

Editorial

Introduction to the Special Issue Spanish in the US: A Sociolinguistic Approach

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This Special Issue highlights the pivotal role of Spanish as a linguistic and cultural force in the United States, emphasizing its relevance in shaping identities, fostering community connections, and navigating complex sociopolitical landscapes. Spanish, as the second-most spoken language in the country, holds a central position in both private and public spheres, reflecting the dynamic interplay between language and societal factors. The studies presented in this collection address a wide range of sociolinguistic topics, including the challenges of language maintenance and intergenerational transmission, the visibility and representation of Spanish in public and digital spaces, the experiences and contributions of heritage speakers, the complexities of bilingualism and code-switching, and the intersection of language with race, identity, and power. Collectively, the contributions in this volume illuminate the multifaceted ways in which Spanish adapts to and thrives within diverse contexts across the U.S., offering fresh insights into its evolving role in a multilingual society.

Devin L. Jenkins' analysis of language shift in the Western U.S. sheds light on the persistent challenges of intergenerational transmission of Spanish in a region marked by significant demographic changes. His findings illustrate how immigration sustains Spanish-speaking populations in areas like the Pacific Northwest, even as longstanding bilingual communities in New Mexico and Colorado face linguistic erosion. Similarly, Eva Mendieta's exploration of Spanish in Northwest Indiana underscores the importance of community attitudes in language maintenance. Her study reveals a complex relationship between local Spanish varieties and broader sociolinguistic ideologies, highlighting the need for educational and institutional support to foster linguistic security and pride. These studies emphasize the critical role of community and demographic dynamics in sustaining Spanish across generations. Future directions might include examining the intersection of language maintenance and socioeconomic mobility or assessing the role of family and community dynamics in intergenerational language transmission across different regional contexts.

Public representation of Spanish plays a central role in shaping societal attitudes and linguistic visibility. Daniel Guarín's analysis of linguistic landscapes in Philadelphia demonstrates how Spanish signage fosters inclusion and identity in diverse neighborhoods, such as the Golden Block and South Philadelphia's Italian Market. Alicia Cipria and Erin O'Rourke's study extends this discussion to a semi-rural context, documenting how Spanish signage in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, reflects the adaptability of Spanish in emerging Hispanic communities. Both studies highlight the symbolic and functional roles of Spanish in public spaces, illustrating how linguistic landscapes can reflect and reinforce cultural belonging. These insights are complemented by Grace Parker, Maia Botek, and Diego Pascual y Cabo, who trace the evolution of Latinx characters in U.S. television. While recent



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portrayals show progress, covert biases persist, shaping public attitudes about Spanish speakers. These studies call for more nuanced and equitable representations of Spanish in both the public and popular culture spheres, aligning with broader efforts to challenge raciolinguistic ideologies.

Complementing the studies of portrayals of Spanish and Spanish speakers in public discourse, Jazmine Exford's examination of racialized sociolinguistic processes among non-Latinx Spanish learners draws attention to the intersection of language, race, and power. Her findings highlight how racial ideologies shape access to and perceptions of Spanish, aligning with broader discussions about the role of race in shaping linguistic experiences. Future research could expand on the intersection of language and race by exploring how raciolinguistic ideologies influence public policy, bilingual education, and workplace dynamics.

Heritage speakers are fundamental to the vitality of Spanish in the U.S., and their experiences offer valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities of bilingualism. Marina Cuartero Marco's analysis reveals how social networks influence heritage speakers' attitudes and motivations, emphasizing the importance of fostering supportive environments to combat linguistic insecurities. This study resonates with the work of the SEC Spanish Consortium, led by Stephen Fafulas, which models how community-based research and educational initiatives can empower heritage speakers and address systemic inequities. By integrating sociolinguistic research with practical initiatives, the Consortium exemplifies how linguists can drive meaningful social change. These efforts highlight the potential for collaborative approaches to support heritage speakers and promote linguistic equity. By connecting heritage language education to broader social contexts, these studies contribute to ongoing discussions about how best to support heritage speakers.

Bilingualism and code-switching also emerge as central themes in this collection. Cecilia Montes-Alcalá's study of bilingual texting practices demonstrates how young bilinguals in New York creatively navigate linguistic boundaries, using digital platforms to express their bicultural and bilingual identities. Roshawnda Derrick's analysis of Spanish-English code-switching in radio advertisements highlights how bilingualism operates as both a communicative strategy and a cultural marker in commercial contexts. These studies challenge deficit-based perspectives on bilingualism, framing code-switching as a sophisticated and contextually rich practice that reflects the dynamic interplay of language and identity. They also open pathways for exploring how bilingualism intersects with emerging technologies and media platforms. The evolving role of Spanish in digital spaces and media platforms, particularly with the rise in artificial intelligence and algorithm-driven content, calls for deeper exploration to understand its implications for representation and accessibility. Representation and accessibility ensure that Spanish-speaking users are not only visible but also empowered in the evolving digital landscape.

