

心神定氣力
內外相合，外重存照才法步，內修



In Translation:

A magazine of language and identity

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From Tlaltenango to Chicago

by Yessica Huizar

The car ride of over thirty hours was exhausting. Five people in a little truck, full with luggage, and the weather over ninety degrees was very overwhelming for six year old Keka. Not only did she had to deal with the weather and a small space, but also with her annoying brother who kept talking the whole ride and who stuck gum in her hair, and her sister who kept on crying because she left her beloved boyfriend back home. Yet, the worst came when Keka and her family were inspected by the immigration authorities. "It felt as if we had done something bad, really bad," Keka thought. They checked everything in the automobile, twice, as if Keka and her family had something illegal. Even poor Mr. Carlitos got checked. The authorities checked Mr. Carlitos by squeezing all of his body, very abruptly, and kept poking him to see if he had anything in him. Keka thought, what can Mr. Carlitos possibly have if he is just my friend, "mi osito," my teddy bear.

After the long ride from Tlaltenango, Zacatecas, Keka arrived on August 22, 1999 to where she thought was a new world. The buildings were so big, the lights were brighter than the sun and the chilly breeze felt unusual. It was late in the afternoon and all she could think of was sleeping in a bed. Yet, to her surprise when they arrived, her father, who had already lived in the United States, only had one twin size bed.

"How in the world are all six of us going to fit there, Mommy?" Keka asked, while her mother laughed.

"Oh mija esa cama solo es para tu papa y yo, your brothers and you will be sleeping on the floor."

That night was rough, well, actually the floor was rough, but nothing as

rough as the first day of school.

"Tienes que ir a la escuela, but why do I have to go school, Mom?" Keka said.

"Mija, tienes que ir so you will be able to have the education that your father and I could not have," Keka's mom claimed. "Your father brought you and your brothers to this country so you can have a better future than we did back in Mexico."

The building was enormous; it had a big sign in front of it that said Chase Elementary School. There were hundreds of kids playing outside. Keka was very nervous because she had never been to a place so big and with so many kids. The last time she remembered seeing so many people in one place was when they had las ferias, the festivals back in her hometown. When it was time to go inside class she begged her mom to come inside with her because she was scared, but her mom explained to her that she was unable to do so. "Tú ya eres una niña grande, therefore you have to go alone."

The classroom was full with all the kids who were screaming and laughing, while Keka was in the corner of the wall observing how everyone was happy, except for her. She did not know anyone, and did not understand what they were saying. They did not speak Spanish, instead they were all speaking this weird language she did not understand. Keka really had to go to the washroom, therefore she decided to ask a young girl who was sitting calmly in her desk, "Donde esta el baño?"

"What, I do not understand you?" the girl said.

Keka did not understand what the

girl was saying, and by the looks of the girl she did not understand what Keka was saying either. "Why does no one understand me?" Keka thought to herself.

Days passed by, and school just became harder and harder. Keka did not understand anything anyone was saying and no one understood what she said. "Why did my parents bring me to a country where no one understand me? Why did they not leave me in Mexico, where I had friends, family and everyone understood me?" Keka thought. On a Tuesday morning, Keka had enough. The teacher was teaching the class a math problem, and Keka recalled how to do the problem, but when the teacher called her out to answer it she did so but in Spanish, and everyone began laughing and saying "What did she say? Why is she always speaking Spanish? No one understands her." Keka looked around as she saw all the kids laughing and pointing at her and she could not take it anymore. She started crying because she did understand anything, and screamed "Yo no entiendo nada," as she rushed out from the class room. "Porque no entiendo nada?" Keka screamed while her teacher was rushing towards her.

Keka did not know where to go, but she just kept running away from her classroom. After what felt like hours of running she decided to sit down at the end of a hallway, in a corner, with her knees up to her chest, as she continued to cry. A few minutes later, her teacher came up to her and asked her if she was okay? And Keka screamed, "No entiendo lo que usted dice!" Her teacher was surprised about Keka's reaction and said "Lo siento," she apologized and told her that she also spoke Spanish. At that moment Keka's teacher finally understood why Keka did not participate, or why she did not complete any homework assign-

ments. All this time her teacher did not know that Keka did not speak English, since she was in an English-only speaking classroom. As she heard her teacher speak Spanish, Keka felt as if she was not alone in this big building full of people that only looked at her as if she was a strange creature from another world. Keka was so happy that she could finally communicate with someone, after those agonizing days of feeling like an outsider.

Since that day everything changed. Her teacher decided to offer extra help to Keka; she explained all the assignments in Spanish and English and offered after school classes. Keka was very happy that she was learning more and more every day. Keka became the hardest working little girl in her class. She would complete her normal homework assignments and in addition her teacher would give her extra assignments for her to complete so she could practice what she had learned in the after school tutoring.

After a year of hard work, Keka became very fluent when speaking English and understood mostly everything in this new language. She was very proud of herself because she felt that after accomplishing this task there was nothing in this world that she could not do. Now she felt that this new world that she had been brought to was not as bad as she thought. Keka had many friends now, and they were not mean as she thought they were before. Her new friends now understood what she was saying and she understood them. At the end of the school year, Keka felt content of what she had accomplished and was ready to accomplish the next obstacles in her life at such a young age.

Keka, that little girl who did not let anything or anyone stop her from learning a new language and adapting to a new country, was me; I was that little girl who emigrated from

Mexico to the United States. I still recall all my experiences as an immigrant child so vividly. I still do not understand why my principal at the time felt that it was a good idea to place a small child in an all English speaking class, yet I am thankful for her doing so because that experience changed me and made me who I am today. My first grade experience has been one of the hardest experiences I have ever faced. I still do not understand how at such a young age I was able to handle all the changes that I encountered in this new country, but I am very glad I did.

Tlaltenango is so different from Chicago. My pueblo is very tiny, but full of people I love. My neighbors were not friends, they were family. The school was walking distance to my house, and my classroom was very small. There were about thirty kids in my school back in Mexico, whereas in Chicago there were thirty kids per classroom. The stores were so close to one another, and instead of sellers, I had relatives. We did not have to purchase our food because my aunts and uncles would give to us for free. They were farmers, therefore, they would provide us with fresh food like vegetables, fruits and meat. One thing that I remember I would miss so much were my friends. Back in Mexico my mom would let me play with my friends all day after I finished my homework; instead, in Chicago I could not come out after five because it was too dangerous. My house in Tlaltenango was very different from my home in Chicago. In Mexico my family and I had animals, like pigs, cows, lambs, chickens, and horses, whereas in Chicago, we could not even have a dog because our landlord did not permit it. In Tlaltenango we had a big house with a lot of space. Our house had four bedrooms, a huge living room and dining room, kitchen and two washrooms; instead, in Chicago we only had a two bed-

room apartment with a kitchen and a small washroom for the five members of my family and me.

There were many more differences than similarities between Tlaltenango and Chicago, but I am so glad that my parents brought me to this country. I am currently a junior at the University of Chicago at Illinois, and pursuing a bachelor's in Criminal Justice and a minor in Psychology. I am so thankful that this country has given me the opportunity to grow and expand my education. Although it was a difficult chapter in my life, adapting to a new country and culture at such a young age, I am glad that I was able to overcome it.

It took a lot of effort and courage for little Keka to adapt to her new home, but it was all worth it. Therefore, if you are struggling with a new language or culture do not give up because just like little Keka did if you can do it. There are many resources in this country that you can look for to help you learn the new language and help you adapt to the new culture. There are also many people who are willing to help you accomplish your goal of adapting to a new culture, just like first grade teacher. All takes is effort and courage.

A Documented Voice

by Phoenix Chen

Five hundred sixty thousand
That is the number of undocumented immigrants living in Illinois.
Of the 1.5 million undocumented Asian Americans in the United States,
67,000 of them live here, and I am one of the people
making up 12% of the “unauthorized population” in the state.

You probably haven’t heard much about my existence
because I have been hiding my immigration status,
trying to protect my family, trying to protect myself,
from the government, from the white-washed society,
from the people who look down upon me
simply because I don’t have a document
saying I have as much right to be here as they do.

