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THE BEAUTY OF BEING BILINGUAL

The Beauty of Being Bilingual: Language and Empathy in Speech-Language Pathology

by

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A Senior Project in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements of the Honors Program

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Flowing between two languages is beautiful in many contexts. Language use serves different purposes, whether language switching is for translation services, communicating with parents who speak different languages, or as in my research, to enhance communication and encourage progress in the speech-language pathology setting. Speech-language pathology is the “scientific study of speech, fluency, feeding and swallowing, and all the mechanisms of speech and language... to help people with speech disorders speak and communicate better” (ASHA, 2009, p. 1). Speech-language pathologists (SLPs) work with students, provide services for speech, language, or swallowing difficulties, and create individualized treatment plans to identify and work toward the students’ goals.

While working in a local Spanish immersion elementary school, I was fascinated by how the speech therapist would work with the students using their preferred language of Spanish or English. Young students who solely spoke Spanish at home were welcomed and encouraged to participate in speech activities in their native language, including during evaluations for speech services. During evaluations, the speech-language pathologist connects with the student’s teachers about their progress, what language is spoken at home, and the student’s preferred language. The SLP then connects with the parents, molding the evaluation criteria based on age and language proficiency, mainly catering towards the preferred language and including small sections of their secondary language as needed. This process allows the SLP to both assess and connect with the student.

While observing this process, I became curious, how does speaking Spanish with native speakers create a safe and comfortable environment for the student? How do Spanish or English language options build relationships and increase comfort between the SLP and their student? What significance does bilingualism hold in speech-language pathology services? What are ways

to become more culturally sensitive and work to reduce and eliminate areas of implicit bias so as to create trust and empathy with students of color? These questions are at the core of this research project.

With my future aspiration of becoming a bilingual speech-language pathologist, I was eager to learn from professionals in the field. I developed my key research points by researching literature specific to this topic and talking one-on-one with bilingual speech-language pathologists in the Twin Cities to learn about their philosophies and discover the significance of bilingualism in the workplace. My findings support the beauty of bilingualism as a form of empathy.

This study aims to combine academic research with practical speech-language pathology experiences to demonstrate how bilingualism builds trusting relationships in a safe and culturally inclusive environment. The rapport built with empathy and language opens dialogue about the students' whole selves, leading to a sense of cultural safety and freedom to incorporate a multitude of identities. Many concrete skills gleaned from the following interviews will be helpful in interpersonal conversations and highlight ways of using empathy to build community and safe spaces.

Through my research and experience, I note that bilingual SLPs demonstrate empathy through a multicultural lens using a student's first language along with cultural awareness and understanding, intending to create a safe and welcoming environment conducive to students' progress in communication skills. As communication and human connection are essential to all people, this topic will be relevant to many students, faculty, and various teaching situations, especially those in a speech pathology setting.

First, I define empathy and bilingualism in the context of speech-language pathology. Second, I take a deeper look at multiculturalism and bilingualism through literary analyses and personal interviews with bilingual SLPs. Finally, I identify areas for active improvement in creating a safe, empathetic environment through language. This research paper will express how bilingualism and incorporating a student's first language builds relationships through empathy and shows an increased understanding of the culture, thus helping the student reach their communication objectives and full potential in a safe and welcoming environment.

Empathy and Bilingualism in Speech-Language Pathology

Human connection is based on understanding and empathy. From the interviews which appear later in this paper, I have gleaned the following working definition of empathy in this field (see pages 29-32 below for further information). Empathy is a genuine willingness to understand others' feelings and perspectives. Empathy can best be expressed through mutual self-disclosure, active listening, positive non-verbal communication, affirmation, and validation. Empathy also includes "putting oneself into another's shoes" and is a communication skill that enhances the therapeutic effectiveness of relationships between clinicians and patients (Ioannidou & Konstantikaki, 2010).

Empathy requires effective listening. Active listening is one of the most important communication skills; like empathy, it takes practice. By listening to understand patients emotionally and mentally, the healthcare professional can imagine the patient's world while maintaining their role by actively understanding what the patient describes.

Empathy is the most important aspect of building rapport with clients. Moore (2006) confirms this in her article, "Empathy: A Clinician's Perspective," of the American Speech and

Hearing Association, writing, “empathy is salient in establishing rapport in the therapeutic relationship” (p. 8). During interactions with others, humans naturally observe the other person’s behavior and internalize the same emotions as if they were their own (ASHA, 2009). In speech therapy sessions, clients can easily feel if the clinician’s manner is anxious or hostile through non-verbal language cues. A communication disorder may increase the client’s sensitivity to nonverbal cues and emotions (Moore, 2006).

The nervous system has a big role in creating the foundation for receptive relationships because relationships are emotional and apply physically; if an environment is inattentive or hostile, the body understands. From there, the brain recognizes that the environment is not socially, emotionally, or intellectually safe and sends stress hormones (Hammond, 2015). The unsafe environment prevents the brain from producing oxytocin, which creates anxiety. In non-dominant racial groups, the nervous system is already on alert based on past social and psychological threats. To create an empathetic environment, Lisa Moore, a speech-language pathologist at Southwestern Vermont Medical Center, suggests active listening without interruption, involving the client in the decision-making process, and asking open-ended questions to communicate the importance of safety and empathy to clients (Moore, 2006).

While empathy is universal, bilingualism is specific to the population that speaks two languages. Bilingual individuals fluently speak two languages, which may be acquired early in their lives from their parents or community members speaking multiple languages, in school, or later in life (*Multilingual People*, 2018). The percentage of bilingual individuals in the United States has almost doubled, from 10.68% of the population in 1980 to 20.55% in 2018, equal to around sixty-three million people (Grosjean, 2021). Along with bilingual individuals, approximately 16% of the world’s population is multilingual, defined as individuals who speak

more than two languages. Bilingual speech-language pathologists have near-native proficiency in speaking a second language and have the knowledge and skill set to work with the unique needs of bilingual individuals in both languages. As demographic changes bring more languages and cultures together, speech pathology clinicians are expected to have clinical training to provide services in both languages, maintain their bilingualism to avoid losing the ability to speak the language, and develop a deep understanding and awareness of the cultures of the people they will serve through continued education (Kayser, 1995).

Bilingual students come from various backgrounds, and each brings their own culture. Culture is defined as “the way that every brain makes sense of the world... The brain uses cultural information to turn everyday happenings into meaningful events” (Hammond, 2015, p. 22). Zaretta Hammond, the author of Culturally Responsive Teaching & the Brain, states that there are different levels of culture, including surface, shallow, and deep.

Surface culture is the level that holds “observable and concrete elements of culture such as food, dress, music, and holidays;” it is relatively easy to notice and describe (Hammond, 2015, p. 22). Shallow culture is comprised of the unspoken rules around social interactions and how deep cultural values are put into action. Some examples of shallow culture include courtesy, friendship natures, personal space, and eye contact. Nonverbal communication is present in shallow culture, and “social violation of norms at this level can cause mistrust, distress, or social friction” (Hammond, 2015, p. 22).

The final level is deep culture, made of unconscious assumptions and ethics around spirituality and group harmony. Deep culture holds an intense emotional charge and can create great anxiety in a person or group. These cultural pieces are embedded in the individual’s worldview and are how the brain makes sense of the world, known as the person’s *schema*.

