Introduction: the paradox of Spanish in the United States

At the height of the 2012 U.S. Presidential election cycle, the nonprofit group known as the Commission of Presidential Debates announced its panel of moderators for the season’s events. All of them happened to be English-monolingual Anglo Whites. The U.S.-based Spanish language television network Univisión, recognizing that they had been effectively shut out by this decision, filed a request that an additional debate be held to focus on Hispanic-related issues. Under their proposal, the debate would be held in Spanish. The Commission denied the request, a move that prompted Univisión to host their own events – one night for each of the candidates, President Barack Obama and Governor Mitt Romney. The Spanish language events ended up being a ratings success for Univisión: 1.6 million viewers tuned in to watch Romney and 2.7 million to watch Obama. The entire spectacle – from the Commission’s decision to block the participation of a Spanish-language medium, to Univisión’s decision to host its own events in Spanish – was awash in language politics. Univisión’s further decision to hold its events in Miami, the U.S. city where Spanish is most closely linked with economic, sociocultural, and political success (Carter & Lynch 2015), is also hardly accidental.

I begin with this anecdote from the world of language politics to illustrate what I call “the paradox of Spanish in the United States.” In the case of the 2012 Presidential debates, both candidates agreed to a Spanish-speaking forum – presumably to gain access to and favor with Spanish speakers in the United States, whom Escobar and Potowski (2015, pp. 9–10) estimate to number 48.6 million1 – but only after that forum was first denied by the official debate commission. As I will demonstrate later in this chapter, political candidates in the United States often make use of Spanish in campaigns and political advertisements, even when their party platforms articulate policies that can be understood as anti-Latinx, anti-Spanish language, or both. The paradox of Spanish is further evident in the explosion of official English and anti-bilingual education laws at the state level in the places with the largest Spanish-speaking populations (e.g. Florida and California) and during the periods with the greatest growth in Latinx populations.

In this Chapter, I explore this paradox by examining the use of Spanish in political discourse, talk about Spanish in politics, and discuss language policies toward Spanish in the United States and pay attention to the broader political and cultural contexts in which these policies find traction. The first section of the chapter introduces the paradox of Spanish in the United States in
both political and sociocultural terms. The second section explores Spanish in recent political discourse, including in the 2016 Presidential election cycle. In the third section I give an overview of the ways in which language policies have shifted with the political winds in the history of the United States. I pay particular attention to the progressive policies toward multilingualism passed during the 1960s and 1970s, as well as the restrictive policies that followed in the 1980s and 1990s. I then consider the implication of these policies for language rights in the workplace. Then I consider the way language attitudes toward Spanish in the United States are shaped by language academies, focusing on two recent debates involving North American linguists and the Real Academia Española (RAE): the response to the official definition of *espanglish* in the RAE dictionary, and the response to the publication of two “style guides” by the Academia Norteamericana de la Lengua Española entitled *Hablando bien se entiende la gente*. Finally, I make conclusionary remarks and suggestions for linguists interested in influencing language policy.

**Discourse about Spanish in politics and beyond**

In the 2016 Presidential election season, Spanish was at issue during both the Democratic and Republican primaries and later during the general election between Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump, where the various racial meanings that attend Spanish in the United States were made explicit. On the one hand, the election cycle saw the rise of Anglo Spanish speakers—Jeb Bush as a Republican candidate for President during the primary season, and Tim Kaine as Hillary Clinton’s Vice-President running mate during the general election. Very little attention was given to the use of Spanish by the two Cuban American presidential candidates, Marco Rubio and Ted Cruz, who competed for the Republican ticket. On the other hand, the election cycle ultimately saw the complete and total repudiation of Spanish, which coincided with strong anti-immigrant and anti-Latinx policy positions from the political right and the eventual winner of the general election, Donald Trump.

Soon after Kaine was announced as Clinton’s running mate, he delivered an address to an audience of Spanish-speakers in Miami, in which he spoke passionately—in Spanish—about living in Honduras and learning Spanish. The audience seemed mostly persuaded, but soon after, Trump surrogates attacked. Scottie Nell Hughes, a Trump supporter and political commentator, remarked on television that “What Mr. Trump did, he spoke in a language all Americans can understand—that is English. I didn’t have to get a translator for anything going on,” in reference to Kaine’s Spanish. During the primary season, Trump famously excoriated Jeb Bush for speaking Spanish, suggesting that “he should really set an example by speaking English in the United States.” Trump’s remarks about Bush, and his surrogate’s remarks about Kaine, suggest a form of nationalism rooted in nativism, and undergirded by the ‘one nation, one language’ ideology described by Anderson (1982). Trump’s nostalgia for an English-only past that never really existed did not keep his campaign from printing signs in Spanish—*Hispanics* [sic] para [sic] *Trump*—with the English spelling of ‘Hispanic’ and the grammatical error *para* for *por* or *con*.

Returning to the Univisión Presidential forum from the 2012 election, the paradox of Spanish in the United States introduced in the prior section is further evident in the discursive content about Spanish during the two debates. For example, during the visit from Governor Mitt Romney, event co-moderator María Elena Salinas, pointing out that the official Republican party platform calls for English to be the official language of the United States, asks, “¿cuál debería ser el papel del español en los Estados Unidos?” [What role should Spanish play in the United States.] Receiving the question via simultaneous translation, Governor Romney responds:
Phillip M. Carter

Well, you know, English is the language of government in this country and that’s the way it’s been for some time, as you know. But I take some inspiration from the comments of Governor Luis Fortuño who is an extraordinary governor of Puerto Rico. He said that Spanish is the language of our heritage, English is the language of opportunity and so if I were, I mean I have a son who speaks pretty fluent Spanish and I’m delighted – my son Craig over there. Look, I’d like our kids to speak foreign languages; if you’re lucky enough to grow up in a home where English and Spanish is [sic] spoken or English and another language, great, learn the other language, be able to communicate with other people in the world, but also teach our kids English so they can achieve the kind of opportunity that is associated with the language which is, really as Governor Fortuño says the language of opportunity here.

