

## *“Dime con quién hablas, y te diré quién eres”:* Linguistic (In)security and Latina/o Unity

Ana Celia Zentella

*“Dime con quién andas y te diré quién eres”* (“Tell me who you go about with and I’ll tell you who you are”) warns that we are judged by the company we keep. My adaptation, *“Dime con quién hablas, y te diré quién eres”* (“Tell me who you talk with and I’ll tell you who you are”) underscores the defining role of language networks in identity, i.e., “identity is defined as the linguistic construction of membership in one or more social groups or categories” (Kroskrity 2001: 107). Latina/o identity in the USA is often linked to Spanish, presumed to be the heritage language of more than 40 million people with roots in 20 Spanish-speaking Latin American nations, including Puerto Rico. The term “Spanish speakers” is used interchangeably with “Hispanics” or “Latinas/os,” although numerous immigrants from Guatemala and Mexico speak an indigenous language, and most Mexicans and Puerto Ricans – the majority of Latinas/os – speak more English than Spanish because they were born in the USA. Understanding the crucial yet contradictory role of Spanish in Latina/o identity and its repercussions for Latina/o unity requires an anthropological linguistic perspective, incorporating socioeconomic and political realities that determine how and why Latinas/os speak as members of different groups at different times, and even at the same time, and how they evaluate those differences (Zentella 1993, 1997a).

National varieties of Spanish sometimes emphasize regional borders, but those borders recede when the Spanish language is embraced as a common denominator. In addition, Latina/o bilinguals often blur the boundaries between Spanish and English in ways that reflect new ethnic and racial identities. Above all, distinct ways of being Latina/o are shaped by the dominant language ideology that equates working-class Spanish speakers with poverty and academic failure, and defines their bilingual children as linguistically deficient and cognitively

confused (Zentella 2002). The fate and form of the languages spoken by US Latinas/os will be determined in part by the ways in which they respond to the construction of their linguistic identities as a group and as members of distinct speech communities, and those responses in turn can have a significant impact on Latina/o unity.

## Latina/o Linguistic Capital

Latinas/os in search of a better life necessarily pursue capital, in the form of well-paying jobs and other commodities that earn status and respect. Language is a major form of unequally distributed capital in society's marketplace (Bourdieu 1991). Despite the "illusion of linguistic communism" (ibid: 43), not everyone learns the most marketable ways of speaking, and they are ridiculed for it. In the USA, where race has been remapped from biology onto language because public racist remarks are censored, comments about the inferiority and/or unintelligibility of regional, class, and racial dialects of Spanish and English substitute for abusive remarks about color, hair, lips, noses, and body parts, with the same effect. "Incorrect" aspects of grammar or pronunciation label their speakers as inferior, with an added injury not inflicted by racial comparisons, i.e., no one expects you to be able to change your color, but you are expected to change the way you speak radically to earn respect (Urciuoli 1996). Foreign languages are intrusive and Spanish, in particular, invades "white public space" (Hill 1999). In English, persistent foreign accents and non-standard verbs also signal an unwillingness to assimilate and a lack of discipline that requires external controls, more so when the speakers are poor immigrants defined as non-white. These attitudes are communicated in everyday conversations and promoted by the media and public institutions, but some groups of Latinas/os are more affected than others.

Whether dancing, cleaning, making love, stealing, shooting, or shooting up, and even when the character is admirable, Latinas/os are usually portrayed as speakers of disparaged dialects. In five films with a Mexican American focus (*American Me*, *La Bamba*, *La Vida Loca*, *Born in East LA*, and *Boulevard Nights*), only one character spoke Standard American English. Most spoke Chicano English (CE), Hispanized English (HE), i.e., English with a Spanish accent, or African American Vernacular English (AAVE), and gang members engaged in exaggerated amounts of Spanish-English mixing (Fought 2003). Spanish television reinforces US race and class ideologies by hiring light skinned Latinas/os who speak *la norma culta* ('the cultured norm') – primarily Mexico City's standard – because "white sells" (Zentella 1997b). Switching is off limits, e.g. on *Cristina*, a popular talk show, "Spanglish errors" are beeped, like obscenities (Dávila 2001). The message is clear: Latinas/os, especially poor youth or black immigrants, enjoy little linguistic capital whether they speak Spanish or English, and mixing languages is particularly devalued. But this message conflicts with

the comfort, trust, solidarity, and affection generated by the sounds and styles of family and community.