You probably haven’t heard much about my existence
because I have been suppressing my own voice,
wondering if my mother had made the right choice
when she sent me to visit my father in America
with a new set of clothes and a tourist visa,
neglecting to tell me that the visit was meant to be temporary.
Yet, even if my parents had told me that I couldn’t stay
in this exotic place called U.S.A.,
I wouldn’t have understood why,
the way I didn’t understand why
they wouldn’t allow me to work part-time when I was sixteen,
saying I should concentrate on my studies and keeping the house clean,
or why they wouldn’t allow me to apply for college after high school,
saying they didn’t have the money to pay for my tuition or graduate school.

For years, my parents kept my immigration status a secret.
It wasn’t until I demanded for answers
that they reluctantly told me the truth.
“You are undocumented”, they said, and they said no more,
as if those three little words had the power to explain everything,
but they didn’t.
Yet, my immigration status wasn’t something
my parents and I discussed about openly,
the way it wasn’t even mentioned in many Asian American families
because we had allowed fear and shame to devour our voices.

As undocumented immigrants,
we fear of deportation and separation.
We fear of losing the place we have been calling our home
and the people we have been calling our friends.
As undocumented Asian American immigrants,
we feel ashamed for not meeting the expectation of the American society.
We feel ashamed for not living up to the model minority,
but what is the model minority but a myth?

Undocumented. Illegals. Aliens.
These are the labels preventing us
from achieving the dreams and success
we came to America to achieve in the first place.
These are the labels covering our mouths,
preventing us from speaking,
and society expects us to stay speechless
because we are deemed as the model minority,
and we are expected to be politically silent.
But why must we remain silent
when the government is threatening
to take away everything
we had worked so hard to create?
Why must we remain silent
when it is not even our fault
that we are labeled as undocumented?
We know we are capable of achieving
as much as the people standing in front of us.
We know we belong in this place
as much as the people standing next to us.
We are more than the labels placed on us,
more than our immigration status,
more than black ink on white paper,
so why must we remain silent?
We must let our voices be heard
in order to prevent ourselves from being
another minority within a minority!

"Ya, da kine."

by *Yasmine Lotfi*

Was she referring to bandaids, a flashlight, tweezers, Neosporin, ice? I stumbled around her kitchen that was piled high with anything but first-aid kit supplies. It was the first night on our trip back to Hawaii and already my sister managed to embed a splinter. In the pressure of the situation I was fumbling with the hem of my shorts when I decided to be of help. "Aunty, do you want me to grab something?"

"Ya, da kine."

Just a few hours on the island and I already felt the familiar sense of confusion and ignorance. Da kine of what? What KIND of first-aid supply was I to bring back? How did everyone else have some sort of telepathy to know exactly what the other person was thinking by the vague term "da kine?"

The importance of Hawaiian Pidgin or Hawaiian Creole in the Hawaiian culture can be traced back to its origin: "Prior to the US annexation of the Islands in 1898, Pidgin evolved based upon English, Hawaiian, Japanese, Chinese, Portuguese and Filipino languages" (Marlow and Giles 54). These were the races of the workers on the plantations, thus Pidgin evolved to assist in communication with such a wide array of different cultures. Furthermore it provided a way to communicate privately from the white strangers in charge whose language was Standard English from the mainland.

Comprised of a mixture of English sprinkled with Hawaiian and Filipino words, Pidgin lacks the grammatical rigidity known to Standard English. Abbreviated sentences and phonetically spelled words are main components of the dialect. Perhaps the most common used word in Pidgin, "da kine,"

translated to mean "the kind," is used in place of any proper name for nouns. It is similar to the mainland phrase "whatchamacallit," taking on the sense of an all purpose word. Hawaiian Pidgin speakers seem to be on the same wavelength with their audience given the easy comprehension of such a contextual dialect, while to the non-Pidgin speakers, conversations comes off as a type of "broken" English.

Unlike the stigma attached to other dialects of English on the mainland by Standard English speakers, Hawaiian Pidgin is more preferred by locals and therefore even used in professional settings. My Aunt Alice, a general practitioner and native of Hawaii, works in the medical field and explains, "I see patients of all different socioeconomic levels. Pidgin is used to build trust, educate my patients and create a sense of community." Establishing and maintaining relationships is very important and her clinic understands that Pidgin is a way to "get on their level" especially with lower socioeconomic patients so that they understand how to administer the treatment. She went on to say how on the other hand, if the comprehension of Standard English is not an issue, Pidgin is still used to break the ice and create a communal bond between the patient and caregiver.

"Howzit?"

A few days in and that familiar sing-song tone echoes my speech. My words string together like the ripples of tide pools—quick and methodical. It's hard not to mimic the rapid speed of my family's speech delicately firing off their conversations in half the time but it is hard trying to keep up. So instead I nod and smile as Hawaiian Pidgin English flies across the room and find myself defaulting back to a comfortable speed when I speak to my sister.

My mother, also a native of Hawaii, spoke about how Hawaiian Pidgin was

used at home growing up as well as in the public school system between students and teachers: "The only way I was exposed and learned Standard English was in the classroom setting until I moved to the mainland."

Therefore, code switching is a vital component of daily life in Hawaii. My mother speaks Standard English now as she lives on the mainland. However, when she is speaking to her family whether that is through the telephone or when she visits back home, she switches very easily into fluent Hawaiian Pidgin.

"You like talk story?"

Why yes, I do. With over fifty cousins and twelve uncles and aunts, very little silence ensues. There's always a story—always something to laugh about, cry about, and at the end of it usually something to sing about. So while everyone jumps in and story after story is shared, we all pile our plates with malasadas and chantilly cake, grabbing as many Hawaiian Sun cans as we can from the cooler as we double over in laughter catching parts of the stories circling around us. My aunt asks me to tell our family about the car troubles we had today on the way to the North Shore. I take a gulp of guava juice before beginning—preparation to say it all in hopefully one breath. "...and then the car lurched forward!" I say. The response is simply a lack of response followed by some hoots of laughter. My aunt interrupts, "Eh, yaz the car went jump!" And here there is recognition on more faces. A little embarrassed for my choice of vocabulary setting me apart yet again, I laugh along. While my skin tone is slightly lighter than those around me, when I open my mouth I sense that my words spell out *haole*, the Hawaiian word for foreigner most often used to describe tourists, more than anything else.

It's a common misconception by mainlanders that those who speak Pidgin are less intelligent by default. My aunt communicates with the Pidgin dialect on a regular basis yet she holds a Masters in Nursing, switching from Standard English to Pidgin depending on with whom she is speaking. For example, she says how with some patients she begins speaking Standard English but then switches over to Pidgin as she gets to know them and their topic of conversation goes beyond health. When I asked her about the negative connotations Pidgin entails in regards to sounding less intelligent, she said, "I don't care how I speak or sound, as long as I get the message across."

This sense of a barrier between locals and non-Pidgin speakers still exists today. Furthermore, my Aunt Alice brought up how Pidgin can be used to communicate when you are in the same room with non-Pidgin speakers so that they don't understand you—similar to how multi-lingual individuals will speak a different language to avoid eavesdroppers.

"I like try"

By the end of a month in Hawaii, I still can't grasp Hawaiian Pidgin fully. At our best, my sister and I will jokingly try to speak it but only to each other in hopes of not offending anyone. Instead of the ease and fluidity of all the locals, it comes off as jagged heavy blocks of unknown phrases and we lose that staple sing-song tone we had become acquired to. So, we don't try, but rather bob our heads in and out of the ocean of Hawaiian culture. After a month, I'm able to know what "*da kine*" is referring to in different conversations. My eyes don't widen when I hear "*choke people!*", understanding that someone is remarking there were many people in the area. And I am accustomed to turn my head when I hear "*Try look ova here!*" When someone

embeds a splinter and needs me to grab da kine to help, I am off to confidently search for a needle.

A few phrases casually make an appearance in my speech and I find “da kine” is actually quite useful, as well as allowing me to be just slightly more lazy. I find my slippahs on the front porch instead of my flip-flops being placed on there, and I’ll ask for da kine when I am finished with dinner in hopes my family receives my telecommunication of meaning dessert—which, of course, they do. While code switching is not a practical option for

me, code meshing is a perfect way to communicate more effectively while also maintaining my comfort level.

My body is immersed in the ocean of Hawaiian culture but my head stays dry. Occasionally I will dunk in and the rush of it all is exciting to finally be immersed and truly a local—but only for a few moments. The saltwater will sting my eyes and I’ll be forced to rise back up to air again and wipe the remnants of water out of my face. Those around me dive freely and hold their breath for as long as they desire, but not me.

