular status when the tourist visa on which they arrived in the United Kingdom expires.

Sociolinguists, who in the last two decades have focused on narratives of geographic relocation (Blommaert, 2010), have captured the presence of Latin American immigrants. For example, Block (2006) documents in his study the lives of three Latin Americans in London, and questions the frequent assumption of a uniform ethnic identification of a very diverse cultural group. Other studies (Márquez Reiter & Martín Rojo, 2015; Patiño Santos & Márquez Reiter, 2019) explore the impact that the limited ability to speak English has for some members of this community who often occupy the lower socioeconomic strata, as well as the interrelationships through the construct of banal interculturalism that sheds light on how they negatively describe their experiences with other Latin Americans.

However, the analysis of the linguistic challenges and social exclusions that Latin Americans face when trying to access health services, as well as their experiences within other institutional spaces, have received little attention. The study of their linguistic challenges becomes pertinent due to the need to shed light on the social and political effects that not speaking the English language or not knowing a specialized legal language, can have, with consequences such as physical aggression or family separation in the receiving society. This article explores these challenges and exclusions, by analyzing the discourse of the two interviewed participants, through a sociocognitive approach. The latter also incorporates ethnographic observations for a better understanding of their experiences. A sociocognitive approach allows us to investigate social inequality critically, by unveiling the ideologies that emerge implicitly and explicitly through discourse, which is conceived as a social practice. That is to say, a discourse can sustain or transform people's lives within social domains such as family or work, at different scales of social reality such as regional, national or global (van Dijk, 2014).

This article aims to contribute to studies of the experiences of a group of people in which scrutiny of linguistic ideologies of 'one-nation, one-language' and linguistic assimilation have

received little attention. Linguistic ideologies have an effect that builds linguistic borders that lead to social and political exclusion.

Therefore, the research questions that this article attempts to answer are: To what extent do monoglot ideologies hint at nationalist ideologies that can motivate symbolic power against the participants in this study? How do the participants deal with the linguistic exclusions they have experienced? These questions allow us to understand what material and symbolic resources the participants have to face the realities they tell and that are not isolated from political and economic processes in a London society affected by neoliberal policies.

The first part provides a brief description of Latin American migration to the United Kingdom, pointing out its causes and characteristics (McIlwaine & Bunge, 2016). This description provides us with the selection of concepts such as linguistic ideologies and the contextualization of the study within neoliberal policies. Subsequently, the methodology that has allowed the compilation and analysis of the testimonies of two immigrant mothers from Chile and Mexico will be presented. Their stories are included and are the center of the argument in this article since; on the one hand, they allow us to observe how the ‘one nation-one language’ linguistic ideology and linguistic assimilation derive in the discriminatory attitudes they report. On the other hand, their experiences also shed light on language policies that have been influenced by neoliberal policies in the spaces where their stories take place.

The last section includes final comments on the linguistic element, which allows us to answer the research questions and understand its relevance in nation-State in a context of migration, as well as pointing out the social relevance of the organizations on which Latin American immigrants rely on.

## RESEARCH CONTEXT

Latin American migration to the United Kingdom is a migration from South to North, mainly reflecting the disillusionment of the societies of origin. Some of the triggers for emigration are the lack of political stability, a low economic income, and the absence of the rule of law in particular decades. Researchers such as McIlwaine (2011) and Patiño Santos and Márquez Reiter (2019) agree that the 1970s and 1990s are characterized by dictatorships and neoliberal economic projects that influenced the migration of Latin Americans not only to the United Kingdom but also to Spain.

This last country has been one of the main destinations for immigrants from Peru and Chile, but mainly from Ecuador and Colombia. Although many emigrated to Spain through bilateral agreements (Padilla & Peixoto, 2007), other factors such as the Colombian armed conflict and the Asian economic crisis also influenced more than a million people to leave their home country (Reina & Zuluaga, 2012). On the other hand, add the floods in Ecuador, which affected crop exports and worsened the economic crisis, and forced more than 500,000 people to emigrate to the United States, Italy, and Spain, where many had lived (Jokisch, 2014).

In addition to all of the above, the approval of more rigid immigration laws such as the *USA Patriot Act* and the *Enhanced Border Security* together with the *Visa Entry Reform Act* (EBSVERA) in the United States influenced the reorientation of migration to other destinations (Lacque, 2011). At the same time, the United Kingdom became a receiving society, giving asylum to Colombians and Ecuadorians, who eventually received residency through regularization programs such as family amnesty in 2003 (McIlwaine & Bunge, 2016).