### Conflicting Norms and Linguistic (In)security

“*Dime con quién hablas y te diré quién eres*” has at least two interpretations. The first encapsulates a sociolinguistic truism, i.e., that regular face-to-face interaction among people who share the linguistic rules of their language(s) along with the social rules for the conduct of speech enforces the norms of the speech community, and those norms become identifying markers for its members. Accordingly, national varieties of Spanish are like linguistic flags, despite the fundamental unity of Spanish. In NYC, where diverse groups of Latinas/os are in close contact, 266 primarily first generation Latinas/os from four backgrounds (81 Puerto Ricans, 76 Dominicans, 72 Colombians, 37 Cubans) were in overwhelming agreement (92 percent) that they spoke the same language, albeit in different ways.<sup>1</sup> Differences in “*la pronunciación*” (‘the pronunciation’) and “*las palabras*” (‘the words’) were mentioned most frequently. National pride was strong: most speakers were pleased to be identified as speakers of their country’s dialect, and few believed that Latinas/os should change the way they sound.

Latinas/os who live in enclaves with their compatriots form dense and multiplex social networks typical of working class communities (Milroy 1987). Those networks help maintain the ways of speaking of the homeland, as do frequent telephone calls, visits, and visitors. As immigrants and their children interact with other groups of Latinas/os and learn English, their linguistic repertoire expands. Although overt norms favor standard speech, powerful covert norms encourage group members to remain faithful to group codes, linguistic and otherwise. In NYC’s El Barrio, for example, the linguistic repertoire of the young dudes of *el bloque* (‘the block’) who often “broke night” with their African American “homeboys” included AAVE as well as Puerto Rican English (PRE), while older domino-playing men had a more extensive Spanish repertoire, including popular and standard Puerto Rican Spanish (Zentella 1997a). In Culver City, CA, where Mexican Americans encounter more Anglos than Blacks, high school networks determine the extent to which students of Mexican background unconsciously incorporate the fronted /u/ and backed /ae/ pronunciations typical of California’s Anglos, as in “dude” or “ask”; they are not heard in the Chicano English of gang-affiliated students (Fought 2003). In a northern California high school, oppositional female networks of *Sureñas* versus *Norteñas* (‘southerners v. northerners’), or *mexicanas* versus *Chicanas*, were distinguished by preferences in clothes and makeup styles, colors (blue v. red), numbers (XIII v. XIV), and languages (Spanish v. English) (Mendoza-Denton 1999). Guatemalans and other Central Americans with civil war experiences too painful to recall and feeling swamped in heavily Mexican communities suffer devoicing, “*como hablar en*

*silencio*” (‘like speaking in silence’) (Lavadenz 2005). Many learn to become American by first becoming Mexican in the ways they speak in public, although they may honor their *voseo* (2nd singular informal) verbs at home. Dominican teens in Providence, RI, on the other hand, play with stereotypical connections between race, nation, and language by shifting among dialects of Spanish and English and claiming Dominican, Haitian, or African American identity, much to the confusion of non-Dominicans (Bailey 2001). In all Latina/o communities there are subcommunities or networks that challenge hegemonic notions of “the Hispanic/Latina/o/Mexican/Puerto Rican/etc. community,” and language is central to the distinctions.

Another interpretation of “*Dime con quién hablas y te diré quién eres*” acknowledges the power of dominant definitions of linguistic capital. All talk, especially with outsiders, involves placing the interlocutor on a linguistic ladder with rungs linked to ethnic, racial, gender, and class status, and the values of insiders and outsiders often conflict. Networks “in the hood,” for example, “give props” to AAVE, CHE, or PRE, while gatekeepers in schools and other institutions associate those dialects with school failure and criminality.<sup>2</sup> But conflict between in-group and out-group pressures does not begin in the United States. Immigrants arrive with Latin American notions of good and bad language that reflect the class, racial, and ethnic divides of their homelands, resulting in entrenched beliefs regarding:

- 1 the superiority of the Spanish of Spain and the local “norma culta,” particularly of highland South American dialects;
- 2 the destructive influence of English on Spanish and on Latin American national identity.

Not surprisingly, many Latinas/os demonstrate linguistic insecurity, i.e., they consider their dialect inferior to others.

### **The Superiority of the Spanish of Spain and the Local “Norma Culta”**

Although no Latin American normally speaks like a Castilian, e.g., pronouncing the letters <c> and <z> like the <th> in ‘thing’, they may evaluate it as superior to their way of speaking because of centuries of Spanish rule. The majority of the Puerto Ricans, Colombians, Cubans, and Dominicans interviewed in NYC, all of whom sounded like members of their group, agreed “we should not learn to speak like Spaniards,” but with revealing differences.<sup>3</sup> More Cubans (95 percent) were against speaking like Spaniards, and more Dominicans (32 percent) were in favor of it. Higher rates of linguistic insecurity among Dominicans and Puerto Ricans and lower rates among Colombians and Cubans occurred in several measures, and this pattern appeared related to lower or higher rates of education.

