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Spanish Language Maintenance in the United States: The Role of Public Opinion

Ashlyn Nutting

Boise State University

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Spanish Language Maintenance in the United States: The Role of Public Opinion

Abstract

As the most widely spoken minority language in the United States, Spanish has an undeniable presence and impact. However, it is also still subject to marginalization as a minority language and does not share the same level of social, economic, or political prestige as English, the majority language. As a result of this marginalization, language loss is a real threat to Spanish-speaking communities in the United States.

This study seeks to (1) explore a variety of language ideologies and practices within the American educational system, media and news programming, and governmental policies, (2) examine how sociopolitical factors actively contribute to language loss in Spanish speaking communities in the United States, and (3) present ideas and solutions for Spanish language maintenance going forward.

Spanish Language Maintenance in the United States: The Role of Public Opinion

Presenter: Ashlyn Nutting / Email: ashlynnutting@u.boisestate.edu
 Faculty Research Supervisor: Dr. Kelly Arispe / Email: kellyarispe@boisestate.edu

Language & Identity: Contributing Factors to Negative Public Opinion

English-speaking monolingual communities
 Bilingualism as a threat to perceived national identity

Spanish-speaking & Hispanic communities
 Negative feelings towards heritage language and personal bilingualism

Additionally, negative public opinion is reinforced and perpetuated by (1) the ideology that English is a central component of a national “American” identity and that other languages “threaten” this identity (Scacchi, 2017) and (2) the ideology that Spanish is in some way inferior to English.

Introduction

As the most widely spoken **minority language** in the United States, Spanish has an undeniable presence and impact. However, it is also still subject to marginalization as a minority language and does not share the same level of social, economic, or political prestige as English, the **majority language**.

As a result of this marginalization, language loss is a real threat to Spanish-speaking communities in the United States. In general, third generation Hispanic immigrants have high linguistic competence in English but little to none in Spanish (Montrul, 2012).

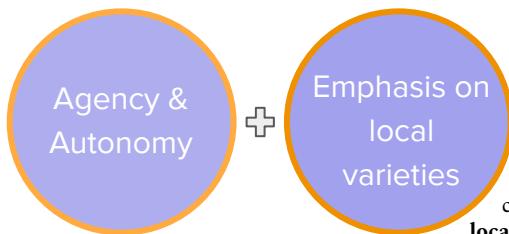
Key Terminology

Minority Language: Language spoken by a minority group; typically associated with lower economic, social, and political prestige (Montrul, 2012)

Majority Language: Language spoken by the majority ethnic group; typically associated with higher economic, social, and political prestige (Montrul, 2012)

Language Maintenance: The continued use of and individual proficiency in a minority language (Hyltenstam & Stroud, 2008)

Language Planning: The intentional implementation of government policies that seek to influence or change the status of a language (Kaplan, 2013)



The Path to Successful Language Maintenance in the United States

Successful language maintenance and revitalization efforts require two key components: (1) **agency and autonomy** within Spanish-speaking communities to carry out research and maintenance efforts within their community and (2) access to and ability to use the **local variety** of Spanish to carry out these efforts (George & Peace, 2019).

Moving Forward: Potential Solutions for Spanish Language Maintenance



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Language Planning & Public Opinion

When it comes to language maintenance, the most influential factor within language planning is **public opinion** towards the minority language and its speakers (Montrul, 2012).

In the United States, a largely negative public opinion towards Spanish and the Spanish-speaking community is perpetuated through English-only ideologies and policies as well as anti-immigrant and anti-Hispanic rhetoric. These ideologies are promoted along three main axes: the educational system, media & news programming, and governmental policies.

01

Education

02

Media & News

03

Governmental Policies