Other factors such as the growing economy of Spain from 1995, the labor demand in construction, tourism, and domestic work, also attracted Latin American immigrants (Vicente Torrado, 2005). However, McIlwaine (2015) reports that the economic crisis that hit Spain in 2008 harmed not only Ecuadorians, Colombians, and Bolivians but also Peruvians and Venezuelans, who already had a European passport, and forced them to relocate their lives to the United Kingdom, where they had also formed transnational ties decades earlier. As mentioned before, by the year 2013 the presence of more than 250,000 people of Latin American origin were registered in the country, and approximately 145,000 were registered in different London boroughs; Southwark and Haringey are the boroughs where the majority are concentrated due to the lower rental costs, compared to Chelsea Westminster, Camden, and Kensington, which is home to Mexicans and Argentines due to their higher socioeconomic status (McIlwaine & Bunge, 2016).

The academic profiles of Latin Americans, their proficiency in English, and their limited economic resources are relevant aspects to consider when moving their lives to a new society. On one hand, their migration exemplifies stratification patterns such as the declassification and disqualification of their professions (Yépez del Castillo, 2007).

The declassification refers to changes in the living conditions of an individual such as loss of economic power, prestige, or social status that previously belonged to him (Block, 2017), and the disqualification of their professions is expressed in the experiences of Latin American migrants who obtained a bachelor's degree or a technical career in their home countries but do not practice them (Wright, 2011). It should be noted that migrants' learning of the English language is hampered by the nature of their jobs, which are often outsourced with low wages and involve fragmented schedules (Mas Giralt, 2017).

As we will see in this study, among other challenges that Latin Americans face in learning English are the family responsibilities that some of them have in having to care for their children. In addition, in their work context, McIlwaine (2015) mentions that they don't receive payment for the work they do and it's a practice of exploitation faced by those who have an irregular migratory status and can't speak out for fear of being reported to the immigration authorities, or because of their inability to communicate in the English language.

## LINGUISTIC IDEOLOGIES AND NEOLIBERALISM

Research on linguistic ideologies originates within anthropological linguistics from a socio-anthropological perspective that takes into account its historical origin. For example, anthropological linguists place the word *ideology* in France at the end of the eighteenth century, as a coinage of Destutt de Tracy, and argue that the word is associated with negative meanings originating in the Napoleonic era. Furthermore, anthropological linguists argue that *ideology* is revealed in contextual linguistic practice (Silverstein, 1998). That is to say, in explicit speech about language, as well as in the regimentation of language use. Although this interpretation highlights the linguistic element and vessel of ideology, there is another important factor. Kroskrity (2004) urges us not to lose sight of ideology as a doxa, or dominant ideology that is naturalized and rarely emerges in discursive consciousness.

The interpretations of linguistic ideologies are diverse due to their complex contextual manifestation. Meaning, the interpretations respond to the experience of a social position in which education, gender, or ethnicity influence how reality is made sense of or experienced, given that they show a partial nature of the conceptions and uses of language (Kroskrity, 2004). However, in this analysis, we will understand linguistic ideologies as socially, politically, and morally charged cultural assumptions about the way language functions in social life and the role of particular linguistic forms in a given society (Woolard, 2016). This last interpretation is interrelated with the social and political roots and bases of linguistic ideologies, and it allows us to move away from a cognitive domain that, at first sight, seems to be its main origin and terrain. This is an important caveat in our initial understanding of linguistic ideologies, because it in turn provides clarity since, as Milani and Johnson (2010) argue, they cannot be solely located within a domain of ideas about language, nor can their interpretation be reduced to responses about language at the individual level.

One of these ideologies is the one of ‘one language-one nation,’ which comprises political and linguistic dimensions at different levels that are all interrelated. Such ideology maintains that a single language is the binder and the marker of identity that fosters national unity (Piller, 2016). However, when looking at the history and mechanisms used by individuals in power, there are clear examples that show the partial and political interests of certain groups that seek to privilege one language and marginalize others for the supposed good of the nation. For example, in the context of the French Revolution, Blommaert and Verschueren (1992) note how French was spoken by a minority, who used it as a means for administration of what would later become the State. They also argue that the Universal Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen did not have a beneficial impact on either the Bretons or the Occitans due to the imposition of French as the language of education in French schools, which resulted in the decrease of linguistic diversity in the ideological process of nation-State.