Approximately 95 percent of the Colombians, Cubans, and Puerto Ricans with higher education (college or graduate school) agreed that “we should not learn to speak like Spaniards,” which was 10 percent more than their compatriots with less education. However, Labov (1966) and others have found that members of the striving lower middle class, anxious to join the upper class, often have the highest rates of linguistic insecurity. Among the Dominicans in the NYC study, for example, those with higher education were more in favor of learning to speak like Spaniards than those with elementary or secondary education (35 percent v. 29 percent, respectively). Dominicans demonstrated a higher level of linguistic insecurity than the other groups of Latinas/os, and at both educational levels.

One possible explanation is that Dominicans may be aware of the low status of their dialect. The majority (58 percent) of the Cubans, Puerto Ricans, and Colombians in the NYC study made derogatory remarks about Dominican Spanish. Also, when asked whether they would consider it a compliment to be told they sounded like a member of another group, sounding like a Dominican was most vehemently rejected, e.g., 41 percent of Colombian rejections were because Dominicans “speak incorrectly” and “it’s an offense.” Not surprisingly, Dominicans have internalized disapproval of their dialect; 20 percent of them said they would not consider it a compliment to be identified as Dominican. Similarly, fewer Dominicans than Puerto Ricans, Cubans, or Colombians believed that their dialect should be the one taught in NYC schools, primarily because of their negative opinions of Dominican Spanish.

Perhaps the root of Dominican linguistic insecurity lies in their elevated use of a stigmatized variable, the deletion of syllable-final *s*, e.g., in *la(s) casa(s)* (‘the houses’), which was the only feature unanimously criticized. Final *s* deletion, typical of the Caribbean and other coastal regions, is most advanced in Dominican Spanish (Terrell 1982). But Cuban Spanish was not as condemned as Puerto Rican and Dominican Spanish, despite their linguistic similarities, and Colombians displayed the greatest linguistic security, despite their aspiration of syllable-medial *s*, e.g., in *no(h)otros (nosotros, ‘we’)* (Zentella 2004), indicating that socio-economic and racial factors can trump linguistic factors.

Puerto Ricans, Dominicans, Colombians, and Cubans in the USA differ in population numbers, periods of and reasons for migration, location and type of neighborhoods, and in their racial, economic, and educational background. Colombians and Cubans have a higher labor force participation rate and median family income and more college graduates and managers or professionals than Puerto Ricans or Dominicans. Participants in the NYC study reflected the national patterns for their groups, e.g., most (69 percent) of the Dominicans had not completed high school, while the Cubans had the largest percent with graduate studies (24 percent). Another crucial contrast is racial composition, e.g., Dominican immigrants include the most Blacks, by US standards, and Colombians include the fewest. Consequently, Dominicans displayed the most linguistic insecurity and Colombians the least. Unlike the other groups, most

(56 percent) of the Colombians were in favor of teaching their dialect in US schools, primarily because they held it in high esteem (49 percent) and believed it to be correct (37 percent). Evidently, linguistic reasons, i.e., the fact that Colombians from the interior retain syllable-final *s*, cannot be divorced from their privileged racial, educational, and class status in any explanation of their linguistic status. Equally important: groups continue to speak in stigmatized ways even when they express overt negative attitudes towards them, because of the trust and unity that the dialect of the homeland represents.

## Prescriptivist Standards

The educated middle class usually views itself as the guardian of the language and its prescriptivism permeates schools, the media, and other institutions, often singling out features of working-class and/or rural dialects as markers of low status. In Spanish, these include non-standard verb forms like *haiga*, *semos*, *estábanos*, *pudistes* instead of *haya* ('that there be'), *somos* ('we are'), *estábamos* ('we were'), *pudiste* ('you [fam.] were able'); archaic words like *asina* (*así* 'thus'); and metathesized pronunciations like *naide* (*nadie* 'nobody'). Racial and ethnic subgroups are also favorite targets, e.g., ". . . he was criticized back in Puerto Rico for speaking *arrabal* ('ghetto') black Spanish" (Laviera 1988). While the Caribbean singles out Blacks, Mexicans pick on Indians: "*Dice, 'Quiero un cebolla!'*" ('He says, I want a [masc.] onion [fem.].'), a busboy roared, ridiculing a Mexican Indian co-worker's problems with gender agreement. Along the Tijuana–San Diego border, "*naco*," from Totonaco, the name of an indigenous people, is a widely used pejorative for anything that is tasteless, stupid, or lower class. Recently, a mass email, meant as a joke, warned against using certain words, including anglicisms, and against certain behaviors:

*PARA NO QUEDAR COMO NACO CUIDESE DE DECIR* ('TO AVOID BEING TAKEN FOR A NACO TAKE CARE NOT TO SAY'):

*diferencia* (for *diferencia* 'difference') *pior* (for *peor* 'worse'), . . . *mucho* (for *mucho* 'much') . . . *mucha calor* (for *mucho calor* 'very hot' . . . *confleis* (cornflakes) . . . *lonche* (lunch) . . . *hicistes*, *vistes*, *trajistes* (ending in +s) . . .

*y EVITE* . . . *vestir los asientos del carro con camisetas* . . . *cantar canciones en inglés sin saber lo que está diciendo* . . .

(and AVOID . . . covering your car seats with t-shirts . . . , singing songs in English without knowing what you're saying) . . .

Most of these southwestern *nacadas* are familiar to Latinas/os from many nations, except that Mexicans stigmatize the *addition* of final *s* to preterite

second-singular informal verbs, e.g., to *hiciste(+s)*, *viste(+s)*, *trajiste(+s)* ('you did, you saw, you brought'), while Caribbeans stigmatize its *deletion* in present tense second-singular informal verbs, e.g., in *hace(-s)*, *ve(-s)*, *trae(-s)* ('you do, you see, you bring'). Worries about committing errors are more likely to plague the middle class because they have been exposed to the rules in school and learned that following them can separate them from the lower working class. Another concern, obvious in the injunctions against *confleis* and *lonche*, is the negative impact of English, but it is more conflicted.

### The Destructive Influence of English

Worries about the influence of English abound in countries whose émigrés to the USA return with desirable clothes, jewelry, money, and the ability to speak English. Often, a unique label distinguishes returnees in Latin America and the second generation of Latinas/os in the USA from natives or recent immigrants. Puerto Rico refers to them as "*neorricans*," although the preferred term on the mainland is "*nuyoricans*"; Dominicans call them Dominican Yorks; and Mexicans use *Chicano*, *pocho*, and *cholo*, sometimes interchangeably, although *cholo* is linked to street toughs. The labels suggest a hybrid – and therefore presumably confused and incomplete – identity, reflected in linguistic deficiency. Latinas/os who speak a lot of English, mixed with Spanish or not, are likely to have their cultural authenticity challenged.

Extensive English in an individual or community's repertoire is a sign of assimilation to US culture, casting doubt on the legitimacy of a Latin American identity. Those who claim to speak more or "better" Spanish may claim to be more or better representatives of the national culture, in a game of linguistic one-upmanship. A pecking order is evident in the comments heard in Latin America, where English is making inroads, about the extent of English influence in Puerto Rico as a result of more than 100 years of US rule. These are repeated in islander critiques of the Spanish spoken by their Nuyoricans, Chicago-ricans and other cousins in the USA. Similarly, *Tijuanenses* and other *norteños* on the Mexican side of the US–Mexico border are used to hearing negative comments about their English-influenced Spanish by residents of central Mexico, which *norteños* in turn make even more forcefully against the Spanish of *pochos* who live across the border (Zentella 2005b). The right to claim a legitimate Puerto Rican or Mexican identity is based partly on the extent to which your Spanish is free from English.

The truth is that English is part of daily life in Puerto Rico and on the US–Mexico border because of the penetration of television, movies, and music in English, US corporations, and the large number of Anglo tourists. For these same reasons, knowledge of English represents significant capital, and the outcry against English contamination does not drown out the contradictory murmurs of

envy from those who do not speak it. As one border bilingual put it: “*Hay gente que dice, ‘Ay qué ridículo,’ pero por dentro se están muriendo de envidia*” (‘There are those who say, “Oh how ridiculous” [when they hear him speak English in Tijuana], but inside they’re dying of jealousy’). In an apparent effort to draw on the capital that English enjoys without jeopardizing their claim to an authentic Mexican identity, 40 students, all US citizens who lived in Tijuana and crossed the border to study in San Diego for at least three years, employed contrasting code switching practices (Zentella 2005b).<sup>4</sup> Those who identified strongly as Mexican, regardless of birthplace, preferred to switch between Spanish and English at the boundaries of sentences and not intra-sententially, for parts of a sentence, which was more common among those who identified equally or more with the USA. Full sentence code switching is also more prevalent than switching within the confines of a sentence among US born and raised Latinas/os (Zentella 1997a), but the *transfronterizos* (‘border crossers’) who believe they are distancing themselves from *pochos* by switching full sentences are unaware of that fact.

