

# **Strangers in a Foreign Land: Hispanic Immigrants on Johns Island, South Carolina**

**Amanda E. Grove**

## **Introduction**

The 2000 Census records a 211 percent increase in the numbers of Hispanics in South Carolina from 1990 to 2000. Smith and Scott (2003) state the growth has been much more drastic, especially in the Charleston area: “many say those numbers are low because scores of them went uncounted during Census 2000” (p. 1). The 1990 census recorded 30,551 Hispanics. The 2000 U.S. Census Bureau recorded 98,440. That number is now obsolete. In revised statistics released last September, the population had risen to 109,197, but according to the University of South Carolina’s Latino Immigration Project, the total population of legal and illegal immigrants may actually be as high as 400,000.

Hispanics first came to Johns Island as migrant and seasonal farm workers. Although most workers are migrant and follow their crew leaders north to North Carolina, Virginia or Ohio, in recent years, more Hispanic workers have stayed on the Island. Herrick (2003) writes that “what used to be a seasonal presence of Mexican migratory farmers has blossomed into a year-round population that seems to grow at the same warp speed as the construction on Kiawah, Seabrook, and Johns Island. Year-round jobs have enabled many people of Hispanic origin to make a permanent home in Greater Charleston and a large percentage of them have settled on Johns Island” (p. 1). Although there is also a great presence of Hispanics in areas to the north of downtown, Johns Island’s large and relatively isolated Hispanic population make it an ideal setting for a case study of the barriers

*Chrestomathy: Annual Review of Undergraduate Research, School of Humanities and Social Sciences, College of Charleston*

Volume 4, 2005: pp. 80-107

© 2005 by the College of Charleston, Charleston SC 29424, USA.

All rights to be retained by the author.

encountered by Hispanic immigrants.

### **Methodology**

Qualitative research was used to collect the data. Qualitative research aims to assess not only the behavior of the participants, but the setting or context that influences those participants. A qualitative researcher always takes the participants' values into consideration and evaluates how these values will affect the data. Though a qualitative study begins with a goal, hypotheses continually change in order to accurately describe the situation or case being investigated. The case is based upon details, making descriptions discernable to those who have not been in similar situations (Lincoln and Guba, 1991).

The collection of data was done through observations, interviews and documents from the participants and sites. Church services in Spanish, English as a Second Language (ESL) classes and health clinics were observed. Members of the Hispanic community, clergy and ESL teachers were interviewed for their contact with the community; handouts from classes, bulletins from church services, posters and other information were analyzed.

Lincoln and Guba (1991) explain the characteristics that are necessary for a legitimate and thorough qualitative research study, which I have combined under nine headings to describe the nature of my qualitative research.

1. Naturalist Setting: Johns Island has a history of Hispanic migration influence and has recently shifted to a more permanent settlement for Hispanic immigrants. It is a small, isolated area with definite boundaries, therefore making it ideal for a case study. There are few resources on the island, so the study could be narrow yet still comprehensive. Also, I had worked on the island; I had many contacts and knew the area well.

2. Gathering Instrument: I, the researcher, was the gathering instrument for this study. All of the data were collected by myself through interviews, observations and analysis of documents. Since this was a qualitative study, human contact was crucial. In addition, I have experience in the field, and I have seen the realities of the Hispanic immigrants on Johns Island. I have worked in the camps during farming season, I have interpreted in social work settings and for medical visits,

and I have done follow-up house visits.

3. Interviews: The study required interviewees with certain occupations and positions in the community, selected by me. Since this is a qualitative research study, a convenient sampling was chosen rather than a random sample. I hand-selected the participants whom I thought would be the most qualified to paint the most true picture of how it is for a Hispanic immigrant to arrive on Johns Island without speaking English. To encourage candor and to protect anonymity, I have changed all the names of the participants. The exceptions are the heads of organizations, who agreed to have their first names included. When the interviews were recorded, I explained to each of the participants that the information was to be used only by the researcher. The interviews lasted from forty minutes to an hour and a half. All interviews were done in person, except for two phone interviews with the founder of Iglesia de la Luz y Verdad, because of a family emergency. All the interviews were recorded and transcribed, except for a community interview in which I felt I would receive more candid answers without a recorder. In this situation, I took careful notes and later transcribed them.

4. Observations: The qualitative method of observation was carried out in two ways: through participatory and non-participatory observation. Some sites, such as an ESL class at Fishburne, were observed without my participation. On the other hand, I was a participant observer in most observations, because I am a volunteer ESL teacher and an interpreter in a prenatal clinic. Although I have previous experience in those settings, I tried not to be biased when taking part as a participant observer. During observations I followed a procedural sheet made beforehand, evaluating the site and the service (see Appendix). During ESL classes I made notes; however, in the clinics and church services I recorded notes immediately afterwards. I also analyzed written material found at the sites. For the church services this included bulletin, hymnals and handouts; for clinics, posters and general information; and for ESL classes, workbooks and available written materials.

5. Multiple Realities: A qualitative study aims at uncovering multiple realities of a situation. I entered the study without a hypothesis, and as I was analyzing the data I saw various themes emerge

that are intertwined and related. Therefore, recognizing and identifying multiple realities allowed me to describe the actual situation of Hispanic immigrants on Johns Island.

6. Analysis: Again, I did not enter the field with an existing hypothesis. Themes naturally emerged and repeated themselves across various sources. The analysis began after all data were collected and all interviews were transcribed. I read all of the interviews and documents and noted themes that came out. A week later I repeated the process and then graphed the themes according to how many times they were mentioned. An idea or theme was considered if it appeared in more than three different sources. Many themes naturally clustered together, and from these groupings arose a few major ideas that became the focus of the study.

7. Idiographic: This qualitative study is idiographic, descriptive of a specific area. The recommendations and conclusions are specific to the Limited English Proficiency (LEP) Hispanic immigrants on Johns Island. It is a new community that emerged out of a migratory population; it is a small area with limited resources in rural South Carolina. This is not a study that can simply be applied or generalized to other Hispanic immigrant populations in other areas.