Similar examples to the aforementioned are found in both the United Kingdom and the United States. In the former, Welsh was officially banned, and its speakers were punished for using it (Sallabank, 2011). In the latter, the movement called *English Only* provides a clear example of

the ideology of ‘one language-one nation’. Its supporters argue that English is a common bond that has allowed Americans from various socioeconomic strata to overcome differences among themselves, but also that linguistic diversity leads to political separatism (Crawford, 2000). At the base of these historical and political events, we find what Blommaert (1999) has called the dogma of homogenism; the mobilization of the idea that monolingualism is the norm or the ideal for society, something that, however, contradicts the factual presence of multilingualism in the vast majority of societies, including the United Kingdom and the United States.

The linguistic ideology of ‘one language-one nation’ is closely related to linguistic assimilation. This last one promotes the idea that linguistic diversity represents a danger to social cohesion, and even an obstacle to the integration of individuals in a receiving society, because multilingualism creates a babelic social environment that is not conducive to communication between people (Martín Rojo, 2002). This vision presents a series of problems given that, as we will see in the participants’ stories, it suggests and promotes exclusion and inequality in several social domains, and carries overtones of value judgments. Meaning, those people who speak a language other than the *de facto* language or that of state institutions, are considered individuals who don’t abide by the rules, wrongdoers, and who often face antagonistic attitudes cemented and legitimized as nationalists. This ideological representation of monolingual nations, which as mentioned above is inconsistent with their current linguistic constitution, can manifest at the institutional and individual level and reminds us that linguistic ideologies apply to everyone (Kroskrity, 2004).

Furthermore, the ideologies of linguistic assimilation and of ‘one-language, one-nation’ must be understood and contextualized in a specific historical moment such as the present, in which there has been a tendency to implement policies from a neoliberal logic. For the purposes of this article, the latter is synonymous with deregulation and outsourcing, which has resulted in job insecurity (Harvey, 2005), and it has not only dictated the dismantling of labor rights, but also the cutback of social benefits, which has significantly influenced high levels of inequality (Sapiro, 2010). This cutback has also affected other sectors such as healthcare, education, and, in England, language policies such as the provision of English classes for immigrants.

In 1960 the English government financed English classes for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), to meet the linguistic and educational needs of immigrants (Granada, 2013). However, Hua and Wei (2016) report that in 2007 and 2011 the government significantly reduced funding for ESOL classes; recently, in 2016, funding reduction was up to 60% (Action, 2016). This has resulted in the withdrawal of payment exemptions and the introduction of fees for these courses, eligibility requirements limited to a certain class of immigrants in addition to long waiting lists for applicants that range from months to years, which generates processes of exclusion and social isolation (Action, 2016).

This has motivated actions from other sectors of society that try to meet the needs of Latin American immigrants. The presence and role of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) such as *Casa Latinoamericana* and the Indoamerican Refugee and Migrant Organization, both located

in London, in the Camden and Lambeth boroughs respectively, provide free or “low cost” English courses, offered by volunteers twice a week, or for a limited time. Such action demonstrates what some authors have called discharge of social responsibility since it’s civil society that’s been addressing the needs of immigrants, both legal and linguistic (Codó, 2013).

In this article, we’ll see how the experiences of the two participants included here are intertwined with the role of one of these NGOs, to which they turn to overcome the legal and linguistic obstacles and challenges they face in London.

## METHODOLOGY

The accounts that allow us to understand the linguistic experiences and metalinguistic descriptions in this article were collected as part of a larger research project. In it, 16 people of seven different nationalities in London 2015 participated and involved five-month fieldwork in which life story interviews were conducted. Regarding the fieldwork, the author of this article joined events that Latin Americans attend for different reasons. These ranged from festivals held in public parks in which immigrants promote their culture through traditional dances and typical food, and where they set up information modules on healthcare services, psychological assistance, and labor rights. Additionally, visits and observations were made in other locations such as the markets in Lambeth and shopping centers located in the municipality of Southwark, south of London, where restaurants and cafes, among other businesses, are mostly managed by Latin Americans and function as meeting places and sources of employment.

Other important organizations offer legal advice in Spanish related to immigration policies, childcare services, and English classes for people of Latin American origin. An example of this are the aforementioned NGOs, which the researcher frequently visited and where he established contact with the two participants included in this article.

As for the life stories, they present a methodological instrumentality in which the participants decide the direction that the narration of the events should take, as well as the selection of topics they consider relevant to their own lives (Linde, 1993). Besides, life stories focus on the human being (Atkinson, 2002). This last feature could mitigate the adversities described here and is the vessel through which they have highlighted the need to communicate their social realities, linking the micro-level experience of the narrative with the macro aspects such as historical, economic, and political factors that influence the perspective of the participants (Pavlenko, 2007).

The interviews were conducted in Spanish, after having interacted with both participants in the aforementioned spaces and after having obtained their consent to conduct said interviews. They were recorded and later transcribed verbatim. Thus, the information collected in the interviews is subjected to a discursive analysis that is complemented by the observations made during the fieldwork.