Romney’s response is noteworthy for the discussion about the politics of Spanish in the United States for at least five reasons. First, declaring English to be the language of government in the United States sets up the assumption of official English monolingualism that interlocks with a broader ideology of English monolingualism (Macías 1985; Wiley 2000), while ignoring the reality of the United States’ internal multilingualism and the fact that there is no official language of government (Wiley 2004). Second, by narrativizing Spanish as the “language of our heritage” and English as “the language of opportunity,” language is given a temporality, with Spanish discursively situated in the past and English in the future. Third, by praising his son for learning Spanish, Romney’s response contributes to what linguistic anthropologists and sociolinguists have described as “the double figuration of Spanish,” (Carter 2014; Hill 2008; Urciuoli 1996; Zentella 1997) in which Spanish is constructed as a valuable resource for Anglos while it is constructed as a “barrier” or cultural baggage for U.S. Latina/os. Fourth, Spanish is incorrectly labeled as “foreign language,” thus normalizing the ideological relationship between the U.S. nation state and English along the lines of the une langue, une nation ideology described by Anderson (1982) and Tetel Andresen and Carter (2016), among others, as well as the long history of Spanish in the United States, including Spanish colonial history. At the same time, it also contributes to the ideology described by Santa Ana (2002, p. 211) in which English is understood to be separate, distinct, and “above” all other languages, where the term “language” becomes a cover term for all forms of speech other than English. Finally, the implicature of the clause “but also teach our kids English” is that there is a place in the United States where children – presumably children from Spanish-speaking families – do not learn English, an idea that distorts the reality in which ethnolinguistic minority languages, including Spanish, have been found to undergo cross-generational language shift by or during the third generation (Potowski 2010; Veltman 1983, 1988). Romney’s remarks – presented to a Latinx audience in Miami and broadcast on Univisión – illustrate a final point about Spanish in U.S. politics that must be made explicit: wherever Spanish is mentioned, questions of race are already at stake. This is true not only because language in the United States is always already racialized (Charity Hudley 2017), but also because Spanish in the United States is constructed as an icon of latinidad (Irvine & Gal 2000). By invoking Fortuño, Romney is able to voice hegemonic positions on English and Spanish without appearing racially insensitive.

Taken together, these comments, and the spectacle surrounding the 2012 Presidential debates in which they found traction, are further reflective of the broader sociopolitical context in the United States in which Spanish is paradoxically visible (e.g. Presidential candidates did in fact agree to participate in the Univisión debate held in Spanish) and vilified (comments about Spanish construct it as inferior to English). In terms of politics qua politics, this paradox is most immediately obvious when we compare the use of Spanish by politicians in political campaigns,
which Callahan (2004, p. 117) notes is still “cause for comment,” with platform policies related to language. There is no shortage of examples of politicians who campaign in Spanish while espousing English-only or even anti-Spanish positions. Perhaps the most extreme example involves Tom Tancredo, a former congressman from Colorado who later ran for President and Governor of that state in 2014. During his stint in Congress, Tancredo was known for his hard-line policies on immigration as well as for his *cause célèbre*: making English the official language of the United States. During his 2008 Presidential campaign, Tancredo – in keeping with his politics – promised not to advertise in Spanish and did not do so. By the time of his gubernatorial campaign, however, his campaign had released a Spanish language website called *Viva Tancredo* as well as several Spanish language advertisements. The promise of reaching voters via a Spanish language medium was apparently greater than the English-only politics Tancredo so vehemently articulated. The paradox of Spanish in U.S. politics was once again at play.

The discrepancy between practice and politics as it pertains to Spanish is also evident in the *Nuestro Himno* controversy of 2006, which has been described in detail by Chavez (2008). In the mid-2000s, as debate about immigration reform became prominent in national conversations, immigration activists took to the streets to protest H.R. 4437, proposed legislation that would have classified “illegal” immigrants as felons. In the spring of 2006, millions of people participated in protests across the country – the largest being held in cities such as Chicago, Dallas, and Los Angeles. The Spanish-language media – including the *Univisión* and *Telemundo* networks – were key in mobilizing participation in the events, where protestors were seen carrying both Mexican and U.S. flags. Protestors also sang *Nuestro Himno*, a Spanish-language version of the English-language *Star Spangled Banner*. Although the Spanish-language version is not a literal translation, its lyrics evoke the sentiment of the English-language version. In addition to being played during protests, the song also gained popularity on Spanish language radio stations.

The English-language media eventually picked up on the song, and their reporting fueled a backlash and national language controversy at a level unseen since the so-called “Ebonics controversy” of 1996 (Rickford 1999; Wolfram 1998). The controversy around *Nuestro Himno* commanded so much media attention that then-President George W. Bush weighed in publicly on the song. He told reporters that “people who want to be citizens of the United States should learn English and ought to learn to sing the national anthem in English” (Vandehei 2006). As with Romney’s comment that we “should also teach our kids English,” Bush’s remarks on *Nuestro Himno* also rest on the assumption that those who choose to sing the song in Spanish could not also do so in English, which of course ignores the reality of code choice in U.S. Latinx communities. The comments also assume that the only people who would sing the national anthem in Spanish are those who “want to be citizens,” rather than those who already are. Citizenship is thus discursively tied to English-speaking, as Spanish is situated as being both outside of the purview of citizenship and outside the borders of the nation. Reflecting again this paradox, George W. Bush himself had previously used Spanish language slogans such as *Juntos Podemos* and *Viva Bush* in his Presidential campaigns.

