# 6

## LINGUISTICS AND LATINO STUDIES

Intersections for the advancement of linguistic and social justice

*Lourdes Torres*

DEPAUL UNIVERSITY, USA

### Introduction

In a 2014 article in the journal *Latino Studies*, Ana Celia Zentella calls on Latino studies scholars to conduct research on Latinos and language. She states:

Latino studies scholars have a leading role to play in opening the nation’s linguistic and cultural borders. Instead of ignoring the role of language in the varied topics we study, or viewing languages as finite essences that define particular identities, we must encourage an expanded view of the linguistic repertoire of “America” in general. Our work should enable our fellow citizens to view the nation’s languages as a tapestry that weaves together the rich colors of transculturation with the creative breaks of code-switching and the powerful threads of hybridity. We must discourage the negative connotations of bilingualism and bidialectalism as impure mixes, as inappropriate or as indicative of inauthenticity, and view them as strengths instead. Our goal is nothing less than the end of linguistic discrimination as essential for the preservation of democracy, following in the footsteps of African American efforts, and counting on their support.

*2014, p. 632*

This is not the first time such a call had been made in the pages of the *Latino Studies* journal. In 2004, Antonia Darder made a similar appeal: “Given the increasingly tenuous state of culturally democratic ideals in this country, it is imperative that Latino studies scholars heed Antonio Gramsci’s advice and put the question of language at the forefront of our inquiry” (2004, p. 231). Both scholars underscore the intersection of culture, language, and power, and the fact that language and language rights are inextricably linked to democracy, social justice, and citizenship. For example, the role of language is pivotal in conceptualizations of belonging in the U.S., as speaking English or having or not having an accent is often used as a measuring stick to determine the rights of immigrants and their worthiness of citizenship.
Likewise, English-only politics and attempts to eradicate bilingual education are symptoms of the power dynamics in the U.S., and discrimination based on language is just one dimension of the racialization Latinos experience. To what extent has Latino studies taken on the challenge described by Zentella and others?

While there is much research exploring the structure of Spanish varieties spoken in the U.S. and how they evolve over time in diverse communities (see Escobar & Potowski 2015, chapters 3, 4, and 5), many of these are quantitative studies that are not grounded in community language practices. That is, most studies have not examined the intersection of language and society and how language really functions in the life of Latino communities. This chapter discusses some pivotal studies that have explored the intersections between sociolinguistics and Latino studies. My intention is not to present a historical overview of the numerous studies focused on the ways of speaking of U.S. Latinos, but rather to discuss some of the trends in this work. I explore how sociolinguistics and Latino studies scholarship has responded to prejudicial, status quo notions of Latino ways of speaking, and has sought to bring awareness to the discriminatory repercussions inherent in such ideology since the 1980s. I then turn to more recent scholarship since the start of the 2000s exploring the incursions of both linguistic anthropology and discursive analysis in issues of Latino language. I conclude by suggesting future directions towards understanding the role of Spanish and English in Latino lives and examples of productive advocacy that sociolinguists and Latino studies scholars have undertaken to advance language rights in the Latino community.¹

Latino studies and sociolinguistics, and their shared investment in the study of Latino language

Latino studies had its roots in the evolution of Puerto Rican and Chicano studies in the 1960s and 1970s (Aparicio 1999, 2003; Cabán 2003; Flores 1997). One important aim of this field is to produce interdisciplinary scholarship about the historical and present day realities of Latinas and Latinos and their struggles for social justice in the U.S., with scholars generating analyses of local, national, and transnational factors that condition the lives of Latinos in the U.S. As an interdisciplinary field located across education, sociolinguistics, sociology, history, and others, Latino studies has had an impact across the social sciences and humanities and has contributed to and created new areas of knowledge. The rise of the field is very much tied to the struggle for civil rights including bilingual education and linguistic rights. For the purposes of this chapter, I review research that connects Latino studies and linguistics in that the work focuses on Latino ways of using language from one of these fields located across the social sciences.