This article analyzes the life stories of two women whose pseudonyms are Julia Silva, from Chile, and Sara Robles, from Mexico.<sup>2</sup> Their experiences are contextualized in hospitals and social services offices, and as mentioned above, they are included because they allow us to observe how the linguistic ideologies analyzed here derive from the discriminatory attitudes they report. It is worth noting that fragments of their stories are included, not to generalize the experiences of Latin Americans in London, but to make an in-depth analysis of their stories from an emic perspective, which, on the one hand, shows how they make sense of the social reality they experience, and on the other hand, enable us to understand how a language is related to the structuring of relationships of power and inequality.

Finally, it is pertinent to recognize an important aspect in the events narrated by the participants. To a certain extent, there is an element of co-construction, since my presence there as a Latin American researcher and the formulation of questions that could allow me to better understand their experiences contributed to the direction of the topics that the participants touched on during the interviews (De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2012).

#### CRITICAL DISCOURSE STUDIES

To analyze the stories collected, this work uses a sociocognitive approach within critical discourse studies. As mentioned in the article's introduction, its choice as an analytical tool lies in its focus on problems of social inequality that can be manifested explicitly and implicitly in the use of language (Wodak, 2001). In a sociocognitive approach, mental models mediate the relationship between discourse and society. These refer to subjective representations of personal experiences, which in turn are understood as semantic and pragmatic models (van Dijk, 2016). The former represents the situation of what discourse is about and accounts for the presuppositions and implications derived from the explicit information contained within a discourse (van Dijk, 2014). The latter account for the suitability of the communicative event and how a personal experience should be described in a specific context. For example, how an accident is reported to a friend will differ from how it is reported to a doctor since mental models organize the selection and production of information by tracking our intentions in speech, as well as the environment and the participants of the situation described by the speakers (van Dijk, 2014).

It is worth mentioning that the aforementioned mental models are multimodal. Meaning that they incorporate information from social experiences that include the visual, the emotional, the auditory, and the evaluative, as well as acting as an interface between the sociocultural experience and the discourse that builds events from the perspective of the individual (van Dijk, 2014). In this light, mental models not only build or interpret personal experiences from what seems to be an isolated cognitive domain but are also based on a partial social cognition. This interpretation allows us to identify and analyze how the participants make sense of their social

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<sup>2</sup> These pseudonyms are used to anonymize the identity of the two participants.



experiences with other individuals in institutional spaces, since it operates as a medium that brings us closer to the reality narrated. Considering the above, the unit of analysis on which this study focuses is the local meaning. This term refers to lexical choices and rhetorical strategies, such as the implications already mentioned above, that go beyond the literal meaning of what the speaker expresses (van Dijk, 2006). Furthermore, the analysis will also consider another rhetorical strategy such as the metaphor. By metaphor, we mean a reference to something other than what it originally or literally means, to suggest a similarity between two different things (Knowles & Moon, 2006). It should be noted that the use of metaphor is ubiquitous in everyday language and that it also has social relevance. Several authors have studied and demonstrated how the metaphor can transcend its rhetorical purpose in the sense that it regulates our normal behavior and structures social relationships, given that the way in which people decide to talk about social phenomena contributes to a certain type of understanding of what society is (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003).

The decision to focus on this unit of analysis is based on the intention of the discourse and its analytical tool. On the one hand, lexical choices are categories that are under the control of the speaker, and therefore suggest a deliberate use of language (van Dijk, 2014). On the other hand, its analytical instrumentality helps us to account for the linguistic ideologies that the participants indicate, and that allows us to establish connections between the multiple dimensions of the discourse and the society in which their experiences are contextualized.

## ANALYSIS

### *Julia*

After partaking in various activities that constituted the fieldwork of this study, such as visits to festivals, informative talks on migrant labor rights and NGOs in London, I met Julia. At the time of the interview, Julia, her husband, and their son had resided in England for two years but had previously lived in Spain for eight years, where they obtained Spanish citizenship. They left Chile due to their son suffering from cystic fibrosis, which was initially treated in Spain. However, because he required more advanced medical treatment, they decided to immigrate to England, where he could get it. Her husband works as a cleaner in London and she takes care of their son, who needs frequent medical check-ups. The son is the only one in the family who speaks English. In her testimony, Julia describes that she has received support from other Latin Americans, who have proven to be a strong social network. On her first visit to the hospital, Julia explains how a Colombian woman acted as an interpreter to help her get the medical attention her son needed. However, Julia has faced discriminatory attitudes at the hospital where her son is treated.