## Spanish Accents

The linguistic (in)security that immigrants bring from Latin America is exacerbated by repeated critiques of what and how they speak in the USA, contributing to the “*chiquita*-fication,” i.e., the diminishment and disparagement, of Latina/o languages and identities (Zentella 1993). Damaging stereotypes include (1) a Spanish accent in English is laughable, (2) Latina/o bilinguals are incompetent in both English and Spanish, and (3) English monolinguals are inherently superior to Spanish monolinguals. The first is no news to anyone who has watched television or movies, beginning decades ago. Carmen Miranda’s chattering and heavy (Portuguese) accent were as comical as her fruit turban in the 1940s and 1950s. In the 1960s, Bill Dana’s character was a ludicrous astronaut, José Jiménez, whose Spanish-accented English, e.g., “/mai ney hosey himenes/” was the butt of jokes. More recently, in an attempt to counter this stereotype, comedian Danny Hoch refused to play the part of “a clownish swimming pool attendant” with a Spanish accent for the Jerry Seinfeld show, and was fired (Brantley 1998). Latina/o comedians use the same ploy. George López has several routines that reflect the Mexican American attempt to distance itself from the first generation; for example, he repeatedly misunderstands an immigrant worker’s voice over the microphone at a Jack in the Box drive-in. In every case, it is not what Latinas/os say in their accented English that is funny, but how they say it. Lippi-Green (1997) has documented the negative impact of accent discrimination on children. Furthermore, linguistic profiling cases prove that discrimination based on accents is no laughing matter; it abrogates the rights of Latinas/os and others to housing and employment (Baugh 2003; Massey and Lundy 2001).

## Spanglish

Just as the English of Latina/o immigrants is cause for ridicule, the Spanish of those born and/or raised in the US is attacked by insiders and outsiders. Second generation bilinguals are accused of not knowing English or Spanish, i.e., of being semi-lingual or even a-lingual, and of contaminating the Spanish language by adapting or inserting words from English. The most widespread term for describing their speech is Spanglish, but Puerto Ricans also decry “*hablar mata’o*” (‘speaking killed’), while Mexicans use *mocho* (‘cropped’) and Tex Mex to describe the phenomenon, or claim that those who *are pocho* (US born/raised) *speak pocho* (the Spanish of US born/raised Mexicans).

Most definitions of Spanglish refer to the mixing of Spanish and English, as the conjoined name implies, and to Hispanized versions of English words, e.g. *lonche* (‘lunch’), which has appeared in lists since the early 1900s (McWilliams 1990). The compilation of loanwords has a long and varied history, including the classic study of New Mexico’s Spanish by Aurelio Espinosa in 1917, the “*glosario de neoyorkismos*” (‘glossary of Newyorkisms’, n = 80) at the end of Guillermo Cotto-Thorner’s 1951 novel about Puerto Rican life in Manhattan, a collection of 300 terms from Cuban Miami (Cruz and Teck 1998), and a recent volume by Stavans (2003) that contains many questionable items. He authorizes improbable or infrequent words, like *loadear* for ‘loiter’ and *deservear* ‘deserve’, includes legitimate Spanish words, e.g., *fiesta*, *doña*, and lengthens the inventory unnecessarily by listing variant spellings separately, e.g, four for *parquear* (‘to park’) occupy 12 lines.<sup>5</sup>

Accuracy aside, Spanglish cannot be reduced to static dictionary entries; it is a creative and rule-governed way of speaking bilingually that is generated by and reflects living in two cultures. But even self-styled defenders of our cause can get it wrong. Stavans (2003), for example, claims that Spanglish represents “the making of a new American language” (the subtitle of his book), which contradicts the linguistic facts, since Spanglish speakers follow English rules in the English part of their sentences and Spanish rules in the Spanish part, and the number of Spanglish terms is no threat to the English or Spanish lexicon. And, further undermining his commendable attempt to legitimize Spanglish, Stavans goes to the extreme of “translating” the introductory chapter of *El Quixote*, violating the co-constructed, contemporary, and in-group essence of Spanglish. Also, he characterizes my allusion to “two monolinguals stuck at the neck” as “a haunting, beautiful image” (ibid: 54), although I use that image to *discredit* the view that bilinguals can be judged by monolingual norms. Spanglish speakers are members of communities that speak local dialects of distinct languages, and this principal marker of their identity links them to other Latinas/os who *speak* both and *are* both. The acts of bilingual identity they perform with each other by switching between Spanish and English accomplish more than two dozen discourse strategies, including topic and role shifting (Zentella 1997a). Some bilinguals acknowledge

their formidable skills despite widespread condemnation, and they admit to being Spanglish speakers with pride, but Spanish is losing ground rapidly to English in every Latina/o community.

