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Identidad en una Idioma Diferente: Identity in a Different Language

"Buenas dias chicos como estas? Esta dia nosotros vamos a estudiar los capitols de Los EstadosUnidos". Imagine what it would be like if this is what you heard when you started your first day of school. This is how many Mexican immigrants spend their childhood education, the only difference is that instead of Spanish their teachers were speaking English. Even though they grew up in America, English was just as foreign as Spanish would be for an American in Mexico. Growing up as Mexicans in American schools, children who didn't speak or read English were separated into a program called bi-lingual education. The envisioned results of this program seemed perfect for the situation but this perfection was proven to be too good to be true. The children that grew up in this world have little identity in the Spanish-speaking world and no identity in the English speaking world either.

Richard Rodriquez, author of a piece called "Aria: A Memoir of a Bi-lingual Childhood", is a product of this world. At the beginning his education, Rodriquez had little to do with the harsh sounding English world. He was forced into the English world but once he became fully immersed, he realized the adverse effects of separating him from this world. Through his use of language in the literal sense and in the literary sense, Rodriquez conveys

his transformation and the importance of private and public identity. His use of images, sound techniques, and word choice successfully develops his argument that language and identity go hand in hand.

The imagery that Rodriguez uses in this essay is vivid and inventive. Richard Rodriguez describes his two-sided childhood, public and private. The first is the Spanish side, his private side. As a child the connection between him and the English world was only a few feet away but to him he might as well have been in Mexico. "They left each morning and returned each afternoon, speaking Spanish as they climbed the five steps to the porch". Pointing out the five steps is a symbolic way to show how close the American culture was to him. At the bottom of the stairs is the world they unwillingly and scarcely participate in; at the top is his comfort zone. The only part of this outside world that Rodriguez had contact with until his schooling was what he learned from his older siblings. "And their mysterious books, wrapped in brown shopping-bag paper, remained on the table next to the door, closed firmly behind them". Like the books and the door, the English world was closed off from this family. He really had little contact with this outside world until it was his turn to enter into the world of education and he was of age to run small errands by himself.

The public life that Rodriguez had was limited and as brief as he could possibly make it. When he was in school, the nuns pushed him to participate, "' Richard, stand up. Don't look at the floor. Speak up. Speak to the entire class, not just me!'"(Rodriguez 393). He shyly participated. This imagery is in the way he punctuates. The anger these nuns showed and how hostile they are towards Rodriguez, you get the feeling that he finds more comfort in the cold eyes of the floor than in the eyes of the nun. When he was out in the

world in stores and around the confidence of English, he would shy away. "I'd move away from them all-all the chirping chatter above me" (Rodriquez 389). Chirping and chattering is associated with birds, which on a surface level these sounds can be annoying and some even alarming but when you step back the sounds can be warm and beautiful. The view you get from this is that on one level that he is scared and does not want to be part of this world but on another level, he wants to join and be welcomed into this society.

Growing up in two worlds like Rodriquez did, he should have been able to create one new culture out of his private culture and this new public culture. His use of sound techniques gives his audience an idea of how hard this really was. He was reluctant to learn English and because of this the only place he felt comfortable was in the Spanish world. To him the outside world was a foreign, loud, demanding, confident world that scared him. "But by being so firm and clear, the sound of his voice said that he was a gringo; he belonged in public society" (Rodriquez 398). Utilizing both the Spanish and English language in his essay, Rodriquez uses word choice to help convey his purpose. Paring Spanish words written in italics with English words written in normal print is just another way to show the separation between his two worlds. "But then there was Spanish: *espanol*, the language rarely heard away from the house; *espanol*, the language which seemed to me therefore a private language, my Family's language" (Rodriquez). The Spanish language to him is beautiful and personal italics is a more personal form of text.

Richard Rodriquez grew up in a Spanish-speaking home and was extremely reluctant to learn English. Once he was forced to learn the language, as was his family, he began to see the doors it opened for his life. Rodriquez is against the idea of bi-lingual education. His

identity was limited in the English world until he accepted the language as another part of his world. While in school, there was no chance of forming a solid social identity.