The levels of culture are comparable to a tree that plays a part in the bigger ecosystem. Surface culture makes up the leaves and the fruits of the tree that change over time. Shallow culture is the trunk and branches of the tree, and deep culture reaches down as the roots. Hammond (2015) states that deep culture “grounds the individual and nourishes [their] mental health. It is the bedrock of self-concept, group identity, approaches to problem-solving, and decision-making” (p. 25).

Students are not confined to only one aspect of their culture but may identify with many intersecting cultures. Multiculturalism is the view that multiple cultures, races, and ethnicities of minority groups should be specifically acknowledged and celebrated for their differences within a dominant culture (Eagan, 2015). Multiculturalism includes views from diverse society members and aims to withhold assimilation to the dominant culture. Individuals of color create their sense of identity through their culture and multiculturalism, and “identities are continually being redefined and rediscovered based on the sociocultural and sociopolitical environment” (Muhammad, 2020, p. 67). Identity has multiple layers, is fluid, and is shaped by the social and cultural environment. A quote by author Gholdy Muhammad in Cultivating Genius states that “identity is composed of notions of who we are, whom others say we are (in both positive and negative ways), and whom we desire to be” (Muhammad, 2020, p. 67). By embracing our identity while learning about different cultures, society leans into respectful and balanced living with others, built through kindness, without judgment (Muhammad, 2020).

The ideal precept is acceptance of one's own and others' genuine identities, while in reality, both individuals and society are hindered by automatic judgments. Automatic or unconscious assumptions and attitudes about cultures are known as implicit biases. Implicit biases are different than explicit racism and occur when race impacts perceptions and actions

without awareness or control (Livingston, 2021). Most people of all races and ethnicities have implicit biases, including children. These perceptions feel ‘normal’ and are created and upheld by deeply ingrained social habits and evaluating what is outside of our awareness and what knowledge is still needed (Hammond, 2015). An example of implicit bias is expressed in The Conversation by Dr. Robert Livingston (2021). A study showed two images to a group of children ranging between six and nine years old. The first image is of a Black girl standing behind a swing, and a White girl is on the ground next to the swing. The second image is nearly identical, but the White girl is standing behind the swing, and the Black girl is on the ground next to the swing. When asked to describe what happened in the scenes, the children interpreted the pictures differently and judged the children in the pictures differently. The children were more likely to give a negative interpretation when the standing child was Black, such as that she pushed the White girl off the swing rather than fell off the swing. The children in the study were also asked how “good” or “bad” the two children were, and they were more likely to point to a frowny face for the Black child and a smiley face for the White child. Dr. Livingston explains that these findings are consistent, and the racial biases can come from school interactions, online media, and parents (Livingston, 2021). Implicit biases directly relate to how our brains are wired, and these messages go unchecked within society (cited in Hammond, 2015).

Implicit biases often are expressed through internal or external judgments of others. Numerous experiments have been conducted to show that White people treat people of color less favorably than other White people, usually unconsciously. In an experiment where researchers created a situation where a person encountered someone who fell, a Black or White individual, 88% of White participants helped the person in need when they were alone (Livingston, 2021). On the other hand, when White participants saw other people were present, 75% helped a White

person but only 37% of White participants helped a Black person in need. Dr. Livingston describes this as an ambiguous situation that allowed a cover for racially biased, “race-neutral excuse to keep walking” (Livingston, 2021, p. 26).

Implicit biases can also be expressed through microaggressions. Microaggressions are subtle verbal or nonverbal slights or insults that communicate negative or hostile messages to people of color based on their marginalized group membership, such as culture, race, or language (Hammond, 2015). Microaggressions invalidate a group identity or experiences and increase anxiety in these individuals while feeling unsupported. The first step is to acknowledge the problem and understand what is causing the problem to combat implicit biases and microaggressions for safety and create a sense of community. Self-reflection is key in recognizing thoughts and behaviors within a diverse environment and doing the “inside-out work” to uncover implicit biases and understand the deep impact of our actions on students or coworkers. Through understanding, concern, and strategies, the next steps include motivation and sacrifice of being in the “comfort zone” towards the “learning zone” and putting in the work to create a safe physical learning environment with minimal, if any, judgment.

In a safe and healthy learning environment, students are free to learn, take interpersonal risks without embarrassment or shame, and hold deep trust in student-teacher relationships (Milner et al., 2019). When anyone experiences a hostile environment, the body’s nervous system sends information to the amygdala in the brain, which sends out stress hormones and creates anxiety because the individual feels endangered. For students of color, the “safety-threat detection system” is already on high alert for psychological and social threats due to past experiences (Hammond, 2015, p. 45). A healthy environment that is deemed safe enables students to engage with the materials, connect with the teacher and other students, and learn. The

student will stretch themselves and place trust in the teacher if there is a sense of safety, including physical, social, and identity safety. Identity safety is the foundation for a psychologically safe environment, where the student feels a sense of support to foster learning and relax the anxiety triggers (Milner et al., 2019). Through creating genuine student-teacher connections, the teacher cares for the students physically and emotionally and values the student as a core aspect of a learning community, especially when building relationships across race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic factors where relationships are hindered due to implicit biases and microaggressions. These techniques also extend to the parents of the student.

The ideal teaching setting follows the “culturally responsive teaching” model, as expressed in Hammond (2015). Hammond explains, “For some, culturally responsive teaching is simply an engagement strategy designed to motivate racially and culturally diverse students... but more than a motivational tool, culturally responsive teaching is a serious and powerful tool for accelerating student learning” (Hammond, 2015, p. 3). The achievement gap in academic performance is a persistent disparity between non-dominant racial or ethnic group students and White students, and Hammond labels it “the epidemic of dependent learners” (Hammond, 2015, p. 15).

To close the gap, culturally responsive teaching (CRT) offers a solution. CRT is defined as: “an educator’s ability to recognize students’ cultural displays of learning and meaning-making and respond positively and constructively with teaching moves that use cultural knowledge as a scaffold to connect what the student knows to new concepts and content in order to promote effective information processing” (Hammond, 2015, p. 15). The educator aims to provide resources and interpersonal support to encourage self-efficacy with a positive school-focused mindset. Simultaneously, the educator fully understands the importance of

creating meaningful social-emotional relationships with the students in forming a safe space for learning.

One way to foster a safe space for learning through culturally responsive teaching is through affirmation and validation of the students. The difference between affirmation and validation lies in the depth of acknowledgment. Affirmation is noticing and acknowledging the student's personhood and appreciating the student's cultural-specific traits that have been minimized by the dominant White culture (Hammond, 2015). Practicing affirmation related to racial, cultural, or linguistic identity shows the whole student is being celebrated, including aspects of their cultural identity and appreciation for the student's native language.

In contrast, validation is the explicit acknowledgment of awareness around impacting iniquities in the students' lives. Kris Gutierrez, bilingual literacy educator, states that a classroom is where students can explore their individual and collective identities through discourse, language, and emotional support (Hammond, 2015). The classroom should reflect and help shape students' individual values as a celebration of multiculturalism. Teachers can consciously and genuinely validate their students by affirming and acknowledging the students' cultural backgrounds, experiences, ideas, and values.