Lastly, the studies by Stephen Fafulas et al. and by Christian Puma Ninacuri and Patricia Gubitosi show how Spanish-speaking communities adapt and thrive in diverse U.S. contexts, from emerging Latinx populations in the South to established diasporas in New York City. Both works emphasize the role of Spanish in fostering cultural identity and resilience while navigating linguistic diversity and sociopolitical challenges. They contribute to understanding Spanish's adaptability across regions, highlighting its role in cultural preservation and adaptation, and advancing discussions on its evolution in a multilingual U.S. society. Community-engaged research, like that of the SEC Spanish Consortium, offers a promising model for studying Spanish in underserved regions while creating tangible benefits for local populations.

This Special Issue highlights the enduring value of Spanish as a linguistic and cultural pillar in the United States, revealing its dynamic interplay with identity, community,

and societal structures. The studies presented in this volume emphasize the challenges and opportunities inherent in maintaining Spanish across generations, particularly as demographic shifts, institutional frameworks, and sociopolitical factors continue to shape its trajectory. Through analyses of intergenerational transmission, public representation, digital and media presence, and the lived experiences of heritage speakers and bilingual communities, the contributors provide a detailed and multifaceted perspective on the evolving role of Spanish in a multilingual society.

Summary of studies:

Devin L. Jenkins' paper, "Shift Still Happens: Spanish Language Maintenance in the Face of Growth and Change in the Western United States", examines Spanish language maintenance and shift over four decades using U.S. Census and American Community Survey data. The study highlights regional disparities: Southwestern states like New Mexico and Colorado face declines in Spanish language density and loyalty due to limited immigration and the erosion of heritage Spanish, while Northwestern states like Oregon and Washington see growth driven by recent immigration. The study revisits the "linguistic cost" of Spanish, previously tied to lower income and education, noting that these negative correlations have weakened over time. Jenkins emphasizes the critical role of immigration in sustaining Spanish use, particularly in emerging Hispanic communities. The findings underscore the complexity of Spanish language maintenance, where demographic growth bolsters its presence, but intergenerational shift poses ongoing challenges.

The paper "Language Attitudes in a Historic Latino Community: The Case of Spanish in Northwest Indiana" by Eva Mendieta examines how Latinos in one of the Midwest's oldest immigration gateways perceive and evaluate their local Spanish variety. Based on 236 survey responses, the study reveals that while some label their Spanish as "improper" or "broken", 78% view it positively as a tool for communication and cultural identity. A significant portion (36%) describe it as a "new dialect" shaped by local influences, with 35% highlighting English's impact. The study also explores broader sociolinguistic ideologies, noting that many participants associate "correct" Spanish with national varieties like those of Spain and Mexico, though some reject a single standard, emphasizing linguistic diversity. Perceptions of Spanish vary by context, with non-Latino attitudes often more negative in areas with fewer Latinos compared to more positive evaluations in Latino enclaves. Mendieta's findings emphasize the resilience of Spanish in Northwest Indiana while highlighting challenges like linguistic shift and stigmatization. The study calls for educational and institutional efforts to foster linguistic security and celebrate Spanish's diverse forms within U.S. Latino communities.

Daniel Guarín's paper "From Bilingualism to Multilingualism: Mapping Language Dynamics in the Linguistic Landscape of Hispanic Philadelphia" explores the role of Spanish in Philadelphia's Hispanic neighborhoods through an analysis of 3437 signs from 2021 to 2023. English dominates (61.65%), followed by Spanish (24.16%) and bilingual signs (13.31%), with a notable increase in monolingual Spanish and bilingual signage over time, signaling greater linguistic diversity. Each neighborhood reflects unique linguistic patterns shaped by its demographics. The Golden Block features a high prevalence of bilingual signs, as it is a historical Latino hub; Olney showcases a mix of languages reflecting its diverse immigrant population; and South Philadelphia's Italian Market highlights Spanish's growing presence in a multicultural setting with a significant Mexican community. The study underscores the symbolic and informational importance of Spanish signage in reinforcing community identity and cohesion, particularly in religious institutions, ethnic businesses, and cultural events. Guarín's work provides valuable insights into urban multilingualism, showing how language shapes identity and community in dynamic sociocultural contexts.