## **Superior English Monolinguals**

The media, the justice system, and the federal government communicate the superiority of English monolinguals in the ways they mishandle speakers of languages other than English. Santa Ana (2002) analyzed the media metaphors related to Prop. 227, which virtually eliminated bilingual education in California in 1998, and found that newspaper reports on immigrants summoned up images of a deluge, floods, and “a brown tide rising,” non-English speakers were portrayed as shackled in a language prison, and languages other than English were referred to as ‘tongues’. In child custody cases, judges in Texas and Nebraska told the Latina/o parent to speak English to the child, not Spanish (New York Times 2003; Verhovek 1995). And in employment cases, employers who fire workers for speaking Spanish on the job find increasing support from judges. Ironically, some who hire workers for their ability to speak Spanish to customers then fire workers for speaking Spanish to co-workers (Zentella 1997c). Spanish has been banned even during lunch breaks, and at one store “bosses belittled [workers] for speaking Spanish although other store workers freely spoke French and Italian” (Lehman 2003).

On the federal level, special treatment for English monolinguals is evident in a US Census classification instituted in 1990, which defines a “linguistically isolated” household as

one in which no member 14 years old and over (1) speaks only English or (2) speaks a non-English language and speaks English “very well.” In other words, all members 14 years old and over have at least some difficulty with English. . . . All the members of a linguistically isolated household are tabulated as linguistically isolated, including members under 14 years old who may speak only English. (US Census Bureau, Census 2000)

Obviously, “linguistically isolated” is an inaccurate and discriminatory label, since it categorizes as “isolated” only the 45 percent of households in the USA where adults who speak another language have some difficulty with English (55 percent speak English very well), not the great majority of the US households (82 percent) in which no one speaks anything but English. The hegemony of English is also reflected in widespread efforts to make English the official language (now the law in 29 states), despite convincing evidence that English dominance is not threatened (Newmarker 2006). English-only laws purportedly target government business dealings, but they foment the kind of linguistic intolerance evident in the inflamed reaction against the Star Spangled Banner in

Spanish, and against a human rights commissioner from Mexico who tried to lecture in Spanish at the University of Arizona. At the educational level, English hegemony makes it illegal to teach children in their home language even when they are also being taught English, e.g., in California and Arizona.

### Reversing Linguistic Insecurity to Encourage Latina/o Unity

What is the Latina/o response to these violations? Recent mass demonstrations on behalf of undocumented immigrants are an encouraging sign of unity, but language rights are not central to that agenda. And few communities have the political and economic power to win out against wealthy individuals and organizations dedicated to eroding those rights. Even in Miami, where Cuban financial and political clout is undeniable and where some of the earliest bilingual programs were very successful, there are few publicly funded bilingual schools; the middle class supports private bilingual education that the working class cannot afford (Roca 2005). In California, middle-class Montebello supported legislation that denied non-citizens health and educational services, ended affirmative action, and eliminated bilingual education, at higher rates than voters in working-class East Los Angeles (García Bedolla 2003). In a few districts, Latinas/os have led the fight against bilingual education, unaware of the number of years that it takes to achieve the level of proficiency necessary to do academic work (Crawford 2000).

But the great majority of Latinas/os *do* want to raise bilingual children, and the need to accomplish this goal becomes more pressing every day. An extensive study concluded that “by the third generation, most descendants of immigrants are ‘linguistically dead’ in their mother tongue,” and even in the second generation Spanish is dying out (Newmarker 2006). Spanish survives a little longer in the Mexican Southwest, but Latina/o families everywhere are battling the reluctance of children to speak a low-status language, and children who are criticized for their weak Spanish may in turn be ashamed of their parents’ English (Zentella 2005a). Linguistic insecurity breeds rivalries based on who speaks Spanish or English more fluently, or which variety of Spanish or English is more correct, pitting generations, classes, and ethnic groups against each other. At its worst, not only the dialects are belittled, but the speakers and the communities they come from as well. In Santa Fe, New Mexico, Eastsider Hispanic teens who did not speak Spanish told me: “Mexico is gross,” “they eat dogs,” “they eat cat tamales,” and “I went to Juarez and there are little girls with babies begging.” Would they be any less disparaging if they knew Spanish? Perhaps not, but at this point they are unable to communicate with Mexicans. Similarly, Mexicans who cannot get to know *pochos* in English may end up fearing or insulting them. Nor is bilingualism a guaranteed remedy; those with advanced degrees who speak both languages with ease can do more damage than good by prescribing

“the right way” to speak, drawing boundaries between themselves and lower working class Spanish-speaking immigrants on the one hand and their English-dominant second generation children on the other.