Other politicians have been more straightforward in articulating anti-Spanish positions. In the 2008 Presidential election cycle, Republican candidate Newt Gingrich stated that “we should replace bilingual education with emergence, [sic] with immersion in English, so people learn the common language of the country, so they learn the language of prosperity, not the language of living in a ghetto.” Though it was not stated explicitly, “the language of living in a ghetto” was presumably Spanish. Like other comments that situate Spanish in the past and English in the future, these remarks work with another false dichotomy: prosperous places (where English is spoken) and ghettoized spaces (where Spanish is spoken). Further, the comments about bilingual education distort the reality that students receive instruction in both languages, Spanish and
English, though the comments imply that bilingual education is in effect education in Spanish only. In this case, Gingrich issued a public apology, but as Hill (2008) points out, apologies rarely, if ever, achieve the same breadth of circulation as the original comments. Thus, the linkage of “Spanish” to “ghetto” was further entrenched in the discursive reality.

Discourse by politicians about Spanish as it pertains to Puerto Rico is also noteworthy given (1) the historical presence of Spanish on the island, (2) the official status of both languages, English and Spanish, and (3) ongoing debate about the political relationship between the island and the United States. Puerto Rico is currently an official territory of the United States, a status that could change should Puerto Ricans vote for independence or U.S. statehood. We have already seen in this chapter that Presidential candidate Romney invoked comments made by Puerto Rican governor Luis Fortuño, by situating Spanish as “the language of our heritage” and English as “the language of prosperity,” which implied that the role of English on the island should be expanded. A somewhat more hardline position was articulated by Republican primary candidate Rick Santorum when he visited the island as part of a primary campaign in 2012. Although Santorum said he supported ongoing sovereignty for Puerto Ricans as well as the ongoing right to self-determination, his comments implied that there were in fact linguistic limits to this self-determination, namely, that he would only support statehood if English were to be adopted as the primary language of the island. He told a reporter:

Like any other state, there has to be compliance with this and any other federal law . . . And that is that English has to be the principal language. There are other states with more than one language such as Hawaii but to be a state of the United States, English has to be the principal language.

The point that I wish to make is not that Santorum’s comments are factually incorrect – the U.S. Constitution does not stipulate an official language as such, neither does it impose in any way a language requirement for statehood. Instead, I would like to emphasize that broad, culturally ratified discourses about the nation, reflected in talk about language by politicians, again assumes the naturalness of the citizens of the state. As Santa Ana (2002) points out, while “American English signals allegiance and full citizenship” (p. 236), Spanish speaking and bilingual education are understood to be “a symbolic threat to the social order” (p. 237).

For Latinx politicians, who remain relatively few at all levels of government, the relationship to Spanish varies by politician. Florida Representative to the U.S. Congress Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, the first Cuban and the first Hispanic woman elected to U.S. Congress, has opposed English-only legislation within her party and at the same time can be seen speaking Spanish to her constituents and granting interviews to Spanish language television stations across South Florida. In contrast, her colleague Marco Rubio, a fellow Republican who also addresses the media in Spanish, has been at the fore of restrictive language policies. In 2013, he proposed an amendment to the immigration reform bill being debated by the U.S. Senate that would require immigrants to learn English before getting a green card. In 2012, Mexican American mayor of San Antonio Julio Castro delivered what was widely perceived to be a career-boosting keynote speech at the Democratic National Convention. In his speech, he used a few lines of Spanish, including Que dios los bendiga. After the speech, the major controversy was not that Castro had used Spanish words to start with, but whether or not he was qualified to do so since he was not “fluent” in the language. Here again, the odd paradox of Spanish in U.S. politics is clear – Latinx politicians can use Spanish and go unnoticed in doing so, unless they are considered “not really fluent.” During the 2016 election cycle, two Cuban American men – Marco Rubio (Florida) and Ted Cruz (Texas) – ran for U.S. President on the Republican ticket. An exchange between
the two men during a Republican primary debate illustrates both the paradox of Spanish in the United States in general and the especially peculiar way Spanish is constructed for Latinx politicians. During a portion of the debate focusing on immigration reform, Cruz noted that “Marco [Rubio] went on Univision [English phonology] – in Spanish – and said he would not rescind President Obama’s illegal executive amnesty.” The line, which implied that Rubio was communicating a different message in Spanish than in English, fed perfectly into the narrative that Spanish allows Latinx people to be secretive and dangerous (Barrett 2006; Carter 2014), and played to jeers and boos from the Republican studio audience. It appeared, for a moment, that Cruz had successfully deployed an anti-Spanish trope against Rubio. As Cruz continued to talk, the camera panned to Rubio, who appeared to chuckle to himself, before replying, “First of all, I don’t know how he knows what I said on Univision [English phonology], because he doesn’t speak Spanish.” As he began “second of all,” over a background of laughter and applause, Cruz interjected: “Marco, si quieres díselo ahora, ahora mismo díselo, en español si quieres.” Rubio continued in English. In the exchange, reference to Spanish was first deployed to disqualify Rubio, and then Spanish was used in a verbal repartee in which the two men tried to one-up each other for what appeared to be the entertainment of the mostly Anglo studio audience. The political meanings of Spanish are thus multiple and contradictory, even within the same speech event.