8. Disclaimer: The objective of the study was to interview and observe community members and resources in the area. I studied the newly arrived population, many of whom might be illegal immigrants. However, this is a study of their situation, and legal and political issues about immigration are questions beyond the scope of this study.

9. Validation: In order to make the results valid, the data were collected through Triangulation (observations, interviews and analysis of documents). Rather than simply taking the word of participants or leaders, I observed and analyzed documents found in those places to get a full picture of the reality of the situation in each case. Many times multiple realities emerged, and taking three separate data sets allowed me to assess the true situation.

## **Participants**

### *In-group Community Members*

Jorge\* (the asterisk indicates that his name has been changed to

protect his identity) is a twenty-four-year-old male from Colombia who came to the area to learn English. He selected Charleston because his two cousins already live and work here. He arrived in the United States six months before the interview. Therefore, he was chosen as a person who had moved to the community recently without speaking English (August 3, 2004).

Pedro\* is a twenty-three-year-old male from Mexico who moved to Florida when he was nine years old. He moved to Florida because he had family there. He quickly left school to work. He came to Charleston seven years ago because his brother's father-in-law came first and told him there was work here. He has lived in North Charleston as well as Johns Island and worked in various construction jobs. He was chosen as a person who lived in the area before the recent influx of Hispanics (August 3, 2004).

Anita\* is a thirty-year old female who originally came to the United States to visit her brother, but never returned to Mexico. She met her now-husband at a Spanish church service on Johns Island, and they have a daughter who was born here in Charleston. The extended family lives together in a trailer in a very isolated part of Johns Island, and she almost never leaves home. She was chosen to show a typical family and home on Johns Island (August 11, 2004).

#### *Religious Affiliates*

Carol is the Hispanic missionary at Iglesia San Juan, an Episcopal church on Johns Island. She has experience as a missionary in the Dominican Republic, and began working on the Island two years ago. She is the second missionary that the church has had, and the only paid staff member. Carol coordinates services, including arranging priests to visit every week, and she also cares for the congregation in formal situations, such as organizing coffee hours for the women and teaching ESL, as well as doing informal social work for her parishioners and their friends and families. I interviewed Carol in her office at St. John's Episcopal Church (August 25, 2004).

Clancy has been involved in outreach to Hispanic immigrants, especially to migrant farm workers, since his youth. In his adult years, as a member of James Island Baptist Church, he decided to start a church service in Spanish in order to further his mission. Clancy

founded Iglesia de la Luz y Verdad. Although Clancy is not a pastor, he still drives outreach for the church into the migrant camps and runs a food and clothing pantry out of the room where the church worships Sunday mornings. I spoke to Clancy twice on the phone; due to extenuating family circumstances, I was unable to interview him in person (September 12 and September 14, 2004).

Hector is from Honduras, and was hired to be the minister of Iglesia de la Luz y Verdad, a branch of James Island Baptist Church. Although he was not trained by the Baptist Church, his religious instruction allows him to be a Baptist minister, and he also tries to meet other needs, such as providing transportation for his parishioners. He expressed great excitement at the chance to work with the Hispanic population in the area. I spoke briefly with Hector after the worship service I attended (September 12, 2004).

Sister Joan is from New York, where she worked for an outreach center and coordinated ESL services. After coming to Our Lady of Mercy in 1997, Sister Joan recognized a need for English language classes for Hispanic immigrants. She proposed the idea to the outreach program, sent out a survey to assess the need, and in 1998 she became the director of the ESL program at Our Lady of Mercy. The program expands every year. I spoke to Sister Joan in the ESL classroom at Our Lady of Mercy (August 23, 2004).

#### *Out-group community member*

Susan\*, a bilingual counselor, works for a government-funded center in downtown Charleston that provides drug and alcohol treatment. She is new to the area, but her previous position was working with Hispanics with drug and alcohol abuse. Although she has recently started working in Charleston, she was chosen as someone with experience working with Hispanics and attempting to start an outreach service in the Charleston area (September 10, 2004).

### **Observations**

#### *Churches*

La Iglesia San Juan: This Episcopal mission uses the facilities of St. John's Episcopal Church on Johns Island, although they are a

separate entity. They do not have their own building; they use the sanctuary of the church to worship every Sunday at 6 pm. The only paid position in the church is the missionary, a non-Hispanic woman who speaks Spanish and uses an office at St. John's Episcopal Church. They do not have a regular priest, but they receive speakers from various churches that volunteer. Normally a volunteer Cuban parishioner interprets services for the congregation in Spanish. All band participants are Hispanic as well as the altar boy (August 1, 2004).

*Iglesia Católica Holy Spirit*: This Catholic church is part of Holy Spirit Catholic Church. The service in Spanish is held every second and fourth Saturday of the month at 7 pm. Although the church has a new building, the service was held in the old building in a large meeting room. The priest, the band and all other participants in the service were Hispanic, so there was no English spoken throughout the service (August 28, 2004).

*Iglesia de la Luz y Verdad*: This church is part of James Island Baptist Church. Although it is not on Johns Island, it is two miles from the island, and most of its parishioners are Johns Island residents. Services are held Sunday mornings at 10 am in a concrete building next to St. James Island Baptist Church, on the same property. A non-Hispanic member of James Island Baptist Church started the church, and there is now a permanent Hispanic minister who conducts the service.. Three Hispanic band members are the only other participants in the service (September 12, 2004).

### *ESL*

*Fishburne*: Private adult education in Hanahan, near North Charleston, approximately fifteen miles from downtown. It offers beginner to advanced ESL classes as well as GED classes. All of the instructors are professionally trained teachers. Visitors must sign in at the front office, and the school is equipped with a teachers' workroom. ESL classes run throughout the academic year and cost \$100 per semester for morning and \$75 per semester for night classes. I observed an entry-level ESL class for an hour. I then went to the office where a teacher and administrative assistant answered my questions (August 15, 2004).