“K, den.”

She is not ESL, She is my Mother *by Safia Khan*

Click click click.

“Hi! How can I help you?”

“I V-ANT TO BY DIS.”

“What? I’m sorry.”

“TH-IS I BUY---”

“My mom wants to buy these shoes.”

“Oh okay! No problem, ladies.”

click click click.

There have been many instances (too numerous to count) of this sort of miscommunication with me, my mother, and outsiders. Misunderstandings leading to misinterpretations. I admit that sometimes I feel ashamed and embarrassed. My mother has been in America for almost 20 years, yet her English is still at an elementary level. “English vinglish”: this term represents my mother’s way of signifying English’s importance in her life (which is minimal). Other times, I feel angry. I see the faces the tellers make at her as soon she speaks in her English. In her motherland, she worked as a MD, a doctor, and was the first in her fam-

ily to graduate college, let alone high school. She used to practice her English daily by attending classes, reading books, and asking neighbors to converse with her in English only. These circumstances make it hard for me to consider her as an “ESL”; to me, she is just my beloved, hardworking mother.

ESL. According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, ESL is strictly defined as “English as a second language”. However, this simple term is significant in ways many may not realize. It is a label; it is a product of social construction. It is a way to discriminate us and them, immigrants versus Americans, foreigners vs patriots. It is capable of creating stereotypes. Also, it envelops a broad group of people from a variety of backgrounds and talents. Many of these multi-language speaking persons come from their own home and comfort to make their name in America. In my interview with UIC Writing Center’s peer tutor Yessica, we discussed the difficulties of the label “ESL” in her life.

At the young age of 5, she moved with her family from Mexico to America, and was dumped into a kindergarten class with no special attention given towards multi-language speakers unfamiliar with English. She described her experience then in the American school system: "I did not know any English. I cried and felt alone. My kindergarten teacher was kind enough to teach me in the Spanish she knew, and to help me." What interested me the most was when I asked her if she considered herself ESL. She replied, "I do not consider myself ESL." I thought about this for a moment and, to be honest, I agree. I do not consider her ESL myself even though English is her second language. Why?

The stigmatization of being ESL has been detrimental for multi-language speaking persons, especially students, in many ways. Yessica explained this situation. "Many of them feel that they are 'stupid' for being non-native English speakers. Therefore, some try to work their ways out of their ESL classes to prove they are not inferior. At the same time, some feel comfortable in their easy, ESL classes and do not want to leave." According to Yessica, some ESL classes are not taken seriously since they are generally too easy for some students. I assume it may be because some ESL classes fail to challenge the minds of students due to language barriers existing between students and professors. However, some students feel that ESL classes are practical and appropriately challenging. Some ESL classes present a real challenge and might even scare some students from trying to go further in schooling. For me, it is difficult to label someone as ESL especially when I know they have worked hard to get to where they are today. A student is always a student, and is always learning.

In a second interview I had with Brenda, who is also peer tutor at the

UIC Writing Center, we discussed a lot of the challenges students labeled as ESL face in school. She, like Yessica, does not consider herself ESL because she felt that it was dehumanizing and restraining. She spoke of an instance she had recently with her brother and sister. Brenda said, "Just a few months ago, a letter in the mail came for my brother and sister. It was a "congratulations" letter related to their English academic achievement. They both have been in Honors English since the beginning of high school...why are they getting letter that basically was congratulating them on not being in ESL classes?" I was really taken aback by this fact. A letter in the mail, to Hispanic students, congratulating them on not being ESL? As if ESL were an insult, "inferior"? It was sad for me to think that such stereotypes exists in even the supposedly "friendliest" of environments, school. No wonder multi-language students were reluctant about getting help, especially with such stereotypes and prejudice exhibiting force against them!

According to an ELL (English Language Learner) panel I attended that was titled "Getting to Know Your ELL Students", multi-language speaking students experience greater difficulty in receiving help with English in college, a two year sequence of composition classes that are often mandated in many universities across America. (This panel was hosted by UIC Linguistics Faculty member Maja Grgurovic at the University of Illinois at Chicago.). Surprisingly, the main reason is not because of the fear of being judged as an "ESL student", although this can be considered as one factor. I found out the main reason many multi-language speaking persons tended to shy away from writing centers. Multi-language speaking students tend to shy away from peer tutors for the same reason many native English speaking

students shy away from sharing their work: its a personal revelation and it is embarrassing to share something they do not feel confident about. Along with the reluctance to share their work, multi-language speaking students feel the language barrier between the tutor and themselves will contribute to making the session difficult as well. I have one experience that I felt really related to the panelists' point.

As a peer tutor myself, I had a writer once who many would have considered to be an ESL student. He was very intelligent and observant. During the first minutes of the session, he told me about his high school back in his home country. He had mentioned that writing there was very template based and left no room for creativity. However, in the English class he was enrolled for, he was doing poorly because the majority of the class was creative writing. He felt that his templates were going to waste. He had been on the verge of just leaving the session because he felt so inferior and ashamed of his work. For me, his story had hit me on a professional and personal level. It was disheartening for me to hear this, but I told him about how writing is a process. Writing is not easy. It takes practice and time, just like any other activity in the world. Luckily, I spoke the same language as him, which removed the language barrier completely. I also related my experiences of my mom and her struggle, which I helped ease his anxieties about writing. We continued working on his personal narrative and placing his thoughts onto paper. The experience I had with this student taught me how some multi-language speaking students felt undervalued in their schooling experience in America. It is important to show all students, regardless of English-speaking ability, that they are more than the constraints of the English language. Again, a student is always a student, someone

who is always learning.

In terms of tutoring multi-language speaking students, we, the tutors, are taught to abide by the rules of our own tutoring handbooks. We depend on it for knowledge and expectations. We reference it daily in our reflections of our sessions. Unfortunately, these tutoring handbooks we use do not adequately address the needs of the multi-language speaking student or cross-cultural communication in general. According to Steven K. Bailey, who is a professor, tutor, and writer, "While Generation 2.0 tutor handbooks typically assume a U.S. context for writing center work, they also position tutors as cultural and linguistic insiders..The unstated assumption is not only that tutors are cultural insiders and native speakers, but that this is the only possible identity for tutors to hold" (5). Peerness is a quality very valued in tutoring sessions. Tutoring handbooks often times fail to emphasize the idea of peerness in peer tutoring. The writer and tutor should be seen as sharing power, rather than the tutor dominating over the writer because of the assumed tutor's knowledge. However, when it comes to sessions involving multi-language speaking students, the tutor may unconsciously dominate the session since tutoring handbooks indirectly support dominance of the tutor.

On a positive note, there has been more work put into writing centers to make multi-language speaking students feel more welcomed and understood by peer tutors and staff. According to author Michelle Y. Szpara's, an author & researcher at Pennsylvania State University, more training has been required of tutors related to being culturally sensitive: "The recognition, understanding, and practice of cross-cultural communication has involved developing the tutors' awareness in three areas: (a) awareness of their own attitudes and values

and those of writers, (b) awareness of different culturally-based writing styles, and (c) awareness of forms of non-verbal communication in different cultures" (24). As more measures are being placed to become culturally educated and open-minded, I believe that this will help and has helped many multi-language speaking students feel belonging and encourage them to share their ideas despite perceived language barriers. Culturally sensitive tutors may even lead to them becoming returning writers at the Center since they will be treated with more respect compared to other places where they might not receive as much respect.

After conducting research, I concluded that the stigmatization of the label "ESL" and the writing anxieties multi-language speaking students face cause many of them to turn away from the help offered at writing centers. Tutoring handbooks also fail to address the concept OF cross-cultural communication. As peer tutors, there are many things we can do to help such writers ease themselves into the center, such as being culturally sensitive. Shanti Bruce, a professor at Nova Southeastern University, mentioned some additional tips in her article, "Breaking Ice and Setting Goals: Tips for Getting Started", related to creating a comforting and peer-like session for the multi-language student. Some ideas she suggested were asking the student knows about the center, gathering information about the student's piece, asking direct questions, and setting a physical agenda for the writer to take with at the end (Bruce 37-40). All these tips, in my opinion, are great for all writers and all sessions, not just multi-language speaking students. As tutors, we need to emphasize how all ideas matter, and help them express such ideas onto paper. Multi-language speaking stu-

dents need to know they are valued in academia.

Click click click.

"Hi! How can I help you?"

