

# The Paradox of Linguistic Hegemony and the Maintenance of Spanish as a Heritage Language in the United States

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It is instructive to interpret patterns of language use in light of the interaction between language use and an individual's awareness of, and resistance towards, linguistic hegemony. While heritage language maintenance is often described as language use motivated by antihegemonic ideologies, this paper suggests that the paradox of the resistance to linguistic hegemony is that in order to be successful, this resistance necessitates acquiescence to this hegemony on a certain level, namely proficiency in the dominant language. This paper contends that a key element influencing the dynamic between these existing factors and language maintenance is the speaker's awareness of, and response to, the paradox of the resistance to linguistic hegemony. Awareness of and conviction towards this paradox seems to supply a dynamic in an individual's conviction towards heritage language maintenance. This paper reports the results of a study that examined this interaction in the case studies of families maintaining Spanish across generations in a rural town in upstate New York, USA. The displays of power illustrated on a personal exchange level, on the media level, and within institutions seem to illuminate the awareness of and response to the paradox of linguistic hegemony – successful resistance that leads to heritage language maintenance.

## Introduction

This paper presents key findings from a sociolinguistic study of the language use and language attitudes of Hispanic families in a small community in upstate New York, United States. This community reveals practices that are illustrative of linguistic hegemony, and, as such, is unsupportive of sustained minority language use. This study sought to identify and describe the familial linguistic patterns that are leading to an emerging population of US-born Spanish speakers by examining the factors that are related to Spanish language maintenance, social and political hegemonic forces within the community notwithstanding.

The following paper provides a discussion of hegemony, in particular linguistic hegemony and its relation to language use, especially as related to linguistic dominance and maintenance. This paper then offers a theoretical framework of the *paradox of linguistic hegemony* that may serve as an explanatory power for heritage language maintenance as successful resistance to linguistic hegemony. Linguistic Family Portraits are described and then analysed within this theoretical framework. Finally, this paper presents implications for the study – for a framework within which to explore heritage language maintenance in hegemonic communities.

## Hegemony, moral and intellectual leadership

Hegemony is one of the most valuable concepts for analysing and critiquing social organisation (Phillipson, 1999a; Wexler & Whitson, 1982). Hegemony comes from the Greek verb meaning 'to lead'. The term, as conceptualised by the

Italian political writer Antonio Gramsci (1891–1937) means intellectual and moral leadership through consent and persuasion (Gramsci, 1971). The concept of hegemony provides a philosophical framework within which we can explore the power relations between dominant and minority groups, particularly the means by which the dominant group, or the 'leading' group, secures its power and position.

The Gramscian concept of hegemony, moral and intellectual leadership through consent and persuasion, is essentially comprised of three concomitant processes: (1) leadership without force, (2) leadership through legitimation and (3) leadership through consensual rule. It is critical to recognise these three fundamental processes of hegemony when applying the concept in an analysis and critique of interaction among social groups because together these processes produce a 'total system which includes more than previously recognized mechanisms of class domination' (Wexler & Whitson, 1982: 32).

The first process, exercising leadership without force, is a form of rule where the dominant group exercises leadership over subordinate groups via the development of a consciousness, rather than an exertion of overt strength. The second process, leadership through legitimation, is a form of rule where the control of the leading group is viewed by the subordinate group as right and just, and unquestioned. The leadership of the dominant group is 'legitimated', taken for granted as correct. The third key process, leadership through consent, is a form of rule where the subordinate group believes that their subordinate position is at their own choice, benefits them equally, and where the subordinate group agrees that the dominant group's needs and concerns are mutual needs and concerns (Collins, 1989; Fontana, 1993; Fontana, 2001; Gramsci, 1971; Gramsci, 1985; Gramsci, 1995).

This 'total system' of hegemony requires that the leading group secures its position via the willingness and consent of the minority group. This consent is secured through the manufacturing of mass consent, a mass belief, of the naturalness and correctness of this social order. The manufacturing of this consent relies predominantly on systematic, consistent persuasion through media, and through institutions; and this persuasion will infiltrate ideas and beliefs of normalcy in daily life, so that they permeate and guide human interactions (Fontana, 1993). Thus, hegemony, as it is used in this paper, refers to leadership through securing active consent, rather than mere domination by exercising coercive power. An examination of hegemonic processes within a community can provide explanation of the maintenance and reproduction of unequal power relationships, or the resistance thereof.

### **Linguistic hegemony**

The larger concept of hegemony offers insight into various aspects of social power relations, including the social power relationships between majority and minority languages and language groups. A good definition of linguistic hegemony, as it will be used in this paper, is offered by Wiley:

Linguistic hegemony is achieved when dominant groups create a consensus by convincing others to accept their language norms and usage as standard or paradigmatic. Hegemony is ensured when they can

convince those who fail to meet those standards to view their failure as being the result of the inadequacy of their own language. (Wiley, 2000:113)

Linguistic hegemony can be perceived where linguistic minorities will believe in and participate in the subjugation of the minority language to the dominant, to the point where just the dominant language remains. As Gramsci (1995: 156) states: 'Great importance is assumed by the overall question of language, i.e. the collective attainment of a single cultural "climate"'.