Work in sociolinguistics theoretically deals with social aspects of language – that is, the ways in which social factors are connected to linguistic features. Through the development of sophisticated quantitative methodologies, sociolinguistics has made many strides in describing how linguistic and social variables influence language use. However, the work often provides descriptions of what people are doing linguistically without considering the sociocultural context of such usage or the relevance of the language use to the speaker or their community. As Romaine (1996, p. 101) puts it, sometimes even sociolinguists treat language “as an object having an existence apart from the social agents who use it.” A number of sociolinguists (Dittmar 1996; Hymes 1996, etc.) have made a case for a critical sociolinguistics (Singh 1996) that has as its focus the social meaning of language. They argue for the need to go beyond quantitative accounts of language use and language change to study the social meaning of language and its importance for its speaker. They remind us of the limitations of studies that provide descriptions...
of variation and correlations of social and linguistics variables without a discussion of social meaning. For example, it is not enough to know that a particular sound is produced in a certain way by X group of people (according to their age, gender, socioeconomic status, ethnoracial group, etc.) and in a different way by Y group of people. A critical sociolinguist, on the other hand, would provide us with an analysis of language that leads to an understanding of the relationship between language and social practices – that is, how members of relevant communities view X and Y productions of that sound, and what such varieties communicate to locals about the people who produce them, which ultimately can lead to an important social impact on the communities themselves.

Linguistic work on Spanish in the U.S. has a long history. In an early attempt to describe the state of linguistics research on Latinos, Teschner, Bills, and Craddock (1975) review studies produced up to the mid-1970s. In his introduction to the volume, Bills points out that most of the work can be classified as falling into the “Hispanic tradition” of linguistics, which he describes as characterized by an “interest in the accumulation of speech fragments with little concern for linguistic or sociological content,” and “an almost exclusive interest in deviations from standard Spanish” (Bills 1975, pp. vi–vii). While subsequent sociolinguistic research in Spanish in the U.S. over the decades became more sophisticated and engaged more modern theoretical and methodological frameworks, many studies were arguably still focused on deviations from standard Spanish (see, for example, Klein 1980; Klein-Andreu 1986; Lavandera 1981) and less concerned with the impact of the research on language on Latino communities (see Torres 1991 for a review of this work). Even more currently, many studies still fall prey to what Rosaura Sánchez describes in Chicano Discourse as “meaningless quantitative studies, giving us proportions and numerous statistics indicating the number of times a particular variant appeared in the speech of one group or another.” She calls for a more integrative approach where linguistic features are analyzed within the social, political, and economic context of the community. Sanchez suggests that when studying “minority languages” one has to be attentive to how such studies can be used to perpetuate stereotypes of inferior and deficient varieties and, by extension, speakers. In that regard, it is clear that some of the work on Spanish in the U.S. has been more concerned with theoretical and descriptive linguistic questions rather than with issues of language justice within a specific sociocultural context or the implications of this research for Latino communities. The Spanish in the U.S. conferences offer a useful overview of the variety of approaches taken by scholars. Since the first conference in Chicago in 1980 initiated by Lucía Elías Olivares, there have been twenty-five conferences dedicated to the study of Spanish in the U.S. Many of these have led to the publication of conference proceedings (see http://spanishintheus.org/ for a list of conferences and volumes). The papers presented at these conferences and the publications that followed range from those that focused on phonological, morphological, and syntactic variation, to processes like borrowing and code-switching, to those that engage language ideology, attitudes, language planning, and policy issues, and from primarily descriptive, to studies that attempt to link structure to language use and social relevance.

**Early Latino studies approaches to Spanish in the U.S.**

Language has always been a site through which the institutionalization of racist and classist practices is played out and thus should be a central concern of Latino studies. Before the 1980s, Latino language was analyzed primarily using a deficit model (Acosta-Belén 1975; Teschner, Bills, & Craddock 1975). The boundaries of Spanish and English were rigorously maintained and enforced, and the bilingualism of working class Latino children was seen as a problem that needed to be eradicated. Both the Spanish and English spoken by Latinos were judged to be
deficient, and language mixing or code-switching was deemed to be particularly noxious and
damaging. In the 1980s, the work of scholars such as Shana Poplack, Rosaura Sánchez, and
Gloria Anzaldúa interrupted this disparaging narrative. While Poplack relies on a sociolinguistics
approach, and Sanchez and Anzaldúa adopt a more multidisciplinary methodology, they were
all concerned with challenging deficit models of Spanish in the U.S.

