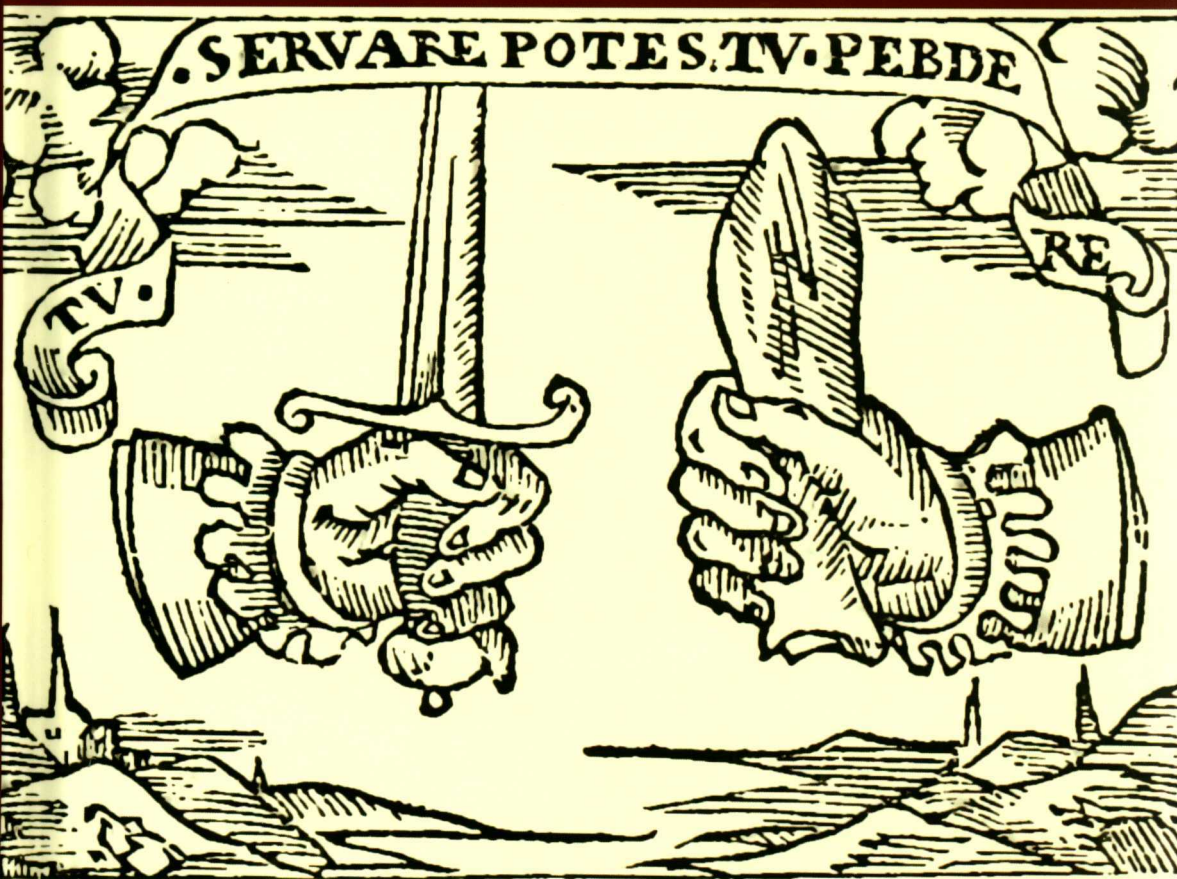


A Political History of SPANISH

The Making of a Language



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17 Introduction to the making of Spanish: US perspectives

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Introduction

The political history of language in the United States has been described by numerous scholars as a series of explicit political actions that have organized the US linguistic field by affirming the structural dominance of English (e.g. Kloss 1977; Crawford 2004; García 2009). In this scholarly tradition, mostly grounded in structural/functional approaches to language policy and planning (Ricento 2006: 10–23), the marginalization of speakers of languages other than English has received ample attention; however, the role that metalinguistic discourses have played in the constitution of specific regimes of language has been, for the most part, a marginal concern. The theoretical framework embraced in this book offers an opportunity to focus precisely on how representations of language have been deployed in the history of the US and, more precisely, how Spanish was and continues to be a contested discursive site in which questions of national identity, political mobilization, public interest and geopolitical maneuvering are played out. In fact, the present part will show what Arnoux and Del Valle anticipated at the end of Chapter 9, that is, the productive trails that can be blazed by taking national as well as hemispheric and transatlantic perspectives in the analysis of representations of Spanish in the US.

