

Heritage Speakers and the *Standard*: Fighting Linguistic Hegemony

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1. Introduction

Much discussion continues to take place in the area of Heritage Language Education regarding what variety of Spanish needs to be the target of instruction. While all researchers agree on the importance of the home variety as a cultural marker for the Spanish-speaking population in the United States, some point out that this is precisely the variety that needs to be taught in our classrooms (Villa, 1996; Bernal-Enríquez & Hernández Chávez, 2003) while others signal the import that has been placed on the standard or academic variety for social and economic mobility (Wiley & Lukes, 1996). A review of the literature on this matter suggests that we are talking about two distinct student populations and one common goal. To wit, the bilingual continuum as discussed in Valdés (2001) runs the gamut from receptive bilinguals—speakers who can understand but do not speak the target language—to balanced bilinguals. The former group of speakers would benefit from a classroom setting that provides ample opportunities for reading, writing, and speaking the home variety. The latter set already brings these abilities to the classroom. Because bilinguals are not a homogeneous group, the type of instruction should be adapted. Nonetheless, the purpose is to allow all of these speakers to further their studies in the language.

While the definition of heritage learners—in the Hispanophone context—taken at its broadest encompasses a continuum that goes from individuals that have a cultural connection with the language but do not speak it or understand it to fluent speakers of Spanish, following Fishman (2001); a more discreet definition, as Valdés (2001) explains, has been used by instructors. This only includes students who, to varying degrees, speak or at least understand the language. In other words, in the lower end of the first group we have students that have in the past been placed in Spanish as a Foreign Language (FL) classes while in the latter are the students placed in Heritage Language (HL) programs, where available, of course.

The students that fall under the broader definition are learning the language but they may have varying receptive capabilities as well as many cultural connections. For them, classes in their home variety are needed since they are trying to reconnect with their culture and their families through their home language. As Villa has pointed out, these students cannot add to their linguistic repertoire, they need to build it first (1996). But they need classes designed for them, not for foreign language learners (Beaudrie & Ducar, 2005). Carreira agrees, adding that even though from a purely linguistic angle, these students might be suited for an FL classroom; they still need the cultural links that an HL classroom would provide (2004). In other words, the ideal curriculum would comprise, in addition to the traditional courses for FL learners (first and second year Spanish as a foreign language courses), a heritage track that would parallel these offerings with a first-year set of courses for receptive bilinguals—to give them the opportunity to be exposed to the home variety (or varieties)—and a second-year line where students could maintain their varieties while acquiring the academic one.

Because in the traditional foreign language classroom the academic variety of Spanish is used and taught, it is in the heritage language track where the home variety provides the students' first approach into the language. As they move into intermediate courses, the academic variety is introduced alongside with the home variety. From a pedagogical standpoint there is agreement among researchers

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that the home variety needs to be taught, respected, and spoken in the classroom. However, if heritage learners at the university level only take enough Spanish to complete requirements for their major, they may end up with little or no exposure to the academic variety. We can argue here that they may or may not need the academic variety as its usefulness as a provider of upward socio-economic mobility has certainly been disputed (Aparicio, 2000). Moreover, as Benjamin (1997) suggests, there is a struggle between the goals of instructors and students. While teachers may be trying to introduce their classes to the literature of the Spanish-speaking world through the standard variety, the students may want to reunite with their own language and culture.

Whether we believe that the academic variety is needed along social, economic, and/or cultural lines, the argument put forth here is that these speakers need to learn the academic variety of their heritage language in order to maintain and defend their home varieties. The point of departure for this premise is an article by Suarez in which she makes a compelling case for the need for heritage language speakers to acquire the dominant language in order to fight linguistic hegemony. In her own words: “While at first it may seem that to resist linguistic hegemony is to resist the dominant language, in actuality this would not be successful resistance. In fact, successful resistance may lie in the usefulness of the dominant language” (2002, p. 515).

