


# Language Ideologies in Spanish Heritage Instruction and Identity\*

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\* Reflection paper

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### **Abstract**

Ideologies related to Latinx identity are central to heritage language (HL) instruction (Leeman et al., 2011). However, early heritage instruction was mainly focused on acquiring the standard norm (Leeman, 2012). What are the current ideologies in both the second language (L2) and heritage Spanish language classroom? This article intends to describe linguistic ideologies in the classroom, the value of English, the use of Spanglish, and how educators can foster positive attitudes through cultural awareness and translanguaging ideologies to promote social justice by fighting hegemonic ideologies.

**Keywords:** Spanglish, linguistic ideologies, heritage language instruction, translanguaging

## **Ideologías de lenguaje en la instrucción e identidad del español de herencia**

### **Resumen**

Las ideologías relacionadas con la identidad *latinx* son centrales en la instrucción de la lengua de herencia (LH) (Leeman et al., 2011). Sin embargo, la instrucción de herencia temprana estaba enfocada principalmente en adquirir la norma estándar (Leeman, 2012). ¿Cuáles son las ideologías actuales tanto en el aula de segunda lengua (SL) del español como en la de herencia? Este artículo intenta describir las ideologías lingüísticas en el aula, el valor del inglés, el uso del spanglish y cómo los educadores pueden potenciar actitudes positivas a través de la conciencia cultural y las ideologías de translenguaje para promocionar la justicia social luchando contra las ideologías hegemónicas.

**Palabras clave:** spanglish, ideologías lingüísticas, instrucción de lengua de herencia, translenguar.

## **Les idéologies de langage dans l'enseignement et l'identité de l'espagnol d'origine**

### **Résumé**

Les idéologies liées à l'identité latinx sont au cœur de l'enseignement de la langue d'origine (LE) (Leeman et al., 2011). Cependant, l'enseignement du patrimoine d'origine précoce fut principalement axé sur l'acquisition de la norme standard (Leeman, 2012). Quelles sont les idéologies actuelles aussi bien dans les classes d'espagnol langue seconde (SL) comme dans celles d'origine ? Cet article tente de décrire les idéologies linguistiques dans la salle de classe, la valeur de l'anglais, l'utilisation du spanglish, et la manière dont les éducateurs peuvent favoriser des attitudes positives par la sensibilisation culturelle et les idéologies de translangue afin de promouvoir la justice sociale en combattant les idéologies hégémoniques.

**Mots clés:** Spanglish, idéologies linguistiques, enseignement de la langue d'origine, translangue.

## **Ideologias da língua na instrução e identidade do espanhol herdado**

### **Resumo**

Ideologias relacionadas à identidade latina são centrais para o ensino da língua de herança (LH) (Leeman et al., 2011). No entanto, a instrução de herança inicial foi focada principalmente em adquirir a norma padrão (Leeman, 2012). Quais são as ideologias atuais tanto na aula de espanhol como na aula de patrimônio? Este artigo tenta descrever as ideologias linguísticas na sala de aula, o valor do inglês, o uso do spanglish e como os educadores podem fortalecer atitudes positivas por meio da consciência cultural e das ideologias translinguísticas para promover a justiça social ao lutar contra as ideologias hegemônicas.

**Palavras-chave:** spanglish, ideologias linguísticas, ensino de línguas tradicionais, translinguagem.

## Introduction

The term *heritage language learner* (HLL) is both cultural and linguistic. Therefore, ideologies related to Latinx identity and its link to the Spanish language are central to heritage language (HL) instruction (Leeman et al., 2011). However, early heritage instruction did not contest linguistic prejudices within Spanish since it was mainly focused on acquiring the standard norm (Leeman, 2012). What are the current ideologies in both the L2 and heritage Spanish classroom? What is the value of English and the role of Spanish? How can educators promote positive attitudes towards Spanish? This article intends to shed new light on these questions. In the first section, language ideologies in the L2 Spanish classroom are described to understand how this is a reflection of the language ideologies that HLLs have to face. Then, the value of English and Spanglish in the classroom is described to understand the language ideologies in the classroom and the tools that instructors should provide to fight them. Finally, some suggestions are offered to build a positive attitude towards the use of Spanish.