Spanish in municipal, state, and legal contexts

Doral, Florida is a middle-class boomtown located in northwest Miami-Dade County. Not unlike other Miami-Dade municipalities, Latinos make up a solid majority of Doral’s overall population, 79.5% according to the 2010 Census. What is remarkable about Doral is that it is home to the largest Venezuelan community in the United States, for whom it is often referred to as “Doralzuela.” The Venezuelan population there is not only large, but also affluent. Venezuelan-owned businesses predominate. The Spanish language television network Univisión and its English language sister network Fusion are both headquartered there. And Spanish abounds. In 2010, Spanish speakers comprised 82% of the Doral population (U.S. Census 2010). Thus, a proposal brought about by Venezuelan-born mayor Luigi Boria in 2013 to designate Doral to be a “multilingual and multicultural city”7 seemed to make good intuitive sense, especially considering that the effort was framed in terms of promoting economic development. The resolution passed, but with language that seemed to formally designate English to be the official language of the city, while leaving the status of Spanish, which the resolution was ostensibly written to address in the first place, somewhat less clear. The resolution reads, “the City of Doral’s official and main language is English, while also acknowledging Spanish as the second official most used and spoken language in the City of Doral.” Section 2 of the resolution states that “The City of Doral will continue conducting its Council and Advisory Board meetings along with all other official government business in the English language.” Again, the paradox of Spanish in the United States is evident: a document that seeks to celebrate the bilingualism of a Latinx-majority city ends up designating English as the official language of the city, declaring English to be the only language of government business, and with ambiguous language declares Spanish not to be the “co-official” language but “the second official most used and spoken language,” which apparently cannot now be used to conduct government business. The language of the Doral resolution was of course not written in a sociopolitical vacuum. Language policy with respect to Spanish in South Florida has ebbed and flowed with the political winds. In 1973, Miami-Dade County passed an ordinance that declared the county to be bilingual and bicultural. The ordinance was in place for exactly seven years until it was swiftly
overturned by voters in a referendum in 1980, at which time the county became officially “English only.” As the Latinx population of the county expanded during the course of the 1980s due to political crises in Cuba and elsewhere in Latin America, the Anglo White population contracted. These demographic changes were eventually reflected in the Miami Dade County Commission, who in 1993 voted to overturn the English-only ordinance passed in 1980. To further complicate matters, English was made the only official language of the State of Florida, when 84% of voters voted in favor of that legislation. That law has not been overturned and remains current today (as well as in 31 other states).

The ebbs and flows of multilingual policy in Florida reflect a broader reality about the role of policy in U.S. language history; namely, as Fishman (2004) points out, language policies move with the changing winds of the broader sociopolitical climate. Crawford (1989) points out that during the colonial era, multilingualism was protected since language was understood to be an integral part of cultural heritage, which the colonists were eager to protect. The pre-Revolutionary Continental Congress even published some of its materials in French and German, in addition to English (Crawford 1989). Hakuta (1986, p. 165) notes that during the post-Revolutionary debates about whether or not to declare a national language, it was finally decided that a single language was “incompatible with the spirit of freedom.” Fitzgerald (1993) writes that support for bilingual education – even monolingual education in the ethnic language – held widespread support from the colonial period to the mid-1800s.

By the end of the nineteenth century, attitudes toward bilingualism began to shift, and for the first time, anti-bilingual policies began to emerge in the United States. English was imposed as the language of instruction in Puerto Rico following the Spanish-American War (Fitzgerald 1993). In 1906 the Nationality Act was passed, requiring immigrants to the United States to speak English for naturalization. And in the era of World Wars I and II, anti-German sentiment resulted in a sharp decline in German language and German/English bilingual schools, despite the decision in *Meyer v Nebraska* (1923) that held that Nebraska’s 1919 law restricting foreign language education was in violation of the 14th amendment of the U.S. Constitution (Fishman 2004). In the 1960s and 1970s, the pendulum swung back slightly in the other direction, with the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which prohibited discrimination on the grounds of national origin. The Bilingual Education Act was passed in 1968 and provided that low-income children in school districts with a high percentage of language-minority students have access to bilingual education. In 1974 the Act was renewed and even expanded as the income restrictions were removed from law (Fitzgerald 1993).

The pendulum shifted once again during the late 1970s and early 1980s. During this period, funding for renewals of the Bilingual Education Act was overwhelmingly tied to English-only instruction (Crawford 1989). In 1981, Senator S.I. Hayakawa proposed an amendment to the U.S. Constitution that would declare English to be the official language of the United States (Wiley 2004). Hayakawa later launched an organization called “U.S. English,” which in addition to promoting a Constitutional amendment, also pushed a broad English-only platform within the United States. As Crawford (1999) points out, 21 states passed laws that restricted the use of minority languages during the 1980s and 1990s.

Although the ‘English as official language’ amendment to the Constitution never passed at the federal level, despite being put forth several times, many states have passed amendments to state constitutions or statutes that designate English as the official language. Florida and California – two states with significant Spanish speaking populations – have amended their constitutions to make English the sole official language. Today, 31 states have some kind of English-only designation. This is remarkable considering that prior to 1981 – the year that Hayakawa proposed amending the U.S. Constitution – only four states had official language provisions.
The expansion of official English laws at the level of the state has moved in parallel with the broader sociopolitical climate as well as with the growth of non-English speaking communities in the United States. This fact is unlikely to be a coincidence.

No state currently designates Spanish to be an official or co-official language. This includes the state of New Mexico, whose Constitution of 1912 set forth plans for a bilingual government in which English and Spanish could be used in the state legislature and laws could be published in both languages. The Constitution stopped short of declaring English or Spanish to be the official language of the state, and today Spanish is no longer used in the state legislature. In 1995, New Mexico became the first state to adopt a “State Bilingual Song,” entitled “New Mexico: Mi Lindo Nuevo México.”