The medical treatment that Julia's son receives is very rigorous. He needs to go to the hospital regularly for his intravenous detoxification, in addition to the physical therapy and the medications he takes at home. He also always carries an oxygen tank. According to Julia, he is in

that difficult age of adolescence and because he has not followed his treatment, his lung capacity has decreased. She and her son went to the hospital for his medical check-up where they usually receive the help of an interpreter, but in this particular visit they didn't, and in the following excerpt, Julia describes the interaction with the doctor.<sup>3</sup>

[the doctor] asks “why is it so low?” And I tell him “because he has become disobedient” my son interpreting “he has become disobedient with physiotherapy, he’s noncompliant with his treatment, he’s a bit rebellious” and [the doctor] tells him “oh man, don’t do that” [the doctor] began saying things to him and my son listened; I understand English... [the doctor] tells me “this is the age when children commit suicide so don’t come crying pointing fingers at me later on,” “I told you so” and my son interpreting and the adult doctors who were there told him [the doctor] “why would you tell him that?” So he shocked me, I was shocked by what he told me and I said “Well, but why do you express yourself that way? Why are you telling me that?” I spoke in Spanish and my son interpreting... (J. Silva, personal communication, October 20, 2015).

According to Julia, her son had learned English informally, through the various interactions he had had with the nurses throughout his stay in London, and it is he who interprets for her and her husband in shops and, as we can observe it in the previous extract, in the hospital.

Regarding Julia’s testimony, the doctor’s attitude, although mediated by her son, is directed at her and is located in a physical space where language and institution elements deserve to be scrutinized in order to understand the social impact on Julia. The power of language is not strictly an inherent characteristic of it but is associated with the speaker’s social position, as well as with the situation in which the communicative event occurs (Bourdieu, 1977).

In Julia’s narrative, an institutional space such as the hospital is understood as an environment in which there is a hierarchy of identities characterized by the roles played by the social actors described here. Likewise, it is a space in which the doctor occupies a position of authority that is highly significant, given that it is also displayed in his statement on two interrelated levels. The first is the language of interaction which puts Julia at a disadvantage due to her inability to interact in English and counteract such attitudes. The second is because through implication, the phrase, “this is the age when children commit suicide,” acts as a prognosis for her child’s health. It should be added that this phrase occurred in a context in which, according to Julia, the doctor

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<sup>3</sup> Transcription conventions used in interview excerpt (Jefferson, 1984).

- ? Indicate question.
- .. Indicates micropause.
- ... Indicates editing/omission of text.
- CAPITAL LETTERS Indicates high intonation/emphasis.
- “Text” Indicates words in reported speech (quote).
- Italics Indicates words in English (excerpts from interviews) or in Spanish (analysis).
- [text] Indicates text insertion by the author.

repeatedly treated her son with disdain and referred to them as immigrants who only sought to benefit from healthcare services. Both levels hint at the exercise of power in a field of specialists in which they have a discriminatory effect on Julia and silence her voice.

The asymmetrical interaction that Julia reports is not completely isolated from other similar experiences in different institutional spaces that also deserve attention. Other studies have documented insufficient support for translation and interpretation services for non-English speakers, as well as cultural insensitivity from healthcare workers in the United Kingdom (Phillimore, Thornhill, Zahira, Marcianne, & Goodson, 2010). In the same way, Julia's experience reflects what has been reported by other studies in which immigrants who try to access healthcare services face a form of linguistic and gender discrimination, and where their medical needs and that of their children are treated with contempt (Moyer, 2013). In the following excerpt, Julia refers to another incident that happened with a nurse in a different hospital, where her son had to have his blood sugar levels monitored.

We had been in the hospital for about a month, there was a machine there that took the sugar out of my son's blood, and he tells me, he talks to me in English, and I tell him "*no speaking English*"; she tells me, according to my son, she tells me "you have to learn to speak English," and I touch my son's computer that I had open, I put my hands on my son's computer, and she closed shut the computer and said, "YOU HAVE TO LEARN TO SPEAK ENGLISH." That happened to me with a nurse... I accused her, yes I accused her because... she made my son cry too... (J. Silva, personal communication, October 20, 2015)

As we saw earlier, Julia's son interpreted the interaction that she tells us here, in which, she says, the nurse yelled at her telling her that she had to learn to speak English. After reporting the incident to the hospital staff, she requested not to be seen by the nurse. However, her experience denotes an ideology that, although it has been extensively studied, is still relevant due to the aggressive behaviors it can trigger and legitimize. For example, the ideology of 'one-language, one-nation' promotes the idea that linguistic borders coincide with the political-administrative borders of the nation-State, and therefore can regulate how identities are produced in a country that's sometimes thought of as monoglot. Likewise, such an ideology implies that immigrants have a moral obligation and responsibility to learn the language of their new society. Meaning, if people are in England they have to speak English, even though the latter is a multilingual society (Piller, 2016). Julia has tried to comply with the above, however, her attempts to enroll in English classes for two years at an NGO that tends to the needs of Latin Americans have been unsuccessful due to her son's illness, which demands her company at all times, as well as her family being relocated to other London boroughs where they can live.

