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Reconstituting U.S. Spanish language education: U.S. Latinx occupying classrooms

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ABSTRACT
This paper aims to redefine Spanish language education in the U.S. by showing how the increased presence of Latinx Spanish-speakers in classrooms brings into question the traditional way in which Spanish language teaching is divided into three, separate fields: as a foreign language, in bilingual education, and as a heritage language. It proposes that Spanish language education focuses on the ways in which the numerous U.S. Latinx perform language, and the reasons for their ways of languaging. The article explores the linked histories of Spanish language education in the U.S and racialization of the U.S. Latinx community. A review of how Spanish language education has constituted itself as three separate fields is then presented, as the cracks in the divisions today are analyzed. The article then proposes a reconstitution of Spanish language teaching by appropriating two concepts that have been increasingly making inroads in the education of minoritized bilingual students: undoing raciolinguistic ideologies and leveraging the translanguaging of Latinx bilingual communities. It concludes with a series of practical recommendations for Spanish language teachers.

KEYWORDS
Bilingual education; heritage language education; Latinx; raciolinguistic ideologies; Spanish language education; translanguaging

RESUMEN
Este artículo trata de reestructurar la educación del español en los EE. UU. mostrando cómo la mayor presencia de hispanohablantes latinx en las aulas cuestiona la división tradicional de la enseñanza del español en tres ramas separadas entre sí: como lengua extranjera, en la educación bilingüe y como lengua de herencia. Proponemos que la enseñanza del español se centre en las formas en que los numerosos latinx estadounidenses producen su lengua y en las razones tras esas formas de lenguar. El artículo establece un diálogo entre la historia de la enseñanza del español en EE. UU. y la historia de la racialización de la comunidad latina del país. Con ello, realizamos una revisión sobre cómo la enseñanza del español se ha constituido en tres campos académicos separados y analizamos las grietas actuales en esas divisiones. A partir de ese análisis, el artículo propone una reconstitución de la enseñanza del español mediante la apropiación de dos estrategias cada vez más avanzadas en la educación de los estudiantes bilingües minorizados: deshacer las ideologías raciolingüísticas y aprovechar el translenguar de las comunidades latinas bilingües. El artículo concluye con una serie de recomendaciones prácticas para profesores de español.

PALABRAS CLAVE
Educación bilingüe; educación de lenguas de herencia; latinx; ideologías raciolingüísticas; enseñanza de español; translenguar

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1. Introduction

There is an enduring tension between the ways in which Spanish is viewed in schools and in non-institutional spaces across the U.S. In schools, Spanish is seen as a “curricularized” or academic subject (Valdés 2015). In non-institutional spaces, it is the language frequently heard in many communities. In textbooks, it is bound by the page, printed and static. In communities, it is articulated by the 60 million Latinx who live in the United States, people who differ in many ways, not only in national background, but historically and culturally, generationally, by class, gender, race, identity and, of course, by ways in which they language.

This paper reviews the disparate and separate efforts to teach Spanish in the U.S. — as a foreign language, in bilingual education, and as a heritage language. Each effort has emerged in a different historical period, establishing itself as a separate research field with its own scholarly literature. But the stark contrasts that have emerged between the constructed language of texts and the very different languaging of Latinx people in communities has shaped Spanish language education today, disrupting the boundaries of these separate fields of study.

In this paper we try to construct a collective sense of what it would mean if instead of starting with Spanish as a language that is taught as an autonomous entity, we would start with the complex languaging of the people who speak Spanish in the U.S. To integrate visions of Spanish language education, we would need to reconstitute what we have learned to call Spanish in schools, focusing instead on teaching the ways in which the many and different U.S. Latinx perform language, as well as the sociohistorical and sociopolitical reasons for the ways in which Spanish is taught.

We use the term “reconstitute” to counteract the imaginary invention of Spanish in the U.S. as a bounded autonomous language that can be studied as an academic subject without regard to the actual practices of its speakers. In so doing, we follow the tradition of Makoni and Pennycook (2006) in Disinventing and Reconstituting Languages. Like Pascual y Cabo and Prada (2018), we attempt to redefine Spanish teaching and learning, but we do so by starting from a position that questions the motives of why Spanish in the U.S. was constructed in ways that excluded the practices of many, and why its teaching has followed these norms.

Because the centering of the U.S. Latinx population and their languaging is key to this reconstitution, we first provide an account of the relationship between Spanish language education and those who are said to be Spanish speakers. To achieve this, we directly contrast the history of Spanish language education in the U.S. with that of the Latinx community, pointing to ways in which different sociopolitical contexts and ideologies on speakerhood have impacted Spanish language education. We then review how Spanish language education has constituted itself as three separate fields, and how the contradictions and the cracks in the divisions are apparent. The article ends by proposing a reconstitution of Spanish language teaching bringing together two concepts that are increasingly making inroads in the education of minoritized bilingual students: namely, undoing raciolinguistic ideologies and leveraging the translanguaging of Latinx bilingual communities. This proposal for a reconstitution of Spanish language education in the U.S. is a call to educators and scholars in the field.