State and municipal laws, such as those mentioned earlier, are, of course, not merely symbolic. Though the impacts vary state-by-state, official English laws can restrict or curtail voting in languages other than English as well as access to a full range of governmental services. They can also shape the outcomes of legal proceedings where language questions are at stake and more indirectly can shape opinions about language diversity in institutional contexts and in the workplace. Zentella (2014) provides an overview of legal cases involving Spanish speaking on the job. She notes that the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) invokes protections against national origin discrimination articulated in the Civil Rights Act of 1964 as a means of banning on-the-job linguistic discrimination. Two guidelines address language specifically: 1) employers may impose English-only rules only if there is a business necessity; and 2) when employers impose English-only rules, the workers must be informed of the policy and they must be informed of the consequences of disobedience. (Zentella 2014, p. 624)

Despite these guidelines, Zentella notes that employers are nevertheless able to dismiss workers for speaking languages other than English simply by claiming that it is bad for business. She describes a number of cases in which workers were fired for speaking Spanish among themselves on the job, as was the case of workers at a Chicago manufacturing plant, who were fired for greeting each other in Spanish. The paradox of Spanish in the United States discussed in this chapter is again evident in those cases in which U.S. Hispanics who were hired for being able to speak Spanish were later fired for speaking Spanish. She cites the Premier Operator Services case in which 13 telephone operators based in Dallas, who were hired to speak Spanish to customers, were prohibited from otherwise speaking Spanish on the job, including during all breaks. When the employer received notification from the EEOC that a complaint had been filed, all 13 employees were immediately fired. Occasionally, cases involving on-the-job language discrimination find their way to U.S. courtrooms. Zentella (2014, p. 625) describes Gutierrez v. Municipal Court (1988), which considered the legality of English-only rules established for courthouse employees in Huntington Park, California, which effectively banned Spanish speaking among Spanish-speaking clerks who were expressly hired to communicate with the Spanish-speaking public. The Ninth Circuit Court ruled that the English-only policy was in violation of the EEOC guidelines having to do with national-origin discrimination.

Judges and municipal police departments have also played a role in criminalizing Spanish. In 2009, Ernestina Mondragón was stopped by Dallas police for making an illegal U-turn, for which she was fined. She was also fined for not speaking English. It turns out that between 2006–2009, some 39 people were fined during traffic stops in Dallas for not speaking English. There is no law in Dallas requiring that drivers speak English (Linthicum 2009). And in 1995, a Texas judge ruled that a mother who spoke Spanish to her daughter was committing a type of child abuse. The judge told the mother that “you’re abusing that child and you’re relegating her to the position of housemaid” (Verhovek 1995).
Anti-Spanish regulations also find their way into U.S. schools and communities, and the formal and informal pressures against speaking Spanish at school are well documented by linguistic anthropologists (e.g., Hill 2008; Santa Ana 2002; Valdés 2001). For example, in 2014, the principal of a middle school in Hempstead, Texas made an announcement over the school intercom that speaking Spanish would not be permitted. The principal was eventually fired (Gray 2014). In 2005, 16-year-old Zach Rubio was suspended from a public school in Kansas for speaking Spanish in the hallway. According to the student, the conversation consisted of two lines, the first a question from a friend who asked, “¿Me prestas un dólar?” to which Rubio replied “no problema” (Reid 2005). In 2004, a teacher at a school in Arizona was accused of hitting or slapping eight students for speaking Spanish in class (Ryman & Madrid 2004). In these cases, the paradox of Spanish in the United States is especially clear. U.S. schools routinely offer Spanish as a “foreign” language – presumably because there is some perceived value in knowing it – at the same time that native speakers are discouraged for speaking Spanish or even penalized for doing so. This points to the ‘double figuration’ of Spanish introduced in the first section of this chapter, in which Spanish figures as a valuable resource for one group (i.e., non-Latinos) while being problematic cultural baggage for U.S. Latin@s. Zentella (1997, p. 283) puts it this way, “Why is the bilingualism of the well-to-do a source of linguistic security, while the bilingualism of the poor is a source of insecurity and disadvantage?”

Attitudes and perceptions: Spanish in the U.S. and language academies

Spanish in the United States is not only in a dialectical relationship with English and subject to ideologies about English monolingualism, it is at the same time in a dialectical relationship with ideologies about Spanish qua Spanish. Ideologies about Spanish have been explored in the sociolinguistic and linguistic anthropology literatures on Spanish in the United States. For example, in her study of Puerto Ricans living in el bloque in New York City, Zentella (1997, pp. 47, 8) discusses the stigma attached to what she calls their “spectrum of linguistic codes,” which includes “Spanglish” and several styles of English and Spanish. She further notes that community members had a great deal of awareness about the stigma associated with Puerto Rican Spanish in New York City. Alfaraz (2002, 2014) has approached the study of attitudes toward Spanish in Miami with methods of perceptual dialectology. She studied explicit language attitudes among Miami Spanish speakers toward a number of national origin varieties, including Pre-Revolutionary Cuban Spanish, the variety spoken by the first wave of Cuban immigrants to arrive in Miami in the 1960s, and Post-Revolutionary Cuban Spanish, those immigrants who have arrived since the Mariel boatlift in the 1980s. In her work, participants ranked these varieties according to two criteria: pleasantness and correctness. For both criteria, participants ranked Peninsular Spanish most favorably, followed by Pre-Revolutionary Cuban Spanish. Post-Revolutionary Cuban Spanish ranks toward the bottom, along with Mexican, Puerto Rican, and Dominican varieties for both traits examined, correctness and pleasantness. For a summary of attitude studies on Spanish in the United States, I direct readers to Escobar and Potowski (2015), and for a history of the development of these attitudes I direct readers to del Valle (2007, 2013). Taken together, the studies show that heritage language speakers of Spanish in the United States often express positive attitudes toward Spanish in responses to direct methods, even when they report using it very little themselves. At the same time, the literature in this area shows that U.S. Latinos are largely aware of which varieties of Spanish are considered prestigious and which are not, including varieties that may be considered U.S. Spanish.