*Our Lady of Mercy Outreach (OLM)*: An outreach center on

Johns Island that offers various services to the communities of James, Johns and Wadmalaw Islands. Although it is a Catholic outreach center, the classes are only to learn English, with no evangelical or religious emphasis. Classes are Tuesday and Thursday nights from 6 until 8 pm, as well as Tuesdays and Wednesday afternoons. They also offer GED classes and individual tutoring. Classes follow the public school calendar. Sister Joan started and runs the program, which is made up of an all-volunteer staff from the community, including a babysitter who provides free childcare. An extension behind the outreach center holds two classrooms of round tables for groups to sit. The meeting hall in the main building offers two large tables for beginner groups. Classes are two hours with a break when a free snack is provided (Participant observation, spring 2004).

#### *Health Clinics*

**Our Lady of Mercy Wellness House:** The Wellness House is a trailer on the other side of the parking lot from the outreach center. The door opens to a waiting room facing the reception area. Three rooms are used for examinations, two for dental and one for prenatal patients. The Wellness House provides free dental and prenatal care to those uninsured who cannot afford to go elsewhere that live on James, Johns and Wadmalaw Islands. On Mondays a nurse midwife comes, and Tuesday mornings are split biweekly between a nurse midwife and a retired OB-GYN. When available a volunteer interprets for prenatal patients. I observed OB-GYN patients, mostly all of whom are Hispanic. A manager and a bilingual Hispanic administrative assistant run the Wellness House (Participant observation summer 2004).

**Sea Island Medical Center:** A general clinic on Johns Island that does not require insurance, but charges patients according to a sliding scale. The patient must produce a U.S. or non-U.S. identification and two pay stubs. I observed only the waiting room, which is usually full of Hispanic patients. There is a bilingual Hispanic secretary who also works as an interpreter (August 2, 2004).

### **Findings and Discussion**

People who grow up in the United States often do not sit back to



think about the networks and the limits of our world. We speak the language; we grew up in American society. Someone who moves to the United States of America lives within limits on their ability to function in society. Lack of knowledge of English, lack of knowledge of the system, few community and low economic levels are just a few of the boundaries that can diminish the size of an immigrant's world. Native-born Americans and Hispanic immigrants move in different circles.

### *Lack of English*

The term Limited English Proficiency (LEP) is used to describe a minority person in the United States whose English is not at the level of native speakers, thereby hindering his or her ability to participate fully in all sectors of society. Hispanic immigrants on Johns Island tend to be LEP speakers and thus to depend on others.

Jorge's brother has been in the United States longer than any other family member, and has had his legal residency since 1983 or 1984, Jorge recounted. Jorge came to the United States to live with his brother when he was nine years old. He lasted two months in public school in Florida because, "I didn't like it. I didn't understand any English at that time." [All translations are my own.] No ESL classes were available. So he began to clean apartments with his cousin. The lack of English, Jorge explained, made it "hard even to go to the store or buy shoes. I did not know my size." So he learned English from his brother's children, who only speak English. Without English, "people became angry and became defiant...At the drive-through they tell me to come to the next window."

Pedro said, "When I arrived...I lived with two American girls to practice English. But, it was very hard because I did not know anything. It was very hard to have conversations with them. I felt bad because they probably thought I was a bad person, shy or mean because I could not communicate with them...The most difficult things were, for example, I was scared to ask for food in a restaurant because I did not want people to see that I could not do things...at first it was hard because I could not ask for exactly what I wanted."

Pedro borrowed a friend's bike and rode to the Department of Motor Vehicles to get a South Carolina Driver's license. He had all of

his papers and waited in line, but when he arrived at the front, he could not understand the clerk: “I said excuse me, I do not understand, and it got to a point where she became disgruntled and did not understand my problem.” He lost those hours, which he could have used to searching for a job, and left with nothing. Later a Mexican friend of his told him about a man that worked there who spoke Spanish, so when Pedro and his friend went the next time, they specifically waited for that man to become available: “We went to him and he helped us find solutions to the problem. He explained to us the documents that we needed, and went to take the exam that was available in both Spanish and English. However, the Spanish translation was awful and because of the translation I did not pass the first time I took the exam.”

Valdés (2000) uses census data to demonstrate that there are a large number of “linguistically isolated households in the United States — those in which no person age 14 years or over speaks only English and no person age 14 years or over who speaks a language other than English speaks English well...these persons, then have personal relationships with individuals with whom they must communicate primarily in Spanish” (p. 119). Valdés adds that “those who do not [learn English] can spend years in the community without learning much English. They depend on other family members of the family to interpret or translate for them” (p. 125). Each of the community members interviewed mentioned having to rely on others at all times when they first arrived, and to this day they still need to rely on others at times.

Complete reliance on another individual for communication seriously reduces LEP speakers’ confidence. If someone speaks for them, they lose their voice. They do not receive information firsthand, and they do not have the same importance or prestige in society that they would if they were able to speak English. Limited and unable to function without others, they may begin to doubt themselves in other parts of their lives, and believe that they are not important. In many situations when an interpreter is present, such as a doctor’s office, the doctor speaks to the interpreter and says, “Tell her...” Unintentionally the doctor is marginalizing the patient, speaking as if she were not in the room.

*Obstacles to Learning English*

A majority of the Hispanic and non-Hispanic interviewees described the lack of English as a major obstacle for LEP Hispanic immigrants. A lack of English limits access to services as well as decreasing self-esteem. Mar-Molinero (1997) explains that “these speakers are well aware of their communities’ low prestige and [the] marginalization with which their mother tongue is inevitably associated” (p. 69). Thus there is strong motivation to learn English, but actually doing so can be a very difficult task.

Anita moved from a large city in Mexico to Johns Island. The trailer her family shares is surrounded by woods, with the nearest store six miles away. Without public transportation and fearing deportation, she is afraid to leave the trailer. Now that they have a daughter who was born in the United States, her husband does not want to take her anywhere, fearing that she will be arrested. So she spends her days with her daughter, without a car, physically and emotionally in isolation. The language of the house is Spanish, and no one is proficient enough to be able to practice English with Anita. Although she would love to speak better English, the physical and linguistic isolation of her home do not allow for that.