"I V-ANT to BUYTH-IS."

"What? I'm sorry."

"Mom, can you repeat yourself?"

"I AM BUYING THESE SHOES."

"Oh okay! Beautiful choice, ma'am!"

"THANK YOU. GOOD DEAL."

click click click.

My mother. I do not know if I stressed enough how much I love her. I love her for her misspoken words and improper tenses. I love her for her "English vinglish". Now, I let her speak for herself. The interviews, the panel, and the experience I had as a tutor made me realize that mutli-language speaking students are students, and they are learning, just like every other student. I listen to her speak her English and I am proud of her. I find myself encouraging her to speak her English with all its imperfections. I stand up for her when others may suggest degrading things about her because of the way she speaks her English. To me, she is more than the label ESL that others may try to confine her and millions of multi-language speaking students like her. She is not a socially constructed label of "English as a Second Language" learner. Being a multi-language speaking student is one aspect of her identity that I refuse others, including myself, to define her by. She is more than "ESL"; she is my mother.

La Norteña

by Debbie Patino

The following is a speech I presented at the UIC Coming Out of the Shadows event on April 2, 2015. Since 2010, groups of undocumented students and allies all over the country come out of the shadows and tell their personal stories to dispel the stigma associated with undocumented immigrants.

Hi. I'm Debbie.

Both of my parents migrated from Mexico in their early twenties. Up until a few years ago, my parents were undocumented. Even now, as US citizens, they struggle daily with adjusting to life in this country. My mom feels scared to speak English sometimes, despite her fluency in the language. Once, I went to Target with her, and she wanted to ask the cashier a question. But as soon as she opened her mouth, the cashier curtly replied, "I don't speak Spanish. Go talk to someone else."

Her legal status doesn't protect her from the sting of racism and discrimination. My legal status doesn't protect me either, from second class citizenship.

Like so many others, I am a child of diaspora. Those that are *ni de aqui, ni de allá*. Growing up, I always felt I was from neither here nor there, not entirely accepted on either side of the border. In Mexico, they call me La Gringa, La Norteña, La del Otro Lado. Here, in the United States, I am rejected in under-the-water ways, through dismissal and silence.

The irony is that the borders between people aren't actually there. We create them and believe in them, and that's how they exist, in this 'make-believe' world of ghosts and zombies.

When I was 13 years old, my hometown of Carpentersville tried to pass an "English-Only" ordinance, under

the claim that it would 'unite the village with a common language'. In a town where one can find La Ilusión supermarket, La Michoacana ice cream store, and La Casa De Cambio at the local shopping center, it was clear the ordinance was an attack on the Latino community.

This shouldn't be happening, especially not in a country that claims equality and freedom for all.

I feel unwanted because I am constantly reminded that I don't belong here, that I'm not "normal".

I am an outsider.

And that's what hurts the most: to be told that my life, my language, and my culture aren't good enough.

I am a citizen, and yet, I don't feel a part of this country. I don't feel protected. I feel like a target, despite my US passport and my ability to pass freely between the border. I am marked by my tan complexion, my way of speaking, and my Mexican culture. I might not be undocumented, but I AM affected by the stigma associated with people of color.

I want you all to think about how harmful it is to call a human being an "illegal alien".

Translation?

Your existence is illegal. You are not human. But we know that's not true.

People should be treated with the dignity and respect they deserve, because we ARE human.

The pain of what happened in my hometown is still so real.

But because we fought back, the ordinance was not passed.

It takes people like us and people like you to make a difference and positive change. I am here, asking your support of ALL people, regardless of skin color or status. Everyone deserves an equal chance at success. For this reason, I ask that you join FUA and other community members in our struggle for equal representations and equal access for ALL students.

Ladder to the Moon

by *Queena Luu*

I gazed at the throngs of people shuffling through the narrow streets of Shifen, like a herd of elephants trudging through the sweltering savannah at sunset. I clutched my mother's hand in a vice grip as I felt the end of an incense stick poking against my back. I glanced in wonder as I stared up at all the adults surrounding me yelling their greetings in a huff and weaving through each other. Meanwhile, standing a grand total of four feet five inches tall in my plastic pink sandals, I felt overwhelmed. It was my first time in Taiwan to visit my aunt, just in time for the lighting of the Kung Ming lanterns, the last day of Chinese New Year. My mother pushed me along as I tripped over discarded wax candy sticks and red fireworks wrappers, ruminants of the gold bangled lion dance a few hours ago.

I felt a bead of sweat - cold and sticky - slide down my back, agonizingly slow, as I tried to breathe in the sardine tin packed street. My hands were still gooey from the syrupy candied dates I ate, and my ankles were chafed to an uncomfortable salmon pink from walking all day in new sandals. I tugged on my mother's hand as I wiped my clammy forehead, matted with strands of hair.

She simply smiled and mimed, "Just a little further."

In the distance, I heard the jangle of the ice cream man, selling sweet milky red bean popsicles, and the faint staccato melody of the street acrobats performing their aerial leaps and tambourine dance. I longed to escape the loud chatter of the crowd and the sea of hands and feet that swept past my vision as we continued our journey down the path.

Gradually, the dusty, suffocating clamber of the asphalt roads and swinging bags of incense gave way to a

lush, cool grassy plain. I took a deep breath of relief, taking in the sweet scent of freshly cut grass and the light fragrant trace of chrysanthemums. The clatter and hawking of the crowd was reduced to quiet murmurs as everyone diffused across the grassy lawn of the park. A light breeze blew toward me, cooling my flushed face and ruffling strands of my black hair, like an affectionate gesture of a doting grandmother. I let go of my mother's hand as she stood on her tiptoes with a frown etched on her face. Suddenly, her frown melted into a relieved smile as she waved.

"Is she here yet?" I asked as I sat down on the soft grass.

Before she could answer, my aunt walked up to us caring ink pots, brushes, and a folded paper lantern that looked like a stack of blank newspaper sheets. I stood up, feeling the dewy wetness of my pants sticking to my legs from sitting on the grass.

"I have everything ready," she unfolded white lantern until it was the size of a large laundry bag. "Are you ready for your first lantern lighting?" Auntie nudged me with a grin on her face.

I clapped my hands while jumping, "I can't wait."

"Hold up the lantern for me," my mom gestured.

I watched in fascination as my auntie and my mom dipped the brushes in the murky blank ink. With the grace of a painter, they wrote on the lantern, filling the empty canvas with poems of courage, prayers of good health, and wishes for prosperity. I ohhed and awwed at the neat lines of Chinese characters coming to life as the ink blossomed across the white lantern.

"Go get the seal," my mother told me as she set her brush down. I rushed up to her purse and took out a green silk tube, no bigger than my index finger. I presented it to my mom gingerly, as if I was handing her a delicate treasure.

She opened the tube and placed a worn stick of jade in my hand, followed by a ceramic pot of ink. I grasp the cold seal tightly as I opened the ink pot to reveal the rosy hue of the chunky red ink. I traced along the grooves of the jade seal that depicted my family name.

Excitedly, I pressed the jade into the ink and placed the seal on the white lantern. Together, the three of us lifted the folded lantern and the cool zephyr in the park puffed it out like a fluffy cloud contrasting the already darkened night sky. Auntie flicked a match stick and lit the candle inside the lantern, casting the entire lantern in a soft comforting orange hue. The candle flickered excitedly causing shadows to dance around us. As per Auntie's instructions, the three of us stood in a circle and held onto the bottom rim of the lantern. I glanced around us in wonderment as families around us also held their own lanterns in anticipation. I looked further across the grassy field and saw lanterns being lit.

The spots of flickering lights bloomed around us like fireflies twirling the summer night. All murmurings hushed as the entire park quieted; only the symphony of soft cricket chirps could be heard. Then, by some invisible signal, a distant spot of orange started to rise. Soon, many more followed. I gasped in amazement as the glowing lanterns drifted up into the inky sky shimmering like liquid gold. I turned back to my mother and auntie; they were smiling gently. Their faces were rosy, warmed by the golden glow of the lit candle. I felt myself smiling brighter.

"Ready?" Auntie asked, gripping the

lantern a little tighter. We counted off.

And we released the lantern. It twirled in the air and joined the others, lifting higher and higher until I couldn't distinguish our lantern from the others. The three of us sat on the grass, tilting our heads upward. It seemed like the sky was overflowing with orange lanterns. The lanterns looked like a bloom of fluorescent jellyfish, only parting for milliseconds to give us a glimpse of the night sky.