2. Constructing the Spanish language, racializing its speakers

In this section we describe two interrelated historical moves. We first consider the U.S. construction of a language named Spanish, and how this has functioned to maintain the domination of a white English-speaking socio-economic order, which has excluded U.S. Latinx. We then look at how Latinx people came to occupy U.S. education. Each of these moves shows a historical progression so that it has been increasingly difficult to ignore the presence of U.S. Latinx people, together with their languaging, in American life and classrooms.
2.1. The Bounding and Othering of a language named Spanish

What was colonially constituted as “la lengua castellana” of the Spanish Empire by Antonio de Nebrija in his 1492 Gramática, alongside many ways of speaking of the conquistadores themselves and of indigenous Americans, was found in the territories that are now Florida, Texas, Colorado, New Mexico, Arizona, Nevada, California, and Puerto Rico, since the late 15th and early 16th centuries. This scenario changed radically after English settlers arrived on the North American continent a century later, and after the 13 British colonies declared their independence in 1776.

At this early stage, the Spanish language was recognized only as the language of trade with elite merchants from Spain and the Spanish colonies, and later for the study of the literature of Spain. The first Spanish language textbook in the U.S., A Short Introduction to the Spanish language, was published by Garret Noel in 1751 to be used by U.S. merchants in their dealings with Spain and “the Indies” (García 1993). Spanish made its entry into education in 1816, when Harvard University established a professorship of French and Spanish to teach literary texts from Spain (Hills 1906).

By othering Spanish and bounding it solely to written texts of Spain, the language of former Mexican citizens in the Southwest was effectively erased. Fueled by the ideology of Manifest Destiny and the wish to control trade, the U.S. went to war with Mexico in 1846. The Treaty of Gaudalupe Hidalgo, signed in 1848, granted citizenship to the former Mexican nationals in the territory, but significantly it excluded the Native American Pueblo people who were also Mexican citizens (Lozano 2018). Race, but also language, was used to classify people in the territory, creating the raciolinguistic hierarchies that are prevalent today.

The biologization of race and the construction of norms of what was constituted as Spanish were used to establish hierarchies, with the former Mexican nationals not accorded full privilege of being either white or Spanish-speaking. They were designated as “legally white,” but were considered an “Indian race,” as Senator John C. Calhoun described in 1848: “more than half of the Mexicans are Indians, and the other is composed chiefly of mixed tribes” (quoted in Fernández-Gibert 2013, 283). These former Mexican citizens were also described as “speaking Spanish,” but not speaking it properly. H. S. Wooster, a Justice of the Peace, said at the time that they speak “the Spanish language, or try to; but I understand that it is not pure Castilian; it is a sort of jargon of their own” (cited in Nieto-Phillips 2004, 88). As Lozano (2018) has indicated, Mexican Americans were granted “political citizenship,” but “not social citizenship.” Their often-darker skin and languaging “marked them as separate in the nativist view of Americans as white and English speaking” (Lozano 2018, 6).

And yet, the language of those racialized “treaty citizens” (Lozano 2018) was used, when convenient, by the U.S. government. For example, in the territory of New Mexico 90 percent of the people were nuevomexicanos who did not speak English. A political system in Spanish was created to enable the participation in government of nuevomexicanos. Spanish was used in their segregated systems of education, civil processes, and their own press. More than half of the Catholic schools that emerged after 1848 in the territory of New Mexico were said to use Spanish in instruction (Fernández-Gibert 2013). But the main reason for the tolerance towards the language of the nuevomexicanos had to do with the measure of control that nuevomexicanos could then exert over the autonomous Native American peoples who lived in the territory (Lozano 2018).

As more English-speaking Anglo settlers arrived in the territory and the Native American population was stripped of all rights, the Spanish spoken by so-called treaty citizens was again demeaned, describing it as a language of uneducated people and having nothing to do with Spanish as written in literary works and spoken by elite merchants. This process of belittling the Spanish of nuevomexicanos made it then easier to justify replacing it with what was assumed to be a real language: that is, English. By 1878, English had taken the place of Spanish as the working language of the legislature in New Mexico (Lozano 2018). And nine years after having been granted statehood, in 1921, Spanish was finally replaced by English as the official language of school instruction (Hernández-Chávez 1995). There, and in other parts of the Southwest, the public use of Spanish was only legitimized.
when it helped to achieve society’s modernist project, for example, when it was used as a tool for health education (Martínez 2013).

One of the consequences of the professionalization of Spanish language teaching was to separate this Spanish language from that which was spoken by Spanish-speaking citizens. In 1883 the Modern Language Association was established with the goal of teaching “literary culture, philological scholarship, and linguistic discipline” (cited in García 1993, 75). In its 1906 publication, E. C. Hills wrote about New Mexican Spanish, pointing to the high rate of illiteracy among the older speakers in Colorado and New Mexico, and the English monolingualism of the young (Hills 1906).

The number of Spanish-speaking citizens increased when Puerto Ricans were granted citizenship in 1917. That same year the American Association of Teachers of Spanish, now AATSP, was established. But this organization consolidated even further the idea that Spanish was not the language of U.S. citizens, but a foreign language “spoken by the educated people of Old and New Castile” (Espinosa 1923, 244). Furthermore, its first president, Lawrence Wilkins, declared that Spanish, considered only an academic subject, was to be taught only by American teachers and never in elementary schools.