While the origins of perceptions and attitudes are complex (see Preston 2010), in this final section I would like to consider the role of language authorities, especially language academies,
in perpetuating beliefs about the “quality” of Spanish dialects both in the United States and elsewhere. Of course, no discourse is completely imposed top-down, but the role of language academies in circulating popular narratives about Spanish in the Spanish-speaking world – including the United States – cannot be denied. I begin the discussion outside of the United States. On February 16, 2015, the director of La Real Academia Española, Dario Villanueva, participated in a live radio interview with Uniminuto Radio, a station based in Bogota. When asked about the Academy’s assessment of Spanish in Colombia, Villanueva opined “los colombianos hablan tan bien el español que sorprende positivamente la habilidad con que se expresan y eso nos estimula a mejorar y a darnos cuenta de los defectos y errores que nosotros mismos podamos cometer.” This response was not met with any push-back on the part of the journalists, who took Villanueva’s comments to be unproblematic.

I begin with this anecdote in order to put forth two points about the role of RAE in the Spanish-speaking world. First, the positions of the RAE – and those of the Asociación de Academias de la Lengua Española in which the RAE is now technically included – are broadly accepted throughout Spain and Latin America (Del Valle 2009, 2011; Senz & Alberte 2011; Woolard 2012). Second, the perceptions they help to construct find their way into the United States. To return to Alfaraz’s (2002) study of Miami Cubans’ perceptions of 21 Spanish dialects, Colombian Spanish was found to be the fourth most “correct,” behind Peninsular Spanish, Pre-Revolution Cuban Spanish, and Argentine Spanish. In terms of pleasantness, it was also ranked as fourth, in the same ranking order. Again, attitudes and perceptions are not produced unilaterally by language authorities, though their influence – both in terms of the breadth of their reach and the nature of the ideas they put forth – is difficult to deny.

Two controversies involving Spanish in the United States and the Real Academia Española illustrate the problematic way the RAE understands U.S. Spanish and underscore the tense relationship between linguists who work on Spanish in the United States and the RAE. The first controversy involves the publishing of the 23rd edition of the Diccionario de la Real Academia de la Lengua Española by RAE in 2014. As with all updated editions, the 23rd edition contained updated definitions and lexical entries for new words approved by the Academy. This edition was noteworthy, however, for its inclusion of the word espanglish (Spanglish), which was defined as “a form of speech used by some Hispanic groups in the United States, in which they mix deformed elements of vocabulary and grammar from both Spanish and English.” In Spain and Latin America, RAE’s decision to include espanglish was met with purist ideologies. In the United States, linguists took issue with the way in which the term was defined, especially the notion that Spanglish is based on “deformed” elements of English and Spanish. The definition – which seems to be uninformed by perspectives of linguists who study Spanish in the United States – was widely considered to be a direct slight at the varieties of Spanish spoken by U.S. Latina/os.

A group of prominent linguists whose work centers on Spanish in the United States – led by José del Valle and Ana Celia Zentella – wrote a scathing critique of the definition, which I have reproduced in incomplete form below. Readers can find the entire open letter on the website elcastellano.org.

Por medio de la presente, los abajo firmantes le queremos expresar a la Real Academia Española y a la Asociación de Academias de la Lengua Española (sin la más mínima esperanza de que les importe un bledo) nuestro más alegre y entusiasmado rechazo del artículo dedicado a la palabra espanglish en la vigésima tercera edición del DRAE.

Por un lado, la brevedad y simpleza de la definición revelan una deplorable técnica lexicográfica y una patética incapacidad para reproducir en beneficio del usuario los
máticas semánticos y resonancias sociolingüísticas que el término exhibe en los distintos usos que de él se hacen. Por otro, la referencia a los fenómenos asociados con el contacto español-inglés en EE.UU. como «deformaciones» muestra que, a pesar de los notables esfuerzos de las academias por limpiarse los mocos del purismo y mostrar una cara limpia y abierta, es la propia institución académica (y no los hablantes de espanglish) la que, al excluir las conclusiones de los trabajos de investigación que muestran la sistematicidad de estas prácticas lingüísticas, perpetra escandalosas tergiversaciones de la naturaleza y funcionamiento del lenguaje.

Claro está que los abajo firmantes no se sorprenden en absoluto ni de aquella incompetencia ni de esta irresponsabilidad, actitudes de las cuales estas instituciones suelen hacer gala. Acostumbrados estamos ya a contemplar cómo esta lamentable gestión de la normatividad convive con la competentísima organización de fastos lingüísticos y de los consiguientes viajes y cuchipandas financiadas por quienes (imaginamos) se sienten beneficiarios de la acción geopolítica de las academias e indiferentes ante sus dislates lingüísticos.

The authors obviously pull no punches, taking issue with the scant length of the definition, the lack of nuanced meaning, the absence of critical perspectives from those who have studied the language, and the insistence that Spanglish be understood as involving deformations of Spanish.

The *espanglish* definition is not the only occasion during which North American linguists and the *Real Academia Española* have disagreed. The *Academia Norteamericana de la Lengua Española* (ANLE) is one of 22 members of the *Asociación de las Academias de la Lengua Española*. In 2014, the director of the ANLE and several of his associates published a language guide entitled *Hablando bien se entiende la gente* (Piña-Rosales, Covarrubias, Segura, & Fernández 2010), which the authors described as “un esfuerzo de servicio comunitario realizado en aras del buen decir,” the purpose of which was to “despejar dudas ortográficas y gramaticales.” Of course, the very notion that grammatical points need to be cleared up by language authorities is itself a prescriptivist notion; the work is from the outset thus mired in what Lippi-Green (1997) has termed “standard language ideology,” the belief in what language is or should be. But beyond this general orientation, the authors articulate a vision of language consistent with what we expect from language academies, but which is otherwise totally out of synch with the positions of contemporary Linguistics. They note, for example, that “[e]l maltrato laboral es sin duda un asunto muy serio, pero lo es también . . . el maltrato de nuestro idioma” (Piña-Rosales et al. 2010, p. 139). The implicature, of course, is that those responsible for this *maltrato* are U.S. Latinos, who mix their Spanish with their English, who use English-based calques, who misuse false friends, and who rely on unnecessary neologisms. While the book is not intended to be a scholarly work, the complete lack of reference to any of the literature published by linguists who have studied the phenomena the book covers is of course also noteworthy. The omission of scholarly perspectives on “Spanglish” as it pertains to calques, loanwords, and other lexical phenomena is especially of note given the immensity of the published literature on the topic (e.g. Otheguy 1993; Otheguy & Stern 2010; Poplack 1982; Zentella 1997, inter alia). Their view of language mixing is especially clear, as they write in the opening pages of the book: “¿no sería preferible hablar bien los dos idiomas, sin mezclarlos, que hablar mal los dos?” (Piña-Rosales et al. 2010, pp. 1–2).