The making of Spanish in the US has always been inextricably linked to the making of “We the people of the United States,” that is, to the construction of the very historical subject envisioned by the Founding Fathers and placed at the center of the politics of national identity. In pursuing the goals stated in the preamble to the Constitution – “form a more perfect Union, establish justice, insure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare and secure the blessings of liberty” –, US nationalism has regularly implemented language policies and produced metalinguistic discourses which, more often than not, have aimed at establishing and naturalizing English as the essential instrument for the political articulation of the community and as a symbol of the nation. In fact, the view of Spanish in the US that emerges in the next four chapters does indeed sketch a picture of how US nationalism has tended to deal with the language question by associating citizenship with knowledge of

English and by displacing Spanish and other languages to marginal positions through institutional arrangements and discourses on language.

However, the theoretical perspective on the US's linguistic history that we take in this book opens our view to the constitution of, and tension among, multiple linguistic ideologies that compete over the assignment of different values to different languages and varieties. Unquestionably, English – or, rather, certain varieties of English – is privileged as the legitimate language, and others – often portrayed as threats to the health of the nation – are relegated to inferior positions in the linguistic market. Even the various forms of bilingualism which normally result from the coexistence of languages have been imagined as a threat to the desired “perfect Union.” But the ensuing studies (which, except Leeman's, focus on the Southwest and must be followed by further research and equivalent work on California, Florida, the Northeast, new immigrant destinations, etc.) also describe a linguistic field more complex than a simple narrative of victimization would lead us to believe, and confirm that a multifarious and dynamic social formation such as the US cannot but yield an equally intricate metalinguistic universe. Leeman's chapter on the evolution of the US Census's tackling of multilingualism reveals various gradations of state recognition of linguistic diversity and its relation to the constitution of race categories, even within an instrument such as the census organically tied to the nation's scaffolding (it is mandated by Article 1, section 2 of the Constitution). Dubord's and Fernández Gibert's analyses of the Spanish-speaking middle and upper classes in territorial Arizona and New Mexico respectively show these groups' ability to mobilize their agency in defense of their interests, destabilize existing structures of domination and negotiate their participation in the political life of the community. Glenn Martínez's study of how public health organizations created conditions for the deployment of new representations of Spanish further demonstrates the availability of resources to face dominant discourses and confront the disadvantages of structural inequality. In sum, linguistic nationalism based on the defense of English has been neither a homogeneous ideology nor a stable political agenda, and alternative views of the sociolinguistic profile of the nation emerge from our incursions into the historical archive.

The segments of the historical record explored by the contributors to this section also call for broader perspectives as they reveal – even if less directly – the presence of linguistic ideologies linked to processes that, while related to matters of national concern, cannot be simply linked to anxieties over national identity struggles. As we will see, representations of language in the nineteenth-century Southwest or twentieth-century Puerto Rico are the result of US expansionism and the frontier/border conditions created through military occupation and colonialism. Similarly, language debates in the US in the nineteenth, twentieth and twenty-first centuries cannot be fully understood without reference to

the development of capitalism and the different maneuvering capacity of the different social classes to defend their interests (in this regard, the connection with other cases treated in other sections of this volume is evident). Also central to understanding language ideologies in the US are the conditions that led to massive migration from certain countries and the discursive arrangements that construct migration either as part of the nation's condition or as a threat to its very identity. Even dominant Anglo groups, in connection with their interests in Latin America or other geopolitical developments, have at times significantly affected the language-ideological landscape upon recognizing the advantages potentially accrued through knowledge of Spanish.

