

HANDBOOK OF HERITAGE, COMMUNITY, AND NATIVE AMERICAN LANGUAGES IN THE UNITED STATES

RESEARCH, POLICY, AND EDUCATIONAL PRACTICE

Edited by

Terrence G. Wiley

Joy Kreeft Peyton

Donna Christian

Sarah Catherine K. Moore

Na Liu

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Introduction

Ofelia García

The chapters in this section give an overview of the role that the five traditionally taught languages—Spanish, French, German, Italian, and Portuguese—have had in shaping the linguistic ecology of the United States. Their European origin has given these languages their stature, yet today very diverse communities in this country speak them. The authors discuss how speakers of their focal language came to use it in the United States and how it is used, taught, and viewed today. Here I review three main topics in these chapters while also shedding light on similarities and differences among groups and extending some of the concepts addressed by the authors:

- Complexity of language origins and use
- From language attitudes to language ideologies
- Languageing and translanguaging in education and public life

I conclude by commenting on the most important lesson that I draw from these chapters—that U.S. “heritage” languages cannot be described or studied separately from the community contexts in which they are spoken and used by bilingual speakers. That is, “heritage” languages must be understood as *U.S. bilingual varieties* that must be sustained (not maintained as separate languages) by validating the language practices of U.S. bilingual communities and leveraging them in education.

Complexity of Language Origins and Use

Scholars have demonstrated the complexity of language origins and use in the history of the United States (Kloss, 1998; Liebowitz, 1971; Molesky, 1988; Wiley, 2005). The situation today is just as complex for speakers of the languages discussed in this section—Spanish, French, German, Italian, and Portuguese.

Speakers of German have roots in Europe, although, as described by Renate Ludanyi, the varieties of German that they speak differ greatly. Early German immigrants to the United States came mostly from Germany, but more recent German speakers come from Austria and Switzerland. Likewise, Italian Americans have European roots, but at the time of their great immigration at the turn of the 20th century, they spoke many varieties and dialects of Italian, and many continue to do so today. Speakers of Portuguese, French, and Spanish come primarily from non-European countries. Noted by Jason Rothman, Portuguese speakers from Portugal have been joined recently by a growing number of Brazilians and Cape Verdeans. New French speakers come not only from France and Canada but also from West Africa, North Africa, the Caribbean, and the Middle East. Finally, Spanish speakers are predominantly from countries in Latin America and not simply from Spain. Although these languages have been traditionally taught in public school as foreign

"European" languages, they are often spoken by people who have been colonized and whose language practices exhibit the complexity of multilingualism, including creolized varieties.

Although these languages are often presented in school as "a language," with one set of vocabulary, grammar, and discourse patterns, they actually are not *one* "heritage" language. The people who have brought these languages to the United States bring many diverse language practices with them. For example, as Kim Potowski points out, many Spanish speakers come from Mexico, where Spanish has been in contact with indigenous languages. They also come from Cuba, where Spanish has been in contact with the African languages of the people who were brought there as slaves. Further, the Spanish varieties of Argentina and Uruguay show features of contact with Italian. Once people settle in the United States, these different ways of speaking Spanish, for example, come into contact with English. The relationship with English differs depending on the nature of the settlement. *Fronterizos*, who cross the Mexico-U.S. border on a daily basis, or Puerto Ricans, who travel back and forth to their island, use language differently from Cubans in Miami, who are often isolated from their country of origin. Language use in bilingual communities in the United States is often different from the practices in the countries from which the speakers originated. Speakers of the languages also encounter the diverse language practices of those who are said to speak the same language but have different national origins, diverse settlement patterns, and various social and racial characteristics. For example, with the exception of European French speakers, most French speakers in the United States today are multilingual, the product of colonization. Thus, the French spoken by a Malian has little resemblance to Parisian French. In the same way, the Portuguese spoken in Brazil is quite different from that spoken in Portugal and in Cape Verde.

From Language Attitudes to Language Ideologies

The chapters in this section point to the fact that attitudes toward speakers of Spanish, French, German, Italian, and Portuguese have much to do with the success of sustaining the language practices of the group in the United States. Each of these groups has experienced discrimination in different measures and at different times. As Ludanyi notes, German speakers were attacked and silenced in the period surrounding World War I, when they were considered the enemy. Arna De Fina notes that Italian speakers were declared "enemy aliens" during World War II. Jane Ross and Fabrice Jäumont point out that anti-French legislation in Louisiana restricted its use, although in 1968 a law was passed promoting the use of French in Louisiana. As for Spanish, California, Massachusetts, and Arizona passed strong antibilingual education laws at the turn of the 21st century, which were largely focused on Spanish speakers (Crawford, 2004).

Studying attitudes toward heritage languages in the United States is not enough. Scholars of U.S. community languages must adopt a lens that accounts for language ideologies, which may reveal why it takes such effort to support and sustain the use of multiple language varieties in U.S. bilingual communities.

Languaging and Translanguaging in Education and Public Life

The chapters in this section mention the importance of education, beyond any other public domain, in the sustainability of languages and language use. Radio, such as RAI for Italian and La Mega for Spanish, and television are also important, as are clubs, newspapers, magazines, and periodicals. The church and religion have had an important impact on sustainability as well. For example, Ludanyi describes how the Anabaptists in Pennsylvania and the Pennsylvania Dutch in Lancaster County both use their German variety, Pennsylvania Dutch, in order to draw a boundary between themselves and the English-speaking majority. The German church and its parochial German-medium schools did a great deal to support German in the 1800s. Still, the church has

not always encouraged the use of community languages. For example, as De Fina points out, the Italian Catholic Church encouraged the use of English, and not Italian, in church and parochial school matters.

While education can have a profound effect on the sustainability of these languages, the U.S. public school system has rarely encouraged the teaching of community languages, especially in elementary schools. Often the earliest opportunity for American “heritage” language speakers to study their family and community language is at the secondary school or university level. The existence of a limited number of one-way or two-way bilingual education programs at the elementary school level is a welcome reprieve from this situation. Although French and Spanish bilingual programs of this kind may be growing, as is noted by Potowski and Ross and Jaumont, the growth is extremely slow. They also rarely exist in other languages.

The U.S. education system does not have the will to truly support dynamic bilingual practices or the programs that support them. For example, most of the language education programs keep the learning of English and other languages separate. This arrangement does not reflect or build on the translanguaging practices that are the norm in bilingual communities; that is, the “*multiple discursive practices* in which bilinguals engage in order to *make sense of their bilingual worlds*” (García, 2009, p. 45, original emphasis). In U.S. schools, rarely is translanguaging used to leverage and sustain bilingualism, which would construct a U.S. multilingual identity for the future. Even in supplementary educational programs, this is rarely done (García, Zakharia, & Otcu, 2013).

Conclusion

Privileging a dynamic bilingual discourse over a monolingual one and questioning socially imposed linguistic hierarchies and inequalities will promote the future of community languages in the United States. For bilingual language practices to become recognized and valued in the U.S. linguistic landscape, we must go beyond recognizing these practices as “heritage” and embrace them as the languaging of bilingual Americans, sharing some features with the languages of the distant places in which they are spoken and having others that are rooted in a U.S. bilingual context. Only then will these practices be recognized as “born in the U.S.A.”

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