Although disciplinarily a linguist and not a self-described Latino studies scholar, Poplack’s
groundbreaking and intriguingly titled study, “Sometimes I’ll start a sentence in Spanish y termino
en español: Toward a typology of code-switching” (1980) revolutionized how sociolinguists and
other scholars understood the practice of code-switching. Previously seen as unstructured, ran-
dom behavior, and by many parents and educators as a sign of confusion and lazy language prac-
tices (Acosta-Bélén 1975), Poplack demonstrated that code-switching was in fact systemic and
rule governed, and most surprisingly for many, that it was precisely those who had the strongest
command of both English and Spanish who most frequently engaged in code-switching (see
Toribio’s contribution to the present volume about code-switching). Pousada and Poplack
(1979) published another controversial work, “No case for convergence: The Puerto Rican
Spanish verb system in a language contact situation,” which posited that the Spanish spoken by
Puerto Ricans in New York was not converging toward English as commonly believed, but
rather possessed a verb system that was similar to other non-contact Spanish varieties. While
the years have produced a far more complex view of the results of language contact, these early
studies backed by empirical research challenged the pervasive idea that Puerto Rican children
were “semi-lingual” with corrupted language. They led to a new perspective on the language
practices of Latinos and rigorous methodologies more grounded in empirical research than in
the impressionistic studies that until then dominated the field.

Pousada and Poplack conducted their research as part of their work with the Language
Policy Task Force (LPTF) of the Center for Puerto Rican Studies at Hunter College in New
York. The Task Force produced a number of studies in the 1980s (1982, 1988), including
*Intergenerational Perspectives on Bilingualism: From Community to Classroom* (1982). This com-
prehensive study sought to assess the Spanish and English language resources of the Puerto Rican
community in East Harlem in order to suggest necessary policy changes in the education of the
children in the community. The LPTF was at the forefront of conducting studies that described
the language practices of the Puerto Rican community and advocated for policies that enhanced
the educational opportunities afforded to Puerto Rican children. This was a healthy change
from previous studies that blamed students themselves, instead turning the focus toward schools
that failed to adequately understand the linguistic reality of the children and the bilingual skills
they brought to the classroom (Flores 2005; García 2010).

Outside of linguistics but within the same timeframe as the studies just discussed, analyses
of Chicano language practices by Rosaura Sánchez (1983) and Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) identi-
fi ed language as a key language of the oppression of Latinos as well as a site of innovation
and potential liberation. Sánchez’ *Chicano Discourse* (1983) provides a sociopolitical framework
for analyzing Chicano language. The book begins with a Marxist history of the Chicano people
in the U.S. and considers how historical and economic factors shape their language use in
rural and urban spaces. While its evidence is primarily impressionistic, the study was among the
first to link ways of speaking to the material conditions of the community and made the case
that language cannot be studied without considering the speakers’ socio-historic background
and context. Likewise, Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands: La Frontera* (1987) is a Latino studies classic that
revolutionized thinking about hybridity and the politics of identity. The chapter “How to tame
a wild tongue” provides a powerful meditation on “linguistic terrorism” or the discrimination
from all sides faced by Chicanos for their ways of speaking; native English speakers find fault
with Chicano English, while native Spanish speakers criticize Chicano Spanish, and just about everyone finds code-switching objectionable. Anzaldúa establishes a strong link between ways of speaking and people’s identity, stressing that when you criticize a person’s language you are essentially demeaning the worth of the individual. While neither Sánchez nor Anzaldúa were linguists, their exploration of language in the Chicano community offered pointed assessments of the linguistic situation of Latinos in the U.S. In fact, Anzaldúa’s analysis of Latino language practices, firmly grounded in sociopolitical reality, powerfully captures the essence of the Latino studies linguistic project of the last twenty-five years, seeking to accurately describe the linguistic situation of Latinos and shed light on and challenge an ideology that devalues the ways of speaking of marginalized groups, preserves normative ways of speaking, and upholds white supremacy.