Historical overview

During the colonial and revolutionary periods, Spanish seems to have been viewed in predominantly instrumental terms. The first recorded use of written Spanish in the English colonies was the 1699 printing of *La fe del cristianismo* (The Christian faith) by Cotton Mather, whose interest in proselytizing went hand in hand with the expectation that communication and commerce with the "Spanish Indies" would eventually increase. This expectation seems to have been constant throughout the colonial period: ads for private lessons in the press of the time and the publication of the first Spanish textbook in 1751 show that there was indeed a market for Spanish as a foreign language among Anglos (García 1993). The situation had not changed much around the time of the American Revolution, when both Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson viewed Spanish as a valuable resource for commercial expansion. In 1787, in a letter to his nephew, the latter suggested: "Bestow great attention on Spanish and endeavor to acquire an accurate knowledge of it. Our future connections with Spain and Spanish America will render that language of valuable acquisition" (qtd. in García 1993: 73).

Spanish does not seem to have played a significant role in the language debates of the revolutionary period and the first few decades of the nation's life. The literature that discusses Benjamin Franklin's concern with multilingualism, which aimed mainly at the influence of a German-speaking community that flourished in parts of the country such as the Midwest well into the nineteenth century, John Adams's failed proposal to create a language academy modeled after the French institution, or Noah Webster's construction of Federal English, shows no evidence that Spanish had any significance in the configuration of the nation (e.g. Crawford 1992; Heath 1976; Simpson 1986).

After independence, the expansion of markets became a US policy priority and was fueled by the ideology of Manifest Destiny and the country's power to control trade by force. A conspicuous result of this policy was the annexation of Texas in 1845, the subsequent two-year Mexican-American War and the

1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, under which the Rio Grande became the recognized boundary between the two countries and Mexico surrendered to the US, in exchange for economic compensations, California and New Mexico (which at the time also included significant portions of Arizona, Colorado and Nevada). In 1854, additional Mexican land would be transferred to the US through the Gadsden Purchase. New Mexico became an organized incorporated territory in 1850 and Arizona established its autonomy, also as a territory, in 1863. They would both be admitted to the Union as states in 1912.

The US's hegemonic intentions towards Latin America had been anticipated since 1823 when the Monroe Doctrine warned European powers that any new colonialist move in the hemisphere would be taken as an "unfriendly disposition towards the United States." In application of this doctrine, the defense of US interests in the Caribbean led to its intervention in the Cuban War of Independence and to the brief but transcendental Spanish-American War of 1898. The Treaty of Paris gave the US control over Cuba, Guam, the Philippines and Puerto Rico. While Cuba gained its independence in 1902, Puerto Rico has remained until the present in a colonial-type relation with the US. During the first few decades after the Spanish-American War, US oversight of the island materialized in different political arrangements. The Foraker Act of 1900 established an appointed governor, an executive council and an elected legislature, and resulted in the creation of political parties that took different stands with respect to the relationship with the US (statehood and independence among others). The Jones-Shafroth Act of 1917 turned Puerto Rico into an organized but unincorporated territory and Puerto Ricans into US citizens. Significantly, these new "citizens" could not participate in the election of their president but could be conscripted and sent to war. In 1948, Puerto Ricans were allowed to elect their own governor and in 1950 president Truman granted the island the commonwealth status (*Estado Libre Asociado*) that has remained to the present in a disputed political field where calls for statehood and independence are also voiced.

These two processes – the Mexican-American and Spanish-American wars – had obvious glottopolitical implications and brought Spanish to the center of political struggles. After annexation, in the Southwest territories of the US both Spanish and English were present in the emerging school system, which paralleled developments in the Midwest with English and German and in Louisiana with English and French (Crawford 1999: 23). However, as we will see in Dubord's and Fernández Gibert's chapters, English progressively became the dominant language and Spanish slowly but surely suffered a significant loss of its instrumental commercial value and a serious disruption of its symbolic status: it went from being the dominant language – when the territories were part of Mexico – to being a subordinate language progressively

inscribed – through Anglo settlement and administrative transition from territory to state – in the body politic of the US.