The First World War opened a space for the teaching of Spanish in secondary schools, as German was replaced by Spanish as an academic subject. Following the recommendation of the Modern Foreign Language Study of 1929 (Coleman 1929), reading was made the aim of Spanish language instruction. The binding of the teaching of Spanish to written texts as an academic subject was further bolstered in 1944 when a Harvard study declared that the aim of language teaching was “not to give a practical command of the new language but to improve one’s English” (cited in García 1993, 77). Spanish language education became a process of binding Spanish to written texts, and othering it as a foreign language that did not exist in the lips of U.S. colonial citizens.

2.2. U.S. Spanish-speakers occupying education

Throughout the 20th century, Latinx students increasingly occupied U.S. schools and classrooms, not only in the elementary and secondary sectors, but also in colleges and universities. We use the word “occupy” not in its traditional sense of seizing space by force, but as it has been used in progressive political protest, that is, as a cry to transform Spanish language education and stand up to the injustices that Latinx students have suffered.

In the Southwest, the proximity to the border brought more Spanish speakers, especially after the U.S. government approved the Bracero program in 1942, bringing Mexican farm laborers on agricultural contracts. Still, Spanish was dismissed as the language spoken by “illegals,” or the language of short-term Mexican farmworkers. By the mid-20th century, the Radio Age brought to everyone’s ears the U.S. Spanish of the citizens in the Southwest. At the same time, the Air Age led to the presence of the first airborne diaspora in U.S. history — that of Puerto Ricans (Sánchez-Korrol 1994).

In 1965 Hispania, the journal of the American Association of Teachers of Spanish and Portuguese, published an article titled “The bilingual Mexican American as a potential teacher of Spanish” (cited in García 1993, 75). For the first time, bilingual Mexican Americans were acknowledged as able to teach Spanish. Until then, Spanish language teachers had been mostly bilingual, but they were generally white Anglos or foreigners who spoke Spanish.

Since the early 20th century, Mexican Americans in the Southwest had advocated for Spanish in their children’s education (San Miguel 1999). But as their numbers increased, U.S. politicians doubled down on the imposition of English, attempting to annihilate what was perceived as “the Mexican problem,” that is, a discourse that presented Mexican immigrants as carriers of disease and delinquency and a menace to the community (McWilliams 1968; González 2001; Molina 2006). In the Northeast, although Puerto Rican migrants made up almost one-fourth of students in New York City public schools by the mid-1960s, they were segregated in English-only remedial classrooms. Fueled by the Civil Rights Movement, Mexican American and Puerto Rican families fought back (for more on this, see García and Sung 2018).
To occupy their rightful place as Spanish-speaking U.S. citizens, Mexican Americans were moved by a race/language radical political consciousness that recognized their history as a colonized and racialized people (García and Sung 2018). Their actions to occupy education were felt most strongly in 1968 during what became known as the Eastside Blowouts in Los Angeles. Over 15,000 Chicana/o students, faculty and community members walked out of seven high schools in East Los Angeles to demand a bilingual-bicultural education. It is instructive to realize that their demands for the teaching of Spanish were tied to learning about their histories and cultures and greater social opportunities (McCurdy 1968). This was not simply a linguistic demand; it was a political claim that needed its own language.

Puerto Ricans also occupied their education in the late 1960s. Their demands for bilingual education were tied to better jobs and housing, as well as political and economic control over their lives. Recognizing that their languaging was not equivalent to the “Spanish” that U.S. education had cultivated, the demands of the Young Lords, a civil rights group that fought for the empowerment of Puerto Ricans, stated: “We want a true education of our Creole culture and Spanish language” (cited in García and Sung 2018, 330).

The requests of the Chicanx and Puerto Rican communities for bilingual education tied to the social improvement of their communities were never fully accepted, as educational authorities alleged lack of funding. In 1968 the Bilingual Education Act was passed, but the bilingual education that was supported in federal legislation had little to do with the demands of the Chicanx and Puerto Rican communities. Instead, bilingual education simply became a way to support the English language development of the Spanish-speaking communities. Nevertheless, as a result, bilingual education came into the hands of educators from these communities. Once Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans were teaching their own children, Spanish became more than a scaffolding tool for the acquisition of English; it was used to transmit histories, including that of their colonization, as well as poems and songs. But as Flores and García (2017) point out, Spanish in the education of these students was accepted only as a way of instilling ethnic pride. Bilingual education had started to delink from the dreams of the Mexican American and Puerto Rican communities for an education that was tied to better jobs, housing, and opportunities, and not to language per se.

Advances made in bilingual education that sought to maintain and develop children’s bilingualism came under attack throughout the 1970s. Developmental maintenance bilingual education programs that had been started by communities were forced to become transitional to qualify for federal funds (García and Kleifgen 2018). Changes in immigration policy in the late 1960s facilitated this shift, as the colonized U.S. citizens were increasingly joined by immigrants in the 1970s who were quickly classified as “Limited English Proficient” and later as “English Language Learners.” Attention turned to them, as the education of most U.S. bilingual Latinx students was ignored.