Linguistic anthropology

Scholars have since expanded these analyses and, importantly, have offered new analytic tools to explore Latino language that underscore the importance of studying language in its socio-economic and political context. The most productive research has emerged from the field of linguistic anthropology. For example, Urciuoli (1997) detailed how racialization is enacted through linguistic judgments with devastating effects. Racialization is the process by which people are categorized according to attributes such as skin color or language, and then subjected to stigmatization and marginalization. Urciuoli unpacks how both the Spanish and English varieties spoken by Puerto Rican New Yorkers are heavily monitored and negatively stereotyped by white people and other gatekeepers. For example, although many of Urciuoli’s participants were native speakers of English, they noted that they were often told by whites that they spoke “broken English,” “bad English,” or had “a heavy accent” Urciuoli (1997, p. 2). Such assessments about the varieties these speakers control clearly result from their racial and class position in society: Urciuoli documents how even when working class Puerto Ricans speak English, their varieties are judged as inadequate by the mainstream. She argues that the devaluation of Puerto Rican language, since both their Spanish and English are deemed inferior, cannot be divorced from the disrespect and discrimination Puerto Ricans face in the U.S. Her analysis, based on ethnographic research, employs an intersectional analysis to illuminate how race and class shape linguistic production as well as the responses to it.

For decades, Ana Celia Zentella has remained at the forefront of exploring how language intersects with sociopolitical issues to condition the lives of Latinos. Like Urciuoli, Zentella’s work is based in linguistic anthropology, but goes one step further by insisting that the work linguists do must be self-consciously political. While some scholars shy away from defining their projects as political, Zentella expressly terms her framework “anthro-political linguistics” (1997, 2002, 2005). Prioritizing the study of language in its sociopolitical context, she argues that language is inherently implicated in socioeconomic life, so that to ignore the analysis of how language works in society is to continue to mask the injustices that are perpetuated on people of color and other marginalized groups. She calls on scholars to make it their business to shed light on these injustices and to work toward linguistic policies that may promote change.

Zentella has influenced a generation of scholars that continue in the tradition she advanced. Her 1997 ethnographical work Growing Up Bilingual: Puerto Rican Children in New York pains-takingly analyzes the speech of children in the same Puerto Rican community where Poplack conducted her study. She provides a close analysis of the speech of five girls that is firmly grounded in their community and their interactions with the adults and children in their world. Based on her ten-year corpus of the informal, conversational speech from the children, she reaffirms the free-morpheme and syntactic constraint rules proposed by Poplack (1980), providing
further evidence of the rule-governed nature of code-switching. In Zentella’s quest to make the research relevant for those working with Latino children, her subsequent work (2005, 2009) aims to help parents and educators understand bilingual Latino children’s language and work with them to develop strong linguistic and literary skills in both English and Spanish. For example, Building on Strength: Language and Literacy in Latino Families and Communities (Columbia Teacher’s College Press, 2005) brings together cutting-edge articles on language socialization and outlines policies that parents, schools, and communities can take to build on the cultural richness inherent in bilingual communities.

Finally, Mendoza-Denton’s Homegirls: Language and Cultural Practice Among Latina Youth Gangs (2008) offers a critical ethnography of the ways of speaking of a subculture of Latina girls who belong to gangs in California. The author undertakes the study of linguistic forms within their sociocultural context, focusing not only on words and sounds but also other semiotic practices (i.e. tattoos, makeup, clothing) that capture how the girls express themselves. Mendoza-Denton unpacks the divisions and affinities between the Spanish-speaking Sureña girls and the more Americanized English preferring Norteña girls in California, and connects them to larger structures such as nationalism, racial and gender identity, and class consciousness.