Culturally responsive teaching also focuses on building a strong sense of rapport. Rapport is generally defined as "a 'sympathetic connection' with another person that results in that warm, friendly feeling you get when you are in sync" (Hammond, 2015, p. 75). Rapport, like empathy, is directly connected to affirmation and the direct acknowledgment of whole personhood through both words and actions that demonstrate care. Instead of feeling the need to make students of color, English as a second language students or impoverished students feel good about themselves, it is the educator's job to build trust and rapport with the students, not self-esteem.

Building a trusting relationship helps protect a student's emotional well-being. For example, when a threat is detected, cortisol is released from the brain and stops all learning for twenty minutes, but cortisol stays in the body for up to three hours (Hammond, 2015). Through trust and rapport, the student's anxiety and fear signals can relax, and their guard can temporarily come down in order to learn because trust frees the brain for learning and creativity. A reason mistrust, fear, or anxiety grows is due to a student not feeling acknowledged, cared for, or seen physically or culturally. This lack of care and the presence of mistrust moves students and families to the defensive side and strains student-teacher relationships. Trust starts with listening. Genuine and active listening demonstrates interest and respect for the student's input.

Several ways to build or rebuild trust and connect with students includes listening, selective vulnerability, familiarity, the similarity of interests, concern, and competence. Listening is more than just hearing the words said, but also understanding the underlying emotions, especially those expressed through non-verbal communication, such as facial expressions, hand gestures, and eye contact. Approximately seventy percent of communication occurs through non-verbal cues, and each interaction and quiet exchange includes the communication tone through of body language (Hammond, 2015).

When communicating with students, it is also important to demonstrate selective vulnerability. The definition of selective vulnerability follows the lines of respecting and connecting with others who share their own vulnerable moments and show their human side, their imperfect side. Allowing our human side to show creates a culture of caring, and psychologists note that self-disclosure is a pillar of intimate, trusting relationships. Through vulnerability, trust and cooperation flourish. One way vulnerability is demonstrated is through storytelling. Storytelling is a universal way to connect, and the brain is hardwired to understand

and welcome stories, including stories for entertainment and passing down wisdom. Researcher Robin Dunbar of the University of Liverpool noted that stories held 65% of the talking time of people in social conversations without distinction of age or gender (Hsu, 2008). The same research noted that storytelling encourages social cohesion between and among groups. Stories not only positively affect groups but also individuals and the building of social skills. These social skills are used in building trust, where students rely on familiarity or regular interactions with educators or support staff. Familiarity in a school setting may appear as seeing students during lunch or recess or attending community events and seeing students and their families.

Another way to build trust is through the similarity of interests. Connection with students begins by finding a point of common interest, such as hobbies, likes, or dislikes, which extend past linguistic differences (Hammond, 2015). Educators connect with students by demonstrating concern for important issues through remembering details and asking questions, such as when students are experiencing life transitions. Concern is also well expressed in non-verbal ways, including maintaining open body posture, avoiding multitasking, and, if welcomed, offering a gesture such as a pat on the back to show genuine care. Finally, trust and connection are built through competence. People tend to trust others after demonstrating knowledge, understanding, and willingness to support them (Hammond, 2015). An example may be when a student trusts the teacher to help support and form a plan to make learning less confusing, more successful, and more engaging.

Through affirmation, validation, rapport, and caring relationships, students will understand that the classroom aims to reflect values of trust. Trust is central to building learning partnerships in student-teacher relationships and empowering marginalized students specifically. In culturally responsive teaching, caring is a main pillar of the pedagogy. By emphasizing the

importance of student-teacher relationships, students of color and linguistically diverse students are more engaged and can achieve their highest potential with less stress (Hammond, 2015). The educator's role is to care about and care for the students as whole beings, mind, body, and emotions, especially students who crave and need connections across racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic lines, where implicit bias is persistent and obstructive to learning goals and the well-being of students. Without this sense of belonging and connection, students contain their emotions, keep their concerns to themselves, and avoid risk while having a stressed nervous system due to a lack of connection with others that the students can trust, resulting in restricted learning potential.

From the student's perspective, being trustworthy also stimulates the brain for connection and fosters building trust and rapport. Culturally responsive teaching creates genuine personal connections with students across their differences, and Hammond (2015) states that "the only way for students to open up to us is to show we authentically care about who they are, what they have to say, and how they feel" (p. 75). Genuine listening and care gently move dependent learners towards being independent learners. Only once the sense of trust and safety is established, the teacher can offer challenges to the students without causing anxiety or defensiveness based on unsafe situations due to a lack of trust. Instead, with trust and empathy, the student and teacher work towards a common outcome.

After academically researching how empathy, trust, listening, and use of native language help with both learning progression and student well-being, I interviewed professional bilingual SLPs to provide context to the research and identify practical concepts for future practice.

Supporting Interviews

Four online interviews were conducted with bilingual speech-language pathologists in the Twin Cities for a concrete application of the research. The anonymity of the interviewees is used to protect the confidentiality of their students, as well as their experiences in the workplace. These interviews provide personal opinions and experiences relevant to the study. The interviews consisted of a series of questions ranging from gathering information about their work setting, working in a multilingual environment, and how speaking Spanish affects the comfort level of the speech therapy sessions. Not every interviewee answered every question, hence some questions having fewer responses. The overarching goal of the following interviews is to identify how the combination of empathy and speaking two languages creates a more welcoming and conducive learning environment for their students.

Interviewee 1:

Interviewee 1 is a Lead Speech-Language Pathologist in St. Paul. She has worked for twenty-three years as an SLP, she began at a Spanish immersion elementary school and moved to secondary education. She has served as a lead SLP for St. Paul Public Schools for the past two years. During the conversation, Interviewee 1 discussed the importance of using Spanish in her home with her family as well as her professional setting, during speech evaluations, student learning disability labels, the importance of putting the student's needs first, and how bilingualism has assisted her in her career and personal life.

Interviewee 2:

Interviewee 2 has been a speech-language pathologist in St. Paul Public Schools for twenty-eight years. She spent a year volunteering in Venezuela and learning the

language. She then returned to St. Paul to work in secondary education and currently works at two different schools in the Twin Cities. She enjoys the tight-knit community of SLPs in the public school system, and during the interview, her topics of conversation included developing Spanish fluency, working with students in their preferred language and avoiding the stigmatized shame of language loss, and active listening.

Interviewee 3:

Interviewee 3 has worked in speech pathology for twenty-six years and obtained his doctoral degree in Communication Sciences and Disorders. He speaks three languages including English, Brazilian Portuguese, and Spanish, and uses his language skills in speech sessions, speech evaluations, and interpersonal conversations with students. The interview focused on the importance of bilingual and multilingual culture in the United States, strong interpersonal connections through acknowledging barriers and learning from others, and code-switching between languages.

Interviewee 4:

Interviewee 4 has been a speech-language pathologist for three years and works in a Spanish-Immersion School. She had a variety of internship opportunities and decided to stay at the site she loved most. Interviewee 3 discussed her deep appreciation for Spanish use in her job, how she is received as a White woman speaking Spanish, and the exciting feeling and reactions of connecting with someone in their language.

Question 1: What drew you to work in a multilingual setting?

Interviewee 1: “I love that our district has many opportunities. Usually, you have to wait until somebody retires because there aren’t that many jobs, but in St. Paul, there are so many

jobs, so many programs; we'll have 115 SLPs next year and there's always room to move and grow and stretch and learn something new. I love that about St. Paul. In my position, I speak Spanish every day, especially with my family, but I also do initial Spanish evaluations for middle schoolers. The way you get good bilingual experience is working at the dual-language or Immersion Schools, so I recommend that everyone gets the opportunity to work there. I enjoyed working at [the Spanish-Immersion school], but I moved to the high school and enjoy working with older students."