With the increased educational opportunities that were the result of Civil Rights legislation, many students of Latinx background started to reach not only secondary schools, but also higher education. It then became increasingly clear that these students did not belong in Spanish as a foreign language classroom. In 1972, the American Association of Teachers of Spanish and Portuguese issued a recommendation for so-called Spanish-S classes. Also, in 1975, Guadalupe Valdés published the first newsletter on the “Teaching of Spanish to Spanish-speakers” (García 1993). During this period of greater openness and attention to civil rights, Latinx high school and college students were perceived as “Spanish-speakers” considered “native speakers.”

The Spanish language performances of Latinx people fell along all points of a bilingual continuum. With increased immigration, some were closer to the Spanish monolingual end, whereas others were closer to the English monolingual end. But even those who no longer used Spanish held an identity-relationship to it. Rather than recognize this linguistic complexity, Spanish became an academic subject, curricularized, as Valdés (2015) has said, bounded tightly as an entity around itself, without relationship to its speakers. The bodies in the classrooms were now those of Spanish-speakers whose languaging differed greatly from the written texts, and thus, teaching them increasingly became a remedial exercise, purging what were seen as “interferences” and taming their differences.
3. An incoherent Spanish language education: separations and continuities

In this section we consider the visions of what are constituted as three separate fields in the present — Spanish as a foreign language, Spanish as a heritage language, and bilingual education. We note that Pascual y Cabo and Prada (2018) have rightly suggested the unification of the fields of Spanish as a Foreign Language and Spanish as a Heritage Language. Because we center the white supremacist motives of educational authorities in excluding ways of speaking of many U.S. Latinxs, we insist that this reconstitution cannot occur by leaving behind bilingual education (also see García 2005). In considering the realities of the three so-called separate fields, however, we point to cracks and disjunctions in their activities which start to direct us toward the continuities among them. But, as we will see, despite practical continuities, and increased dialogue among the three trends, U.S. Spanish language education continues to suffer from much of the white Anglo-supremacy western logic that has been the tradition in U.S. education.

3.1. Spanish for Others opens up to Latinx students

Today, Spanish is the language other than English most studied both in secondary schools and universities, and in many adult education centers. The field of teaching Spanish as the language of others focuses on teaching Spanish to students who do not yet speak the language and who are supposed to acquire it through formal education. Spanish then is often designated as a “foreign,” “modern,” “world” or even “second” language, and those in the field are associated with three long-standing professional organizations—the Modern Language Association (MLA), the American Association of Teachers of Spanish and Portuguese (AATSP), and the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL). Their scholarship is published mostly in the journals associated with these organizations—The Modern Language Journal, Hispania, and Foreign Language Annals.

Spanish continues to be taught not as spoken in U.S. communities, but as what Michael Mena (Mena and García 2021) has called “a language-elsewhere.” As Mena and García explain: “Spanish is, at minimum, from anywhere else but ‘home’—a language-elsewhere that can be recognized as a ‘standard’ register that is not marked by a history of racialization (i.e., linked to ‘deficiency’)” (5). And yet, many of the students who flock to Spanish language classes, especially at the intermediate and advanced levels, are increasingly of Latinx heritage, eager to develop their bilingualism, and rupturing the ideology that these classrooms are for Others (Alvarez 2013).

For the many Anglo teachers in the profession, especially at the secondary level, the insistence on one norm of Spanish often hides their inability to understand the different languaging of Latinx students. The gradual incorporation of teachers from Latin America and Spain, bringing with them the study of linguistic norms and literary texts in their countries of origin, has not improved the situation. Being recent immigrants and middle-class professionals, their languaging is still far from the language practices of many U.S. bilingual Latinx communities. Based on hegemonic linguistic ideologies of nationalism, monolingualism and standardness (Valdés et al. 2003, 24), the focus of teaching then becomes the middle- and upper-class-based varieties of Spanish from Latin America and Spain (Valdés et al. 2003, 10), generating hierarchies and maintaining privileges and inequalities based on the varieties’ origin.

In keeping with neoliberal economic policies, Spain has exploited its historically hegemonic and colonial position through an ideological process which José Del Valle (2006) has called hispanofonía. To legitimize its economic entry into Spanish-speaking U.S. and Latin American markets, Spain has argued for its leading role in the cultural and linguistic union of all Spanish-speakers across the Americas. To sustain this hispanofonía, the Instituto Cervantes was established in 1991 to teach Spanish abroad and to spread Spanish culture worldwide.

Moved by this new interest in Spanish as a language of economic potential (both to facilitate trade relations and to enter national and international new market niches), the teaching of Spanish has entered many U.S. elementary schools. Many U.S. preschools are marketing themselves
as “bilingual,” and Spanish language immersion programs in primary school are growing in number. In other cases, the relevance of Spanish language education is related to its functional value, recognizing that in order to participate fully in the local community, Spanish is required.

