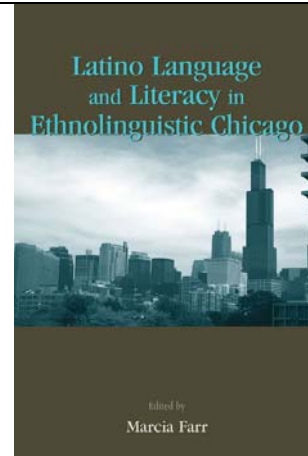


Latino Language and Literacy in Ethnolinguistic Chicago
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As our Hispanic population continues to expand, not only in Chicago, but in many parts of the U.S., it becomes increasingly more important and crucial to understand the many faceted social issues related to language and literacy. The editor of *Latino Language and Literacy in Ethnolinguistic Chicago*, Marcia Farr, does an excellent job of doing this by skillfully bringing together through the chapters in this book the complexity of language and literacy issues.

Because of the attention linguistic assimilation and resistance are receiving right now in the United States, the messages in this book are of utmost importance. The U.S. has the 5th largest population of Spanish speakers. Only Mexico, Spain, Argentina, and Colombia have more. Not only do they continue to immigrate to the United States, but their fertility rates are higher. Even though the Hispanic population continues to grow, more of them actually consider themselves Americans. They are proud to be Mexican (or any other Latino culture), but they are equally proud to be Americans. After all, there are people in Boston who call them selves Irish and are proud of it, but no one questions their patriotism. It's also important to remember that many immigrant Hispanics have come to the U.S. because of the economic superiority of the U.S. and not because they feel there is a cultural superiority in the U.S.

Although this book is written about Chicago, the issues brought to the forefront in this volume will be of interest and be relevant to anyone desiring a more in depth understanding of how language is not only related to literacy, but how it relates to assimilation and is central to one's social identity.

Each chapter in this timely book provides a unique focus and helps the reader to take a deeper view of the issues. The book is divided into 4 parts. Part I which is the Introduction by Marcia Farr and Elías Domínguez Barajas provides a background of the Mexicans and Puerto Ricans who have come to the Chicago area. The authors discuss the implications of non-English tongues on education and the importance of viewing a student's L1 [first language] as an asset rather than a hindrance. "Funds of knowledge"

which means that which is known, learned, and valued at home is one approach schools can implement to change this attitude in educational settings. Language not only expresses and constructs ethnic identities, but class identities as well. It is intriguing that there is such a radical difference in attitudes between a dominant speaker learning a 2nd language and a minority acquiring a dominant language.

Part II, *Within The Family Circle*, has three chapters. The first chapter, *¡A Mí No Me Manda Nadie!*, explores the distinct characteristics of the Mexican rancheros that set them apart from other Mexican immigrants. Private property which is earned through one's own efforts is highly valued since self-reliance is of utmost importance to them. Because they also value ties of kinship, rancheros undermine the dichotomy between "Mexicans" who are characterized as group-oriented and "North Americans" who are characterized as individualistic. *Franquez*, a verbal style which is direct, straightforward, candid language, is another characteristic of rancheros, including men, women, and children. This style of language is a sharp contrast to the stereotype of the image of Mexicans. Marcia Farr, as the author of this chapter, explains that it is very important to rancheros to distinguish themselves from other Mexicans, primarily indigenous Indians and the "citified" people.

In the second chapter, *Sociocognitive Aspects of Proverb Use in a Mexican Transnational Social Network*, Elías Domínguez Barajas discusses how proverbs help to keep families connected to their country of origin, Mexico. He explains that even though it is difficult to give a definition to proverb, proverbs are nonetheless a dynamic element in conversations and social interactions. They are used to censure, teach, establish rapport, and to entertain communicating social values and appropriate social behaviors.

Tony Del Valle, the author of the third chapter, *"Successful" and "Unsuccessful" Literacies of Two Puerto Rican Families in Chicago*, uses the stories of two different Puerto Rican girls to challenge the assumption that the presence of literacy in the home leads to academic success. Research is showing that the dropout rate for Hispanics is 4x the dropout rate for non-Hispanic whites and statistics show a higher dropout for 2nd generation Hispanics. Just having materials in the home related to literacy is not enough; they must have ways to interact with them so they can move beyond just recognizing the importance of education to a deeper understanding of the why and how of learning and literacy. Del Valle begins the chapter by acknowledging Puerto Rico's history which helps to explain why Puerto Ricans have not been incorporated and why they have remained at the bottom of the socioeconomic scale as well as are experiencing a high dropout rate. In order to understand the dropout rate amongst Puerto Ricans, Del Valle asserts that history and politics influencing their lives must be taken into account as well as frequent migration patterns.

Assimilation is not working as it was intended. Often parents are seeing their children assimilate but often to the worst aspects of the American culture. The problem is not with a lack of assimilation to American culture, but too much of it.

Immigrant families and youth who maintain their ethnic identities and bilingualism are generally more successful in integrating into mainstream American life. Young people who are not successful in the integration process are gravitating toward gang culture to find identity, importance, and belongingness. Riots and ethnic violence are a product of the loss of traditional values and of poverty, not of multiculturalism and multilingualism. In fact, research demonstrates that students least assimilated often do better in school.

Part III, *At School*, is comprised of 4 chapters. The first two address issues in a dual-language school: *The Bilingual Echo: Children As Language Mediators in a Dual Language School* by Irma M. Olmedo and *Latino Children's Spanish Use in a Chicago Dual-Immersion Classroom* by Kim Potowski. The study of dual language programs are of great significance because nearly a quarter of Hispanics speak little or no Spanish. Research is showing that by the 3rd generation (grandchildren of immigrants), only a minority in any group maintains bilingualism and that English monolingualism is the prevalent pattern. What is being eliminated rapidly is the ability of these children to maintain fluency in the language of their immigrant parents. It's immigrant languages being threatened; not English.