Jorge considers himself lucky: his niece and nephew spoke only English, so by living with them he learned to speak the language. He noted that his is a rare case. Most Hispanic immigrants who come to Johns Island do not interact with English speakers. They work with other Hispanics and live with other Hispanics, so contact with English is minimal. In order to learn English, someone either has to make an English-speaking friend with the patience to teach him or her, or he or she must attend ESL classes.

Going to an ESL class, however, requires transportation. Many Hispanic immigrants who move to Johns Island do not have their own vehicles, and public transportation is minimal in this rural area. Anita explained, “After I arrived here the first problem I encountered was that if someone does not give you a ride, you’re not going anywhere. If the person you live with does not like what you like, well, that’s hard because she needs to go to one place and you to another...so, transportation is one of the hardest things.” There are free local ESL classes with free child care offered during the day, but Anita cannot

get to them.

Work also poses substantial obstacles. Hispanic immigrants come to Johns Island in order to work — because they hear about construction or landscaping jobs that pay better than those in Florida, for example. Jorge heard from his brother's father-in-law seven years ago that there was the possibility of work in the Charleston area. Long hours and overtime are (happily) accepted, and such work schedules are often not conducive to learning a foreign language. Work provides the number one reason adult students miss ESL classes. Hard workers are not going to take time off from the job they need to provide for their family in order to attend classes. Many “night classes” start at 5:30 or 6 pm, which are still within work hours. One of the suggestions from the ESL students at OLM was to start class at 6:30 rather than 6 pm because of work schedules. But even later hours cannot assure attendance. Anita's husband works long hours doing physical labor for a landscaping company, and by the time he comes home from work he is exhausted or wants to spend time with his wife and new baby. Family is culturally a top priority for Hispanics; thus a family man has a hard time leaving the house at night, after a full day at work, to attend ESL classes.

Nor does a student's physical presence in an ESL class ensure rapid acquisition or any acquisition of English. Motivation, personality, input, ability, aptitude and consistency are all important factors in the success of a Hispanic immigrant to learn English. One must have input or access to the language in order to acquire English, and this must occur on a consistent basis. Teachers of ESL must also provide consistency in lessons and their attendance to classes. In addition, students will learn at different rates because of their motivation, personality, ability and aptitude.

Almost all ESL classes on Johns Island are free and taught by volunteers. These volunteers do not often have experience or speak Spanish. Since the job is unpaid, there is no mandatory attendance or evaluation of the teachers. In addition, the ESL organization's goal is to encourage students' attendance. It is hard to give homework and hold students accountable when the organization does not want to deter attendance. This creates a lack of responsibility in the students for their learning. With less invested in the classes, there is less urgency.

Some LEP Hispanic immigrants are illiterate in their own language. For an adult who is unable to read or write well or at all, it is courageous just to attend a class in a foreign language. In most ESL classes the majority of materials are written, and teachers clarify by writing on chalkboards or whiteboards. Thus it may be intimidating for the illiterate adult to attend class. Many students will not admit their illiteracy, and so the teacher, generally a volunteer without training or experience, must notice. Even if a teacher does notice and is sensitive to the literacy issue, even if that teacher provides excellent instruction and practice in the classroom, the illiterate adult has no way of completing homework or writing down vocabulary to study at home. Thus it is a greater struggle to retain information. Finally, the classroom is a new and potentially uncomfortable setting to someone who has not been formally educated since kindergarten; school buildings, structured environments and sitting at a desk are foreign and sometimes foreboding to adults. And making the students comfortable in class can even backfire. An ESL teacher at Fishburne School described a class that had become a kind of social club: the students, mainly women, stayed in the same classroom regardless of linguistic level because they felt comfortable being with each other.

#### *Lack of Cultural Knowledge*

An earlier vignette about Jorge described his difficulty in going to the store to buy shoes. His problem was not only a lack of English, but also that he did not know his American shoe size. There are many things that people who grow up in the United States take for granted. For example, I know my shoe size. I know to call the doctor right away and make an appointment when I'm sick. I know where not to park during the day unless I put money in the meter, and I know that if I get a traffic ticket I go to court to pay it. I know to call the school to find out where and what time the school bus will arrive. I know that children receive report cards four times a year and that I need to sign a permission slip and send money for children's field trips. I know that South Carolina has a tax-free weekend before school starts. I know buying generic brands, even of tissues, is much cheaper than name brands. A Hispanic immigrant, newly arrived on Johns Island, does not know any of this. American culture can be quite different

from that of Mexico. For example, as Jorge noted, the shoes sizes are different. In Mexico ones goes to the doctor only when one is very ill. When sick people need medicine, they go to the pharmacist and tell them their symptoms, then buy the medicine the pharmacist recommends. In many parts of Mexico, an herbal healer is consulted. Parking meters are not standard in Mexico. Children in Mexico ride public transportation or walk to school; school buses do not exist. In Mexico, field trips are something you do with your family on the weekends, not during school hours. On Sundays in Mexico all museums are free to the public.

Sister Joan, as an ESL teacher, recognizes that immigrants need to learn much more than English: “I would really like for people who are really planning to have the U.S. as their home, to have the exposure of our country. Even exposure of Charleston: going downtown, going to the theater, going to art museums, grocery stores with someone who could actually walk them through it. These would probably be mostly beginning people, giving them a sense of their own environment and make them feel really comfortable in it...If we could get someone who is a doctor or nurse who speaks Spanish that are bilingual to help people to feel at ease when they go to a doctor or a dentist in this area. We don’t have many interpreters, we certainly don’t have one for everyone that walks into an emergency room, and that would be good...”

Anita went to the hospital last year for an x-ray and waited hours for the results. In Mexico the doctors hand the patient the x-ray to carry to the doctor. Anita was not aware that in the United States the hospital sends the results directly to the doctor; nor did she understand the nurse’s English that the hospital would send the results on its own. Torres (2000) points out: “In institutional settings, the communication barrier impedes full participation in health care, social services, law enforcement, religion and school. In health care, health care institutions struggle to meet the needs of patients who cannot describe symptoms or understand instructions from professional staff who lack the necessary language skills to communicate with their patients” (p. 5).