Nativist anti-immigrant discourses

Discourse analysis of mainstream media, government documents, and everyday language has helped us understand how white supremacy and the degradation of Latinos is enacted and perpetuated in public discourse. Santa Ana (2004) uses critical discourse analysis to focus on how Latino stereotypes are perpetuated though the language of the media. He argues that metaphors of Latinos as animals, invaders, and outsiders in the media serve to reinforce and perpetuate negative perceptions of Latinos in the U.S. He finds that such language creates anxiety and hostility in the mainstream population and leads to discriminatory policies against Latinos. For example, Proposition 187, which severely limited social, educational, and health benefits available to undocumented immigrants, was passed in California in 1994 after a sustained campaign that demonized Latinos. After another fierce campaign filled with hateful rhetoric, in 1997 Californians passed Proposition 227 which effectively ended bilingual education in the state. Likewise, Chavez (2013a, 2013b) has explored how the discourse around the Latino threat narrative and illegality serve to disparage Latinos, undermine their human rights, and keep them in vulnerable positions. This research can be seen as an extension of earlier work that detailed how the rhetoric around English Only laws and policies served to marginalize Latinos and question their allegiance to the U.S. As of 2015, 31 states have declared English their official language, and there are consistent calls to make English the official language nationally. Although outward hostility toward Latinos in many modern circles is deemed unacceptable, the Spanish language has become a proxy that can be attacked without seeming racist (Hill 2008). Thus, the rhetoric surrounding English-only policies demonstrates that language has become an acceptable way to express displeasure about immigrants and their growing numbers in the U.S. (Chavez 2013a; Santa Ana 2002). In this discourse, whiteness is associated with standard English and deemed the unmarked norm, while everything else is judged deviant. Latinos are cautioned against using Spanish through English-only and restrictive legislation and repression, yet Anglos feel no compunctions about using Spanish in public places and in fact exert their superiority and dominance by attempting to render Spanish insignificant. Hill’s (1998) work on “Mock Spanish” documents how Latinos are kept in their place through the trivialization and distortions of Spanish words. She argues that through the use of anglicized pronunciation of Spanish words and the creation of mock Spanish words by adding the vowel –o at the end (i.e. “no problemo,”
“mucho bookos,” “el cheapo”), Anglos exert control and dominance. Likewise, Zentella’s (2002) work on the “chiquitafication” of Latinos and Latino languages – strategies to discredit Latinos through claims that they refuse to learn English – and the resulting stigmatization of the Spanish varieties that Latinos speak and the labeling of second-generation bilinguals as semi- or a-linguals exemplify other common strategies aimed at maintaining white supremacy.

New directions in understanding the role of Spanish and English in Latino lives

In this section, I briefly present four overarching areas of scholarship that have potential to uncover additional complex instances of the disenfranchisement of Latinos that is enacted through primarily linguistic means. These include the use of engaged scholarship, a focus on Latino communities of indigenous origin, the power of language brokering and translanguaging, and the importance of examining intra-Latino relations as related to Spanish.

Engaged scholarship

Across many decades, linguists and Latino studies scholars have been actively engaged in the struggle for language rights for Latinos. This advocacy is very much in the spirit of the work done by linguists such as William Labov and Geneva Smitherman, who responded to the uninformed and degrading depictions of Black English in the 1960s and 1970s, and helped educators and parents develop strategies to legitimize the language of African American children. Likewise, sociolinguists such as Shana Poplack and Ana Celia Zentella, and education scholars including Guadalupe Valdés and Ofelia García, have been active in fighting for racial equality and linguistic diversity in the Latino context. In their copious academic writings, passionate teaching, and memorable public speaking engagements, scholars such as these consistently advocate for respect for Latino communities and their language practices. Their groundbreaking work on bilingualism in the U.S., bilingual education, code-switching, language socialization, “Spanglish,” and “English-only” policies has not only shaped the perspective and approach of emerging scholars in multiple fields, but has also had a significant impact in the public sphere. They struggle to educate people in multiple fields and worlds about how language functions in social contexts and how scholars and students have a responsibility to participate in public discourse to challenge discrimination and injustice.

Sociolinguists and Latino studies scholars have been at the forefront of just about every language rights issue that impacts Latinos. From the early struggle to reinforce the notion that bilingualism should be treated as a valuable asset rather than as a deficit, and that code-switching is an innovative and skillful verbal strategy, to the fight against English-only laws and toward a society that values its multilingual population, sociolinguists have fought through their rigorous, engaged scholarship and fierce participation in public debate. Some recent examples of this activism are good models for the type of engagement that continues to be necessary. The Language and Social Justice Committee of the American Anthropology Association has led the charge in a number of grueling battles and has effected substantive change. For example, they challenged the Census Bureau to change the language used to describe speakers of immigrant languages other than English, and as a result the insulting term “linguistically isolated” was eliminated as a category for individuals who do not speak English “very well.”