An important finding is that children learn more from each other than they learn from the teacher. They are sensitive to language skills of their peers and make adjustments in order that communication can take place. Therefore, peer interaction with speakers of the 2nd language is a critical component of second language development. Another important principle for dual immersion is to teach the second language through content. Olmedo describes the "the bilingual echo" as a process in which a child helps a peer with language and learning and therefore, acts as a mediator. This is true for both the native English speaker and the native Spanish speaker. Potowski in the second chapter presents research that demonstrates that students in dual immersion programs, irregardless of native language, prefer to use English for social talk and Spanish for academic purposes. This is contrary to what the larger society would indicate. Research also indicates that the native Spanish speakers achieve a higher level of English proficiency than native English Speakers do with Spanish. It must be remembered that dual immersion programs by themselves do not solve all educational problems for Latino students.

The third chapter in this part, *Global Links From the Postindustrial Heartland: Language, Internet Use, and Identity Development Among U.S.-Born Mexican High School Girls*, by Jennifer L. Cohen tells the story of Flora who was able to use Spanish chat rooms on the internet which gave her an opportunity to try on a possible future self. The possible selves theory allows an individual to take on many different aspects of one's identity, at times conflicting aspects, while striving to make a decision about the future.

The last chapter in this part is *Writing in Two Languages/Living in Two Worlds: A Rhetorical Analysis of Mexican-American Written Discourse* by Maria Spicer-Escalante. In this chapter Spicer-Escalante compares the writing of Spanish heritage speakers in the U.S. (SHS), Spanish second language learners who are also are English native speakers (SSLL), and Spanish native speakers from Mexico (SNS). Irregardless of language, although the tendency is greater in Spanish, Spanish speakers build their essays primarily on the basis of personal experiences instead of including bibliographic sources. In contrast, English speakers tend to include one reference after another, with little or no

further explanation whether writing in English or Spanish. One implication that can be drawn from this analysis is that Spanish heritage speakers could benefit from courses in which they learn how to include facts and bibliographic references. Yet, it is also important to recognize that their style of writing has the potential to enrich the learning environment for all students.

Part IV focuses on *Within Community Spaces* consisting of 5 chapters. In the chapter, *Resisting Assimilation: Mexican Immigrant Mothers Writing Together*, Janise Hurtig, the author, shows that through their writing these Mexican mothers participating in The Parents Write Their Worlds program struggle with what it means to them to be a good mother and the “materialismo” concept in the U.S. coming to the conclusion it is more important to be at home to protect and nurture their children than to go to work to buy things for their children. These mothers who are committed to maintaining their homeland language, traditions, and customs feel they are writing their stories for their children so their children will understand the values, customs, and dreams of their heritage. Even though by the 3rd generation most Hispanics tend to have views more reflective of mainstream Americans concerning gender roles, divorce, abortion, homosexuality, etc., there are some things that have remained strong for them despite generational divisions--- importance of family, a strong work ethic, religious orientation, and the commitment and support of patriotic values. It is primarily through immigration that the American culture is being preserved. After all, our American culture is based on ideas and not blood, skin color, or religion. The “glue” holding this country together is not the English language but the ideas embodied in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. The principles contained within these documents can be lived in any language.

Ana Ubilluz Coloimb in the next chapter, *Readings With Mexican Immigrant Mothers: Expanding Our Horizons by Expanding Theirs*, shows the reader how these Mexican mothers not only wanted to be trained on how to meet the learning needs of their children, but they desired a literacy program that would benefit them personally. Through the books and articles they read they began to understand that by expanding their horizons they were in a better position to help their children and to be advocates for them when they were receiving a mediocre education.

Literacy and Religion: Reading, Writing, and Gender Among Mexican Women in Chicago by Marcia Farr is the next chapter. Farr shows through this chapter that religion has promoted literacy, and literacy has promoted religion as literacy has been associated with authority and power. As church members have become more literate and are able to read for themselves, they have been in a stronger position to challenge church leaders. Farr provides examples of this happening in her chapter.

The next chapter, *The Magic of Verbal Art: Juanita’s Santería Initiation*, by Richard G. Gelb relates Juanita’s journey to become a healer. Juanita describes this journey through storytelling.

The last chapter of this part and of the book is titled *What It Means to Speak the Same Language: An Ethnolinguistic Study of Workplace Communication* and is authored by Jeanne Weiland Herrick. What Herrick discovered was that social connections and social cohesion may play a more significant role in communication than sharing the same language. Just knowing the same language does not mean those speaking will understand each other. Making the assumptions that those who speak the same language understand each other and that there are more differences than similarities between cultures have influenced diversity training in work settings. From the studies of Herrick, these assumptions need to be reexamined and as they are reexamined they should have an effect on what happens in diversity trainings as well as workplace literacy programs.

Language is not the issue! Even in cases where one's primary language is English does not guarantee economic and political integrative success. We only need to look at Native Americans, Native Hawaiians, Chicanos, and African Americans to see this reality.

As a closing thought, it's important to remember that assimilation can't be mandated. Plus, no matter to what extent an illegal immigrant assimilates, learns English and accepts American ways, he or she faces insuperable barriers to full inclusion and participation in the American society.

I highly recommend this book for those who are interested in providing literacy programs for families and children and who want to better understand linguistic assimilation and resistance. There are ideas presented in the chapters of this book that if implemented could have a profound impact on Mexican families and children achieving a higher level of literacy and thus be in a better position to achieve the "American Dream" that seems to be eluding so many.

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