## Language Ideologies in the L2 Spanish Classroom

Languages are mostly perceived by their ideologies rather than by their internal structures (Moreno-Fernández, 2017). Schwieter (2008) conducted an experimental study in a basic Spanish class on language attitudes among genders. Females showed more positive attitudes and men showed negative attitudes towards the language, based on ethnocentrism and nationalistic ideas. Positive attitudes make students value bilingualism contrary to those who hold negative attitudes. In fact, there is a correlation between positive attitudes and linguistic attainment, so instructors could overcome this challenge through language awareness (Delbene, 2012). The construction of the monolingual ideology of one country-one language hides the most common scenario of multilingualism around the world and requires assimilation into English (Rosa, 2014). There is a popular belief that Hispanics do not want to learn English. These beliefs are social stereotypes and Spanish classrooms are not exempt from these attitudes (Delbene, 2012). Sánchez-Muñoz and Amezcua (2019), therefore, argue that recognizing the interconnection between language and identity may deconstruct hegemonic ideologies and the stigmatization of Spanish. Furthermore, when HLLs are enrolled in courses of L2 Spanish, they find that their US dialects are somehow ignored, and the curriculum only addresses the Spanish from Spain and Latin America. The teaching of Spanish as an L2 has traditionally promoted prestigious varieties of Spanish to the detriment of US Spanish (Leeman, 2005).

Unfortunately, Felix (2009) showed that this ideology is perpetuated by both teachers and learners. In fact, in DeFeo (2015) HLLs reacted towards those ideologies and challenged the curriculum. The erasure of the US Spanish dialect in the curriculum promotes monolingualism as a norm instead of multilingualism. Thus, educators should reflect on teaching materials regarding how Spanish speakers are portrayed (Leeman, 2014). In these L2 Spanish classrooms, there is a standard and idealized dialect that does not reflect the diversity of the Spanish language and, therefore, the different representation of identities is ignored. For all these reasons, Gallego and Conley (2013) recommended raising awareness

of cultural differences from the beginning courses with a double objective: to avoid linguistic discrimination and to embrace diversity.

Despite all these challenges that need to be overcome, there is room for optimism since recent research such as that of Toledo-López and Pentón-Herrera (2015a, 2015b) suggests that Spanish language teaching in the US nowadays advocates for bilingualism and biculturalism. This article is in favor of the implementation of critical pedagogies to provide HLLs with the necessary tools to fight all the challenges to resist these ideologies against their identities, considering the value of English and Spanish in the US. One of the main objectives of Spanish for HLLs is the maintenance of Spanish. However, conservative ideologies focused on the acquisition of the standard form may be detrimental to the maintenance of local varieties. The classroom should mirror the community. Instead, hegemonic ideologies are still present, so student resilience is key to overcome them. Even though not all Latinx have a command of Spanish, those who do, find that Spanish is an important part of their identity. As a consequence, their bilingualism can be used as another tool to empower them.

In the following sections, we will describe the value of English in the US and the role of Spanglish as a bridge between the American and Hispanic identities in order to understand the linguistic ideologies we can find in the classroom.

## **The Value of English**

It is widely assumed that all Latinxs speak Spanish and that they are a homogenous community. This assumption ignores the complexity and diversity of the community (De Genova & Ramos-Zayas, 2003). Even in transitional bilingual programs such as the one located in the US-Mexico border, only English is valued and used to teach. These students' bilingualism is perceived as language-as-problem (Palmer, 2011). Even though students showed their teachers' ideologies, they also found space for Spanish to communicate with their families (Herrera-Rocha & De La Piedra, 2019). On another note, the language-as-problem orientation suggests that the supposed underachievement of emergent bilinguals is due to the Spanish language (Escamilla, 2006). Some schools even use shame to make students speak English instead of their HL (García, 2010). Unfortunately, sometimes these students react to it by disassociating themselves from Spanish (Fuller & Hosemann, 2015). The fact that Spanish is subordinated to English in the US may have a strong impact on the vitality of Spanish because of linguistic discrimination (Escobar & Potowski, 2015).

Interestingly, US Latinxs that are English dominant use Spanish to show their Mexicanness and they use their bilingualism with Spanish-dominant Latinxs as language elitism in their transnational community (Christiansen, 2018). Spanish is more a tool for Latinx identity rather than a tool to increase their socioeconomic class (Fernández-Mallat & Carey, 2017). In Yoon (2020), Spanish-speaking families considered bilingualism fundamental to be living as Latinx in the US. Being bilingual and biliterate was more like a social practice needed for survival. Many of them act as language brokers for their parents as a way of strengthening their relationship with their families. They use Spanish to develop resiliency to face challenges (Stevenson et al., 2017). In fact, most US Latinx feel more comfortable using Spanglish despite the linguistic ideologies attached to it. What can we consider Spanglish?

## Spanglish

Spanglish has been considered the most important linguistic phenomenon in the US in the last decades (Ardila, 2005). Students' linguistic ideologies are not only what they say their beliefs are regarding Spanglish, but also how they actually use language in daily interaction (Martínez, 2013). It is more a psychological dialect rather than a structural dialect (López García-Molins, 2015). In spite of the fact that it is the everyday language in Latinx communities, it could also be of value to increase the development of literacy skills in English (Martínez, 2010). Unfortunately, people who speak Spanglish may feel alienated (Smith, 2015). Their bilingualism is often seen as not having a domain of either English or Spanish. This results in a perception of needing linguistic remediation to acquire the standard for success in the economy (Flores, 2016). However, researchers see it as a communication strategy that is a product of the bilingual identity of its speakers (Betti, 2011) as well as a way to contest dominant ideologies (Martínez, 2013). In fact, ignoring the ideologies of Spanglish implies de-legitimizing its speakers' identities (López, 2011).