A critical response to *Hablando bien se entiende la gente* was published by Andrew Lynch and Kim Potowski in the journal *Hispania* in 2014 (Lynch & Potowski 2014). Their critique reframes the objects presented in ANLE’s guide in terms of the literature on Spanish in the United States and corrects some of the misinformation presented in the ANLE guide.
For example, *HBSELG* presents a number of terms as “extranjerismos” from English, which Lynch and Potowski show are in fact well attested in print in monolingual varieties of Spanish. For example, the ANLE claims that *supuesto*, as in *supuesta víctima*, is the result of English influence. However, Lynch and Potowski (2014) show that in Spain’s very own newspaper, *El País*, there were 280 searchable instances of *supuesta víctima*.

In the final section of their paper, the authors set forth their vision of a more productive way to promote the Spanish language in the United States. Rather than a style guide designed to “improve” the speech of U.S. Hispanics, they suggest a practical book that encourages bilinguals to use Spanish more frequently, not only with parents but also with friends in a variety of social contexts. They suggest that the ANLE’s resources may be better spent providing information for Spanish-speaking parents about how to make speaking Spanish in the home effective and promoting bilingual education in U.S. schools.

Several months after the publication of Lynch and Potowski’s (2014) critique of ANLE’s book, *Hispania* published a response letter written by Gerardo Piña-Rosales (2014), the Director of the *Academia Norteamericana de la Lengua Española*. In it, Piña-Rosales concedes nothing, arguing in the first page that “sus juicios sobre *Hablando bien se entiende la gente* obedecen a un principio de laissez-faire irreconciliable con cualquier intento normativo de la lengua que hablamos y escribimos.” He adds that if Lynch and Potowski were to write a book themselves, it would be titled *Lo que importa es que hables, aunque hables mal*. After the publication of Piña-Rosales’ response, the debate spilled over to the Internet, where a repartee ensued between sociolinguists, who gave negative reviews to *Hablando Bien* on Amazon.com, and representatives of ANLE who defended their work. Sociolinguist Kim Potowski wrote reviews to two editions of the book *Hablando Bien Se Entiende La Gente* 1 and 2. In both reviews, she notes that the book is “sociolinguistically uninformed” and is intended to “shame U.S. bilinguals into conforming to someone else’s way of speaking.” She makes the point that language shaming promotes cross-generational language shift and accuses the ANLE of mocking Spanish speakers in the United States. Reminiscent of the recommendations made at the end of Lynch and Potowski’s (2014) article, she also adds the following suggestions for the ANLE:

If they really wanted to promote Spanish use, they’d do something useful. Like promote dual language K-8 schools. Contribute to greater TV programming offerings in Spanish relevant to U.S. Latino youth. Lobby the government for more favorable language policies and a federal cabinet dedicated to multilingualism. And sponsor trips abroad for heritage speaker high school and college students.

A number of other critical reviews of the books were published on the Amazon site, most of which focused on the same issues raised by Potowski. Many comments defend the text, including one written by Porfirio Rodríguez, a member of the ANLE, which he titled “ANLE is a great asset to the improvement of the Spanish language in the United States.” In the review he accuses linguists of mistaking their book “with a sociolinguistic investigation” and misunderstanding the intentions of the ANLE. Addressing Potowski and the other linguists who review the book, Rodríguez writes:

They want to impose their views that lack objectivity and scientific evidence. They do not present any valid theories in their arguments; they just present their opinions that seem to be more the result of emotions, than the product of good reasoning. They seem to be using personal attacks, rather than acknowledge the good work that ANLE has been doing.
These debates illustrate the ongoing, fundamental differences between linguists and Academy grammarians about the nature of language, particularly as it pertains to the Spanish language in the United States.

**Conclusions: undoing the paradox**

In 2015, at the start of the 2016 Presidential election campaign season, Hillary Clinton announced her candidacy via a web-based video that featured vignettes of ostensibly ordinary Americans doing ostensibly ordinary things. One of the vignettes depicted two brothers preparing to open their first business. This vignette was different from the others featured in the three-minute clip in that the men spoke to each other and to the camera in Spanish, as English subtitles appeared on the bottom of the screen. Not long after, Jeb Bush announced his own candidacy during a speech given in Miami in which he spoke English and Spanish. The use of Spanish – either by a candidate or surrogates of the candidate – will now likely be a prerequisite in future presidential campaign announcements. But Jeb Bush took things a step further by granting a Spanish language interview to ABC news anchor David Muir, who like Bush, speaks Spanish as a second language. While the interview was itself considered newsworthy, it was not met at the time with the kind of controversy one might expect given the political climate toward Spanish described in this chapter, or the kind of hostility with which it would likely be met given the climate toward Spanish after the 2016 election. The optics of two powerful non-Latinx men speaking to one another in Spanish in an English-language medium seemed to suggest, on the one hand, a shift toward greater acceptance of the Spanish language in the mainstream. At the same time, it is difficult to imagine the same interview on the same network taking place among two Latinx participants. The media’s fascination with Tim Kaine makes the same point. Kaine, an Anglo from Virginia, learned Spanish in Honduras, and was praised effusively for his bilingualism by the mainstream English-language media. To my knowledge, no Latinx politician running for national office has ever been praised for his/her bilingualism. The paradox of Spanish in the United States discussed throughout this chapter is itself always racialized.