In another example, Ana Celia Zentella and Jose Del Valle led the charge for accountability of the Real Academia Española, an organization notorious for its disrespect for U.S. Latino Spanish varieties. Although in 2012 the Academia began including the descriptor term
estadounidismo in its *Diccionario de la lengua española* (DRAE) to refer to Spanish words and usages of the U.S., the dictionary still did not include the term Spanglish. After many years and pressure from the Academia Norteamericana de la Lengua Española, in 2014 the Academy finally included a definition of Spanglish in the DRAE. Unfortunately, but not surprisingly, the definition was insulting: “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.” Rather than recognize that Spanish in the U.S., like all varieties of Spanish, is always undergoing change, Spanglish is singled out as a deformed variety. In a cogently argued petition signed by hundreds of linguists and educators, Zentella and Del Valle wrote:

> 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.

The petition and pressure were successful, and the Real Academia dropped “deformándolos” from their definition of “espanglish” in the DRAE.

Another example is the “Drop the I-word” campaign promoted by linguistic anthropologists, which has been urging news organizations like the *New York Times* and the Associated Press to stop using the term “illegal” when referring to undocumented people in the U.S., since the language we use to frame a debate has a powerful effect on the debate itself. “Illegal” is a dehumanizing term that serves to create distance and demonize not only undocumented people but also all Latinos by extension. The “Drop the I-word” campaign has successfully challenged the language used in conversations around immigration in local and national newspapers, blogs, on Facebook, and other social media. This is a significant victory for as Jonathan Rosa (2012) reminds us, “While language change is not necessarily equivalent to social change, struggles over representations of immigration make it possible to imagine and enact an alternative politics of inclusion in this nation of immigrants.”

Finally, “linguistic profiling” is the phrase Zentella (2014) uses to describe the restrictions placed on Spanish-speaking in public spaces. The establishment of English-only-laws has given people and institutions permission to attempt to restrict the speaking of Spanish in public places. For example, in the workplace, the number of complaints against Spanish-speakers has increased dramatically. Zentella (2014, p. 623) states:

> In the first 4 years after the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) began tracking job-related accent and language discrimination charges in 1996, there was a 500 percent increase in cases (1996: 91 vs. 2000: 447) (US Commission on Civil Rights, 2011); the annual average remains circa 460; approximately 88 percent of the English-only complaints are made by Hispanics. Clearly, this is yet another case of discrimination against Latinos.

There is ample evidence that a hostile climate exists for Spanish speakers in the U.S. and that this chauvinistic attitude materializes in myriad ways (Feagin & Cobas 2014). A number of studies have examined the meaning and impact of these laws on Latino communities in the workplace.
and beyond (Callahan & Gándara, 2014; Cameron, 1998; Weinstein 2012). As Zentella suggests in the quote that introduces this chapter, there is a crucial role for Latino studies scholars and linguists interested in advancing language rights and human rights. Zentella and many others have provided a model of how we can insert our research and our voices in important policy debates that have significant repercussions on the lives of Latinos in the U.S.

Indigenous communities

An emerging area in Latino studies is the focus on Latin American-origin Indigenous communities in the U.S. An important component is how the Indigenous family adapts linguistically to an unfamiliar milieu across generations and the extent to which younger generations are maintaining Indigenous language skills (Cassanova et al. 2016). Indigenous communities striving to maintain their languages in the U.S. face extraordinary obstacles (Makar 2012; Velasco 2010) in part because they have even fewer resources to support these languages than do Spanish speakers. Some scholars have analyzed the efficacy of bilingual education programs for Indigenous children (Collins 2012; Velasco 2010), while others have studied how Mayan speakers rely on their Indigenous languages for expressions of solidarity and to preserve their heritage (Kramsch & Whiteside 2008; Whiteside 2009, 2013). Cassanova et al. (2016) usefully analyze the linguistic decisions that Indigenous families make according to a language ecology framework that considers factors such as the multiple language ideologies Indigenous families encounter both in Mexico and the U.S., local and national beliefs about language, labor market realities, and material resources available to Indigenous families that many desire to transmit their native languages. Clearly, future work needs to focus on the dynamics of Indigenous language maintenance and shift in these growing communities.