As Spanish language education has moved to elementary schools, another crack in the artificial barriers of separate fields is starting to show, for young children learning to act with other linguistic resources require a different pedagogical approach. Spanish cannot then be taught simply as the language of others. The use of Spanish as a medium of instruction in elementary schools then overlaps with bilingual education approaches, as we consider in the next section.

3.2. Bilingual education opens up to Others

Bilingual educators have had their own professional organizations since the 1970s — The National Association of Bilingual Education (NABE), with many state affiliates, notably the California Association of Bilingual Education (CABE). NABE has its own research journals as well, including The Bilingual Research Journal and NABE Journal of Research and Practices.

There are more bilingual education programs at elementary level than at secondary level. This has to do with the great number of young Latinx children who come into schools from bilingual homes and are assessed as being “English Language Learners.” Many middle schools and high schools offer bilingual education programs to their Latinx newcomers. In these secondary bilingual education programs, Latinx students are taught some academic subjects in Spanish. They also take an academic subject named Spanish. This “bilingual” class labeled “Spanish” is indistinguishable from what others might call Spanish “as a heritage language,” opening up another crack in the epistemological divisions between fields that are considered separate.

To raise prestige and acceptability of bilingual education, a model known as dual language education or double-immersion education was promoted in the early 21st century, where “English-dominant and target-language-dominant students are purposefully integrated” (Lindholm-Leary 2001, 30). Dual language education has brought bilingual education nearer to efforts associated with “foreign” language teaching. For specific periods of time or certain subjects, instruction is in a single “target language” so that children can learn a “second language.”

Latinx bilingual scholars and educators have been increasingly critical of how these “dual language” programs serve to attract white middle-class families to public schools and to gentrify neighborhoods (Cervantes-Soon 2014; Palmer et al. 2014), distancing themselves from the socio-political aim of educating U.S. Latinx communities bilingually. The division of children into two distinct categories—English Language Learners and Spanish Language Learners—and of Spanish and English into strictly separate spaces ignores the complexity of linguistic practices of Latinx children. Bilingual education scholars and educators are reclaiming dual language as critical bilingual education, reinserting its political commitment to Latinx minoritized communities.

3.3. Spanish as a Heritage Language opens up to critical perspectives

Like bilingual education, the teaching of a language other than English to ethnolinguistic minorities in the U.S. is not new. But what is new now is the naming of this activity as “heritage language” education, and its inclusion in public secondary schools and universities where it is taught by paid professionals. Although the term “heritage language” had been used in Canada since the 1960s, it first appeared in the U.S. in 1999 for the first conference on Heritage Languages in America that took place at the University of California, Los Angeles. The first issue of what is seen as the field’s main research publication, The Heritage Language Journal, was published in 2002 (Carreira and Kagan 2018). This is precisely the year that The Bilingual Education Act was replaced by Title III of No Child Left Behind, now named “Language Instruction for Limited English Proficient and Immigrant Students.” It is instructive to realize that as heritage language studies came into being, the term “bilingual” and “bilingual education” were totally silenced, substituted in the former case by
“English language acquisition,” and in the latter by “dual language education.” In this way, bilingual education was disassociated from the critical political activity that fueled its origins.

The term “heritage language” has been criticized not only for pointing to something old and of the past, but also because it robs bilingual Latinx students of the right to name Spanish as their own native language which they use in the present (García 2005). Despite some objections to its naming, the field known as Spanish as a Heritage Language has grown in importance (Beaudrie and Fairclough 2012). The journal *Spanish as a Heritage Language* was first published in 2021, and there have been annual conferences on Spanish as a heritage language since 2014. For U.S. Latinx university and secondary students, this means that they can claim Spanish as part of their heritage, and not simply as a language of others. Additionally, because the activity takes place mostly at the secondary and tertiary level, it is accorded the prestige that comes with being credit/diploma-bearing.

There has been much discussion about who is a heritage language speaker and how they are classified as such. Much initial scholarship focused on what these “heritage” students could not do with what had been normed as Spanish. Classes attempted to “remediate” the errors and inferences in the Spanish of these students, pointing to their incomplete acquisition (Montrul 2008). But increasingly, there has been criticism of these negative evaluations of the languaging of these “heritage speakers” (see, for example, Otheguy 2016; Kupisch and Rothman 2018). To address these issues, many have called for joint work with teachers in actual secondary and tertiary classrooms to better understand the language performances of these students (Alvarez 2013; Torres, Pascual y Cabo and Beusterien 2017; Carreira and Kagan 2018).

As a result, many scholars within the field are turning their attention to critical bilingual perspectives (see, for example, Prada 2022; see also Alvarez 2013; Quan 2021), which have also been the focus of bilingual education scholarship. Leeman, Rabin and Román-Mendoza (2011) call for heritage language education to not only promote agency, but also “contribute to social justice outside of the classroom,” generating “community-based opportunities to enact and strengthen identities as language experts and to contribute to positive social change” (481). Leeman and Serafini (2016) also denounce appropriateness-based models of Spanish for reinforcing dominant sociolinguistic hierarchies.

The Spanish heritage language field was initially an extension of the principles and pedagogies of the foreign language field. But as university and secondary classrooms have been occupied by racialized Latinx students, the field has taken on the more critical aspects of bilingual education, creating yet another crack at the artificial divisions within Spanish language education.