Anita recognized that often LEP Hispanic immigrants are simply unaware of the easier way to do things: “One is used to doing certain

things they enjoy, like go to the theater or play a sport, and well, here one cannot do that because they don't know the system. I mean to say one does not know how to buy tickets or make reservations. Many times a person wastes time going to the place when they could have called, but the person did not know. One has to sometimes miss a whole day's work to do some things that they could have done by phone. As time passes I realize that there are things that you can do to save time, like call the clinic, but if someone does not know that..." An extra phone call for natives of the United States is all it takes to make an appointment. If new Hispanic immigrants to Johns Island do not know this fact, or do not know the number, or where the clinic is, or how much it costs, or if their legal status is a factor or they do not have a phone, they must physically go to the clinic. If they go without an appointment they may have to wait all day and miss work, which will cost them a day's salary or even put their job in jeopardy.

Without this kind of cultural knowledge, just going to the grocery store, clinic, movies or bank can cause fear. One has to be very brave to enter an unknown world, especially if that person does not speak the language of the place. For example, Anita described why she does not have a bank account: "The bank BB&T has a cassette recorded in Spanish that explains how to open an account and everything. They pay my husband there, so he can open an account. You can pay for everything with this card. But my husband hasn't wanted to open an account...he says that he prefers to buy what he can buy and what he cannot afford, to wait until he can pay for it. I think that he's missing some information. Also, sometimes we are definitely afraid, because if we open an account, well, we're a little scared and without information — there is nowhere to go to ask, a person that can explain to us the benefits and advantages. We have nowhere to go. I think there should be more places to go ask because one has these fears. What happens with us, the Mexicans...there is a lot of fear, because they say certain things...there is fear. Like my husband: I tell him, let's go to another state, or I want to go out, but he tells me, 'And what if they arrest me? What happens if they deport me and you have to stay here and our daughter was born here?' So there is fear for certain things."

Although Anita sees the advantages of having a bank card, it is

not an option for her family. She has a basic understanding from the cassette, but this does not provide her or her family with enough comfort to change the way they handle money. Fear creates a vicious cycle of vulnerability. Because of their discomfort with banks, Anita's family and many other Hispanics use cash in their daily lives. Thieves are well aware of this, and so Hispanics are more vulnerable to being robbed, and to being easy victims of robbery. They usually have large amounts of cash, especially on a payday, and when robbed they often will not report it to the police for fear of being deported. Smith and Scott (2003) report, "In North Charleston last year, Hispanics accounted for 35 percent of the city's 368 robbery victims. So far this year, 23 percent of the city's 79 robbery victims have been Hispanics, according to police records" (p. 1). Carol, the Hispanic missionary at Iglesia San Juan, said, "One of the biggest things that I can see, at least, is that people are living in fear."

#### *Lack of Access to Services*

Linguistic and cultural barriers create a gap between the Hispanic immigrants of Johns Island and the larger society in which they live. That gap greatly affects the amount and quality of services that Hispanic immigrants receive, as I saw clearly in my experience at the Wellness House clinic.

At the clinic every new patient must be interviewed in order to collect the patient's history. I called a patient's name and two women came. The petite lady barely came up to my shoulders and never made eye contact. Her friend informed me in Spanish that the woman spoke what she called a dialect of Mexico, or an indigenous language. The three of us sat down at a table and attempted to answer medical questions. Many of the questions the friend immediately answered. Only after coaxing could I get her to translate some of the questions into the indigenous language so that the patient herself could answer. She always gave one-word answers. When her name was called to go back to the room, the male doctor asked her to sit up on the table. Because the doctor was male, legal and insurance regulations required that a female nurse be present at all times. So in a ten by fifteen foot examining room in the trailer of a free clinic crowded a doctor, a nurse, two interpreters and the patient. The woman was so nervous and



embarrassed that she could not relax, making the exam almost painful. It was also the first gynecological exam in her life.

I encountered a similar gap in service for Hispanic patients at a second clinic on Johns Island. This clinic has a number of Hispanic immigrant patients, a population that many non-profit and government agencies would like to target, especially for grant money. When there is an office that has a great number of Hispanics, researchers, outreach workers and public officials rush to ask them questions. I observed patients in the waiting room barraged by researchers asking questions about their prescription drug usage. I have also observed, as an interpreter, multiple organizations wanting to “talk to your Hispanics.” Such invasive questioning is alienating, and could easily make the patients uncomfortable about coming to the facility. And if the researchers are basing their findings on the responses of the Hispanic patients in the clinic, their findings are distorted. This limited group is composed of those that already know enough about services to come to the clinic, and it does not necessarily include the majority of the population, those who have yet to take advantage of services and are thus most in need of help.

In the first gynecological clinic mentioned above, an interpreter was present. At the second clinic, the bilingual secretary serves also as interpreter. Interpreters are not easy to find, and many times they are volunteers. If interpretation is necessary, it means no current employee speaks Spanish, and therefore the person in charge of the volunteer interpreter has no way of evaluating the Spanish proficiency of the volunteer. If volunteers do not have high proficiency in the language, their interpretations will result only in confusion and inadequate service.

Even if a good interpreter is present during a doctor’s visit, the visit typically ends with a prescription or a referral, and the patient cannot bring the interpreter to the pharmacy or the hospital. Clinics very rarely have medicine on site; nor do they tell the patient how much a medicine will cost. The patient must figure out how to get to the pharmacy, how to ask for a prescription, and then how to cover the cost. The patient will not know to ask for a generic medicine, so naturally the name brand and an exorbitant cost will be waiting for them when they go to pick up the medicine. Warnings and instructions

for taking medicine are rarely translated.

### *Unity*

Hispanics might respond to these gaps in services by organizing themselves, by coming together and pooling their resources to help each other. Assessments of the unity of Hispanics of Johns Island differed, with non-Hispanics (Sister Joan, Carol, Clancy and Susan) perceiving more unity, while Hispanics (Jorge, Anita and Pedro) perceived less.