This suggestion is backed up by Hornberger and Wang who explain that “[w]hile HLLs [heritage language learners] need to acquire the literacies of the dominant society, their biliteracies in Standard English and the HL [heritage language] and HC [heritage culture] should become part of their empowering tools as well.” (2008, p. 7) In their words, “It would also help them understand that multiple memberships are necessary and possible in their negotiation of self-identity and empowerment” (2008, p. 15). Schmidt—addressing the identity problem felt by U.S. Hispanics—advocates for a national policy of fluent bilingualism that would give them access to the socio-economic benefits while allowing them to maintain their ethnic values (2009). All in all, there is agreement among the above cited researchers that pushes forth the premise that a powerful step towards fighting the linguistic hegemony imposed on U.S. Speakers of Spanish by the standard variety will be taken when these speakers expand their linguistic knowledge of their own language to encompass the prestige variety.

2. Linguistic Hegemony

For the purpose outlined here, the concept of hegemony as put forth by Gramsci and explained by Suarez indicates “intellectual and moral leadership through consent and persuasion” and “is comprised of three concomitant processes: leadership without force, leadership through legitimation, and leadership through consensual rule” (2002, p. 513). Based on this definition and the situation of bilingual Spanish varieties in the United States vis-à-vis monolingual varieties, this tri-partite system can be applied to the linguistic sovereignty imposed on speakers of U.S. varieties of Spanish by those individuals or groups claiming to speak the standard variety.

The first application of this system is leadership without force, through the development of awareness. The constant critique of U.S. born Hispanics has created the firm conviction in this group that their Spanish is faulty and in need of remediation (Carreira, 2000). The constant influx of new Spanish-speaking immigrants places U.S. Spanish speakers in contact with many, if not all, of its monolingual varieties. Newly arrived immigrants find contact phenomena unexpected and comment on it, with negative repercussions for U.S. speakers of Spanish and the image they have of their language. Monolingual speakers impose a linguistic sovereignty on speakers of U.S. varieties of Spanish, whether it is self-granted or ceded by the bilingual speakers. As García Bedolla signals, U.S. Hispanics are faulted for both speaking and not speaking Spanish (2003). Even within the same family, Elías-Olivares’ research showed older, first generation members would disapprove of codeswitching and Caló (cited in Galindo, 1995, p. 80). Aparicio (2000) gives several specific cases of speakers of U.S. Spanish that had been embarrassed or intimidated by monolingual speakers.

The second part of this definition, leadership through legitimation, indicates that the subjugated group does not question leadership by the dominant group and sees it as the correct and logical state of affairs. The fact that critiques of the U.S. varieties come from monolingual speakers of countries that have Spanish as the official language gives them immediate legitimacy in the eyes of U.S. born

Hispanics. As Suarez explains, this “is a form of rule where the control of the leading group is viewed by the subordinate group as right and just, and unquestioned [...] taken for granted as correct” (2002, p. 513). Evidence is put forth by Galindo, who in her research found that her informants—Mexican-American adolescents—recognized the existence of three varieties of Spanish in their communities: the formal one spoken by parents, older adults and Mexican immigrants; the informal one spoken by and between young people; and what they called Tex-Mex and described as incorrect (1995). The same negative attitudes about their own language were found by Gonzalez Pino & Pino among students that the University of Texas at San Antonio had identified as HLLs (2000). The privileging of monolingual varieties in departments of foreign languages found by Valdés and Geoffrion Vinci (1998) goes hand in hand with the negative attitudes towards speakers of U.S. Spanish found by Valdés et al. (2003, 2008) among university-level Spanish instructors.

The third aspect of hegemony—leadership through consensual rule—convinces the minority group that their position is of their own choosing and that it is equal to that of the dominant group. It is easy to see how U.S. bilinguals would consider their situation equal to that of new arrivals as they share the same concerns of minority populations living in the U.S. As Suarez explains: “the subordinate group believes that their subordinate position is at their own choice, benefits them equally, and [...] agrees that the dominant group’s needs and concerns are mutual needs and concerns” (2002, p. 513). According to Fontana,

this “total system” of hegemony requires that the leading group secures its position via the willingness and consent of the minority group. This consent is secured through the manufacturing of mass consent, a mass belief of the naturalness and correctness of this social order. The manufacturing of this consent relies predominantly on systematic, consistent persuasion through media, and through institutions; and this persuasion will infiltrate ideas and beliefs of normalcy in daily life, so that they permeate and guide human interactions (cited in Suarez, 2002, p. 513).