In Puerto Rico, US language policy was, as described by Frances Negrón-Muntaner, “a complex, often coercive, and desperate process of producing bilingual Puerto Ricans who were to be loyal subjects (later ‘citizens’) of the colonial state apparatus as well as disciplined laborers” (1997: 258). The Language Law of 1902 established the co-officiality of Spanish and English, securing the legal linguistic ground for monolingual English-speaking colonial rulers. Language policy in education aimed for the most part at the (essentially failed) Americanization of Puerto Rico, and was often advanced by pro-statehood Puerto Ricans (Negrón Muntaner 1997: 260–1). The island’s contested cultural and political status has given language a special prominence and led to a profusion of politically explicit metalinguistic discourses: the promotion of English as a strategy to operate within the US, the defense of Spanish as a strategy to counter the effects of US colonialism and the recognition of heteroglossic linguistic repertoires linked to new complex social identities among Puerto Ricans both within the island and in the diaspora (e.g. Negrón Muntaner 1997; Pabón 2003: 89–103).

The Southwest and Puerto Rico exhibit a historical structural analogy: in both lands, the dominance of Spanish was the outcome of Spain’s early modern imperial expansion; and, in both cases, in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries Spanish speakers saw themselves overrun by yet another process of imperial expansion, now led by the US. Once again, political borders crossed over communities, rapidly creating brand new linguistic markets in which people had to reassess the value of their linguistic possessions.

The Puerto Rican diaspora has been a significant actor in the US’s glotto-political scene throughout the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Soon after citizenship was granted to them in 1917, many Puerto Ricans began to migrate, pushed by economic conditions in the island and pulled by working opportunities in the mainland. World War I, World War II and the post-war years were periods of intense migration that created Spanish-speaking and, in due course, multilingual enclaves of Puerto Ricans mainly in the Northeast. Similarly, Mexican migration to the US has also been constant since the end of the nineteenth century. However, in the case of Mexicans, their status as non-citizens and, in many cases, undocumented immigrants created special circumstances. The legal conditions under which they migrated to the US alternated between periods of official encouragement such as the *Bracero* programs during both world wars and periods of open hostility that even included organized repatriation during the Great Depression. These twentieth-century migrations – to which we must add those of Cubans and Dominicans as well as Central and South Americans – gave Spanish an even greater role in the historical sociolinguistic complexity of the US and resulted in continued

metalinguistic discourses associated with the new conditions for the distribution of resources and for the cultural and political articulation of the nation.

In the 1960s, in an international context that seemed more sensitive to the demands of minorities, a significant cultural change took place in the US under the thrust of the civil rights movement. While ethnic minorities organized to demand equal rights, greater tolerance of ethnic diversity and even pluralist narratives of US history took hold among sectors of American society (Schmidt 2000: 100–15). In the linguistic field, advocacy of the legal recognition of Spanish in education, voting and other government functions grew, and the arrival of mostly middle- and upper-class Cubans after the 1959 revolution led to a successful experiment in two-way bilingual education as these exiles tried to secure their children's acquisition of English and Spanish. The passage of the Bilingual Education Act in 1968 and its ensuing authorization – supported in great part by Chicano civil rights activists – were hailed as an accomplishment for the Spanish-speaking communities of the US. However, federal and state education laws moved towards a remedial model that would focus on easing the transition to English among disadvantaged students rather than on promoting bilingualism as a social value (Crawford 1999: 36–7).