In-group participants gave the opinion that there was no unity in the community, usually due to job competition. Because many Hispanics are in the area and more arrive by the day, there is definite competition for jobs. One must be willing to work long, hard hours; if not, there is always someone else who will take the job. Jorge describes the situation as “pure competition.” Torres (2000) explains:

...Latinos in the South and Southeast, like other ethnic minorities, are geographically clustered. They relocate to where the jobs are — be it a carpet mill in Dalton, Georgia, or a poultry plant in Newberry, South Carolina. The results are uneven geographic distributions clustered around certain types of agro-industrial production or other employment sectors that appear to rely mostly on Latino workers” (p. 4).

This competition does not create a supportive community that helps each other. Susan, the local bilingual counselor for a government agency that offers help with drug and alcohol abuse, noted that competition creates an obstacle to her Hispanic patients trying to receive services: “It’s hard to get time off, it’s hard to coordinate schedules, especially if you’re holding a job that 40,000 other people are waiting in line for, and if you mess up, something happens, and a lot of our stuff is offered during the day time, so that is definitely, yes, [a problem].”

The Hispanic community is also divided by differences and even discrimination between people from different regions, from different countries, and of different work status. Anita recognized that this situation impedes unity: “United? It’s not united. It is not united because, well, to start with, I see that here I am meeting a lot of

Mexicans from other states of Mexico. In Mexico I did not meet many people from other states: just my state and some of the surrounding states. But when I got here, I met people from Chiapas and all over...so it is a different society. It is very diversified, no? Also...people stab each other in the back in order to get a better paying job. To start with they say things about you to make you sound bad... to the person that is progressing, we tell them no, don't progress. There are people that say no, don't pay him well...there are well known people from other countries, like Nicaragua, Ecuador and El Salvador that have papers and are in better jobs and have a good place in the company. To those with good jobs one says I need a job, and they say no, no, there are no jobs here. But I need a job, why don't you help me? So there is a diversification — we that are Hispanics should help each other, but we don't, the contrary happens.”

The 2000 Census states that Hispanics are a heterogeneous group, which includes people from various countries of origin. The in-group participants mentioned in interviews that discrimination is based on how long people have been in the United States, how much English they speak and what kind of job they have. Duigan (1998) confirms these ideas: “‘Hispanic’ comprises people of diverse national backgrounds...there are striking variations even within the same family, say between a person who grew up in the United States and habitually speaks English and a relative, a newcomer, who speaks little or no English” (p. 318). Because permanent Hispanic populations on Johns Island as well as in the South are recent phenomena, there is little research exploring the creation of communities in South Carolina. However, these interviews tended to confirm Madrid's (2002) claim that: “ultimately, however, the imagined Hispanic community is not one we all fit into, for a variety of reasons” (p. 3).

People in contact with Hispanic immigrants on Johns Island who are not Hispanics themselves had different, sometimes idyllic views about Hispanic unity.. For instance, Sister Joan said, “...they really help each other. Like, I see a student say to another student there's an opening where I am, I know that you're looking for a job, or this daycare is really good, I trust them you can send your little ones there. It's like a network. I just am so happy working with the Hispanic community because they're so loving.” Sister Joan explains what she has seen

inside of a safe ESL environment. Since her Hispanic students come to classes for the common purpose of learning English, she has seen them, from an out-group perspective, connect and bond.

Carol, the missionary, agreed with Sister Joan, but only to a certain extent. “[Is there a community?] Yes. Sometimes it takes a while to get there. Like, Pablo\* started coming to church right after he arrived, which is just after a year, and he slowly integrated himself into the family that is San Juan. I think it’s because we sort of do feel like a family, we always talk about the fact that we are a family. There are so many here without families and people understand that they can lean on our shoulder and come and talk to us about problems. The women sort of get it quicker. Even if they don’t see each other every week outside of church, they tend to rely on each other more, they’ll call their fellow parishioners and say, can you come help me with this? But the guys, I just think it’s a male thing...I think it also comes from the type of lives that they have to lead, where it’s hard to trust people because they have had to trust people and been tricked and all that kind of stuff...I think they can come together. I’ve heard some of the Latinos say that people from Monterrey all hang out together and people from Chiapas all hang out together and people from Vera Cruz all hang out together. So, I guess it makes sense, you know you hang around people who talk exactly like you, and you know, if you say something you know, like when we were on X street, people understand where you come from. So it makes sense that people sort of divide...”

Here Carol offers both what she has seen within the church as well as her experience as a social worker in the community. Within her church community she speaks of coming together. When talking about Johns Island in general, she describes segregation based on where someone was from, which she as an out-group observer can understand.

### *Church Services*

The majority of Hispanics who come to Johns Island usually share one characteristic in common: Catholicism. This is not to say that all were baptized and confirmed and went to church on a regular basis in Mexico; however, being Catholic is part of the culture. Fishman (1989) declares it is natural for people to worship in their native language. Although one may learn English, praying and singing and fellowship

do not have the same meaning in a foreign language; they are too personal. On Johns Island church services can be a safe meeting place and common ground for Hispanics. Johns Island has at least four church services in Spanish; the denominations include Episcopalian, Catholic and Baptist. Each church and each congregation are very different.

The Episcopal Church, Iglesia San Juan, has a service in Spanish every Sunday at 6 pm. I arrived a few minutes late; however, when I opened the door a non-Hispanic woman handed me a bulletin and service book, both in Spanish. I slid into a back pew, though the service was not very crowded. Scattered throughout the pews were three non-Hispanics and fourteen Hispanics. A Hispanic altar boy led a non-Hispanic missionary and a non-Hispanic priest to the front of the church. The altar boy did the first Bible reading; a Hispanic woman read the second scripture. A picture of the Virgen de Guadalupe stood in a gold frame in front of the lectern. It was a special treat this Sunday that the bilingual Bishop was visiting and giving the homily. He spoke very fluent Spanish and was very animated as he discussed his time as a missionary in the Dominican Republic. He explained that he had his priorities straight in the Dominican Republic, but that when he moved to South Carolina and rose in the ranks to bishop, the position and money went to his head. Only when he sold all of the expensive things he had bought and moved back to the Dominican Republic did he find peace.