3.4. Continuities more than separation? A summary

As more diverse students have occupied Spanish language education, the divisions between the three visions of teaching Spanish—as a foreign language to Others, as one of two languages in the bilingual education of Latinx students, or as a heritage of Latinx students—are no longer appropriate. For example, scholars and educators talk about Spanish for bilinguals, Spanish for heritage speakers, Spanish for native speakers. And yet, the labels bilinguals, heritage speakers, and native speakers all refer to the same students. It is the academic traditions of naming that create the separations.

We continue to hold on to the divisions because they respond to the monolingual monoglossic Anglo-supremacy/western logic of U.S. education. The question then is: How can we reconstitute the field of Spanish language education with a logic derived from the experiences and practices of Latinx racialized bilingual students themselves? The next section attempts to provide some answers to this question.

4. Reconstitutions: focusing on borderland-Latinx people’s language

Efforts to teach Spanish in the United States continue to be met with resistance. Universities feel their students do not need it because it is neither considered a true “academic” subject nor useful for educational success. Even schools that offer bilingual education programs only truly assess and value
academic performances when they are rendered in English. The failure to command the attention that the study of Spanish deserves relates to the fact that it is taught as an autonomous language entity, even when taught to Spanish-speaking students. Instead, Spanish language education could focus on the recognition of the ways of languaging of bilingual Latinx students, and on situating these linguistic practices in the history of colonization and imperialism that surrounds the presence of Latinx people in the U.S.

To teach Spanish that reflects the linguistic practices of Latinx people we would have to, as we said before, follow Makoni and Pennycook (2006) in disinventing Spanish and reconstituting it. The Latinx students who increasingly occupy classrooms disrupt the bubble in which Spanish has been kept, and the traditional concepts with which we have studied the Spanish language and bilingualism. This necessary shift in the profession is being increasingly acknowledged, for example in Glenn Martínez and Robert Train’s Tension and Contention in Language Education for Latinxs in the United States (2020).

Spanish language educators would have to first recognize Latinx students’ valid and legitimate existence as borderlanders, living and languaging entremundos (Anzaldúa 2012 [1987]) who have a “modo de vivir” that is “neither español ni inglés, but both,” and that is “[n]either eagle nor serpent, but both. And like the ocean, neither animal respects borders” (84). Latinx borderland existence is rarely accepted because it does not fit the nation-state imaginary of being monolithic and monolingual.

There has been a concerted effort to criminalize the Spanish spoken by U.S. Latinx as the language of violent racialized communities, and of undocumented people. In classrooms, Spanish spoken by U.S. Latinx is accepted only to be “corrected” (Urciuoli 1996). In communities and media “This is America, speak English,” “You are in America speak English” are common expressions of racist harassment to Latinxs (see CGTN 2020, for example). Workers are fired because of speaking Spanish at work (Zentella 2014; Crowley 2019; Paúl 2019). Racial crimes and intolerance towards Latinx communities and their language have increased (Rushin and Edwards 2018; Associated Press 2019; Feinberg, Branton and Martinez-Ebers 2019).

These criminalized Latinx people are then portrayed as languageless (Rosa 2015) or as monolingual speakers of a stigmatized variety of Spanish. And yet, the Pew Research Center estimates that most Latinx people in the U.S. today are bilingual (Krogstad and González Barrera 2015). According to the U.S. Census, 71% or almost three-fourth of Latinx people in the U.S. speak Spanish at home, and of these, only 8% do so because they do not speak English (U.S. Census 2019). In addition, we cannot assume that the 29% of Latinx people who say they speak English at home or the 1% who say they speak other languages, most likely a Native American language, do so because they do not speak Spanish. Our own families have different language practices, some choosing to only speak English at home (or only Spanish), even though they are bilingual.

To teach the language of Latinx borderland-dwellers, and not simply a language named Spanish, two factors must be taken into account. On the one hand, it is important to enable students and their teachers to become critically conscious of the raciolinguistic ideologies that have produced the racialization of U.S. Latinx people and the construction of their language as inappropriate. On the other hand, it is also essential that teachers of Spanish and their students develop understandings of translanguaging that come from the bilingual community’s own practices. In describing these two concepts next, we point to changes that would have to occur in the preparation of teachers to teach Spanish in ways that validate the language practices of Latinx students.

### 4.1. Beyond “bad speakers” to raciolinguistic ideologies of listeners: the role of teacher education

The processes that Flores and Rosa (2015) have named raciolinguistic ideologies have been present, as we have seen, since the Anglo colonizers entered the American Southwest. Racial and linguistic categories were produced to render Spanish-speakers as “less-than,” interrupting the process of
communication that, as the Chilean biologists Maturana and Varela (1984) have said, allows human beings to become, to emerge, and to learn.