Interviewee 2: "When I was in high school, I went on a trip to Mexico and I was one of those people inspired by hearing bilingual people; it seemed really cool to me. I had been studying German and found myself enjoying language learning. When they offered Spanish my junior year of high school, I took both Spanish and German. But seeing these opportunities within my own community, it sparked something in me that I didn't want to use language learning for purely academic pursuit. I loved learning about people and cultures, and that's why I hoped I would be able to gain that experience. Both in graduate school and in my early career, the question kept coming up of 'How do you know if someone's struggling to communicate because of language use [or if it is instead a language delay or a disability?]' Seeing that need clarified for me that it was a good route for me to take, where I'd learn about, communicate, and use second-language learning with a need in education that was really strong."

Interviewee 3: "I don't know if anything in particular drew me to being a bilingual therapist. It just happened to be a part of who I am, so incidentally through working in urban school districts where populations are more diverse, there's a lot of people who speak other languages, because I happen to be a Spanish speaker, it's a state of growth. Language is always evolving, and you're always learning more, you're never done. You keep learning language

throughout your life, so to me, I never thought, ‘Oh I have this specialized unique skill to offer, but I find in our culture in the States which is very monolingual in its orientation, there is this view that being bilingual is novel and unique and you’re bringing a special skill to the table. Not necessarily, I’m just a bilingual person and I’m navigating life with more than one language. Anybody can do that and the idea that there’s something special about bilingualism, we can all be doing this if people decide to. To me, [bilingualism] is an experience that you have where you’re living this multilingual life and I happen to be able to have skills where I can work with people in more than one language. I’m grateful for that, but I’m always learning. To answer your question, I sort of ended up being able to do that rather than seeking it out or believing that it was a specialized thing to do.”

Interviewee 4: “I loved that aspect [of a multilingual environment]. I did my internship [at this school] and it didn’t occur to me to work in an immersion setting, but since I was placed here and this opportunity exists, this is fantastic and I really like it. I was familiar with the idea of immersion; I went to Concordia Language Camps which are immersion-based. With my friends who went to immersion schools growing up, it was also very normal for them to say ‘I don’t know that in English, I only know it in French,’ and we would communicate that way.”

Question 2: What positive experiences have you had working in a multilingual setting?

I1: “For positive experiences, when I was at the immersion school especially, you got to be like a big fish in a small pond, immersion is a very specialized thing and often immersion schools don’t have special ed staff that teach the target language. When I started 25 years ago, it was really rare to have a bilingual person in the dual-language schools. Being bilingual has given me opportunities because of my Spanish assessments, that has allowed a bunch of people to get

to know me and maybe that had something to do with helping me find my current job as the lead. It gives you opportunities in your career that other people don't get. Even if you're a bilingual person though, and you do a Hmong or Karen (Thailand) language assessment, having the knowledge of what it is to be bilingual helps you be a better assessor anyway, even if you don't speak the target language."

I2: "It's so different now at the immersion school with all the staff being bilingual. I've worked in lots of different schools in St. Paul Public Schools, and now in my position, only six of my students are bilingual. It is still very much something that I find as an asset and I think that kids do relate differently. With my Spanish speakers who are super English speakers now and use Spanish informally, they don't need me to speak Spanish with them. I do notice that they respond to me differently when they know that I speak Spanish; it's interesting how much more they'll talk about their families in their home language. I get to know my Spanish-speaking students in ways that I don't feel like I usually have the opportunity to get to know a lot of the other speakers of other languages that are bilingual. I feel like I can put the same amount of energy and want, and I can like that student and relate to them and do the work in English with them with the same quality, but with my Spanish speakers, I definitely feel a sense of being able to offer more to them and get to know them better."

I3: "For me, the positive experience about it is that my brain goes into a new place, and I'm always able to learn something new. I appreciate the fact that I can see this receptivity in the person's face. When you're a therapist, it's very much about the rapport. If there no relationship, then there's probably not much progress; you really have to have that connection and have that rapport and connecting with a student, even if you only try to learn a few words in a language, showing them that you remember a few numbers, you get this recognition like 'This person

seems to care about my language background.’ If I had any advice for monolingual practitioners, it would be: make an effort, show some interest, ask about what it’s like for the students when they speak the other language. Questions like when do you use it, how does it feel, who do you talk to in that language, what do you like about it, is it stronger for you in that language or is it stronger for you in English, and what are your challenges and experiences? We filter everything through monolingualism so readily without realizing we’re doing it. I see it happen. There has been an effort to acknowledge that bilingual and multilingual kids bring something unique, and there’s also some assumption in ourselves that because we haven’t learned it yet, we don’t need to, and [that belief] is rampant in our country. To make a connection, we need to move beyond [the monolingual mindset], and then we’re living in a multilingual world where you can build better relationships with your students. Everybody can learn languages, it doesn’t matter if you’re having language challenges. I believe the immersion in another language can only help, personally. If we don’t keep learning, we hang up our hat, we get older. We need to keep evolving, it’s fun and necessary.”

I4: In a multilingual setting, “I feel like I can be more myself. I feel like I’m a ‘language-y’ person and language is what I love and what I do, and I can flip back and forth. I can use expressions in both languages and I can express excitement in multiple ways! I learn so much from the kids and I’m learning with them, like when I have the opportunity to observe a kid in their classroom, it feels like magic to me to see second-graders who are having a full discussion about their book project in Spanish and it includes English speakers that have never used Spanish outside of school. Seriously wow, you’ve only been studying this language for two or three years and the amount you’re able to express is really amazing. There are so many cognitive benefits and you can see that. You can see the strength that bilingualism brings, even

for a kid with a language disorder. The fact that you can communicate with two different groups of people in two different languages is such a strength and that should be celebrated!”

Question 3: What challenges have you faced working in a multilingual setting?

I2: “We really need to be careful not to make assumptions about where kids are at, and we need to be aware of that sometimes students have lost their home language and do have a lot of struggles in communication with their families because they might be the only one in their family that isn’t able to develop that bilingual fluency. Often students tell me, ‘I don’t really speak the language but I try to pretend.’ I share the feeling and I offer my stories to try to decrease that sense of shame of when your environment has told you that you should be bilingual. I’ve seen lots of examples of kids who go through times where they feel awkward not being able to speak their language that’s the most comfortable and now they’ve been put in the position of having to speak that second language and it makes them feel insecure rather than something they feel proud of. It’s really important to have that open dialogue to avoid the shame.”

Question 4: Please tell me a story about how communicating in two languages opened up the dialogue differently than solely using English.

I1: “Sharing a language is the biggest piece in building trust and building our relationships. Middle-class White educators are not seen by a lot of our families as ‘someone like us’ and any way we can bridge that to let them know, ‘No, I’m not from Mexico, but I am someone who speaks your language. I speak Spanish, I frequently patronize thell Asian restaurants, and I live in their community, and we can talk about that; it’s beneficial and I always

try to find [a point of connection]. With Latino families, first they may say, ‘Your Spanish is so good, where did you learn it?’ I say, ‘My husband’s from Guatemala.’ ‘He is? Well I’m from near there!’ and it just starts that conversation through connection.”