Although the Bishop tried to connect with the parishioners through his experience in the Dominican Republic, his message spoke of the riches and how he became caught up in them, which Hispanic immigrants on Johns Island did not identify with because of their working class background. Although he spoke very fluent Spanish, there was a clear distinction between the Bishop and the average parishioner.

My visit to Iglesia Católica Holy Spirit, a Catholic Church on Johns Island that has services in Spanish the second and fourth Saturdays of the month, was a very different experience. On a daily basis I pass by the Catholic Church and its grand new stone building, so I was excited to visit. However, the directions I received were not to the large building but to the old building they inhabited before. The parking lot

did not suffice for all of the cars. I entered what looked like a meeting hall. The cinder block walls outlined a fairly large room with a microphone and portable speaker set up in front, and with a band to the left. Folding chairs were set up in rows, and I pulled one off of the wall because the service was filled to the brim. Families were sitting all over, with children running around and constant chatter. I was the only non-Hispanic. The hall was filled with leather belts and boots and jeans and pure Spanish. People sang loudly and enthusiastically when songs came on, following in their hymnals in Spanish. The homily was about humility and how we are all the same, no matter who we are, where we live, or where we work — a message that spoke directly to the lives of the Hispanics on Johns Island. We should all have humility, and no one should think that they are better or worse than anyone else. We all came from dust and we will all return to dust.

Iglesia de la Luz y Verdad, the Baptist church on James Island, is two miles away from Johns Island, and most of its parishioners are from Johns Island. It is a part of James Island Baptist Church, which is more evangelical than the Episcopalian and Catholic Churches. The minister is a Hispanic immigrant married to a non-Hispanic American, and the service was attended by both Hispanic and non-Hispanic individuals.

As I pulled into the church parking lot and turned off my car, I stared up at the large brick structure in front of me. I turned to the right, away from the towering church, and walked a few yards to a small concrete structure, similar to one found in a strip mall, and followed the other Spanish-speakers into a room of worship. The walls were white cinderblock with folding chairs set up in the middle facing a pulpit, band and projection screen. The first thing that struck me was the bongo set that the minister would later play with a huge smile during the hymns. Two guitarists and a bassist were warming up and discussing dropping a song because they had not had a chance to practice it that week. Only Spanish was heard.

People slowly trickled in, many late. Two families were present, a few single men, and two non-Hispanic women other than myself, one of whom spoke Spanish fluently. There were approximately seven males by themselves, two couples and a non-Hispanic bilingual man who sat in the midst of the single men. The entire service was

conducted by the Hispanic pastor with a great amount of enthusiasm. He started the service talking with people individually, making jokes and smiling the entire time. During the first prayer a man asked in Spanish that the Lord be with the United States in remembrance of September 11. The pastor gave a lengthy sermon covering various themes about how people should lead their lives. Before and after the band played, and the songs were placed on an overhead; people joined in to the tune of two guitars, a bass and the bongos. Throughout the service two or three people trickled in, carrying food for a lunch after the service.

Before we ate I met with the man who started Iglesia de la Luz y Verdad. He wanted to tell me about the mission work they do and their services to the community, the highlight being a closet with food, clothes and medical supplies. The closet is directly off the room where the parishioners worship. Everyone carried tables and folding chairs outside and listened to Latin Christian music while enjoying food they had brought. They had to eat outside because they were not to get food on the carpet. As we shared food, the large English church service let out and some parishioners walked over to where we had worshipped to hold their Sunday School.

The Catholic Church felt most like a real church service. I felt like I had walked in from Mexico, with people worshipping God in their own language with all of their own materials and music. The homily was pertinent to their lives, and afterward there was a board meeting. More was expected of parishioners at the Catholic Church, thus increasing their responsibility as parishioners. The other services felt more like social work being performed for the Hispanic community, or a kind of mission.

The Catholic and then the Baptist churches were the best attended. Each group worshipped in a separate space, apart from their sponsoring congregations; these services seemed more intimate because they took place in smaller spaces. The Episcopal Church service is held in the sanctuary of Johns Island Episcopal Church, which is an enormous, open space. The Catholic and Baptist services each had a constant, Hispanic pastor/priest. There seemed to be more response from the parishioners in these two church services than in the Episcopal church, with its visiting non-Hispanic priest. All three had all Hispanic bands;

however the Episcopal service had more participation from non-Hispanic individuals. A non-Hispanic woman greeted me at the door, and announcements were done by the non-Hispanic missionary. I felt more of a sense of ownership from the participants in the Catholic and Baptist services. The level of Anglo involvement seemed in inverse proportion to the number of parishioners. The more Hispanic parishioners with responsibilities in the services, the more parishioners in general were present.

### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

Torres (2000) writes, “The first challenge for the South is to acknowledge that Latinos are here to stay and that the Latino problem is no longer a borderlands problem...the South’s second challenge is to accept the permanency and understand the potential impact the population shifts have on host communities” (p. 6). Torres’ evaluation of how Southern societies are reacting and need to react to a new influx of Hispanics, parallels Ruiz’s idea of a “problem orientation” toward Spanish as a minority language, as explained by Hornberger (1994): “a language as a problem orientation...would tend to see local languages as problems standing in the way of the incorporation of cultural and linguistic minority groups in society, and to link language issues with the social problems characteristic of such groups — poverty, handicap, low educational achievement, and little or no social mobility”(p. 83). Spanish is now viewed as a problem because it is such a new phenomenon. Outside of parts of Florida, Spanish has historically not been spoken in the Southeast. Combining Torres’ and Hornberger’s ideas, we can say that the first step for Johns Island is to accept the presence of Spanish and Hispanics on Johns Island and stop viewing this presence as a problem.

A huge part of this is awareness and communication. Captain Dana Valentine of the Charleston County Sheriff’s Office, as quoted in Reeves (2004), recognizes that “[t]he Hispanic community is a growing segment of society, not just here but across the nation. We need to reach out to members of the Hispanic community to let them know we are here to help them... because of the language barrier, sometimes they don’t understand there is help if they’re victimized” (p. 1). Emergency and other services are starting to realize that they



have a new population under their protection on Johns Island that requires different attention. Non-Hispanics must work to make Johns Island an accessible place for Hispanics, to close the gap in basic services. Interpretation services offered by the sponsoring organization are important in offering services to LEP Hispanic immigrants, so that a neutral third party may facilitate the message; as things stand now, parents often have to rely on their young bilingual children. Young children should not need to interpret for doctor and lawyer visits; no child should have to worry about such matters or about having the vocabulary necessary to discuss them.