Despite greater recognition of the US's diversity, essentialist views of the US and the historical discourses that had racialized Spanish, constructing it as a dangerous foreign body within the nation, had not subsided during and after the civil rights movement. A nativist backlash resurfaced – in fact, it had never gone under water – and assimilationist nationalism produced its own historical narratives in order to counter efforts to recognize minorities' simultaneous right to full citizenship and cultural maintenance (Schmidt 2000: 115–29). For nativist and assimilationist sectors of US nationalism – as the immigration of Spanish speakers grew at unprecedented rates towards the end of the twentieth century – Spanish came to symbolize a threat to the nation's identity and viability. These fears resulted in the creation of the US English Foundation in 1983, a "citizens' action group dedicated to preserving the unifying role of the English language in the United States" (www.us-english.org/view/3), and in the introduction of legislation to make English the country's official language. Although efforts at the federal level have thus far failed, English Only laws had been passed by twenty-eight states by early 2007 and three states have banned the use of languages other than English in education (California, Proposition 227, 1998; Arizona, Proposition 203, 2000; Massachusetts, Question 2, 2002) (García 2009). This ideology of fear and threat associated with Spanish has been perhaps best expressed at the beginning of the twenty-first century by Harvard professor Samuel Huntington (2004: 30) in his revealingly titled book *Who Are We?*: "The persistent inflow of Hispanic *immigrants* threatens to divide the United States into two peoples, two cultures, and two languages . . . There is no *Americano* dream. There is only the American dream created by

an Anglo-Protestant society. Mexican Americans will share in that dream and in that society only if they dream in English" (45).

Despite the persistent ideologies that construct Spanish and Spanish/English bilingualism as dangerous for the nation, the fact is that the US has now become enmeshed in – and has, in many respects, led – global movements spurred by an economy that relies on new information technologies and a large service sector. Spanish, already considered to be an economic asset by Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson as well as by the Neomexicano business elites of the nineteenth century, is now promoted by institutions such as Spain's language academy (RAE) and the *Instituto Cervantes*, which portray it as a highly valued linguistic commodity (Del Valle 2011a). On one hand, Spain and, more recently, Mexico have declared their intention to build a sense of communion with the US's Spanish-speaking population as a strategy to enter the highly coveted US market. On the other – paradoxically in parallel with the already-mentioned crisis of bilingual education – Spanish is the preferred language other than English among American students at all levels of education. As always, the context is complex and so is the system of competing linguistic ideologies involved in the representation of Spanish. Some of these representations are new and some are not, but in all cases, while responding to present conditions, they all rely on existing discursive matrixes and on the contested memories of a nation always in the making.

Ideologies of Spanish: national identities, expansionism and migration

As stated above, the westward expansion of the US and Anglo settlement in what used to be Mexican territory produced not only a demographic transformation of the conquered lands but also a new linguistic field in which the relative value of Native American languages, Spanish, English and multilingual practices was profoundly restructured. In their respective chapters, Dubord and Fernández-Gibert discuss how the Catholic church focused on language and education in order to secure a space of power within the rapidly changing social structure of the Southwest. The creation of parochial schools, in particular, was well received by the wealthier sectors of the Arizonan and Neomexicano society as they mobilized their resources to constitute a relatively autonomous cultural field that would provide their children with the type of linguistic capital needed to operate in the existing frontier/border conditions. Annexation had resulted in Arizona and New Mexico becoming territories of the US, that is, peripheral and dependent entities within the body politic. In the absence of any credible option for independence, any desire for self-government had to focus on the construction of a path to statehood facing serious roadblocks that ranged from blatantly racist stands to milder opposition from often liberal assimilationist

ideologies (these cases can be productively contrasted with Barrios's discussion in this volume of policies in the Uruguay–Brazil border). As one might expect, the debates surrounding the true exercise of citizenship and the right to statehood included language as one of their principal objects.