The obvious conclusion is that bilingualism is a laudable goal, but language is not the fundamental solution because it is not the fundamental problem. Anthropological linguistics pierces the language smokescreen that relies on insidious linguistic hierarchies which obscure ideological, structural, and political impediments to unity and equity. As Woolard and Schieffelin (1994: 55) point out, focusing on ideology reminds us “that cultural frames have social histories, and it signals a commitment to address the relevance of power relations to the nature of cultural forms and ask how essential meanings about language are socially produced as effective and powerful.” It is in the dismantling of critiques of our English, our Spanish, and our Spanglish, and in an understanding of who benefits from the diminishment of our linguistic repertoires, that a powerful Latina/o unity can be rooted. Fortunately, many Latinas/os are fashioning alternative conceptualizations of the linkages between language, nation, race, and ethnicity that contest dominant discourses (González 2005), and in embracing hybrid linguistic and cultural creations they unite with other Latinas/os and *hermanas/os* everywhere.

## Notes

- 1 A Rockefeller Foundation grant supported interviews conducted by the author and research assistants between 1986 and 1990 (Zentella 1990).
- 2 Although the linguistic details remain to be studied, these varieties borrow some features from immigrant Spanish and others from local working-class white and black dialects, contributing to their low status (Bayley and Santa Ana 2004; Fought 2003; Urciuoli 1996).
- 3 The data for this question come from 194 interviews with Puerto Ricans (n = 73), Colombians (n = 51), Dominicans (n = 50), and Cubans (n = 20), a subset of the larger group of 266 interviews.
- 4 The principal and indefatigable interviewers for this research, supported by a UC-MEXUS grant, were María Balandrán, Ana María Relaño, and Cristina Pérez. *Un millón de gracias*.
- 5 UCSD students in my 2005 seminar on Spanglish found that 60 self-defined Spanglish speakers rejected approximately 50 percent of the words listed in the Stavans dictionary.

## References

- Bailey, B. H. 2001. “The Language of Multiple Identities Among Dominican Americans.” *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 10 (2): 190–223.
- Baugh, J. 2003. “Linguistic Profiling.” Pp. 155–68 in S. Makoni, G. Smitherman, A. Ball, and A. Spears (eds.), *Black Linguistics: Language, Society, and Politics in Africa and the Americas*. New York: Routledge.
- Bayley, R. and O. Santa Ana. 2004. “Chicano English: Morphology and Syntax.” Pp. 168–83 in B. Kortmann and E. Schneider (eds.), *A Handbook of Varieties of English*, vol. 2. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