I2: “A current example for me has been a student who came into ninth grade, and he has autism, and his mom only speaks Spanish. At the high school level, there’s so little parent communication, but in this case, the student was really struggling after the pandemic. As soon as I got connected to his mom, things really started to change. He was more open with me and his case manager, and he’d stop by my office and ask, ‘Did my mom tell you this?’ Before, he had been shutting down completely at school, but sometimes making a connection with a family of a student, I felt like it made a difference to him. His attendance increased a lot, and he sought me out. That was an example to me of the power of building that relationship, and I felt like his full participation at school was impacted by having someone who he knew could relate to and respect his mom.”

I3: “With one of my students from El Salvador, it’s very helpful to go back and forth [from Spanish to English], I’m doing a lot of checking to see if the comprehension is there and introducing new strategies. I can show a video in English and debrief about it, but then I’ll switch back to Spanish because even though they’re constantly engaged in English, it helps because you don’t have to be as cognitively ‘on’ in your first language. So to get that information there, [using Spanish] helps her to internalize it a little better. The luxury of [speaking the] same language as the person you’re working with, widens the capacity to facilitate their internalization of the information you cover in a session. You’re sort of fortunate to be bilingual in your session; it’s a special thing in that sense, but I wish it was more common, it adds value and to the comfortability of [the environment].”

I4: “During a recent evaluation, I had a kid and I talked to them in Spanish. All of a sudden, they just chatted and chatted and wanted to tell me so much! I gave an evaluation subtest using the conditional conjugations, such as ‘*Si yo ganara la lotería, yo compraría...*’ and they told me that their dad almost won the lottery and they talked a ton. Their SLP later said she’d never heard that student talk so much; that was the first time hearing an explosion of language. She said she didn’t know why because ‘I’ve only interacted with them in English and I hear it sometimes when he talks with his sister.’ After that, the student started using Spanish with his English-speaking SLP. They didn’t even realize it, he was just excited to be able to talk.”

Question 5: What opportunities did you have that prepared you for working with the Latinx/Hispanic population and native Spanish speakers?

I1: “I was an SLP who happened to speak Spanish, I wasn’t trained as a bilingual SLP. That’s a different skill set than being a bilingual SLP who knows how to be an SLP in two languages and that’s what I had to learn on the job. I didn’t know anything about normal language milestones and development in Spanish-speaking kids, I didn’t know L was a common substitution for R in Spanish, and all those things I had to learn. The question is, for a bilingual kid, how does that impact what I’m supposed to be seeing? When I get Latino kids who speak Spanish at home and have only been educated in Spanish immersion, I expect them to outperform the norms. You need time to establish your own internal norms, what can most third-graders do, and if they can’t do that, maybe it’s a problem. Another example, Latino kids who speak Spanish at home and go to Spanish immersion school, still sometimes lose the ability to use the subjunctive correctly, but the influence of English takes that away. It’s not a disorder, it’s just the difference.”

I3: “In the late 90s, I know I had a course in cultural and linguistic diversity. New Mexico [where I lived] is a multilingual kind of place. Navajo and Mexican Spanish are spoken in a lot of areas, so it was a good place to begin my career and sow some early seeds of having a multilingual practice— now it’s all the rage, but it was just a part of my normal training.”

Question 6: Please tell me about your experience as a bilingual SLP working with students from various cultures. How were you perceived and received by the student?

I3: “There’s always the wondering of ‘What did they think of me?’ For anyone that’s a therapist, that’s a question in their mind including are you connecting and is the rapport okay? You see it play out over a session and in the way someone makes progress over time. I think it’s about actively listening and asking questions about experiences outside of school from their perspective and remembering they have a different experience to reference. A way to connect is asking what they remember about their time at a school or another country, asking about their home, and what matters to them. It’s easy to make assumptions that everyone is just fully assimilated into our culture here in the States, but it isn’t so. We need to actively seek that information. Sometimes it emerges if you just listen to what kids say.”

“One of the greatest skills we can learn as speech therapists is to be good listeners which means we have to shut our mouths and stop talking. It is an occupational hazard, it really is. Everybody knows that, that we talk-talk-talk-talk-talk, but we need to just listen. Sometimes we need to learn to be quiet, and then you get information. So yes, actively listen, ask questions to seek out information, find out about life outside of school, observe, and listen some more.”

I4: “The younger kids aren’t as shocked or overwhelmed, sometimes they initially look at me and don’t expect that I’m going to speak Spanish, and that may be surprising to them, but

once I start talking, they are okay with it. Especially in the immersion school, it's less weird. When I'm at an English school, students are wondering, 'Why are you speaking Spanish to me in my school?' because it's not the context in which they use Spanish. I had one sixth-grade student I did an evaluation for, and she was taken aback by the fact that I spoke Spanish, and I don't think she liked that. She would engage with me but would do a lot more in English than Spanish because 'This visage does not match what I think you should look like when you speak Spanish.' Her mom even said, 'I don't know if it was that or just that she is uncomfortable with new people in general, and so it's a new person speaking her home language, and that doesn't fit for her.' When I speak Spanish in the community, a lot of them are taken aback, and they don't expect it. Sometimes it's really positive and they ask how you learned, and sometimes they just speak English to you."

Question 7: How do you approach conversations with first-language Spanish speakers with respect for the culture?

I1: "I would try and enter a conversation in a place where you have something in common. That way it's not about you speaking Spanish, but what they're talking about. It gives them an opportunity to tell you about it, finding a common interest instead of just a common language."

I2: "[After spending a year volunteering in Venezuela,] I was finally comfortable considering myself bilingual and taking on positions with lots of kids who's families didn't speak English and kids who were only developing in Spanish. Humility is huge, and a lot of it comes from asking questions and learning about cultural experiences. That's another place I feel my lack of experience, for example, the current culture. I want the comfort to approach a

conversation in a way that makes a connection. Sharing and being open with Latinos is very effective. Another thing I think is really important is don't expect; Latinos are not a monolith, and there are so many different cultural experiences from this fully integrated community. Being open goes back to asking and not being afraid of making mistakes, as well as not presenting yourself in a position of power or as the expert. We may have an area of expertise to help their child develop skills in this, and it's important to acknowledge that, but as a parent, they're leading this development. There is, in the culture, a definite sense of authority where teachers are higher and [the parents] see themselves as less learned so through working with the families and opening the conversation with them, it helps build that confidence and welcome parents as an integrative part in their child's speech journey."

Question 8: When are times that you will switch between Spanish and English during a session?

II: "At the Spanish immersion school, I started my sessions in Spanish. When we start in Spanish and use Spanish, I don't think I've needed to do anything other than talk to them. People make a connection through language alone because language carries culture, language carries that community and cultural understanding. I've had very few students who don't immediately let me in. I do think it's easier for Latino kids to feel like I might understand them more as a middle-aged White lady than maybe my Black students do. There's more of a sense of you're one of us— In family pictures on my desk, I'm the only White one and they can see who my people are. There are things that kids can connect with and be like 'maybe you do know me a little bit.' But that's the icing on the cake. Mostly kids connect with you because you're a good

person, because you love them and care about them, and making that extra connection with language or culture is extra.”