On one hand, Dubord and Fernández-Gibert identify discourses that constructed Spanish speakers as anomalies and subjected Spanish to a process of racialization that defined it as the language of non-white Catholics. These discourses were transforming not just the field of linguistic exchanges in the Southwest but throughout the nation: in 1848, Senator John C. Calhoun of South Carolina said: “We have never dreamt of incorporating into our Union any but the Caucasian race – the free white race. To incorporate Mexicans would be the very first instance of the kind of incorporating an Indian race; for more than half of the Mexicans are Indians, and the other is composed chiefly of mixed tribes” (qtd. in Fernández-Gibert in this volume). More than the classification of Mexicans as belonging to another race, it was the attribution of impurity – “mixed tribes” – that achieved its intended effect, since, through this operation, language became the defining factor and all Spanish speakers, whether they looked white or not, became the object of exclusion. As we will see, this particular ideology of miscegenation as racial impurity was explicitly projected onto language. Fernández-Gibert (this volume) quotes H. S. Wooster, a Justice of the Peace, as saying: “[The population of New Mexico] speak the Spanish language, or try to; but I understand that it is not pure Castilian; it is a sort of a jargon of their own” (qtd. in Nieto-Phillips 2004: 88).

Ghaffar-Kucher (2011) has proposed the concept of “religification,” a process of cultural production whereby religion identification becomes fixed and linked to a certain identity and is used either to mobilize the group or to place it in a particular social position. In the case of Spanish during territorial expansion, the language underwent this kind of identification. As we mentioned above, in the Southwest it was the Catholic church that created parochial schools that enabled the maintenance of written Spanish. In the reproduction of negative stereotypes, the Black Legend's image of Catholic Spain as a repressive, brutal, intolerant and backward society came to be superimposed on the racialization of Spanish speakers. In the national imaginary, the Catholic religion came to be linked in fixed ways to Spanish speakers and their language, and placed in opposition to the benevolent and enlightened Protestantism of the Anglos.

Significant portions of the political class, however, took a liberal position that aimed at equalizing the population through a solid public education system grounded in the English language (the parallels are clear with nation-building processes in Latin America; see Arnoux, Barrios and Valdez in this volume). In sharp contrast with the racist rhetoric that referred to the “mongrel breed known as Mexicans,” assimilationists believed in the incorporation of various

ethnic groups into the social fabric of the nation as long as they gave up their cultures and embraced the principles and values of US nationalism. The path to statehood required this process and Anson Safford, governor of the Arizona Territory, clearly stated it in 1871:

The people of the Territories [acquired from Mexico] have suddenly been transferred from another government to our own. Speaking a foreign tongue, we call upon them to adopt our customs and obey our laws. They are generally well-disposed, law-abiding citizens and have but little needs; they have and will continue to have an important influence in the governing power of the country, and it is essential that they should be educated in the language of the laws that govern them. (*Arizona Citizen* January 14, 1871, qtd. in Dubord in this volume)

Dubord's and Fernández-Gibert's chapters show, however, that Arizonans and Neomexicanos with means did not simply passively accept racist and assimilationist discourses and policies. They responded instead through the mobilization of their cultural and political resources and the production of a discourse of their own. They supported a Catholic school system that guaranteed the maintenance of Spanish and promoted the acquisition of English, and created an energetic Spanish-language printed press that contributed to the constitution of proper Arizonan and Neomexicano public spheres through which to voice and organize strategies of resistance and defend their interests. In their discourse on the Spanish language, they insisted on its commercial value in the context of a foreseeable relationship between the US and Latin America, and envisioned a form of citizenship that did not require abandonment of their cultural heritage (a discourse that, Dubord suggests, foreshadows Renato Rosaldo's more recent notion of cultural citizenship). They also took full advantage of their cultural and political capital in negotiating with the government: Dubord relates how in the 1870s a prominent Tucsonian legislator, Esteban Ochoa, offered support for the governor's plan to establish a public school system – one central agent of assimilation – in exchange for government contracts and linguistic concessions such as the presence of Spanish-speaking jurors and bilingual publication of laws and court proceedings.

The Arizonan and Neomexicano elites' strategies often entailed the fractal reproduction of the very cultural and linguistic ideologies they were trying to counter in their struggle over economic and political prominence. Their defense of Spanish, as we will see in the following chapters, was often grounded in purist ideologies that reproduced class inequality and, especially in New Mexico, in a (transatlantic) historical narrative that linked their culture and language to Europe via a supposedly uninterrupted and untarnished descent from Spain.