The responsibility lies on the Hispanic immigrants as well. Simply attending ESL classes or church services or school meetings is not enough: Hispanic immigrants must get involved on Johns Island. It is their new home, and in order to make it feel like a home and to become participatory members in the community, a sense of responsibility is necessary. For instance, ESL students must be given responsibility and feel that they are actively taking part in education. In the church services where participation was high Hispanic parishioners actively ran and played a large part in the services.

ESL classes play a crucial role in bringing Hispanics and non-Hispanics together, since these classes acclimate people not only to the language, but to culture as well. Lipski (2000) acknowledges, "The best tool a teacher of Central American students can bring to the classroom is knowledge of the culture, language and recent sociopolitical history of the countries involved...reaching out to students by acknowledging their unique background" (pp. 210-211). The ESL teachers on Johns Island become cultural ambassadors, answering questions not just about the language but also about the culture. While volunteering as an ESL teacher, one of my students asked me if all bosses are rude in the United States. We broke down the situation to daily interchanges when she thought her bosses called her a man. He was saying "ma'am." I taught her not only a new word, but also a cultural context of respect.

In order to assure full access to and participation in ESL classes, we must tear down the barriers to succeed in learning English. This research suggests that organizations offering ESL classes need to provide:

- transportation for students;
- class times that accommodate work schedules, perhaps through communication with individual employers;
- training in Spanish for volunteer teachers;
- teaching methods appropriate to illiterate students;
- consistent and challenging instruction, which demands that students (and teachers) aim at specific goals, with expectations of regular attendance and regular homework assignments.

Most importantly, ESL instruction cannot be limited to linguistic instruction. It is necessary to base lesson plans on real life situations, to provide them with the practical and cultural knowledge that will have an immediate impact on their everyday lives. For example, health and business professionals from Johns Island could visit classes and explain their services. Then students would be able to put a faces on the services. Classes could also taking field trips to various cultural settings — to the grocery store, to downtown or to the movies. Relevant vocabulary could first be studied in class, and then used by students in the field. The goal is to overcome the linguistic and cultural isolation of Hispanic immigrants, to create a community that is ready to welcome them as members.

### **Appendix: Observation Guide**

On the way:

- Where have I seen signs/advertisements for this place? If I am following a map, is it accurate? Are streets clearly marked? If I call for directions, can someone tell me in Spanish? Do they provide transportation? Is there a fee/limit?
- Signs on the road in front? How easy is it to park, get into the building? Signs/arrows? Anything in Spanish?
- Does a secretary or someone speak Spanish or is willing to help? Do I feel welcome as a first time visitor, or do I think I would if I'm new to the country? Can I find my way to the proper room?

Once inside:

- Does a secretary or someone speak Spanish?
- Are all the posters/decorations in English with American culture? Fliers/brochures, anything in Spanish?
- Does the secretary speak Spanish? Are forms in Spanish? Are other Hispanics there, how are people treated?
- Does everyone appear to be a professional, or are there volunteers? Do the staff themselves speak Spanish? If there is an interpreter, does he or she appear professional?
- How does the environment feel: clean, sterile, comfortable, shabby, etc?

Services:

- Any extras? A lot of follow-up, personal contact, eye contact, etc?

### Works Cited

- Duignan, P. J. and Gann, L. H. *The Spanish Speakers in the United States: A History* (University Press of America, 1998).
- Fishman, J. A. *Language and Ethnicity in Minority Sociolinguistic Perspective* (Multilingual Matters, 1989).
- Herrick, H. "Burritos, Tacos, and Chalupas, Oh My!," (Charleston SC) *Post and Courier*, 9 January 2003, [http://www.charleston.net/stories/010903/pre\\_09mex.shtml](http://www.charleston.net/stories/010903/pre_09mex.shtml).
- Hornberger, N. H. "Literacy and Language Planning," *Language and Education* 8 (1994), pp. 75-86.
- Ary, D., Jacobs, L. C. and Razavieh, A. *Introduction to Research in Education* (Wadsworth, Thomson Learning, 1996).
- Lincoln, Y. S. and Guba, E. G. *Naturalistic Inquiry* (Sage Publications, 1991).
- Lipski, J. M. "The Linguistic Situation of Central Americans," in S. L. Mc Kay and S. C. Wong (eds.), *New Immigrants in the United States* (Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 189-215.
- Madrid, A. "Imagining Ourselves: The Role of Arts and Culture

for Latinos.” *El Aviso* 4:1 (2002), pp. 6-7.

Mar-Molinero, C. *The Spanish Speaking World: A Practical Introduction to Sociolinguistic Issues* (Routledge, 1997).

Parker, J. “Local Agents Learn to Communicate with Latinos,” *Post and Courier*, 10 May 2003, [http://www.charleston.net/stories/051003/loc\\_10hispanics.shtml](http://www.charleston.net/stories/051003/loc_10hispanics.shtml).

Ramirez, R. R. and Cruz, G. P. *The Hispanic Population in the United States: March, 2002* (Current Population Reports, U. S. Census Bureau, 20-545).

Reeves, S. “Program Reaches Out to Hispanics,” *Post and Courier*, 17 January 2004, p. 1.

Smith, G. and Scott, J. “Local Hispanics Find Themselves Targets of Crime,” *Post and Courier*, 12 April 2003, [http://www.charleston.net/stories/040203/loc\\_02hispanics.shtml](http://www.charleston.net/stories/040203/loc_02hispanics.shtml).

Torres, C. C. “Emerging Latino Communities: A New Challenge for the Rural South,” *Southern Rural Development Center* (2000), pp. 1-8.

Valdés, G. “Bilingualism and Language Use among Mexican Americans,” in S. L. Mc Kay and S. C. Wong (eds.), *New Immigrants in the United States* (Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 99-136.