Language brokering and translanguaging

Recent studies on Latino children and their evolving language practices offer innovative ways of thinking about what it means to grow up as a Latino child with access to more than one language. This work is an excellent corrective to earlier studies that considered Latino children to be impoverished since they were often raised in a bilingual context. The work of Robert Weisskirch (2005) and others (Morales & Hanson 2005; Olmedo 2005) on language brokering finds that Latino children often serve as translators in both oral and written contexts. In a study based on self-reports, Weisskirch (2005) finds that Latino adolescents express positive feelings about the translation services they perform for their families. In fact, those who engage in language brokering tend to have more positive feelings about their Latino identity then do children who do not engage in this practice. More recent work on language brokering (Katz 2014), documents how important it is to examine the practice from a family systems approach that sheds insight on how these practices have repercussions beyond the individual. Based on ethnographic work in numerous settings in a Los Angeles community, Katz documents the positive and negative repercussions of language brokering. For instance, children can connect the immigrant family to a host of resources and introduce them to media and technology at the same time that brokering can require much time and effort at the expense of homework, which can have long-term effects on children’s education. Similarly, other work finds that when children are asked to translate sensitive or complicated medical/financial information for their families that is beyond their cognitive capacity, they can experience significant amounts of stress. This has led to requirements such as Executive Order 13166, signed by President Clinton in 2000, requiring all agencies that receive federal funding to provide translation and interpretation services as necessary.
In the field of bilingual education, recent work has advocated for developing the “translinguaging” skills of students. This concept, which connects linguistics, education, and Latino studies, privileges the ways of speaking of Latino communities and the richness of their linguistic repertoires, encouraging children to freely utilize all of the linguistic resources available to them. Ofelia García (2009a, 2009b, 2011) has argued for bilingual education that focuses on acknowledging and building on all the tools that children bring to school, arguing that in order to be educated for the 21st century, rather than prioritizing English and insisting on bounded, separate languages, students should be encouraged to embrace and develop all the languages in their repertoire and the multiple language practices they and their family engage in.

Inter- and intra-Latino relations

Recent work concerning language and Latino communities has taken some innovative directions. Studies recognize that neither Spanish nor English, especially in their normative forms, can be said to represent the entirety of Latino communities. This research stream interrogates the identification of Spanish as emblematic of Latino identity. As De Genova and Ramos-Zayas (2003), Zentella (2002), and Rosa (2014) argue, Spanish often becomes a point of difference among Latinos of different ethnolinguistic groups due to the complexity of Spanish varieties, varying proficiencies, and the diverse valuing of varieties that exists across the Americas. In actuality, both Spanish and English are deployed by Latinos to express aspects of their identities and to forge both solidarity and difference with Latinos from other ethnolinguistic groups, as well as with U.S. white Americans, African Americans, and others. A number of studies are examining the interactions of Latinos from different ethno-nationalities and tracing how language emerges as an important tool to negotiate their relationships.

De Genova and Ramos Zayas’ chapter (2003) on the language practices and ideologies of Puerto Ricans and Mexicans was one of the first to look at the role of language in intra-Latino relations. They argued that rather than being a point for unification for Latinos, ideologies around the varieties of Spanish language actually serve as a way of magnifying differences between the two groups. They found in Chicago that both Puerto Ricans and Mexicans rely on hierarchizations and stereotypes of Spanish, English, and bilingualism to racialize each other and create distance. For example, some Mexicans say that Puerto Ricans do not speak Spanish well, while some Puerto Ricans criticize Mexicans for not speaking English. Puerto Ricans’ English is also found to be unacceptable as it is associated with Black English.

Rosa (2014, 2015), also in Chicago, explores language ideologies in a public high school and argues against a simplistic assimilation process. He looks at how Puerto Rican and Mexican students perform their ethnolinguistic identities through linguistic practices. They also use these particular ways of speaking to create borders and boundaries around their diasporic identifications. Rosa develops the idea of “inverted Spanglish,” the use of Spanish lexical items with English phonology, to explore the ways that second- and third-generation Puerto Rican and Mexican students experiment with and mix Spanish and English to make a statement about who they are, in defiance of the ways they are expected to speak. Through the creation of inventive speech strategies, students reject the marginalization and stigmatization that is attached to their identities and language, and validate their particular variety, while marking it as different from other varieties in their environment. Rosa notes that high school students have internalized the idea that accented English is inferior, so they work to prove that they can speak unaccented English at the same time that they signal that they can understand Spanish. He finds that students who are not first-generation Spanish speakers privilege English and that, “They must signal their Latina/o identities by always sounding like they could speak Spanish in English, while carefully...
preventing too much Spanish from seeping into their English” (2014, p. 52). He concludes that these strategies are examples of how Puerto Rican and Mexican young people are reimagining and creating Latino panethnicity.