At that moment, I realized what made the tradition so awe-inspiring was the fact that everyone came together to create such a captivating sight. I felt a sense of light heartiness to know that this was my tradition.

My culture's tradition.

That even though hundreds of years as past since the start of this custom, we were continuing it. Together, we wrote our dreams and our history onto these lanterns. Drifting somewhere in the sea of brilliant lights was my family's lantern - a single piece in something that represents us all. And that fact, not the glittery lights, was the reason why it was beautiful.

Linguistic Challenges of International Students in STEM (among other) Programs at UIC

By Hossein Fazel Sarjoui

According to the Institute of International Education, nearly 820,000 students came to the US in the 2013-2014 school year. Because they are categorized as non-resident students in American colleges, they pay out-of-state tuition which contributed 24 billion dollars to the US economy in 2013/4. This high level of international student enrollment is certainly beneficial to American schools and colleges which are still suffering from the lingering effects of the Great Recession of 2007-2009. With this rise in the number of international graduate students, many STEM programs, especially at large research universities, are dominated by students whose culture is very different from American culture and their mastery of English is "less than complete." Therefore, providing the foundation to help these students to improve their English proficiency and socialization skills is indispensable. Most accredited American research universities provide such a foundation through different programs and courses for non-native students, but are the available resources at all American schools successfully helping the international students fit into their new communities?

It seems that the foundation provided may not help these students enough to improve their English proficiency and navigate different cultures because, based on academic research and the memoirs of foreign students, many international students suffer

from some level of distress and anxiety throughout their career which may be based on communication and acculturation difficulties [1, 2, 3, 4, 5]. Lack of knowledge about Standard English forms, such as grammar, speech, and writing, along with understanding societal linguistic and cultural norms [6], are some of the most common challenges that international students face in the US. Although they all have some basic background in the English language, and have passed English language exams prior to being admitted to graduate and undergraduate programs at US schools, they often fail in successfully interacting with native English speakers and adapting to the new culture.

Schools and universities can play key roles in the language development and acculturation needed by some of these students and help them fit in better with their new society. But, I believe international students at UIC, especially in STEM programs, may not be encouraged enough to improve their English, and utilize the current resources available at UIC. Therefore, these resources might not be as useful as they could be.

All international students, prior to entering any US institution, must pass preliminary exams such as the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL), Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT), Graduate Record Exam (GRE), and/or Medical College Admission Test (MCAT), for example. The TOEFL

directly measures reading and listening comprehension, speaking, and writing skills in academic level while the others mainly test grammar and vocabulary knowledge along with mathematical skills. So, one can get the minimum scores needed for college admission by taking multiple prep classes and reading educational and instructional materials published by Educational Testing Service (ETS) and other associations. However, based on my experience, even getting high grades on these exams does not guarantee successful interactions with native English speakers. Additionally, to get a good grade on the “verbal” section of the GRE, one needs to learn or just memorize a lot of sophisticated vocabulary that seems to be rarely used in daily or academic communications.

As I stated before, cultural differences and the lack of proficiency in Standard English dialect often make the international students hesitant to interact with their new communities and join groups of native speakers which may contribute to homesickness. As a result, these students seek linguistic and cultural comfort zones which, in turn, segregates them into smaller groups [2, 3, 10]. These problems are clearly expressed in the memoirs of two exchange students, Milena da Silva and Joao Goncalves, who came to UIC on scholarship from Brazil after a competitive application process. They say that they could not fulfill their expectations of making many American friends which they attribute to the fear of a lack of language skills and unfamiliarity with different vernacular dialects, the dialects used by different social groups in everyday speech [2, 3]. On the other hand, they believe that society’s negative judgment on other cultures and languages is also a barrier to acculturation and communication with the US community [2, 7].

As well, even college students who came to the US at much younger ages face similar challenges. Ziyin Li, who immigrated to America from China with her family at the age of nine, states that she still needs to translate every single sentence from Chinese to English which results in miscommunication and difficulty in maintaining conversations. Her accent and mispronunciation are other major linguistic problems that have made her join a circle of Chinese friends, where she does not face such barriers in communication [4].

These challenges are also addressed by Junjie Xu, an undergraduate student in Kinesiology, who immigrated to America at the age of eleven. In his memoir [5], he explains the negative experiences he had during high school. He complains about how the academic abilities of non-natives are negatively judged based only on their accent and mispronunciation, regardless of their talent. Junjie was aware that it would not be easy to change the social perceptions towards foreign languages; so, he put a lot of personal effort to overcome language challenges and was rewarded with more social and academic opportunities. From his memoir, we understand that bilinguality can provide people with higher chances of success throughout their lives and careers.

These problems are highlighted in STEM programs and seem particularly “acute” in Science and Engineering [12] when compared to other programs, such as History or Humanities, where the English language and cultural knowledge are greatly involved in the studies. In fact, many Engineering departments at UIC are dominated by non-native speaker faculty members and graduate students, and the majority of teaching assistants (TAs) for undergraduate courses are also international graduate students, primarily

from China, India, and Iran. As a result, some native students complain that they cannot get the most out of the courses offered by these departments, or communicate with the International Teaching Assistants (ITAs); the main issue being the accent and language ability of instructors and ITAs [7].

Although there are some resources, like preparatory classes for ITAs or the basic Academic Support Program (ASP) courses, they mostly provide general information and guidelines, and might not be productive enough. Also, most of these courses are mainly designed for ITAs whose TOEFL scores are lower than UIC requirements, so they might not help students with higher grades that still could benefit by improving their English. Furthermore, the course credits are not usually counted towards degree requirements, which makes many students unwilling to enroll in them or take them seriously.

Furthermore, graduate students in engineering programs deal with mathematical calculations and reading or writing technical papers with technical vocabulary. They often spend a lot of hours in their offices doing research, and do not have the chance to meet and communicate with many native speakers. During class presentations, the linguistic make-up of the group means no one usually cares about the accent, improper vernacular vocabulary, and grammatical mistakes. None of these is a problem as long as the work or research is clearly expressed in technical terms. This is quite similar to the atmosphere of other STEM programs whose participants may contain a majority of international students. The culture and perception of language in these small groups does not necessarily encourage international students to learn and improve their Standard American English (SAE); however, this attitude is not similar to

that of the outside world.

As a result, these foreign students may be negatively judged when they interact with US society, because they have not had the opportunities to improve their language and communication skills. And, I believe other difficulties, such as isolation and homesickness, stem from these challenges. These problems will still continue if international students stay in the US, as many do, after their graduation.

Even though environmental adjustments to the new community greatly depends on geographical distance from one's home country and psychological background [8, 11], it is believed schools can play a major role in helping foreign students explore the US community and culture. I believe the international students at UIC should be provided with more scholarly writing education, and supported with professional socialization skills which will also positively affect their social and academic achievements [9]. According to a comparative research conducted by Gourche (2006), both university-wide training and academic-specific instruction experiences could develop TAs' communication skills more effectively. Therefore, UIC STEM departments should enrich their preparatory classes for the ITAs and all international students, even those with high TOEFL grades. Additionally, providing internship opportunities in professional firms or companies and developing interdisciplinary programs with focus on culture and linguistics, will help the foreign students improve their communication and acculturation skills along with achieving their academic goals.

If schools do not provide this foundation for linguistic and social transition, these students face a lot of challenges in communicating with the US society and learning new cultures

which may lead them to isolate themselves in smaller linguistic and cultural groups. Although developing national cultures and maintaining ethnic identities are the fundamentals of a multicultural and multilingual society, this segregation deny the international students the full richness and advantages of successfully developing the knowledge of different cultures and their linguistic dialects.

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What Does it Mean to be Asian-American?

by Nahian Saed

Juss Decena was a model Asian-American student: bright, focused, respectful and studious. Juss was beloved by many students and teachers alike, and he had attributes that most people, including myself, strive to achieve. On top of that, he played piano that brought you to tears and sketched drawings that made you smile once more; he was an extraordi-

nary person as well as a friend.