Raciolinguistic ideologies are the sets of beliefs that produce different perceptions, despite similar linguistic practices, depending on the ethnoracial position of the subjects that language (Rosa 2015, 108). Flores and Rosa (2015) have argued that it is not language itself, but the social categories of being considered non-white, non-native, immigrant, and a criminalized Spanish speaker, that produce the perception of signs that are, in turn, negatively evaluated. In classrooms where Spanish is taught, these ideologies perpetuate inequalities by strengthening racial hierarchies and expanding them to linguistic systems, accents, and discourse practices. More than an issue of the language of Latinx students, it is about how they are being listened to by “the white listening subject”: that is, the ideological positioning usually taken by those who inhabit places of power (Flores and Rosa 2015).

To change the ways in which Spanish language teachers are listening to Latinx students and their languaging, teacher education programs would have to ensure that the history of colonization and imperialism and its relationship to language is addressed in the curriculum. Teacher education programs would also have to include the study of the politics of language, of what Arnoux and Del Valle (2010) and other Latinx scholars call glotopolítica, and of the relationship between language and the political economy, focusing on understanding the role that language plays in maintaining social inequalities. The most important aspect to transform the preparation of Spanish language educators would be to teach about bilingualism, as Mignolo (2000) has said, “otherwise.”

4.2. Beyond “Spanish” to speakers’ translanguaging: the role of teacher education

Spanish language teachers are prepared and educated following established concepts from sociolinguistics, applied linguistics, bilingualism, and second language acquisition that have been constructed with monoglossic dominant logics. Traditional teacher education programs teach about “additive bilingualism,” as if a language could be added as an autonomous entity. In teaching about the language of bilinguals, course content for teachers always includes “language contact” studies that have resulted in simply identifying linguistic “interferences” of bilinguals (Weinreich 1974[1953]), instead of reflecting on the contact of speakers with different power differentials. The concept of “incomplete acquisition” of Spanish (see, for example, Montrul 2008) has contributed to the erroneous comparison of Latinx language performances with those of monolingual foreign middle-class speakers, contributing to their linguistic stigmatization.

Beyond the concepts of additive bilingualism, language contact, and incomplete acquisition, Spanish language teachers are taught to defend their efforts for Spanish “language maintenance.” Yet, they are not made critically conscious of the fact that, as with all life-sustaining efforts, language practices need to work in conjunction with the linguistic ecology of the racialized borderland community of speakers. Language practices need to be sustained and developed in organic relationship with speakers and contexts. We need to shed the static concept of language maintenance based on a monoglossic view of Spanish and instead embrace Spanish language sustainability for a heteroglossic bilingual U.S. community.

The Spanish language pedagogies that teacher education promotes are also often based on outdated concepts of diglossia, the functional compartmentalization of two languages, as the only way to ensure societal bilingualism, without acknowledging that these diglossic processes are merely ways of exerting power (Martín Rojo 2017). Teachers are further taught that Spanish as a “second language” or “heritage language” could be acquired and performed separately from English, when all bilinguals act linguistically with the force of an ocean that, like Anzaldúa (2012 [1987]) has said, does not have a clear boundary between the shore and its waters.

These accepted concepts in the sociolinguistic and applied linguistic literature have done much harm to the Spanish language education profession. The idea that only a narrow norm of Spanish can be used in the classroom promotes the perpetuation of monoglossic ideologies that are
linked to raciolinguistic ones. As scholars and educators, we need to work with the situated bilingualism of Latinx groups in culture-specific ways, with their translanguaging (García 2009).

Translanguaging refers to “the deployment of a speaker’s full linguistic repertoire without regard for watchful adherence to the socially and politically defined boundaries of named (and usually national and state) languages” (Otheguy, García and Reid 2015, 281). Like monolinguals, bilinguals act with a unitary linguistic/semiotic repertoire. It is only when language is viewed from the external point of view of society and institutions such as schools, and not from the bilingual speaker’s own internal cognitive perspective, that the speaker’s language is divided into separate named languages, different varieties, and various modes. Translanguaging is based on the speakers’ own actions as they language. It acknowledges that the unitary repertoire with which they language does not reflect dual separate linguistic systems or a dual psycholinguistic correspondence (García and Li 2014; Otheguy, García and Reid 2015, 2019). The trans- in translanguaging is not about going across Spanish and English, but about going beyond the naturalization of Spanish and English as monolingual norms of nation-states and leveraging all the speakers’ resources to make meaning.

For Spanish language education, taking up translanguaging is a political act (Flores 2014), acknowledging the sociopolitical reality of the language named Spanish and its importance for identity, but leveraging the students’ entire unitary repertoire of meanings, and insisting that their performances must be their own and relevant to their lives. The language performances of bilingual students do not have to be identical to the performances of other monolingual Spanish speakers living elsewhere. It is the unfortunate comparison with white middle-class monolingual Spanish-speaking students using Spanish elsewhere that has enregistered U.S. Latinx students as having “incomplete” acquisition and “lacking” language. The unfortunate consequence of this comparison has been that Latinx languaging has been left out in U.S. Spanish language education.