Clearly, we can see this acceptance among U.S. Hispanics, an acceptance that occurs without contestation, without questioning the legitimacy or validity of the *standard*.

The belief speakers of U.S. Spanish sustain that their variety is somehow deficient is reinforced by (1) foreign language programs that emphasize the cultures of Spain and Latin America and not take into account those that inhabit the U.S. (Ortega, 1999), (2) the preference given to foreign varieties of Spanish (Pomerantz, 2002), (3) the belief in academia of an intrinsic superiority of the *standard variety* (Leeman, 2005), (4) the little interest demonstrated by the Spanish government through the Instituto Cervantes in teaching Spanish to heritage speakers while on the other hand promoting Spanish as a global language to non-native speakers (García, 2008; 2009), (5) the devaluating effect of pejorative attitudes on bilingual speakers (Felix, 2009), and (6) the continued hiring of monolingual foreign-born Spanish speakers in Spanish television in the U.S. (Carreira & Armengol, 2001).

Suarez explains that

linguistic hegemony can be perceived where linguistic minorities will believe in and participate in the subjugation of the minority language to the dominant, to the point where just the dominant language remains. [...] The results of successful linguistic hegemony are often language shift from the minority language to the majority language and, ultimately, loss (2002, p. 514).

Here, I am not suggesting that the standard variety will push aside the local ones. The strength of English as the majority language and the language contact situation will continue to influence the Spanish spoken in the U.S. The relevant issue for this discussion is the effect of the prestige dialect on speakers of stigmatized varieties. Wiley provides penetrating insight into our particular situation:

Linguistic hegemony is achieved when dominant groups create a consensus by convincing others to accept their language norms and usage as standard or paradigmatic. Hegemony is ensured when they can convince those who fail to meet those standards to view their failure as being the result of the inadequacy of their own language (2002, in Suarez 513-514).

The two components of linguistic hegemony that Woolard proposes: a group that has knowledge or control of the standard and groups that have a recognition or acceptance of it, even if they do not have knowledge or control of it, are well entrenched in Spanish-speaking communities in the U.S. As she explains,

[t]he test of legitimacy is the extent to which the population that does not control that variety acknowledges and endorses its authority, its correctness, its power to convince, and its right to be obeyed, that is, the extent to which authority is ceded to those who do control that variety (1985, p. 741).

In order to debunk this power and in the same way that Eriksen argues that “perhaps paradoxically, cultural minorities may have to assimilate culturally in important respects in order to present their case effectively and thereby retain their minority identity” (1992 p. 313) a parallel statement should be made for the heritage language speakers and their heritage language. These speakers need to learn the standard variety otherwise, as this author indicates “any opposition against the use of dominant languages is inherently paradoxical. With no knowledge of these languages, one remains parochial and powerless” (Eriksen 1992, p. 319).

3. Language Maintenance and Teaching

Fishman has pointed out that schooling in the home language is not sufficient for language maintenance and that what is needed is growth of the language at the community level (quoted in Tse, 1997, p. 726). García adds that the way to strengthen the position of Spanish in the U.S. is not endorsing it for the entire population but

by cultivating its U.S. ethnic character with the culture, history, and literature of the Spanish speaking world and by promoting it for the enrichment of U.S. Latinos. The protection of U.S. Spanish in the face of the inevitable spread of English will not come by expanding it to the Anglo majority, but by expanding it within Latinos and their children. U.S. Latinos must then be willing to dialogue with the Spanish speaking world, insist that it includes them, and in turn, allow themselves to partake of it (1993, p. 81-2).