I first met Juss in the seventh grade, and we quickly became good friends throughout middle and high school. I remember the days when he would entertain us all with his oddball humor and unrelenting sarcasm, which were qualities that I reciprocated. When we were together, it didn't take much dialogue for us to burst into tears from laughter as our antics ensued; there

was never a dull moment. As high school graduation neared, our time together thinned. The responsibilities of college and adulthood came upon us, but that didn't stop us from keeping in touch. Graduating in the top ten of our high school class, Juss went on to pursue his dream career at Chamberlain College of Nursing. I knew he chose this passion because of his love for helping people, although he would have never admitted it to my face in fear of sheer scrutiny. As we finished our first semester in college, Juss boasted to me about his remarkable grades, even saying that "it was too easy" for him. It was apparent to me that he would flourish in the field of nursing and would lead a successful life; he had a bright future ahead of him. A bright future until January 1st, 2015 when Juss took his own life.

While his outer appearance painted him as content, his inner psyche suffered from a secluded depression during the last years of his life, a condition that the Mayo Clinic describes as "a mood disorder that causes a persistent feeling of sadness and loss of interest." But why is this so? He seemed to have a life worth living and a successful future ahead of him. Although Juss's case isn't clear to me, there are a few reasons that could have contributed to Juss's death: his stress, his depression, and, astonishingly, his ethnicity. On a broader scale, we can see that many other Asian-American youths face similar problems that Juss may have went through.

When we take a careful look at the statistics, we can find a relationship in Asian-Americans and mental health disparities. Being a child of immigrant Bengali parents, I fit right into the Asian-American category myself. That is why it is concerning to discover that Asian-Americans between the ages "18-34 have the highest rate of suicidal

thoughts compared to any other age groups" (Hijioka). This disparity calls for investigation as to why the rate is so high. It is also important to note that this age range signifies a time in one's life that is synonymous with studying and career development. Could it be that school stress drives this statistic to be so high? Well, it could be. In fact, "Asian-American college students were more likely than White American students to have had suicidal thoughts and to attempt suicide" (Hijioka). These students could possibly be worrying about their performance in school. This motif continues to pop up in a consistent fashion when looking at young Asian-American women between ages 15 to 24 who "die from suicide at a higher rate than other racial/ethnic groups" (NAMI). Again, the age approximation, when analyzed, is of high school and college age. In this statistic, we see the dangers of depression; prolonged depression in one's life can lead to suicide. After all, "depression is the leading cause of suicide" (Mayo Clinic). If we can lower the rate of depression and mental health in Asian-American youths, we may be able to reduce the amount of tragic deaths that follow.

Asian-American students, like Juss, have bright futures ahead of them. While this does entail their happiness in life, what's also important to think about is their potential contribution back to society. A student who works tirelessly in school to become a contributor to society is counterproductive if they are depressed or, even worse, deceased. Those who do suffer from depression are unable to continue with their education; they suffer from a severe lack of interest or have given up hope. Therefore, they cannot contribute back to society, and a bright mind is wasted. When they are lost, society loses. In Juss's case, society has missed out on a devoted and

virtuous nurse. If this mental health disparity is not taken gravely, more potential nurses, doctors, or lawyers will be lost and America will never be as developed as it could have been.

Set aside the economic casualty of the matter, and you'll find a more human aspect to the loss; after all, this is a human life we are talking about. Such a travesty is never easy to bear, especially for family members. Even after months and months of coping, the gravity of the matter still lingers; one will never see their loved one again. In an interview with Juss's older brother, Jan Decena, I asked him how he and his family were coping with their loss. Jan responded in a somber tone, "we pray for him everyday. We think about him everyday. There's not much you can do at the end of the day, but we do it." Families like Juss's suffer emotional damages for the rest of their lives. It is especially heartbreaking when you consider the circumstances of the death. In all truth, suicide is thoroughly preventable. So long as you simply engage the victim directing them to help before things get to a critical point, a life can be saved and families will not have to suffer like Jan and his parents do. That is why we must recognize why Asian-American youth is falling under this illness. It is so we can prevent this silent killer from plaguing future students before it reaches an epidemic.

With all these concerning statistics and stories, the question is simple; why are so many Asian-American high school and college students falling into depression and suicide? There are many factors that contribute to these alarming rates which create a disparity when compared to most ethnic groups. The causes range from academic expectations to emotional culture and even social constructs like gender role culture; as one can deduce, these are all cultural byproducts of Asian culture as a whole. There are

even complications with the treatment of depression for Asian-Americans in the mental health community. Ironically enough, these complications help proliferate the illness instead of alleviate it. When looking at the data and statistics for most of these causes, it is critical to remind ourselves that depression is an inherently difficult disorder to study across all groups because it goes severely under-reported. Therefore, many statistics may be inaccurate or unrepresentative of reality. It is also notable that there is no real way to determine how many of these causes contributes to the overall problem because culture is unquantifiable. With all these complexities in mind, it is no wonder why statistics say one thing, while results say another.

The first theory of cause is academic pressure. Academic pressure relates to Asian parents, as well as Asian culture, expecting too much of a student. This pressure could lead to stress which, when built up, can cause depression in some form. The second theory is emotional culture. In the East, emotions are deemed as a sign of weakness, so when a child has emotions they need to express, they cannot because their environment is unwilling to listen. This, in itself, can lead to even more emotional issues and mental issues. The third theory of cause is gender-role expectations. Gendered roles add to the storm of depression for women because women are expected to act in a way that pleases their family more than men in Asian-American culture; they have less freedom and more work. This explains why Asian-American women between the ages of 15-24 are more susceptible to suicide than their male counterparts. Men are also a victim of gender expectations, as well. Boys in Asian culture are supposed to be strong, therefore they cannot cry or show emotion because that is considered weak. All three of

these causal theories contribute, in one way or another, to make Asian-American youth develop depression or suicidal tendencies.

Academic expectations are very high for Asian-American students. A dramatization that Dr. Ngo, a psychologist at Baylor University in Texas, uses is a parent saying to their child, "you should not bring home A's and B's. Only A's" (Kim). This insightful anecdote helps describe the sort of cut-throat expectation that Asian culture puts on its students. Perfection is acceptable; anything less is not.

But why is this pressure so prevalent in Asian-American families? Well, in Asian culture, Laurie Meyers, journalist for the American Psychological Association, says that immigrant parents "expect their children to be obedient as a gesture of appreciation" for their parent's sacrifices in pursuit of a better life for the family. From this, one can see that immigrant Asian parents in this position typically believe that their child is in debt to them. Repayment, typically, is acceptable only in obedience and servitude toward the parent's every expectation.

This idea is further developed by David Chae, head of the Department of Behavioral Sciences and Health Education at Emory University, in his research study when he comments that "interdependence, filial piety, and family obligations are values commonly emphasized in Asian cultures." From the beginning, an Asian child's life, whether they like it or not, is burdened by their culture that demands filial piety--the Confucian philosophy of respect for one's father, mother and ancestors. However, if the child chooses to break the mold and follow a path of independence, it may lead to "conflict between child and parent, which increases their risk for experiencing mental health problems" (Meyers). Thus, if one does not get good grades,

they are disappointing their parents and are paid little attention to which, in turn, leads to conflict and causes adverse mental effects. These emotional traumas can be seen in the American Psychological Association's own research that says "Asian-American college students were more likely than White American students to have had suicidal thoughts and to attempt suicide." The fact that more Asian-American students have suicidal thoughts helps prove that high expectations can yield adverse effects on students.

For those who are not yet convinced that all Asian parents expect academic excellence and absolute obedience of their child, they are right to think that. However, those who are unconvinced fail to recognize that I am specifically focusing on immigrant Asian parents and first generation Asian-American students instead of Asian-American parents who have been exposed to western culture for their entire lives.

The second theory deals with emotional culture of Asian-American families. Fundamentally, Eastern and Western cultures are different with respect to how they show their emotions. While it is more customary to openly talk about your grievances in American culture, according to a study by the California Polytechnic State University, "in Asian cultures, both sexes are taught to tightly control the expression of their emotions." From this, one can suspect that Asian-American teenagers are less likely to tell anyone about any mental health issues they might be experiencing. This way of living can cause a severe case of under reporting of mental health issues in the Asian community. In fact, Asian-Americans are twice as likely to tell family and relatives about their mental health issues than Asian-Americans are, according to the Asian-American Suicide Prevention & Education Organization. More concerning,

Caucasians are 6.5 times more likely to tell physicians and mental health professionals about these issues than Asian-Americans (AASPE). This staggering difference between Asian and Caucasian mental health awareness is frightening, to say the least. If one does not even bring up their mental health issues to people who can help them, how will one ever initiate the healing process. This not only shows us that Asian-American mental health and depression goes under reported medically, but it also fortifies the theory that Asian-American culture is un-supportive of telling anyone socially for the fear of being judged.