- Bourdieu, P. 1991. "The Production and Reproduction of Legitimate Language." Pp. 43–65 in J. B. Thompson (ed.), *Language and Symbolic Power*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Brantley, Ben. 1998. Theater Review: "Exploring Rap and Race in a Jangle of Cultures." *New York Times*, March 31.
- Cotto-Thurner, G. 1951. *Trópico en Manhattan: Novela*. San Juan, Puerto Rico: Editorial Occidente.
- Crawford, J. 2000. *At War with Diversity: US Language Policy in an Age of Anxiety*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Cruz, B., B. Teck, and the editors of *Generation ñ* magazine. 1998. *The Official Spanglish Dictionary: un user's guía to more than 300 words and phrases that aren't exactly español or inglés*. New York: Fireside.
- Dávila, Arlene. 2001. *Latinos, Inc.: The Marketing and Making of a People*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Espinosa, A. 1917. "Speech Mixture in New Mexico." Pp. 408–28 in H. M. Stephens and H. Bolton (eds.), *The Pacific Ocean in History*. New York: Macmillan.
- Fought, C. 2003. *Chicano English in Context*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- García Bedolla, L. 2003. "The Identity Paradox: Latino Language, Politics, and Selective Dissociation." *Latino Studies* 1: 264–83.
- González, N. 2005. "Children in the Eye of the Storm: Language Socialization and Language Ideologies in a Dual-Language School." In Zentella, 2005a, 162–74.
- Hill, J. 1999. "Language, Race and White Public Space." *American Anthropologist* 100 (3): 680–9.
- Kroskrity, P. 2001. "Identity." Pp. 106–9 in A. Duranti (ed.), *Key Terms in Language and Culture*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Labov, W. 1966. *The Social Stratification of English in New York City*. Washington, DC: Center for Applied Linguistics.
- Lavandez, M. 2005. "Como hablar en silencio ('Like speaking in silence'): Issues of Language, Culture, and Identity of Central Americans in Los Angeles." In Zentella, 2005a, 93–109.
- Laviera, T. 1988. *"Melao": Mainstream Ethics*. Houston: Arte Público Press.
- Lehman, J. 2003. "Spanish Lipstick Smear at Shops." *New York Post*, November 8: 4.
- Lippi-Green, R. 1997. *English with an Accent: Language, Ideology, and Discrimination in the United States*. New York: Routledge.
- McWilliams, C. 1990. *North from Mexico: The Spanish-Speaking People of the United States*, 2nd edn. New York: Greenwood Press.
- Massey, D. and G. Lundy. 2001. "Use of Black English and Racial Discrimination in Urban Housing Markets: New Methods and Findings." *Urban Affairs Review* 36: 470–96.
- Mendoza-Denton, N. 1999. "Fighting Words: Latina Girls, Gangs, and Language Attitudes." Pp. 39–58 in L. Galindo and M. D. Gonzáles (eds.), *Speaking Chicana: Voice, Power, and Identity*. Phoenix: University of Arizona Press.
- Milroy, L. 1987. *Language and Social Networks*, 2nd edn. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Newmarker, C. 2006. "Spanish Use by Hispanics Dies Out Quickly." *Philadelphia Enquirer*, posted September 14. [www.philly.com/mld/inquirer/news/local/15514502.htm](http://www.philly.com/mld/inquirer/news/local/15514502.htm).
- New York Times Archive. 2003. "National Briefing | Plains: Nebraska: Judge Quits Case." October 18.
- Roca, A. 2005. "Raising a Bilingual Child in Miami: Reflections on Language and Culture." In Zentella, 2005a, 110–18.
- Santa Ana, O. 2002. *Brown Tide Rising: Metaphors of Latinos in Contemporary American Discourse*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Stavans, I. 2003. *Spanglish: The Making of a New American Language*. New York: Rayo.
- Terrell, T. 1982. "Relexificación en el español dominicano: implicaciones para la educación." Pp. 301–18 in O. Alba (ed.), *El español del Caribe*. Santiago de los Caballeros: Universidad Católica Madre y Maestra.
- Urciuoli, B. 1996. *Exposing Prejudice: Puerto Rican Experiences of Language, Race, and Class*. Boulder: Westview Press.

## Ana Celia Zentella

- US Census Bureau, Census 2000. Summary File 3, Matrices P19, P20, PCT13, PCT14.
- US Census Bureau. 2004. "The Hispanic Population in the United States: Table 6.2: Educational Attainment of the Population Age 25 Years and Over by Sex and Hispanic Origin Type." [www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/hispanic/cps2004.html](http://www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/hispanic/cps2004.html).
- Verhovek, S. H. 1995. "Mother Scolded by Judge for Speaking in Spanish: Language at Home is Issue in Custody Fight." *New York Times*, August 15, A12.
- Woolard, K. and Schieffelin, B. 1994. "Language Ideology." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 23: 55–82.
- Zentella, A. C. 1990. "Lexical Leveling in Four New York City Spanish Dialects: Linguistic and Social Factors." *Hispania* 73 (4): 1094–105.
- Zentella, A. C. 1993. "The 'chiquita-fication' of US Latinos and Their Languages, or Why We Need An Anthropological Linguistics." *SALSA III: Proceedings of the Symposium about Language and Society at Austin* 1–18. Austin: Department of Linguistics.
- Zentella, A. C. 1997a. *Growing Up Bilingual: Puerto Rican Children in New York*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Zentella, A. C. 1997b. "Spanish in New York." Pp. 167–201 in O. García and J. Fishman (eds.), *The Multilingual Apple: Languages in New York City*. New York: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Zentella, A. C. 1997c. "The Hispanophobia of the Official English Movement in the US." *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* 127: 71–6.
- Zentella, A. C. 2002. "Latina/o Languages and Identities." Pp. 321–38 in M. Suárez-Orozco and M. Pérez (eds.), *Latinos: Remaking America*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Zentella, A. C. 2004. "Spanish in the Northeast." Pp. 182–204 in J. Rickford and E. Finegan (eds.), *Language in the USA*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Zentella, A. C. ed. 2005a. *Building on Strength: Language and Literacy in Latino Families and Communities*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Zentella, A. C. 2005b. "Transfronterizo Talk: Spanish and English on the Tijuana–San Diego Border." Presented at the 5th Bi-national Border Pedagogy Conference. University of San Diego, October 7.