I2: “To report about their Spanish skills, I definitely start in Spanish sort of trying to present yourself as a Spanish speaker from the beginning, although obviously they look at me and know that I am not a native Spanish speaker. I start in Spanish as well. In a high school setting, I do sometimes communicate with them first in English because I think a lot of our kids who have experienced a lot of language loss have a lot of shame around not speaking Spanish. They have a lot of guilt that they should be able to speak Spanish better, so a lot of our Latino population at this point are not fluent Spanish speakers and I don't want kids to feel that that's wrong. I don't want to give the “Well I'm White and I'm bilingual, so what's wrong with you?” That's a big danger and I'm particularly sensitive to that because our kids are adopted from Columbia. My daughter does not speak Spanish and had significant learning difficulties and her picking up of bilingualism didn't work well. She has some Spanish but when people start speaking to her in Spanish, it's very intimidating. With Latino students in general, if I'm just getting to know them, I've learned I guess to first interact with them and ask if they also speak Spanish. I find that out first then put in phrases in Spanish, and then if they start speaking Spanish, trying to let them use the Spanish they have on their own terms is really important with older students.”

“When we start talking about something about home and students really are bilingual, definitely the content of the conversation. If we're talking about Geography, we'll use English, but if we're talking about the weekend or a trip to Mexico, we'll be in Spanish. Sometimes it's the content of a conversation. I find myself using English if I think that it would make them feel more confident and build their language skills the most. If the kid starts struggling to express

themselves in Spanish, then that's my cue that we're at the level where they need English support; that's more true in our bilingual populations. Their job is to develop English or Spanish skills, while our job as SLPs is building the base aspects of language. I look at are they breaking down at the same level in English and Spanish, and if not, I'll go to the one where they are finding the most success and have the highest level because that's where we're going to push their developmental level higher."

I3: "Rarely is it the student who initiates [switching languages], it's more that I initiate it. If they really didn't understand, then they would say something, but because I know there's some hesitance of speaking there and she wants to be a good student and is well-liked, very polite, I don't want to assume that she's going to request clarification. I alternate and it's good to cover information in both languages.

"Sometimes I make the sessions more in Spanish when I'm trying to gauge what his Spanish skills are like and I didn't need to evaluate his English skills. There's some back and forth needed to show that it's okay, you can be bilingual and go in and out of the languages that you're using, especially if you're with someone who knows both, so yes, code-switching and reasons for code-switching."

I4: "I usually start in English if I don't know the student at all, and as they get to know me and as I explain my role and why I speak Spanish, then they fall into what's comfortable for them and I follow that. Sometimes, bilingual kids feel like they can be themselves and code-switch. If a student starts a sentence in English then switches to Spanish, we [as SLPs] follow that in informal settings, like talking about a restaurant walking down the hallway, and I just enjoy that they are switching. I feel most comfortable when people flip back and forth, I like that ability to have the flexibility. Sometimes you feel like you can express something better in

the other; there are certain words I like better in Spanish or some expressions that only work in English. The biggest thing is I start in English because if I don't know them, I don't want to offend them or make the assumption that I think that they don't speak English. I also want to acknowledge that I'm a White woman and English is my first language, so I can communicate better in English. I often start in English to break the ice.”

Question 9: How would you define empathy in your field of work in a Spanish-speaking environment? Please share a story you have experienced regarding empathy.

I2: “I would define empathy as giving importance to another person's perspective and their emotions about the multilingual experiences and giving importance and communicating a sense of caring for their experiences as learners in terms of disability and communicating in any language or both.”

I3: “It's about being present to the other person's experience and observing, asking, learning, watching what they're experiencing, and what they might be feeling and trying to connect with that. The best thing you can do is listen and hear their experience. You don't have to fix it, you don't have to problem-solve it, you just need to acknowledge that it's there and hear it and reflect back that you are [hearing them].”

***Interviewer:** Do you believe that active listening and letting the students talk first will bridge racial divides?*

I3: “I think it has some potential to move in that direction. We need empathy and listening is extremely important with that. We have our lens through which we view the world, and each of us has a different experience. Mine is as a gay, middle-aged White man who happens to be bilingual, I've lived a lot of places in

the country and I've spent some time outside the country. These experiences allow me to have some openness to certain kinds of differences of experience, but also knowing that I'm in my White skin as a middle-aged White man, it's impossible for me to know the experience of a Black girl in second grade without listening, observing, asking, finding out. It's easy to make assumptions about things; we have to be present to what the other person's experience is and listen to other voices and make sure that we're trying to understand what is going on for them and with them. We should not try to tell them what they're feeling or what their experience is. That's a challenge for a lot of people and at times has been a challenge for me. I grew up in a certain world so my perspective is limited and I own that. It's really about owning that you only know the world from your own experience if you don't care to learn about somebody else's experiences, you've created a barrier. I think it's easy for White people to do that because we haven't had to question that and now we're starting to question it. We have to be open, present, and listening."

I4: "Putting yourself in someone else's shoes and feeling something from someone else's perspective. I take that into account with all my kids. Most of the time if you're in here with me, you're working on something you're not good at, which isn't necessarily fun. It might not be the most enticing thing, so I try to think about that. I also try to share stories with them, like when I got my expander and having to relearn where a student's tongue is in their mouth, and I understand that. I try follow that idea of where is the other person coming from."

Question 10: What does empathy look like in your speech pathology work sessions and how do you strive to create a comfortable environment for all students?

I1: “I listen for real. I try to have books that represent their cultural heritage or I’ll ask them about their foods and where they’re from, then connect it to their home lives. I try to connect with every kid with something we have in common and I don’t try to be the grown-up who’s in charge; I try to be the adult that cares about you. I’m also helping you with your IEP but I’m willing to toss the lesson plan any day that you need me to listen to something else. I’d like to believe that I always put the students first; we need to notice when they’re upset or need something different. With secondary kids, it’s a little easier because sometimes they want to tell you things. They know that you’re there every week, they can count on you; we give them tough love sometimes.

Often I’ll disclose things like my husband’s from Guatemala, and if they’re Indigenous, my father-in-law was a Mayan shaman, so they trust me more. With my husband being from Guatemala, I have some real knowledge about what that feels like, but of course, with my White privilege and my American citizenship so it’s not equal. My White privilege is clear to me every day. When you have a partner who’s a non-White immigrant with an accent and doesn’t speak English, the way people treated him when I was alone and when I was at his side was totally different. It was like I legitimized him. When I’m in the same line as my husband at Target, people don’t assume we’re together. The cashier wonders if they should put the divider down, but no, we’re together. I was a White girl growing up in a small town with an interest in diversity, but I wouldn’t have become a world traveler without my husband; my entire trajectory of my life was changed because of becoming bilingual.”

I2: “It looks like that piece of opening up conversations about their experiences and asking for their perspectives. I kind of understand the dynamics of Latino families enough to ask kids questions like, ‘What did your mom say about that?’ For one of my Black or White teenagers, I wouldn’t ask that, but I would ask that for my Latino and Hispanic students because of the role of their mom or dad plays in their family. When kids bring in their own thoughts, I show them that I relate and know a little bit about how the messages they’re getting from home are impacting them at school. Often there is where I’ll do a lot of code-switching from English to Spanish around when I’ll ask the kids.”