Actually, I noticed this sort of behaviour with Juss. In a conversation with Jan, he told me that Juss's search history was full of self-diagnostic tests, definitions for different mental disorders and clues of that nature. As expected, he never actually sought help from a mental health professional. Instead, he chose to keep it to himself by self-diagnosing in private. I was one of his closest friends, and I don't remember a single conversation that we had where we sat down and talked about our mental well-being. Even after I occasionally hinted toward the topic, he would always dodge the question with an unintelligible joke or something of that vein; the only funny part was that I always chose to fall for it. In retrospect, I think I tricked myself into falling for his humor instead of facing the seriousness and possible embarrassment of the subject; I suppose I am just another example of how Asian culture stigmatizes this sort of topic. Since Juss never externalized his emotions, like many Asian-Americans often don't, he harbored these feelings for longer than he could handle, which, according to Zornitsa Kalibatsev, head of psychology research at Michigan State University, "increases chances of becoming depressed or having sui-

cidal tendencies." Emotional repression very much affects the lives of its victims and those around them.

Those who are skeptical may say that this sense of emotional culture does not remain exclusive to Asian culture. They might add that emotional stigma lies in many if not all cultures. To them, I say that this stigma does arise in most cultures, and I generously agree with you. However, I would reveal to them that they may be referring to a different source of the stigma than I am referring to. The stigma that they would most likely be referring to is the male aspect of emotional conservation. By this, I mean that while all cultures hold a stigma against men showing emotion, Asian culture holds another layer of stigma that is inherent in the culture, as well as the male emotional stigma.

The third theory that can help us find out why Asian-American suicide and depression rates are so high is to look at the gendered expectations of Asian culture. Why do Asian-American females between 15-24 have the highest rate of suicide of any other ethnic group (NAMI)? And, according to the American Psychological Association, why is suicide the second leading cause of death for Asian-American females of this age? It seems that females, in particular, are subject to some kind of extra pressure that males are not exposed to that drives these girls into committing suicide at a higher rate. Well, according to Dr. Ngo, psychologist at Baylor University, "Asian-American girls are more subject to family pressures" (qtd. in Kim). This means that girls deal with hassles like family responsibilities, and duty to the family more than boys deal with them. Some responsibilities include being a perfect "motherly figure" and knowing how to cook and clean which are all values that are instilled and glorified in traditional Asian cultures.

One might think that if parents ex-

pect their daughter to fulfill these gender roles, that they would expect less in other aspects of their lives. This is simply not true. In reality, Along with essentially being family servants, sisters are expected to receive marks as high as their brothers, all while not showing any emotional anguish, so as to not disappoint their family. To put it simply, Asian-American girls are supposed to fulfill the fantasized role of the super-woman or else they run the risk of conjuring a family conflict which is shown to increase depression; it's a vicious cycle.

While the research I have gathered provides many perspectives as to why this mental health disparity exists, I think that there is an underlying common factor that links all three causal theories together. Ironically enough, I believe that parents put their child at risk for increased mental health issues, while, in reality, they are doing everything to keep their child safe. While their intentions for their child are genuine in success, it is the parents who place academic pressure on their child. It is also the parents who reinforce that their child not express any emotions in the family. Asian parents are also the ones who expect boys and girls to stick to their gender roles. No matter how you look at it, at the end of analysis, it all leads back to parents taking accountability. There is a cultural chokehold that Asian-American youths are trying to get out of in America. The aggressor: immigrant Asian parents.

Now that we are aware of some of the problems in Asian-American mental health, we must take steps to reduce depression and suicide rates in this community. But where do we start? Well, we can look at some of the cause theories that I provided and reverse the problem to find a solution for it. In a sense, it will be like reverse engineering a system to stop the product

from ever generating. In this case, the product is Asian-American suicide and depression. Once we deconstruct the cause, we can prevent the cause from ever initiating. While Asian-American mental health is difficult to answer as a whole, there are some progressive solutions that we can implement to gradually reduce the problem. Although there are a number of ways to help diminish Asian-American suicide and depression rates, I will be specifically looking at two policies that have the most potential.

The first policy I'd like to enact is a response to my second causal theory. If you recall, I argued that the emotional culture of Asian-Americans stigmatizes emotional expression. Therefore, Asian-American students are less likely to seek help from mental health professionals. To counteract this problem, I propose that high schools and colleges hold more Asian-American mental health awareness programs to reach out to more students. Additionally, these awareness programs should be designed so that students do not have to try and find it; rather, the program reaches out to the students. The reason for this is that if we normalize talking about mental health issues outside of the home, then more Asian-American students will accept that it is okay to show emotion and seek mental help. Ultimately, I am confident that the antithesis of stigmatization is normalization.

One might argue that groups like this already exist, in abundance, as a matter of fact. It is true that there are many Asian-American resources available, especially on the UIC campus. In fact, as a part of my research, I've attended many different programs from many different organizations regarding Asian-American mental health; one of which was a play. What I noticed, however, was the lack of a certain demographic in each program's

audience. The group I am referring to was the target demographic themselves--Asian-American students! Instead, the audience was filled with representatives of Asian-American student organizations, mental health organizations, UIC alumni, and people who had a great deal of knowledge and awareness about the subject, including myself. All these programs had attracted no one new. In a sense, they were preaching to the converted.

My policy is nothing new; rather, it is an innovation of the old. Adding more of an outreach approach to Asian-American mental health organizations will allow a wider audience to be aware of this issue and it will help Asian-American students seek help. My policy is very economical because all the funding would replace paying for ineffective programs, like seminars and plays, and into more useful ones that would be more effective. Not to mention, it is also feasible because all this requires is showing awareness more publicly in the same way existing awareness groups manage it, such as breast cancer awareness. If we can make Asian-American mental health anywhere near as ubiquitous as Susan G. Komen's pink ribbon, we've won the war on stigma.

The second policy I'd like to propose is a counter to my first causal theory--academic pressure. The core of the problem here is that Asian-American students want to be successful. At face value, there is nothing wrong with that; it is natural to want to be successful. Where the problem lies is if you delve deeper into the dynamics of what Asian-American culture defines as "success."

Success, in typical Asian-American culture, is seen as having a highly selective and competitive profession such as a doctor, lawyer, or engineer. Personally, I've seen this trend far too many times to care about. What this

culture refuses to accept is that equal success can be found in less strenuous passions--passions that will make some Asian-Americans truly happy. To reverse this problem, it makes sense to target the institutions guiding these impressionable students into life decisions. That is why I point the finger again to high schools and colleges and suggest that they provide Asian-American students, as well as other students, a more diversified and involving mandatory career day. Along with this, individual diversified career counseling should be required. What this will accomplish is, it will show Asian-American students different ways to be successful without becoming an intensive professional, while still being happy in the future. While career day does exist in many high schools and even colleges, there is a lack of guidance beyond asking if this job is even right for you. Economically, this type of project does not seem beyond the power of school funding and it is feasible because being happy in one's profession is what defines true success.

While these two policies may help Asian-American youth seek more help and treatment, there is one factor that many of today's policies fail to confront. This factor is at the heart of the problem, and for many, the source of the pain. Of course, I am referring to the immigrant Asian parents who onset these pressures on their child in the first place. If we can find a way to convince parents to step out of all of these cultural norms and not place these pressures on their child, they may be less likely to suffer mental health issues and commit suicide. Immigrant parents, like most, are typically stubborn when it comes to listening to people outside of the culture--at least, my parents are. However, I can definitely see my parents fawning over every single word of advice if it

comes from a figure of authority who happens to be of the same culture. Subsequently, if said authority figure decided to talk about the graveness of Asian-American mental health in today's youth, I believe they will listen wholeheartedly and finally show concern in their own children's lives. But who fits this criteria? Well, if you come from a religious family, like Juss and I do, you usually go to prayer at a church or mosque and hear a religious speaker of the same culture speak on a topic. If cultural speakers in a well-respected position tried to convince parents that this issue may be affecting their sons and daughters, I have no doubt that it will evoke some sort of response from the parents. While this step may seem miniscule, it is the first step, I feel, that will effectively expose Asian parents to the larger issue at hand. The most convenient part is, it does not cost a thing other than maybe a cup of tea for the speaker to show your appreciation.