While acknowledging that Spanish varieties can be used to signal intra-Latino conflict, Negrón (2014) is interested in examining how Latinos from different backgrounds deploy varieties of Spanish and English to express both solidarity and potential cooperation. One way they do this is by emphasizing the importance of Spanish as a potential basis for panethnic identification. Other strategies speakers use to invoke solidarity include code-switching, style-shifting, using Spanish pronunciation for Latino names, and the use of English in particular contexts to index a nonspecific Latino identity. This is an especially useful strategy in those instances when speaking in a specific ethnolinguistic Spanish variety may be taken as a sign of exclusivity. Negrón notes that “we can think of Latino ethnolinguistic repertoire as being composed of nested repertoires with features that, depending on the context and speakers’ objectives, can serve to index a specific ethnonational identity or a broader panethnic Latino identity” (2014, p. 114). Rather than just assuming it is one or the other, her microanalysis of conversations between Latinos reminds us that speakers can chose to emphasize a common Latinidad or signal exclusive identities depending on the context and the intent of the speakers.

Potowski (2016) examines the ethnolinguistic identities and ideologies of three groups of Latinos in Chicago: Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, and mixed ethnicity “MexiRicans.” She finds that first-generation Puerto Ricans and Mexicans hold the most negative opinions about the other group, while second-generation individuals tend to produce negative linguistic judgments about each other, and the third generation was the least likely to offer either negative social or linguistic assessments of the other group. Also, reflecting internalized stigmatization of their own variety, the people most critical of Puerto Rican Spanish were Puerto Ricans themselves across all three generations. MexiRican participants, as embodiments of features of both Mexicans and Puerto Ricans, were also less likely to reproduce negative linguistic judgments about the speakers of any particular linguistic variety. Across the three generations, there seems to be a decline in the belief that one variety was better than any other. Potowski (2016) asserts that subsiding negative linguistic assessments might be due to the reality that for these speakers, as suggested by Zentella (2002), the Spanish language is not an essential component of Latino identity. In an earlier piece, Potowski (2012) summarized some of the ways in which Latinos discriminate against each other based on the kind of Spanish they use, how proficient they are in it, and indeed whether they speak Spanish at all.

Finally, recent studies on language and identity are investigating the links between language and other dimensions of identity between different groups of Latinos. For example, Cashman (2015; Cashman & Trujillo in Chapter 9 this volume) analyzes ethnographic interviews with bilingual queer individuals from Phoenix, Arizona, finding intersections of Latino ethnic identity, sexual identity, and language practices. Specifically, she discusses how the act of coming out or maintaining silence about sexual identity impacts speakers’ access to the Spanish language and thus conditions their language practices. She argues that since it is the first-generation migrants who tend to speak Spanish and are most likely to have issues with homosexuality, if Latinos come out and are alienated from their Spanish dominant family members, this likely promotes a shift to English.

While emerging Latino studies and sociolinguistic research begins to respond to the challenge put forth by Zentella (2014), many more studies are needed, especially at a time when Latinos and immigrants continue to be vilified and marginalized. As we have seen, the best of such linguistic and Latino studies research can serve to assess community language practices within a socio-political context, unmask linguistic injustices, and advance liberatory linguistic policies.
Linguistics and Latino studies

Notes

1 Two additional language-based areas with relevance to Latino studies, but not described here, include the maintenance and loss of Spanish among U.S. Latinos and the teaching of Spanish as a heritage language. These issues are addressed in Chapters 4 and 20 (respectively) of the present volume.

2 Recent cases include drivers being issued tickets for “not speaking English” and employees hired for knowing Spanish and then fired for speaking it on the job (see http://potowski.org/resources/repression for a list).

3 However, this organization is also guilty of unapologetically shaming U.S. Latinos for their ways of speaking Spanish; see http://potowski.org/hablando_bien, and Lynch and Potowski (2014).

References