The paper “Multimodal Analysis of the Spanish Linguistic Landscape in Alabama” by Alicia Cipria and Erin O’Rourke examines Spanish signage in Tuscaloosa County, a semi-rural area with a growing Hispanic population. Using a multimodal framework, the study explores how language interacts with visual elements like colors, fonts, and symbols to reflect community identity. Restaurants use multimodal resources to convey authenticity, employing Mexican imagery to appeal to diverse audiences. Stores showcase broader Latino identities through elements like Guatemalan symbols and bilingual text, while churches focus on community connection, using primarily linguistic resources. The study highlights how Spanish signage adapts to sociolinguistic shifts, fostering identity and cohesion even in small communities. Cipria and O’Rourke contribute to understanding Spanish’s resilience in less-studied contexts, emphasizing its role in shaping public spaces and cultural belonging.

The paper “The Evolving Landscape of Spanish Language Representation in U.S. Media: From Overt to Covert Discrimination” by Grace A. Parker, Maia Botek, and Diego Pascual y Cabo examines how portrayals of Spanish and Latinx characters in television have shifted from overt to covert discrimination. Analyzing six shows from the 1990s to today, the study highlights how earlier programs like *That ‘70s Show* and *Family Guy* often ridiculed linguistic practices and perpetuated stereotypes, while contemporary series such as *One Day at a Time* and *Gentefied* present greater linguistic and cultural authenticity. Despite progress, covert biases persist, subtly reinforcing stereotypes tied to race, gender, and class. For instance, Spanish-dominant characters are still linked to lower socioeconomic status, and Latina women are hypersexualized. The study calls for ongoing critical examination of media to dismantle raciolinguistic ideologies and foster authentic, diverse portrayals that reflect the richness of Latinx experiences.

Jazmine Exford’s paper, “Racialized Sociolinguistic Processes in the Spanish Learning Journeys of Non-Latinxs in the U.S.”, explores how race, identity, and power shape Spanish acquisition among non-Latinx learners. Based on ethnographic interviews, the study identifies three processes: racialized positionality, where learners’ racial identities affect their engagement with Spanish-speaking communities; racialized embodiment, where physical traits influence interactions with Spanish speakers, sometimes leading to exoticizing or gendered perceptions; and indexical fields of racialization, where learners interpret racialized terms like *negra* through cultural and historical lenses. The study highlights the need for Critical Language Awareness (CLA) in Spanish education to address these dynamics, fostering discussions on race and identity to better support diverse learners. Exford’s findings advance raciolinguistics by showing how race mediates language learning in multilingual settings.

The paper by Marina Cuartero Marco, titled “Dime con Quién Andas y te Diré Qué Piensas Sobre el Español de los US”, examines how social networks shape the attitudes and motivations of 26 Spanish heritage speakers (HSs) in a Spanish Heritage Language program. Using Personal Social Network Analysis (PSNA), the study shows that close relationships, particularly with family, play a dual role: providing support and encouragement but also inducing language shame or high expectations that affect confidence and motivation. The study identifies intrinsic and extrinsic motivations, with family expectations and cultural identity strongly influencing the latter. Attitudes within networks, such as beliefs about language correctness, significantly impact HSs’ willingness to maintain or improve their Spanish. Cuartero Marco underscores the need for supportive educational and community environments to foster positive attitudes, address linguistic insecurities, and combat negative ideologies about bilingualism. This research highlights the complex

interplay between language, identity, and community dynamics shaping HSs' experiences in the U.S.

Cecilia Montes-Alcalá's paper, "Bilingual Texting in the Age of Emoji", examines Spanish–English code-switching in text messages among bilingual youth in New York City. Analyzing 44,597 messages from the Bilingual Youth Texts (BYTs) Corpus, the study identifies key patterns, including tag switching (e.g., "baby", "bro"), textisms like "LOL", cultural references (e.g., "sancocho"), and shifts for emphasis or clarification. Although code-switching appears in only 6.4% of messages, it reflects strategies found in oral discourse, serving as a tool for identity expression, bicultural creativity, and stylistic nuance. Montes-Alcalá highlights that texting code-switching is a sophisticated adaptation to bilingual realities, providing valuable insights into how technology shapes language use and cultural belonging in multilingual communities.