Essentially, at the core of the relationship, it is a cost-benefit transaction for the parents. The cost of encouraging your child to seek mental health counseling is having other families see yours as being dysfunctional or flawed. However, the benefit you reap is astronomically significant. That benefit is the life of your beloved child.

Juss Decena was a model Asian-American student: bright, focused, respectful, and studious. While he epitomized all of these qualities, I don't think he was happy with any of it. What does it mean to be bright when that's all people expect from you? What does it mean to be respectful when you do not have respect for yourself? So I ask, what does it mean to be Asian-American if you are not happy with it? Although, initially, I was not able to understand why he took his own life, doing this research and attending these programs has made me grow not only

at an academic level, but more importantly, at an emotional level. As I recall, I attended Juss's funeral service with the intention of speaking, but I couldn't bring myself to do it. If I could go back, I think I would talk about the impact that Juss had on my life and the warmth he brought into everyone's heart. While I do not know what Juss's family went through after their loss, I do know that other families can be spared the same grief. We must take action as a society and as human beings to reduce mental illnesses and casualties in this war against stigma.

In memory of Juss Decena.

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Variations of English

by Danbi Kim

The English language has a lot of varieties depending on time, place, and person. According to Oxford Dictionary, this West Germanic language of England is now widely used in many varieties throughout the world. It has become one of the most common languages in the world, and is broadly spoken and learned as a second language. Therefore, English surely has a diversity that comes from use of a number of qualities, such as the environment, culture, particular time, historical background, and race.

The English language has changed over time. There is Old English, the earliest form of English in the fifth century, Middle English, which was used in the eleventh century, Early Modern English, used in the late fifteenth century, and finally, Modern English, the one spoken nowadays. All these varieties are English, but they are not exactly the same. Each has its own characteristics that show particular features related to that time period. As the things get changed over time, the English language has changed in many different ways, such as structure, grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation.

In September of 2012, my first year in the United States, I lived on the west

side of Chicago, where a significant African American population exists. I attended George Westinghouse College Prep, which had a large enrollment of African Americans, more than two-thirds of the student population. Due to the fact that a majority of my friends were African Americans, their English, African American Vernacular English, became my natural English. At the end of the year, it became common for me to hear some people describing me as "the blackest Asian girl". Also, many of my friends often tell me that I talk ghetto meaning odd or poor. Due to the fact that I am an Asian girl, it is possible for people to think that I am strange and odd. Not a few people seem to have negative stereotypes about African American Vernacular English, and they also refer it to ghetto English. However, it was not easy for me to control how I spoke English because it was the first English I had heard and started learning it from the first day I arrived in the United States.

African American Vernacular English, which I had never known before, was much more difficult for me to listen and comprehend at first. African Americans not only spoke very fast, but they used a lot of particular words

to the dialect, such as finna and fleek, which is the equivalent meaning to fitting to and on-point. At the end of the year, I still had issues with listening and speaking English. However, my level of my English evolved to the point where I was able to clearly express myself and communicate with others much more thoroughly. Even though I spoke English with different words, accents, and grammar, there was no issue in interacting with others. African American Vernacular English is just simply one of the variations of English that involves the historical background, culture and identity of the African American group.

As there are many different dialects of English, every individual speaks either significantly or slightly different than one another based on their culture, environment, and mother tongue. It is clearly natural for all individuals to speak distinctly with those unconditional circumstances. However, there are some people who judge others based on the way of speaking English and think of themselves as better than others. A society evaluates an upper or upper-middle-class English speaker more highly than those with non-standard accents, low lexical diversity, and a working-class background. According to Amy Tan, an American writer and the author of *Mother Tongue*, people in department stores, at banks, and at restaurants did not take her mother seriously because of the way she spoke. They did not give her good service, pretended not to understand her, or even acted as if they did not hear her. Because of the English her mother spoke, which is described it to people as 'broken' or 'limited' English, the quality of her thoughts or of what she had to say seemed to be imperfect and limited.

On the other hand, this kind of problem is not just shown from outside, but also from inside. I have seen many peo-

ple who feel ashamed of their mother tongue, a dialect that they grew up with and have intimacy with, and their English that involves their cultured accent. They would refuse to speak their mother tongue and pretend to be an only English speaker in public. Likewise, those of foreign descent, who were born in the United States tend to avoid getting along with people who just came from their own country. For instance, some 'twinkies', which refer to Asian Americans who are either adopted or raised in the United States, feel hatred towards 'fobs,' a term meaning fresh off the boat, used describing immigrant families or international students who barely speak English. This is because of shame of their background and ethnicity.

There are immigrant families and international students, who feel ashamed of their ability of speaking English. Due to the fact that they are often judged based on their English, they occasionally tend to hesitate to speak English. It has gradually become an obvious matter for immigrant families and international students, those who have either gone through or are still going through the struggle of the grammatical term and the pronunciation of English. They are frequently getting judged and evaluated negatively based on the way they speak English. Due to the fact that one does not speak perfect English, this does not mean that they are less educated than the others or have a lack of ability to express themselves. It is never a matter of an individual's lack of linguistic skills, but simply a matter of cold-hearted society, where lack of understanding and respect of cultural characteristics is often shown. It is just nothing more than prejudices and stereotypes that are unnecessary in our society.

Each individuals is unique and has his or her own perspective that no-

body else has or can have. The different kinds of English we use, regardless of accent, quality of words, or completion of sentences, reflects a distinct culture and identity of us as individuals. Thus, all variations of English should be respected as they are. It should never be a matter for individuals to feel anxious or afraid that they are getting judged by others based on their English. In the first place, there is no better English or worse English. While there is no such a thing as rule of speaking in English, it is ridiculous to evaluate or judge others based on their English.

As the English language is much more widely spoken and taught in all over the world, the more variations of English are emerging. New vocabularies have been created and added, some of words have stopped being used, structures have been changed, and dialects are newly formed. English has been and will be continuously changed over time. However, those who have thoughts of segregating Englishes would have to learn how to adapt and understand the differences and the characteristics among Englishes. In spite of noticeable variation between the forms of English spoken in different world regions, English-speakers from around the world can communicate with one another effectively and sufficiently. Different structures, accents, dialects and grammars are characteristics that distinguish one form from one another.

People who do not speak Standard English often get pointed out to fix their English. Standard English, which people refer to 'correct' or 'good' English, is also described as 'professional' and 'polite' English. The other day, I heard a guy say 'play your own race' to an Asian guy, who spoke African American Vernacular English. How are you supposed to speak and play your own race? What is an Asian way or an

African American way of speaking? There is no specific one way of speaking English for all kinds of humans. Race surely plays an important role in forming and building an identity of an individual, but it is just one of the qualities that influence one's identity. It is not a matter of race, but environment that an individual grew up with.

In spite the fact that some people have the same nationality or have grown up in the same area, there still is a change that they might be a little different in pronouncing several words. It is simply natural that an individual has his or her own accent or own way of speaking English based on an environment and a culture in which he or she grew up with.

The English language has many varieties depending on a number of qualities, such as vocabulary, structure, grammar, and pronunciation. These qualities are diversely formed around time, environment, and human race. Each dialects of English has its own distinct characteristics and properties. However, this does not mean a particular vernacular of English is considered more or less valuable based on whom, when, where, or how it is used. Due to the fact that every single vernaculars of English includes their specific historical background of how it has created and changed over a number of centuries, they should be respected and understood as they are. From my point of view, there is neither a better version of English nor worse English. Although there is such thing as Standard English, there still are so many variations even within that no one dialect can be defined as the correct one. All dialects of English should be valued equally, and they should never be an issue for someone to feel anxious or afraid that they are being judged by others.

Phoenix Chen is a junior majoring in Teaching of Mathematics and minoring in Asian American Studies. She started writing poems when she was thirteen. In high school, she joined the poetry club, participated in spoken word performances, and competed in Louder than a Bomb. What started as a hobby soon became a passion and a part of her identity. After watching the documentary "A Dream A Part", she wrote "A Documented Voice" in hope of capturing the experience of undocumented Asian American students.

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Hossein Fazel Sarjoui is a PhD student in Structural Engineering at UIC. Having lived in three countries in three different continents, he has experienced how language and identity may influence an individual's life in their new communities. Beside academia, Hossein is also an active volunteer and fundraiser for childhood cancer research.

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