I4: “[I show empathy by] offering choices, but I’m trying to be flexible. I have kind of a plan of what we’re going to do, then I think on the fly and we can switch it up. I try to use their preferred language and preferred activities too. I choose what they work on, but there are three options and they choose their reinforcement of what makes them happy. If a student is having a ‘shut-down’ day and doesn’t want to talk, I say that we can still work on listening, and here’s a pointing task or a ‘moving the object’ task. After sessions, the students would say that being a confident speaker was something they worked on, whether or not it’s directly part of their goals, and that was really validating to me because that’s ultimately what I want for every single student that comes through here to feel, like I’m giving you the space to be a confident speaker and giving you the tools to help you feel like a confident speaker, and that’s the core of what we want.”

Question 11: In your experience, how has speaking Spanish with someone whose first language is Spanish affected the session/comfortability in the speech session?

I4: “When they’re young, I see [the effect of speaking Spanish] more and with parents. I had a student once that was Puerto Rican and she got happy when I spoke Spanish to her because everyone else in that part of rural Minnesota is from the same family and speak English, and there aren’t many Spanish speakers in that nursing facility so I was the first person outside of her family that addressed her in Spanish. I asked if she wanted me to speak to her in English and she said she’d preferred in Spanish, and I explained swallowing results in Spanish. Sometimes you can see their face light up and their comfort level increase because they know that they can use Spanish.

Sometimes people forget; when I was working in a conversation group and there was a Spanish speaker in the group who had just gone through a stroke and he was working on getting their speech and language back. He was equally recovering both languages and he was telling me a story about a wedding and he had a moment where he couldn’t find a word and I asked him in Spanish “*¿Lo sabes en español?*” and he had a moment where he lit up and remembered the word. That helped him because he had forgotten he had the option of using Spanish. The rest of the conversation was in English, but he felt better that he had more tools in his toolbox to get his ideas out and he wasn’t stuck.”

Interviewer: *What does that feel like for you when they “light up?”*

I4: “It makes me light up! I get excited. It’s cultural too. It feels authentic, feels like us, feels like our family, it feels like you’re at home. With one of my students, I put the word flan, and the fourth-grade student got really excited, saying “I love flan, *mi abuelita* makes flan,” and she had this whole story about flan and this cultural piece, it’s really meaningful.

The interviewees provided examples of how empathy is a willingness and flexibility to understand others' feelings and perspectives. In the speech-language pathology field, SLPs put empathy into practice through mutual self-disclosure, active listening, positive non-verbal communication, affirmation, and validation. Each of the interviewees deepened my understanding of the practical application of my research and provided deep insights. Through connecting with these licensed professionals, several open-ended questions were proposed to explore the root of why speaking more than one language with bilingual native Spanish speakers opens up dialogue and builds trust in student-teacher relationships.

In each of the interviews, the interviewees explained that they each have a passion for language, and they really like their place of work. Each shared positive experiences in the multilingual setting, including Interviewee 1's story of networking within the bilingual community, Interviewee 2's story of relating to students and offering them a closer personal connection, Interviewee 3's opportunities to continue learning, and Interviewee 4's opportunity to be herself in the multilingual environment. The interviewees also shared in stories how they demonstrate empathy within their work, including having various books and resources that represent students' cultural backgrounds, self-disclosure to build trust, maintaining flexibility within speech sessions, asking for their student's perspectives within their own speech journey, and especially using preferred language in formal and informal settings and asking about their families and personal experiences.

The celebration of cultural diversity while affirming and validating students as explained in the interviews directly echoes Zaretta Hammond's Culturally-Responsive Teaching and the Brain (2015). Hammond (2015), through her strategy of culturally responsive teaching, guides educators on how to use a scaffold of cultural knowledge to motivate culturally diverse students

in an environment that is safe, welcoming, and trustworthy. The rapport increases with students comes from a place of incorporating a multicultural lens in speech-language pathology sessions, and notably, through language.

Yet, the question is, what empathetic role does Spanish hold when speaking with a native Spanish speaker? Connecting with a student in the language they speak at home, with their friends, or in the community, whether or not they are fully bilingual, opens the dialogue by creating a connection that extends past the speech session. By speaking Spanish, the SLPs extend the notion to the students that they are present and willing to put in the energy and time to really get to know this student, hear about their home life and personal experiences, and code-switch in language based on comfortability. Interviewee 2 expressed, “I get to know my Spanish-speaking students in ways that I don’t feel like I usually have the opportunity to get to know a lot of the other speakers of other languages that are bilingual...I definitely feel a sense of being able to offer more to [my Spanish-speaking students] and get to know them better” (I2). Interviewee 3 continues this thought, saying, “Bilingual and multilingual kids bring something unique... To make a connection, we need to move beyond [the monolingual mindset] and then we’re living in a multilingual world where you can build better relationships with your students” (I3). Interviewee 4 stated that bilingualism brings strength, no matter the present speech ability. To celebrate bilingualism, speech-language pathologists incorporate code-switching languages into the session. Through opening up a conversation in Spanish, asking appropriate rapport-building questions about how the student’s family is or how their trip to Mexico went, the student’s confidence builds and the student feels the nod of cultural celebration because the SLP demonstrates care for the whole student’s experience, including their cultural identity. Hammond (2015) reiterates this point, explaining that individualistic communities praise students for what

they do, and in more communal cultures, recognition of who the child is and what unique contributions they make to the community is more meaningful. Identity safety is reiterated in the book, These Kids Are Out of Control by Milner et. al (2019), expressing that identity safety is the base for a psychologically safe environment where students relax the anxiety triggers and can be their wholehearted selves while learning. The genuine student-teacher connections demonstrate that the speech-language pathologist and educators have a deep care for the student, while acknowledging racial, ethnic, or socioeconomic differences, and the staff works to actively listen and continue to learn about cultures different from their own to create a safe environment for intellectual growth while welcoming the student's full identity.

Overall, this research provides ample support for the root connection between empathy and bilingualism through delving into literature surrounding culturally responsive pedagogy, the importance of student-teacher relationships in the learning environment, and the rarity yet necessity of students' access to bilingual education. Through active use of a Spanish speaker's native language in speech therapy sessions or informal settings, speaking their home or preferred language builds rapport with students. Language use also demonstrates that the educator fully cares for the student and is eager to put in the time and effort to visualize the student's perspectives by "putting themselves in their shoes," and asking questions to deepen their understanding. Pursuing personal interviews with local bilingual speech-language pathologists built on the connection of empathy and bilingualism, bringing in the perspective of actionable steps and concrete application in school systems.

Though the research focuses on bilingualism in speech pathology, the themes of cultural celebration and student connection are also relevant for monolingual SLPs. For monolingual English-speaking SLPs, the emphasis on cultural appreciation is amplified. The interviewees

each discussed how they aim to create a welcoming environment for the student through empathetic tactics, including personal connections such as asking about the student's weekend, with a cultural celebration aspect, like listening about a special dish a family member prepared for the ofrenda for Día de los Muertos. Students engage more with educators and adults who demonstrate have worked to combat their own implicit bias, affirm and validate students, actively listen, ask questions about their lives, and demonstrate a genuine interest in them, signaling that the classroom and the student-teacher relationship is a safe space and worthy of placing trust.

Language is used everywhere, whether spoken, signed, or written, and facilitates communication between people. Looking within the overarching concept of communication, language helps to express identity, including accents and vocabulary, as well as opinions and wishes. Deeper still, language creates a connection in equally listening to experiences of someone else's reality and experiences, where we can explore where these realities intersect and what common aspects we share. Language expresses a desire to know the other person, especially their intersectional identities and how it affects how they see the world. With incorporation of using language as empathy, asking questions, and opening conversations from a place of connection and similarity, trust in strong relationships flourishes.