In the twentieth century, US nationalism, economic expansionism and the tactics associated with an aggressive geopolitical strategy continued to be the

backdrop against which representations of Spanish came to be produced. However, the economic, political and social context changed in a way that led to constant and significant migration of Spanish-speaking people – Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, Cubans, etc. – to the US. The presence of Mexican immigrants in the Southwest triggered the reproduction of nativist trends and racist discourses surrounding Spanish that had their origin in the nineteenth-century annexation of northern Mexico. Glenn Martínez, in his chapter, focuses on what came to be known in the 1920s and 1930s as “the Mexican problem,” that is, the perception that the migration of Mexicans was excessive and caused major social disruptions. Mexicans became associated with unsanitary living conditions and high rates of disease, and such biosocial categorization led in turn to the adoption of aggressive protectionist policies such as the creation of the US Border Patrol in 1924 and the organized massive deportations of the Great Depression era. In response to this situation, groups of Mexicans and Mexican-Americans in Texas decided to organize themselves and create, through organizations such as the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC), the *Movimiento Pro Salud* in order to deal with health issues and, in particular, with the tuberculosis epidemic. Glenn Martínez focuses on the productive role that Ruben C. Ortega, a leading figure of the *Movimiento*, designed during the 1930s and 1940s for the Spanish language, and identifies the conditions that led to his embracing specific linguistic ideologies that valued not only the privileged space of writing but also the possible impact of face-to-face interaction and storytelling, rhetorical practices that were consistent with the community’s traditions. By understanding the target communities and operating in tandem with public health institutions, thus situating his views within the paradigm of modernity, Ortega was able, according to Glenn Martínez, to legitimize his actions and his instrumentalization of Spanish in spaces from which it had been excluded.

Jennifer Leeman’s chapter covers a long period that spans the two hundred years of the US Census. She focuses on the census as a key site for the production and reproduction of linguistic ideologies that construct difference and racialize groups. The census is an unequivocally and highly institutionalized instrument of the state apparatus and, therefore, a privileged object through which to analyze the evolution of official constructions of language in the social world of the US. Leeman’s study of the language question in the census (pun intended) reveals not only the well-known complexity of race in the nation’s history but also the role that language has played in constituting racial/ethnic identities and foreignness. The instability of the criteria on which national identity should be constructed, and the inherently diffuse contours of racial/ethnic categories, are brought to the fore, revealing an inherent tension between a deeply monoglossic dominant ideology – which constructs English as the national language and couples *Latinidad* with Spanish – and multiple points of resistance that destabilize the dominant ideology.

Conclusion

In sum, the four chapters that follow identify sets of metalinguistic discourses surrounding US Spanish and place them in contexts defined by specific political circumstances. We will see how competing configurations of US nationalism, aggressive US expansionism in pursuit of international influence, US market conditions and immigration flows, institutional efforts to make sense of the US's demographic complexity, civil rights advocacy and US–Latin America trade relations are inextricably linked to representations of Spanish as the inherent marker of an inferior race, as the proudly displayed symbol of a venerable culture, as the basis for an autonomous public sphere, as a valuable tool in international markets or as an instrument at the service of public health and progress.

Far from offering – or even trying to offer – a closed or totalizing narrative of the political history of Spanish in the US, this part barely suggests a two-sided project. First, by its very inclusion in the present book, it automatically invites the exploration of continuities and discontinuities between the historical conditions under which discourses on Spanish have operated in the US and those under which they have operated in other parts of the world. Second, it takes a few timid steps towards a fuller historicization of Spanish in the US (California and Florida, among other regions, are conspicuously absent, as are both processes that led to the intense activities of Spanish-speaking intellectual groups within the US and the debates surrounding heteroglossic practices) that focuses not on the evolution of linguistic forms, nor only on explicit language policy and planning, but on how discursive constructions of the language are essential for understanding the nation's history, its efforts to build an identity and its relationship to the rest of the world.