The paper by Roshawnda A. Derrick titled "Radio-Lect: Spanish/English Code-Switching in On-Air Advertisements" examines Spanish-English code-switching (CS) in advertisements on Los Angeles' bilingual radio station 96.3 La Mega. Analyzing 72 h of recordings and 143 ads, the study reveals that national ads favor monolingual Spanish (74.8%), while DJ-endorsed ads show greater linguistic flexibility, with 15.8% featuring hybrid sentences that blend Spanish and English. DJ-endorsed ads align with the station's bilingual ethos, mirroring the linguistic practices of its DJs and younger Latinx audiences. Derrick highlights CS as a strategic tool for engaging bilingual communities, emphasizing its cultural relevance and adaptability in diverse linguistic contexts. This study contributes to discussions on bilingualism in media and marketing, showing how CS reflects both cultural identity and audience connection.

The paper "Ecuadorians in NYC: Language and Cultural Practices of a Community in the Diaspora" by Christian Puma Ninacuri and Patricia Gubitosi examines how Ecuadorian migrants in Queens and Brooklyn maintain their cultural heritage while adapting to NYC's superdiverse environment. Based on ethnographic fieldwork and interviews, the study highlights Ecuadorian Andean Spanish as a marker of in-group solidarity, despite linguistic insecurities stemming from ideologies favoring "standard" Spanish. Features like the discourse marker *ve* and terms like *ñañño* (brother/friend) remain central to community identity. Cultural practices such as festivals, Ecuavolley games, and food-related events foster a sense of belonging and intergenerational dialog, enriched by newer Kichwa-speaking migrants. The study stresses the importance of linguistic and cultural spaces in maintaining diaspora cohesion and resilience, offering insights into the balance between cultural preservation and adaptation in multilingual urban settings.

The paper "The SEC Spanish Consortium: Foundations for Linguistic Gratuity and Language Documentation Among Latinx Populations in New Destination Communities of the U.S. South" by Stephen Fafulas, Chad Howe, Rafael Orozco, Alicia Cipria, Erin O'Rourke, Nina Moreno, and Matthew J. Van Hoose introduces an initiative focused on documenting and supporting Latinx communities in the rapidly growing and diverse U.S. South. These "new destination" communities provide unique insights into language contact and bilingual identity development. The Consortium combines sociolinguistic research, community engagement, and advocacy with initiatives like documenting linguistic landscapes, conducting interviews, and fostering "linguistic gratuity" through bilingual health fairs and heritage language programs. The findings reveal that while Spanish strengthens community cohesion, its use is influenced by regional context, migration histories, and sociopolitical challenges. The Consortium addresses barriers like linguistic discrimination through partnerships with local stakeholders, promoting appreciation for Latinx linguistic and cultural contributions. This work highlights how Spanish adapts in

nontraditional Hispanic regions, offering a model for collaborative, community-driven research in multilingual settings.

In conclusion, while this Special Issue thoroughly explores Spanish as a linguistic and cultural force in the United States, it also identifies opportunities for further research. For example, the vitality of Spanish in smaller, nontraditional Hispanic communities, where population density and institutional support may differ from larger urban centers, remains underexplored. This collection also leaves room for more nationwide comprehensive analyses of generational language shifts among newer immigrant groups and long-standing Hispanic populations and the impact of socioeconomic mobility on language practices. Additionally, while this collection sheds light on heritage speakers and bilingualism, it highlights the need for deeper analysis of the generational dynamics within their families and communities, particularly how changing social networks influence language retention and shift over time.

Another critical area for future research involves the informal standardization of U.S. Spanish varieties. As Spanish gains prominence in media, education, and public life, certain structural features and bilingual practices are becoming widely recognized. Questions surrounding the potential need for official standards, their legitimacy, and their implications for education, society, and policy are yet to be resolved. Who should participate in these standardization discussions, and what would be the broader societal impacts of institutionalized norms? Addressing these questions could provide valuable insights into the future trajectory of Spanish in the U.S.

Lastly, the intersection of language and systemic inequities, including the influence of raciolinguistic ideologies on bilingual education, workplace dynamics, and public policy, continues to be a vital area for future inquiry. These efforts could further illuminate how structural barriers can be dismantled to promote linguistic equity. Future research could also address the sociolinguistic implications of emerging technologies, such as generative artificial intelligence, which increasingly shape the representation and accessibility of Spanish in digital spaces. By addressing these gaps, future research can build on the foundation laid by this Special Issue, contributing to a richer and more inclusive understanding of Spanish's evolving role in the multilingual U.S. context. This ongoing work underscores the importance of interdisciplinary, community-engaged approaches that both celebrate and support the diversity of Spanish speakers and their linguistic practices.

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