It should be mentioned that learning the *de facto* language of a host society could have several benefits, which in turn can lead immigrants to a better lifestyle and greater social participation. In fact, as I was able to corroborate in my observations during the fieldwork, Julia needed to learn English. In a coffee shop, Julia asked for a bottle of water by pointing to it, without speaking or responding to the employee who asked if she wanted something else; Julia looked

away and held out her hand with the money to pay. Learning the language of her new environment could provide her with options such as lessening isolation and social exclusion in spaces and contexts where she can express her needs. However, what is problematic is the financial resources, and as we pointed out earlier, the circumstances in which Julia intends to learn it. In other contexts, various researchers have discussed the challenges and diverse needs that can motivate or hinder an immigrant's learning of a new language.

In the United States, McHugh and Doxsee (2018) have shed light on family responsibilities and the changing work schedules of immigrants and refugees, which hinder their chances of becoming fluent English speakers. Something similar has been reported in England. Through the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG), Foster and Bolton (2018) report that the government has wanted to offer new ways of teaching basic English to people who find integration challenges, but have pointed out that such courses are not suitable for their needs, given that they are located too far from their homes or that they lack the infrastructure which as consequence is not conducive to a hands-on learning environment. In addition to the failure of the government's proposed policies, Julia's opportunities to learn English are very limited. The NGOs that cater to the needs of Latin Americans in London offer free English classes, but only twice a week (House, 2018). Therefore, for Julia to learn English, she has to deal with a series of personal circumstances, as well as political and structural factors that both hinder her learning and have an impact on her social reality.

Julia's experience resembles that of many other Latin Americans, who seek to meet their needs through the help of NGOs focused on the challenges they face in London, in the sense that they seek to meet their needs through the help of NGOs that focus on the challenges they face in London. As noted before, NGOs have proven to be a valuable source of information by providing advice on social assistance, housing, and immigration law in Spanish. This last one is very useful to clarify issues and help with legal procedures carried out by Latin Americans who not only don't speak English but are also unfamiliar with the laws and policies of a specialized language, as we will see in the following case.

### *Sara*

Sara's life story reflects the complexities of obtaining citizenship in England, as well as the motivations and circumstances in which she migrated to that city. Sara met and married an Englishman in Mexico, with whom she had a daughter, but divorced him after five years. The daughter obtained dual citizenship while they lived in Mexico. Sara recounts that her daughter began dealing with health issues but her treatments were too expensive for her so she got help from her cousin for a while before he couldn't continue to support them because it was financially burdensome. As Sara continued to seek help, she went to the British Consulate in Mexico City, where she was advised to go to England, where her daughter had the right to receive medical attention due to her nationality.

Before moving to England, Sara had basic knowledge of English but did not have contacts that could offer her accommodation or inform her about immigration laws. Her daughter received the medical attention she needed, but they did not have a permanent place to stay, so she and her daughter stayed in hostels or in the living rooms of Spanish nationals they had met in London. However, the people who hosted them eventually returned to their home country, forcing Sara and her daughter to sleep on the streets. Below is a description that will help us contextualize Sara's life story, in order to better understand the subsequent analysis of linguistic ideologies and their consequences.

I asked Social Services for help and they denied it, they always talked to me with laws, always, I did not find help as a single mother in this country, even though they knew my immigration application was already sent, it was not easy for me; They always told me that she was the English girl and I was the Mexican... (S. Robles, personal communication, November 10, 2015)

In this short excerpt, Sara describes her experience when applying for social housing assistance, which she was finally able to get with the help of a person of Spanish nationality. However, this narrative illustrates an experience of exclusion. While not all cultural distinctions are essentially exclusive, in this context, Sara's narrative points to both the contemporary complexity of obtaining citizenship associated with nationality and the delineation of boundaries between those who are citizens of the state and those who are not, which in turn differentiates who has rights and who doesn't. As Sara was later able to confirm, she could have been legally separated from her daughter due to the precarious situation in which they lived. Relocating to a new country calls for learning new regulations, and Sara's limited knowledge of English influenced her experiences, as we'll see below.