One way for this growth to occur is to provide students an increased number of domains in which they can use the language. The biggest hurdle heritage speakers encounter when trying to use their HL is limitations in vocabulary. When the use of the language is restricted to interactions with family and friends, the terminology is constrained to topics related to these situations. In areas such as work or school, where bilingual speakers only use English, the mental lexicon may either never have been acquired or may have attrited. In order to promote HL use among this population, we must provide them more spheres of use to amplify their knowledge, since it is at the lexical level, more than any other, where differences between monolinguals and bilinguals lie (Valdés & Geoffrion-Vinci, 1998; Fairclough & Mrak, 2003).

When it comes to morphology and syntax, Hidalgo has indicated these are the areas of the language in which most stigmatized forms that set apart U.S. Spanish are found (1997). Since these constructions are also part of non-prestige varieties outside the U.S., they would be addressed just like in any academic setting for bidialectal education. Students need to be able to compare the forms of their variety with those of the academic one. For example, if the instructor indicates that *haiga* is an informal form used in some varieties of Spanish equivalent to *haya* in the formal variety in the same way that *aint't* is an informal way of saying *isn't* in English, students begin to see that what happens in Spanish also happens in English and other languages: formal and informal options are available and it is up to the speakers to choose which one they consider appropriate.

The objective is an increased use of the HL in order to provide speakers with as many opportunities as possible to employ Spanish and to feel comfortable and secure using it accompanied by instruction so that speakers can add to their linguistic repertoires. Siegel (1999) has indicated that speakers acquiring a second dialect need to be given opportunities for contrastive analysis as they may

not be able to differentiate between the form in their own variety and the academic one. To illustrate, if a student uses *autobús* to refer to a *bus* but hears *camión* from the instructor, she will quickly discover they are synonyms belonging to different varieties of Spanish (if she does not know it already). If she uses *fuistes*, *trajieron*, *íbanos* for *you went*, *they brought*, *we went*; how is she to know they are not standard forms, interchangeable with *fuiste*, *trajeron* and *íbamos*. Of course, any teaching must take place within current and evolving approaches to Heritage Language Education, in an environment of additive bilingualism where the home variety is promoted and respected and the academic variety is taught as an optional mechanism of communication that gives the speaker the choice to decide which one is appropriate, when, and where. In other words, a continuation of bidialectal education, along the research done by Labov (1972) and Wolfram (1991), which encourages the use of the home varieties in the classroom alongside the academic variety not as a means to replace one with the other but to complement each other. Involving members of a minority language community in the process of discovering the multiple varieties of their language, their uses, and their validity can be, as Colombi points out, “a liberating and an empowering experience” (2009, p. 48).

4. Language Ideologies

In order for language maintenance to occur and for instruction to have any measure of success in helping with this task, the language ideologies of both the minority and majority speech communities need to be understood. As far as language majorities are concerned, Dorian explains how Western language ideology conceives of bilingualism as a problem and disapproves of languages or varieties other than the one used by the majority. Of course, this ideology affects how minorities view their heritage languages, specifically the level of prestige and loyalty these speakers feel for their own mother tongue (quoted in King, 2000, p. 174).

With this in mind, King, in her analysis of two Quichua/Spanish communities in Ecuador discovers that parents: (1) want their children to learn the dominant language (Spanish); (2) are concerned that learning the subordinate language (Quichua) will encumber this process; (3) feel they must make a choice between one of the two languages (2000). An additional parallel to the Spanish/English communities in the U.S. is King’s finding of a negative correlation between positive language attitudes and the real life use of the language; data that had been already presented by Fishman for U.S. immigrants from Eastern and Southern Europe (quoted in King, 2000, 178-9). The pattern observed in Spanish-speaking communities in the U.S. is no different. Parents desire for their children to learn English, their concern that elementary school education in Spanish (transitional bilingual education) will somehow impede English acquisition, ongoing public opinion of one-country, one-language; all combine to reduced space for the Spanish language.