Martínez (2013) conducted a study on language ideologies in bilingual students in LA and found that these students used both dominant and counter-hegemonic ideologies regarding Spanglish, which made this researcher conclude that educators should foster critical language awareness among these students. These students had internalized purist ideologies and viewed their Spanglish as a sign of deficiency. Instead, Spanglish may be a potential tool for literacy teaching, using it as a resource to extend the students' skills (Martínez, 2010). HLLs use Spanglish as a way of self-constructing their Latinx identities (Andrade, 2019). According to Sayer (2008), educators witness the language use in the classroom, how Spanglish is embraced as a social language, and as a projection of the Latinx identity.

Language use and attitude determine the social identity of heritage speakers. Regarding US Spanish dialects, Chicano Spanish has been stigmatized even within the Chicano community (Hernández-Chávez & Bernal-Enríquez, 2003). The future of Spanglish in the US will depend on the number of Spanish-speaking immigrants and the linguistic policies on bilingualism. It will probably continue being a "non-recognized anglicized Spanish dialect" (Ardila, 2005, p. 79). Ultimately, what makes Spanglish unique is its efficiency and creative way of communication between the Hispanic and American world (Sciortino, 2018). It is our role as instructors to acknowledge and validate it in the classroom. What are the language ideologies in the heritage classroom and how can we provide students with the necessary tools to fight them?

## Language Ideologies in the Spanish Heritage Classroom

Spanish heritage courses were envisioned as culturally responsive education, and the learning of the Spanish language as to strengthen HLLs' ties to their communities (Leeman & Martínez, 2007). According to Carrasco and Reigelhaupt (2003), the most important goal should be the transmission of Spanish to the next generation. Additionally, the basis of instruction in the heritage class should be the students' varieties (Loza, 2017). Nevertheless, evidence shows that there is still an emphasis on the standard in many Spanish HL programs (Valdés et al., 2008). Thus, many programs are still supporting hegemonic language ideologies that clearly

harm US Spanish and its maintenance, as Loza (2017) shows in a study that was conducted in a Spanish heritage classroom. These data suggested that literature seems to be a powerful tool for students' linguistic development and to fight hegemonic ideologies that contest US Spanish especially through Chicano literature to engage HLLs with their own culture.

As said by Leeman (2012), language ideologies about the relative value of non-standard varieties are unfortunately often reflected in teaching practices. Thus, educators have a crucial role in this. Spolsky (2004) found that most teachers were embracing purist ideologies rather than resisting them, even though these ideologies do not reflect students' linguistic realities. This behavior could unfortunately derive into language loss of students' varieties (Román et al., 2019). It is important to acknowledge the negative ideologies of the speakers of non-standard varieties so that we can find tools to support and show respect towards these students' dialects and teach them how to have respect towards their own dialects (McEvoy, 2017). Furthermore, textbooks collect a homogenous ideology of a pan-Latinx-identity under the assumption that one common textbook fits them all (Leeman & Martínez, 2007). As García and Torres-Guevara (2010) claim, these students are often perceived as a linguistic problem, and therefore, their bilingualism is stigmatized. However, their identity as HLLs is mostly linked to a high proficiency in the HL independent from their actual proficiency (Beaudrie et al., 2009).

HL learning pedagogy should address this issue to empower these students and providing their dialects with value. Ultimately language ideologies are directly linked to their identity construction (Herrera-Rocha & De La Piedra, 2019). The HL learning experience needs to be considered as an asset and teachers should focus on students' academic development (Achugar et al., 2007).

What is the place of Spanish? On one hand, Latinx feel pride in their identity and the need of affirming it, but on the other hand, they feel nostalgia. Mackinney (2017) found that they had an instrumental motivation for maintaining Spanish and as a way to socialize with their families even through transnational relationships. In the HL classroom, students saw Spanish as a tool of resistance against linguistic discrimination (Sánchez-Muñoz & Amezcua, 2019). This is directly related to the opportunity given to maintain the language and improve their linguistic skills, and the positive connections between language and identity (Beaudrie & Ducar, 2005; Sánchez-Muñoz, 2016). In fact, when students have a positive attitude towards the Latinx culture, they tend to speak more Spanish and thus, to acquire a more native-like accent (Oh & Au, 2005).