I had to fight for my daughter physically and I didn't let them take her away from me; They were already calling Social Services because they said that I was putting my daughter at risk, by me not being well, by not giving her a good home, food, and everything, right? They had to make sure that my girl was not being affected by anything and that I was taking good care of her... that... everything I have as a mother, to take care of her, so I no longer knew what to say, what things could be used against me... I did not know the language to be able to defend myself, to be able to explain things correctly, I did not... NOW I know that there are translators [*sic*] they didn't offer me translators or anything, so I tried to defend myself with what I knew of English, right? and it was very frustrating... (S. Robles, personal communication, November 10, 2015).

In this excerpt, Sara describes an asymmetric linguistic interaction with municipal workers. She recounts how she did not have access to an interpreter, who could have helped explain why she was applying for housing assistance, in a situation where a worker tried to take her daughter away from her and told her that she would be placed in foster care. In these circumstances, language is represented by Sara not only as a vessel of communication but as an instrument to defend herself against what she describes as aggression. For example, the metaphorical representation of language as a shield, *I did not know the language to be able to defend myself*,

acquires social relevance in the situation described, in the sense that the expression indicates that the knowledge of the language as a tool that allows her to protect herself and her daughter, in an event that Sara hints at as threatening due to fear of losing her.

In addition, the fact that Sara can explain her situation and her need for support to get housing in a “correct” way in a language that she does not speak has implications for its use in context. Sara’s experience is interpreted as communicative competence in which the speakers choose particular ways of speaking with specific social functions, whose impact and purpose depend on the spaces inhabited by the interactants (Rampton, 2006). That is, describing a robbery to a friend or a police officer involves the use of a particular register, and therefore the result will vary. In a space that is regulated by the State and with uncertain immigration status, the suitability of Sara’s speech becomes crucial, since her ability to explain herself in English does not seem to be strictly associated with her knowledge of the language, rather, it is associated with her material reality. Meaning, the frustration at inadequately describing her situation, coupled with *I no longer knew what to say, what things could be used against me*, have the implication that Sara could not have had access to the contextual meaning of a register, in particular one that articulates and materializes regulations put into effect in her new social environment, and that could have separated her from her daughter.

Sara’s testimony suggests that she faced an ideology of ‘one-language, one-nation’; that is, a monoglot and specialized ideology that places her in a disadvantaged social position and that could have exacerbated her frustration at that moment. As the interview progresses, Sara points out that she finally got housing for herself and her daughter, but her visa application was still under review. As mentioned, this process lasted five years, during which Social Services sent her letters that I had access to and that notified her that she would no longer receive housing. At first, Sara explained to the social workers that her visa was still pending and that it had not been denied. Later, Social Services coordinators called Sara to meetings, in which she explained that she would not leave the country until the UK Home Office issued a letter of deportation.

Everything was in English, everything in English, even though they also have interpreters [*sic*]... they didn’t offer them to me and... and they said that they could understand me well, but I know that I made many mistakes and that I couldn’t express myself as I would have liked to, I had many doubts, many questions, and I couldn’t... I couldn’t do it, right? ... (S. Robles, personal communication, November 10, 2015).

In the excerpt above, Sara answers my question about the language in which the meetings with the coordinators were held and again reports not having received help from an interpreter. The failure of providing an interpreter has a vertical effect on Sara’s social identity, which is articulated through two intertwined aspects in a situation that hints at inequality. The first aspect is her lack of expertise to communicate her ideas, “I couldn’t express myself as I would have liked to,” which carries an implication that points out how her agency is undermined and how her communicative needs are silenced within the Social Service offices. These offices are the space in which the power of language, as we saw in the case of Julia, is revealed through the

social position of the interactants, which are implicitly described here. That is to say, the event narrated by Sara is situated in a state institution that is politically regulated and in which her use of language, the way it's used as well as the substance of her speech, depend on her social position that may or may not give her access to the language of institutions (Bourdieu, 2003).

The second aspect is that it's a monoglot ideology, in which a language is treated as homogeneous, uniform and that includes all social domains as a neutral vessel of communication (Spotti, 2011). This ideology is revealed in the phrase *I had many doubts, many questions*. Both her lack of communication skills and a monoglot ideology point to the relevance of variations in the meanings and social functions of a particular register. In other words, as we saw earlier, by not having an interpreter, Sara was unable to clarify her doubts, the consequences of which go beyond a communicative event in a place vested with a strong political and legal burden. Her experience is echoed by those of other women in various areas in the United Kingdom. For example, a study conducted in a school setting reports how Bengali-speaking immigrant mothers from Bangladesh did not address English-speaking teachers out of shame (Blackledge, 2000). In addition, in this same context, the consequences of the ideology of 'one-language, one-nation,' materialized in the lack of translation and the absence of an interpreter when one of the mothers received a letter describing her daughter's need for regularization classes (Blackledge, 2000).