King demonstrates the connection that exists between language ideologies and the success of heritage language education. She found cases of speakers that professed a high opinion of their language, a desire for their children to learn it and yet, said language was not used at home. As she explains, this is a case of speakers having a positive attitude about their HL while at the same time not placing value on the use and/or knowledge of it. The latter, then, is a broader, societal or cultural belief where hegemonic practices have influenced the heritage language population (2000). The same dilemma is described in García Bedolla for the Latino community in the U.S. where “Spanish remains a source of ethnic pride and solidarity, yet is seen as an obstacle to socioeconomic and social mobility” (2003, p. 266). Understanding this discrepancy between language attitudes and the accompanying language behavior and how they together coalesce in the more expansive concept of language ideology clarifies the importance of providing heritage speakers the tools to contest the subordinate position of their language and their group.

As Dauenhauer & Dauenhauer explain, taking back a language, claiming ownership of it, cannot be done for someone else. It requires the active participation of the heritage language population and even though the rhetoric may be one of maintenance, active participation may be missing (cited in King, 2000, 168, 181). This lack of involvement seems to be a recurring theme (see Dauenhauer & Dauenhauer in Alaska, Dorian in Scotland, Stroud in Africa; all cited in King, 2000, p. 179, 180, and 179 respectively): we claim we want to hold on to our language but what are we doing about it? Truthfully, a group that has suffered countless derision related to their home language is going to have a very difficult time insisting on retaining it (Dorian cited in King 2000, p. 181). Being bilingual is

good; that is the message bandied about. However, this is a case of saying one thing and meaning something else. It's obvious to heritage language speakers that their brand of circumstantial bilingualism is not desirable, that only the elite bilingualism of those that learn Spanish as a second language is valued by the society in which they live. Hence "conflicting or competing language ideologies" exist on the mind of heritage speakers (King 2000, 180). Bilinguals need the information necessary to defend and demand respect for their language so they can create new language ideologies that are congruent with heritage language maintenance.

5. Conclusion

Overall, the socio-political environment in the U.S. points to a continued preference for English monolingualism. We argue that in order for bilingualism to become an advantage for the Hispanic population, not just for the foreign language learner (Pomerantz, 2002), heritage speakers need to go beyond acquiring the dominant language to also acquiring the dominant variety of their heritage language. However, the rationale exposed departs from the current emphasis placed on heritage languages as *resource*, taking into account Ricento's warning that it does not serve the populations in question to adopt pro-HL actions based on the needs or demands of the country. These needs or demands change, as politics often do, while the socio-cultural facet of the language for its speakers does not. To allow the political structure to dictate the communities' need for their languages would, in Ricento's words, "perpetuate mainstream and hegemonic views about the role of language(s) in America" (2005, p. 358).

As Phillipson has pointed out "[h]egemony is lived experience which is in a constant process of negotiation, recreation and adjustment. It is therefore open to contestation" (1988, p. 343). One huge caveat needs to be emphasized: acquisition would be pointless if we, the instructors, try to eradicate the home variety, if we fail to teach our students about language variation—both to understand it and to respect it—if we don't offer the standard as an optional tool and not a replacement, and if we don't keep in mind that by *standard* we are following Reber and Geeslin's sociolinguistic definition of "language which is not stigmatized", not prescribing one variety as being superior over any other (1998, p. 40). Tse reminds us that heritage languages will only be maintained if they are promoted by the society and that

[o]nly when bilingualism and EL [ethnic language] proficiency are valued by majority cultures, and seen as an asset to both majority and minority groups, will ethnic language development be widespread, and active promotion cease to be necessary. Until then, however, schools can play an important role in giving students the support they need in order to develop positive attitudes which will increase their chances of EL acquisition and allow them to experience the benefits of bilingualism (1997, p. 726).

Instructors trained in linguistic variation are the people most indicated to inform HLLs on the validity of their languages and to help them expand their language abilities. In the words of Eriksen, the cultural brokers, "those individuals mastering both the code of the dominator and that of the dominated are simultaneously the minority members farthest removed from the traditional culture *and* those best equipped to serve their interests" (1992, p. 317). In order for our students to have positive attitudes about their home variety, they need to see it for what it is and not for what they have been led to believe. Armed with this knowledge and being able to articulate it, they will own their language.

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