Santa Ana (2002) notes that the idea that “Latinos do not speak English” is a foundational part of the “Anglo-American narrative” about Latinx people. This explains a good deal of the political rhetoric about Spanish explored in this chapter. As linguists, we must continue to heed Zentella’s (1997) call for *anthropolitical* linguistics, as well as Wolfram’s (1993, p. 227) principle of linguistic gratuity, “investigators who have obtained linguistic data from members of a speech community should actively pursue ways in which they can return linguistic favors to the community.” The biggest favor we can return to U.S. Latinx speech communities is educating the broader public about the nature of bilingualism, the history of Spanish in the United States, and the realities of multilingual education. We should also seek to influence language policy by providing linguistically informed perspectives to policy stakeholders (community members, educators, politicians) and by actively resisting popular narratives about Spanish that influence public opinion and lead to restrictive language policies. Political rhetoric implying that U.S. Latinxs do not know English, that Spanish is a threat to the state, or that bilingual education is code for Spanish-only education can only find traction when widespread misinformation about basic language matters prevails. Sociolinguists, linguistic anthropologists, and other scholars working on issues related to Spanish in the United States should make public engagement a foundational, rather than ancillary part of our professional commitments. This may include speaking with the press about news stories related to Spanish, partnering with university Media Relations offices to promote socially responsible research on language in U.S. Latinx communities in the media,
authoring Op/Eds and opinion articles in local and national newspapers, and engaging in other forms of extension. Linguists interested in models for community engagement and social change should consult Charity (2008), and linguists interested in engaging future educators on issues of language awareness should see Mallinson and Charity Hudley (2010). Finally, although academy grammarians are unlikely to abandon the prescriptivism that currently defines their professional practice, we should not give up on our relationship with RAE and ANLE altogether, either. If they could take up even some of the suggestions made by Lynch and Potowski (2014) we, as sociolinguists, could have a potentially powerful ally. In an era in which Spanish language content has been removed from Whitehouse.gov, the primary online platform for communicating information from the executive branch of the government to the public, our perspectives and our activism are more urgent than ever.

Notes

1 Escobar and Potowski’s (2015) estimate includes 34.8 million speakers of Spanish aged 5 years and older as reported in the 2010 U.S. Census, 11 million undocumented immigrants from Latin America (Pew Hispanic Center 2013), and the estimated 2.8 million non-Latinos who use Spanish in the home (González-Barrera & López 2013).

2 Although the United States has always been a multilingual nation in practice due to the presence of indigenous and immigrant languages, “the linguistic culture” of the United States is at the same time staunchly monolingual (Schiffman 1996).


4 Amanece, lo veis?, a la luz de la aurora? 
   lo que tanto aclamamos la noche al caer?
   Sus estrellas, sus franjas flotaban ayer,
   En el fiero combate en señal de victoria.
   Fulgor de lucha, al paso de la libertad,
   Por la noche decían: «¡Se va defendiendo!»
   ¡Oh, decid! ¿Despliega aún su hermosura estrellada
   Sobre tierra de libres la bandera sagrada?

5 The most recent plebiscite vote regarding the political status of the island took place in 2012. The referendum asked two questions: (1) do you agree that Puerto Rico should continue to have its present form of territorial status? and (2) regardless of your selection in the first question, please mark which of the following non-territorial options you would prefer (Sovereign Free Associated State, Independence, Statehood). To the first question, a slim majority (54%) answered ‘no.’ To the second question, a majority (61%) chose ‘statehood.’ The problem with the results is that in the second question, there was no option for ‘territorial status,’ which means that the 46% of voters who answered ‘yes’ to the first question were forced to choose an answer to the second question that did not match their preference. Regardless of this or any future voting results, the U.S. Congress would have to approve any change in the territorial status of the island.


7 Should the proposal have passed, Doral would not have been the first municipality to make such a designation. On March 14, 2007, Chicago Mayor Richard Daley signed a resolution adopted by the Chicago City Council to recognize and celebrate the multilingualism of the city. Readers can find the full text of the resolution here: http://multilingualchicago.org/resolution.

8 In addition to Spanish in New Mexico, French is also given special status in Louisiana, and the states of Alaska and Hawaii designate non-English co-official languages.

9 The original, Spanish definition of espanglish found in the dictionary of the RAE is as follows: “Modalidad del habla de algunos grupos hispanos de los Estados Unidos, en la que se mezclan, deformándolos, elementos léxicos y gramaticales del español y del inglés.”
The letter to RAE was signed by dozens of linguists working in Spain, Latin America, and the United States. It was also signed by popular Mexican screen actor Gael García Bernal.

Dada esta realidad, pensamos que con los objetivos que articula la ANLE se correspondería mejor un libro práctico que animara a los hispanos bilingües a hablar la lengua con más frecuencia, a hablarla en la calle y con las amistades y los padres, estudiarla en la escuela y en la universidad, viajar a países de habla hispana para experimentar el uso de la lengua en un contexto mono- lingüe. O bien una guía que ofreciera a los padres y los abuelos consejos de cómo fomentar el uso del español en casa, que recalcase la importancia de la educación bilingüe y explicara por qué es tan valiosa y necesaria para los niños. Nos parece que podría ser mucho más adecuada y efectiva una campaña lingüística alentadora, que animara a los jóvenes bilingües a hablar más la lengua en vez de censurar su uso.

References
Spanish in U.S. language policy, politics


Phillip M. Carter