Spanish language teachers that take up translanguaging as a pedagogical practice develop a stance, a belief that bilingual performances in so-called Spanish draws from a unitary repertoire. They then learn to listen to students not simply with expectations of what has been constructed as Spanish, but in ways that follows the bilingual students’ own logic in languaging. Teachers, of course, guide the students’ linguistic performances so that they expand their repertoire, use it more convincingly and for more complex uses. At times, they may even insist that the written or oral products be in what has been constructed as standard Spanish. But their lesson designs focus on the process of doing Spanish, which leverages the students’ unitary repertoire (for more on translanguaging pedagogy, see García, Johnson and Seltzer 2017). Only when Spanish language educators enter a space of recognition of raciolinguistic ideologies will they be able to listen to Latinx translanguaging performances for their potential and understand that these linguistic practices must be part and parcel of how they develop all students’ bilingualism.

5. The undoing of raciolinguistic ideologies and the leveraging of translanguaging in Spanish language education

We have pointed to changes in ideologies and practices that teacher education programs must make to accommodate the undoing of raciolinguistic ideologies and the leveraging of translanguaging. But what should teachers do in classrooms? We summarize here in the form of bullet points what we have said before, so as to serve as signposts for Spanish language teachers:

- Focus on teaching students who will be using Spanish in the U.S. and not on an abstract language named Spanish. That is, center the linguistic practices of Latinx people.
- Make sure that you understand the linguistic histories and life histories of all the students in your class. What are their experiences with bilingualism? Their relationship with Spanish speakers? Listen intently. Observe deeply. Be a co-learner. Learn from your students and their communities.
Teach in ways that raise the critical consciousness of your students regarding the role that Spanish has played in the domination of the most numerous group of Spanish speakers in the U.S.—Latinx. Make them conscious of how language and race have been constituted as categories of domination, and how raciolinguistic ideologies continue to operate in society.

Remember that in the process of becoming bilingual, it is important to encourage students to leverage their entire unitary language/semiotic repertoire, their translanguaging.

See yourself not as teaching a language or adding a language. You are providing students with new linguistic features that they could then incorporate into their repertoire to use in meaningful ways for different functions and in new communicative contexts.

Differentiate between the external social definitions of bilingualism as two named languages, and the internal process by which all speakers (including bilinguals) select features from their unitary repertoire to language and communicate.

Encourage students to access all their linguistic/semiotic resources in the process of learning, even though at times you may ask that the oral or written product exhibit specific linguistic features.

Bilingualism emerges through the interaction of text and speaker / reader / writer / listener / signer. Texts can be emitted orally or in writing in one language, for example, Spanish, but once a speaker of another language or a bilingual speaker engages with the text, the text is dynamically constructed in bilingual ways. Focus on what students do with texts.

In classrooms, group students in ways that will allow them to use their entire language / semiotic repertoire to make sense of Spanish language texts and instruction.

There will always be heterogeneity of practices and experiences in language classrooms. Teach with those differences in mind. Some students will need more scaffolding. Know when to scaffold instruction to extend the students’ Zone of Proximal Development—a concept developed by Vygotsky (1978) to refer to the space between what a learner can do without assistance and what a learner can potentially do with guidance or in collaboration with others. Know also when to remove the scaffold. Some students will need more experiences with different ways of languaging. All students’ language practices are valid and must have a place in the classroom.

Extend the classroom texts beyond the academic ones you plan to use. The practices of the Latinx community must enter your classroom not only through the students’ practices, but also by engaging the community through assignments, linguistic landscape studies, etc.

Overall, know that the traditions of Spanish language teaching, modeled after foreign language teaching (and the teaching of Latin and Greek), have not served us well. The study of language and its components, i.e., grammar, phonics, etc., has no purpose in isolation. The teaching of aspects of metalinguistic awareness can only help if we first have nurtured secure listeners and speakers who are comfortable using their heteroglossic practices to compose meaningful discourses and texts.

6. Conclusion

The future success of Spanish language education in the U.S. will rely on whether educators can shift their focus from teaching a language to teaching how to listen to and value Latinx people’s languaging. For this to occur, the present divisions in the field, maintained by structures of power in universities, where teachers of Spanish are prepared and educated, would have to come tumbling down. Interdisciplinarity in university spaces has become more common; but teacher education programs in foreign language, bilingual education, and heritage language education continue to be housed in separate departments.

In centering the Latinx people who study Spanish and the reasons for doing so, Spanish education would cease to be seen as the purview of the Other. Instead, teachers would open up educational spaces so that all students could understand the histories of racial and linguistic
subjugation that have enveloped the lives of U.S. Latinx people. Within these spaces, all students would learn to appreciate translanguaging for its potential to empower them as legitimate speakers of their own language. Spanish language educators would then understand that bilingual performances go beyond what we have learned to circumscribe as “Spanish,” and can contribute to expanding a student’s repertoire. In these spaces, monolingual English speakers would learn to appreciate the heteroglossic practices of the many different U.S. Spanish speakers.

Finally, U.S. Spanish language educators need to reflect on why many insist on defining themselves as teachers of a language, and not of people. They would then soon realize that, even without intent, they are continuing to support the ongoing colonization and domination processes of the United States over Latinx populations. A critical Spanish language education can work against the injustices that have been perpetrated against U.S. Latinxs so that they can re-exist with their own language practices, able to participate as equal citizens, linked to their past and their future, linked to this land and the others upon which they and their ancestors have walked, and centered on the borders in which they live today.

References


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