I've experienced the lasting effects of language and empathy firsthand while working at a Spanish immersion school. I have been a volunteer at the school for the past eight months, and during my time, I shadow a bilingual speech-language pathologist and assist in a fourth-grade classroom for fifteen hours each week. My daily tasks include room and material preparation, classroom management before school, one-on-one math tutoring for a student with dyslexia, and professional debriefing and planning conversations with staff while working on projects, such as

grading, creating lesson plans, organizing materials in the classroom, or assisting with errands. During my time with the speech-language pathologist, I have shadowed different speech sessions with students ranging from preschool to fifth grade, including sessions focused on articulation, fluency, language comprehension, cognition, and voice. After sessions, the SLP debriefs about the session, what was said, possible diagnoses, and the short-term and long-term goals for the student.

While I originally volunteered to work at the Spanish immersion school so I could refine my Spanish language skills, the truth is, this experience gifted me with so much more than that. I've formed and strengthened networking connections, and I have a deeper understanding of the school SLP setting. Beyond that, I've grown exponentially in knowledge surrounding learning delays and disabilities, and even more so, knowledge about Latinx cultures. In my work tutoring and working on phonics flashcards with a bilingual Hispanic student, we start our time together in Spanish. He starts counting in English, then when he gets stuck on a number, he looks at me for help and we continue in Spanish. He enjoys making jokes in Spanish and telling me about his friends at school in English, and he will code-switch without any hesitation or second thought. As Interviewee 4 mentioned in her interview, it is a special experience when my student's face lights up in a conversation, switching from English to Spanish every other sentence, based on topics he is comfortable within each language. I follow along and encourage him while using active listening skills. I am constantly working to understand and refine my role as a bilingual volunteer and teacher who cares wholeheartedly for each student, building connections and starting from a place of commonality through language and empathy. With my Spanish-English speaking students, practicing empathy and flowing between the two different languages deepens

our connections while building trust, building rapport, and building beautiful bilingual connections.

This research project combined academic research, literary analysis, and a variety of relevant interviews to demonstrate how using bilingualism as a form of empathy builds rapport by creating an inclusive environment. My volunteer experiences have allowed me to begin to practice these new skills with incredible success. I am excited to share these results in hopes that the information will help others in the school setting to deepen their connection with multicultural, bilingual students.

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Addendum Essay

My Antonian Honors Project, “The Beauty of Being Bilingual,” is a deeper dive into the intersecting effects of language and empathy in the speech-language pathology field. With my plan of becoming a bilingual speech-language pathologist, I was eager to start on this experience. When I first met with my advisor, I knew I wanted to incorporate my communication skills through conducting interviews. My original plan for the project was to complete these interviews with bilingual speech-language pathologists fully in Spanish and translate them for my paper, using my Spanish fluency skills.

The two interdisciplinary aspects of my project include Communication Studies and Spanish based on my degrees. I’ve been passionate about learning Spanish for over eight years. That passion flourished with my recent trip to Costa Rica, where I volunteered at an underserved early education center, working directly with fifteen seven-year-old students. I am also passionate about Communication Studies, especially interpersonal communication, which inspired the idea of incorporating interviews into my Honors Project.

Over the last four years, the Antonian Honors Program has challenged me academically in many subjects, especially Communication Studies, and Spanish. I’ve grown from these classes and experiences, and through hard work and dedication, I discovered who I am and what I want to do for my career.

I began preparing for my project by connecting with possible committee members, including Dr. Bethsabe Huaman Andia, Department of Literature, Language and Writing & Women’s Studies; Dr. Margret McCue-Enser, Department of Communication Studies; Dr. Laurie McKendry, Department of Business Administration; and Dr. Paul Greene, Department of Theology. We discussed my project, its relevance to the larger university and community, and the

next steps, including Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval to interview speech-language pathologists (SLP).

The reason I chose each committee member ties directly to my journey at St. Catherine University. My advisor, Dr. Bethsabe Huaman Andia, has inspired me to continue my Spanish-speaking path and shown me how important it is to have another language, including connecting with the Hispanic population around the Twin Cities, finding opportunities to bridge language divides, and using my Spanish in my future career as a bilingual speech-language pathologist.

I chose to work with Dr. Margret McCue-Enser as my committee member because she has been an essential part of my Communication Studies degree. I work with her to explore connections between individuals and groups and how language and nonverbal communication opens dialogue for a deeper understanding.

Dr. Laurie McKendry was my inspiration for the importance of cross-cultural communication and support. Through her course, *Managing Within a Diverse Workplace*, I learned how to have conversations about race, past damage, and implicit bias through genuine, active listening. By listening first instead of waiting for our turn to speak, we open the conversation, validate the other person's perspective and feelings, and show empathy.

Dr. Paul Greene has helped me explore ethics and empathy, specifically from a theological and values standpoint. I have valued his feedback about maintaining equity and acknowledging the current system harms various populations. Dr. Greene reminds me to look at the bigger picture of who benefits from the system and who needs help, but even more so, how we can work towards justice in fixing the system.

Each of my committee members significantly contributed to my Honors Project and offered various ideas to bring my Project, “The Beauty of Being Bilingual,” to fruition. I gained knowledge through my research for my literary analysis. I learned more about my future career as an SLP. I also incorporated my research findings with my hands-on experience at the Spanish immersion school and practiced empathy through language with the students.

During the Project process, I found the most challenging moments of my project while working on IRB approval. I completed the Citi Training for Social and Behavioral Research and began the process of submitting the IRB application and additional forms. I submitted my application in early February after returning from my study abroad experience in Costa Rica. In early March, the IRB noted some revisions to make; I resubmitted the corrections and waited for approval. Between submitting my application and receiving approval to begin my interviews, the period was ten weeks, from February 10-April 21.

After gaining approval, I conducted all of my interviews in one week. Due to this time constraint, I needed to adjust the number of interviews I would conduct from eight to ten, to four interviewees. I also conducted the interviews in English, contrary to the initial discussion of the project. I transcribed the interviews by hand and completed my Honors research paper by May 5.

I have connected with several other bilingual speech-language pathologists since completing my Honors research paper, including an American Sign Language-English bilingual SLP. With more time, I would have included her interview in my writing because it complimented my topic beautifully. Some of her advice included always putting the student first in all decisions and exploring their goals because they are motivated. She also stated that the best way to show up in relation to the students is to be genuine, show you care, and maintain a trusting relationship by doing what you say, whether the outcome is positive or negative. She

noted that she puts the kind comments that her students say into a file, reminding her of her love for the students and that she is doing meaningful work.

An opportunity for continued research relative to this study may include further deliberation of when speech-language pathologists alternate between Spanish and English, including starting a session in a specific language while evaluating a bilingual student for services and during informal conversations while building rapport. Interviewee 3 also expressed interest in working with me on a master's thesis on how monolingualism in the United States has become the norm while many areas of the world celebrate bilingualism, trilingualism, and multilingualism, conducting business and making connections cross-linguistically.

I am so grateful for the Antonian Honors Program, my incredible team of advisors, and the opportunity to explore the deep connection between language, empathy, and speech-language pathology. I will take this research into the workforce to understand my students, starting with empathy.