The Spanish heritage classroom can also be envisioned as a place for social justice and personal transformation (Petrov, 2013). In a study conducted by Sánchez-Muñoz (2016) on language attitudes of Spanish HLLs, she found that their *Latinidad* was connected to their ability to speak Spanish so that they could fully participate in their community. Hence, as this researcher argues these classes play a crucial role in the maintenance of the language and in healing HLLs' low linguistic self-esteem. On the other hand, retention of minority languages is correlated with academic success, and positive feelings towards the HL tend to narrow the *Latino achievement gap* (Carreira, 2007). The real paradox is that US Latinxs are judged by speaking a non-standard dialect of Spanish and by not speaking Spanish at all (Sánchez &

Chávez, 2010). If students are informed about linguistic ideologies, they can become aware of the status of privilege of the English language. If they are also aware of Hispanophobia, they can start challenging these negative ideologies towards the Spanish language and its speakers (Beaudrie et al., 2020). On the other hand, ideologies in the classroom may differ from the ideologies in the community. In transnational Mexican-American families, Spanish is valued as a marker of the *Ranchero* culture (Farr, 2011), and in Latinx communities, as a marker of membership of the US Latinx culture (Torrez, 2013).

What about Latinx panethnicity? According to a study conducted by García (2020) on Latinx parents' approaches to bilingualism, Spanish is relevant to claiming a Latinx identity. It is a situational pressure that Latinx negotiate regarding Spanish. Even though language ideologies could be absent at the administrative level, English dominance could still be present in the classroom (Potowski, 2007). In fact, if we revise the goals of heritage language programs, intergenerational continuity is not usually of them (Valdés, 2015). Correa (2010) suggested teaching HLLs about language as a tool for reflection and empowerment. Retaining their dialect is their right, but they would be able to use it in their career too if they work in their community (Correa, 2016). As educators, how can we implement positive attitudes towards Spanish in the classroom? This is crucial to make HLLs agents of change.

### **Suggestions to Foster Positive Attitudes Towards Spanish**

Traditional culture instruction fostered negative attitudes towards US Spanish in the case of HLLs (Tecedor et al., 2020). Thus, it is still crucial to work for promoting positive attitudes with respect to Spanish and its dialectal diversity, especially towards the Spanish in the US. There have been several proposals to improve the attitudes in relation to the Spanish language and culture. Study abroad programs may be an important resource for HLLs to reinforce their bilingual identities. These programs should include opportunities for identity reflection (Quan et al., 2018). Critical Language Awareness (CLA) is a critical framework that is especially relevant to fight linguistic subordination and to promote social justice (Leeman, 2018). Therefore, global and cultural awareness activities can be designed to foster empathy (Alonso Santillana, 2019) such as the discussion of power issues via service-learning opportunities or the reflection on their linguistic practices through student journals. Courses should include a component of multilingualism, Spanish in the US, language policies, and use of code-switching in the media (Leeman, 2018). Another way of working to improve student attitudes is using the arts as a tool for self and cultural exploration to give voice to their experiences (Mostow, 2017).

On the other hand, García (2008) explained the importance of translanguaging to legitimize the bilingual practices in communicative situations. Translanguaging pedagogy pushes students to integrate the languages they know in communication (García & Wei, 2014). This kind of pedagogy advocated for social justice to overthrow hegemonic ideologies (García & Leiva, 2014). In addition, it is important to highlight the pedagogical advantages of translanguaging by promoting fluid linguistic practices to address linguistic hegemonies using entire linguistic repertoires (Emerick et al., 2020). Flores and García (2013) conducted a study where teachers created a linguistic space for dynamic practices. Another positive aspect



of translanguaging is the practice of celebrating how Latinx speak (Powell & Carrillo, 2019). Educators could use testimonials along with translanguaging to share the experiences of Latinx in the classroom (Ramírez, 2018).

## Conclusions

Language ideologies are present in both L2 and heritage Spanish classrooms when there is still an aspiration to acquire the standard ignoring the non-standard and the diversity of the Spanish dialects, especially in the case of US Spanish, usually ignored in the curriculum. This article intends to offer tools to empower HLLs to fight hegemonic ideologies and to show resiliency to protect their bilingual identities by validating their own dialects. Unfortunately, HLLs, who are usually speakers of Spanglish, find themselves in situations where their identities are often delegitimized (López, 2011).

Our job as educators is to empower our HLLs and promote social justice in the classroom by giving value to their dialects, and to provide them with the tools to fight negative ideologies against their varieties. Since Spanish defines their bilingual identities, it should be used as a tool for resistance and reflection: What is the place of Spanish in their identities and in the classroom? Instructors should also be informed about critical language awareness pedagogies to promote empathy towards cultural diversity, and teaching practices should reflect this through ethnographic projects, the study of Latinx literature, or directly, the study of the wide array of Hispanic cultures. Finally, translanguaging pedagogy should also be considered as a means of social justice to fight hegemonic ideologies. More research is needed on classroom practices as a result of the implementation of these pedagogies and their efficiency to empower HLLs.

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