Sara narrated that her visa was finally granted for humanitarian reasons, which is valid for six years, after which she applied for the United Kingdom's Indefinite Leave to Remain visa. However, her application was rejected because the lawyer handling her application submitted the wrong paperwork, something Sara found out about through a letter from the United Kingdom Home Office. According to Sara, the lawyer didn't keep her up to date with her visa application process, even when Sara tried contacting her, to avoid any misunderstanding, through text messages and emails written by her daughter, who for all this time has had education in English. At the time of the interview, Sara had requested an extension of her visa and was still awaiting a response from the Migration Institute, which has been a process that she has carried out with the help of a Spanish-speaking lawyer who works as a volunteer in an NGO located in London.

I came to this NGO and met Marcos, who knows about immigration, and began to give me advice about immigration, but practically I am the one representing myself before Immigration. He advises me, helps me, guides me; he helps me write the letters and everything, so I have a little more knowledge and thanks to the support that I found there, that helps Latinos, and I felt a weight was completely lifted off my shoulders because before I felt totally alone... (S. Robles, personal communication, November 10, 2015).

In our conversations at coffee shops and at home with her daughter, before and after the interview, Sara demonstrated the ability to communicate in English. During a visit from her daughter's friend, Sara greeted him and introduced him to me in English, as well as explaining to him why I was at her house and how we had met. The three of us continued the conversation in English for more than thirty minutes, in which we touched on, among other things, the high cost of living in London, at the same time she interacted with her daughter fluently in the same

language. However, Sara's previous testimony, despite the circumstances of her immigration status, reveals a sense of relief, in which language works as a mechanism that allows her to make sense of her reality when faced with specialized and cryptic legal discourse. In this context, receiving help to write letters addressed to the United Kingdom Home Office continues to highlight, on the one hand, the aforementioned monoglot ideology in which state institutions ignore the linguistic diversity of their society and permeate all social domains as an apparent neutral communication vessel (Blackledge, 2009).

On the other hand, the specialized register that Sara came across, and could not have had easy access to, shows up with socially and politically significant consequences. The specificity of legal language influences social behavior, and lack of access to it can hide information about rights or lead to marginalization. For Sara, receiving information and legal advice in Spanish has improved her understanding of the immigration laws that impact her daily life and that may affect her permanence in England. In my last conversations and correspondence with her, the UK Home Office had not yet refused or confirmed the extension of her visa.

## CONCLUSIONS

Not mastering the official language of a receiving society is associated with social behaviors that are usually valued negatively, and that can also lead to situations of social exclusion. In addition, as we have seen, not knowing the language of state institutions can generate uncertainties, which in the case analyzed have put at risk the family integrity of the participants, whose experiences are included here. In this sense, the first research question can be answered by arguing that language has a close relationship with the construction of the nation-State, in a context of migration in which language can become an instrument of both physical and symbolic violence. In other words, the use of a single language hints at a nationalist ideology that builds borders and promotes patterns of social stratification by constructing marginal social identities. It is also worth highlighting the role of *Casa Latinoamericana*, which is the NGO that tends to the linguistic and legal needs of Latin American migrants residing in London. The information and services it provides seek to solve the limited access to information in the migrants native tongue, realities that other institutions such as the Coalition of Latin Americans in the United Kingdom also seek to address (CLAUK, 2015). To some extent, Julia and Sara's linguistic and migration experiences shed light on some aspects of the social reality in which other Latin Americans live. Likewise, their experiences allow us to answer the second research question, by arguing that the links with said NGO function as part of a social capital that is made accessible to the participants of this study, who have a more limited one, to tend to them and help them deal with the social inequalities and political exclusions they face.

Based on the experiences reported by the two interviewed participants, I consider that the analysis of this article contributes to the understanding of the impact of linguistic ideologies in the construction of our social reality. Julia and Sara's experiences are captured and analyzed through two life stories and a sociocognitive approach, that respectively allow the



contextualization and problematization of the use of the *de facto* language that can create a place of tension that people with linguistic resources specific to their social and migratory trajectory enter. In this sense, it becomes pertinent to study the linguistic needs and experiences of migrants from an ethnographic and sociolinguistic perspective to seek to articulate linguistic policies that are sensitive to people's realities and that are inclusive in a destination society.

Translation: Érika Morales.

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