Because hegemony relies on the development of an ideological structure which the minority group will support, hegemonic forces are predominantly non-coercive and are, therefore, useful markers that may illuminate the process by which the dominant ideas in a society are internalised and thus substantiate political legitimisation. Thus, how are hegemonic forces apparent? Linguistic hegemony is asserted in multiple ways, for example international scientific collaboration is increasingly dominated by English (Kaplan, 1993). As a further example, linguistic hegemony exerts and legitimates power by presenting the dominant language as an instrument, or tool to be used by those who acquire it in whatever way they choose. This is an exertion of hegemonic control because the 'selling' of English appears to be politically and socially neutralised, when in fact it is clearly not the case. Thus, learning of English is presented as a 'technical instrument (like a tractor), not a world order' (Phillipson, 1992: 287). To this end, English hegemony is exerted. English as the unquestioned dominant language of usefulness is legitimated. Daily forms of linguistic hegemony include using the media, institutions and social relationships to associate linguistic minorities with inferiority, lower self-esteem, and belittlement – yet, to conversely present positive associations with the dominant language and culture. In discussing linguistic hegemony, Phillipson (1999b: 40) states:

The top language benefits through the image-making of the ads of transnational corporations and the connotations of English with success and hedonism. These symbols are reinforced by an ideology that glorifies the dominant language and serves to stigmatize others, this hierarchy being rationalized and internalized as normal and natural, rather than as expression of hegemonic values and interests.

The results of successful linguistic hegemony are often language shift from the minority language to the majority language and, ultimately, language loss.

## **Heritage Language Maintenance**

The effectiveness of linguistic hegemony notwithstanding, linguistic minority groups can and do maintain minority languages over time. Language patterns of minority groups have been studied in order to identify factors related to the process of language choice and use resulting in minority language maintenance. Key factors have been identified that provide both descriptive and explanatory value for the language-contact situations. Key factors have been identified, such as ethnolinguistic vitality of the language group (Yagmur *et al.*, 1999), language as a symbol of a stigmatised ethnic group (Brankston & Henry, 1998), modernisation, and occupational and educational mobility (Priestly, 1994), establishment of ethnic identity (Koenig, 1980), political and social attitudes (Frank, 1993;

Galindo, 1995), socially situated group membership (Miller, 2000), and network-situated strategies of social reproduction (Ó Riagáin, 1994). And certainly native language use as a resistance to linguistic hegemony has been examined (e.g. Shannon, 1995; Woolard, 1985).

It is additionally worthwhile to explore factors related specifically to heritage language maintenance. While no one definition of 'heritage language' exists, nonetheless, a good working definition of a heritage language speaker is one who has been exposed to a language other than the dominant language in the home, often a minority language within a nation-state (Van Deusen-Scholl, 2000). So, for example, while Spanish is a global language, it is a heritage language within the United States. Within the context of heritage language use in a democratic society, to what extent will individuals maintain their heritage language when there are incentives and opportunities to shift, as presented through hegemonic ideologies in a given community? With this question in mind, it is useful to examine resistance to linguistic hegemony.

### **The paradox of the resistance to linguistic hegemony**

While at first it may seem that to resist linguistic hegemony is to resist the dominant language, in actuality this would not be successful resistance. In fact, successful resistance may lie in the usefulness of the dominant language. As Eriksen (1992: 313) states, 'perhaps paradoxically, cultural minorities may have to assimilate culturally in important respects in order to present their case effectively and thereby retain their minority identity'. As Eriksen (1992: 319) continues, 'any opposition against the use of dominant languages is inherently paradoxical. With no knowledge of these languages, one remains parochial and powerless'.

The paradox, then, of linguistic hegemony is that one must 'buy into it', or acquiesce on some level in order to resist it. Resistance is not through monolingualism in the minority language, but rather through bilingualism. Proficiency in both languages is the successful strategy of resistance. As aptly stated by Kaplan (1993: 151): 'To some extent, the hegemony of English seems to militate against bilingualism, though ultimately it probably does not'.

Although there are direct efforts of linguistic coercion and attempts to federally mandate language use (e.g. US English and English-Only), nonetheless, English is the official language *de facto* and holds on to this power via hegemonic means: English as the language of usefulness is unquestioned. Incentives and rewards for learning English are offered. Yet, heritage languages are maintained across generations in the United States. It is within the daily lives of individuals and families where English hegemony is fought, and linguistic alternatives are sought.

### **Language maintenance in the US context**

The United States is linguistically and culturally diverse. More than 150 languages are spoken in the United States today (Brecht & Ingold, 1998). This diversity is evident in the nation's public schools where the number of school-aged speakers of a language other than English continues to grow. In the 1980s, one in ten school-aged children was from a non-English-speaking background. By the early 1990s, the number increased to one in seven (Macías, 2000).

During the 1999–2000 school year, the total reported number of limited English proficient (LEP) students was approximately 4.4 million, comprising 9.3% of the total Kindergarten – Grade 12 (K – 12) public school enrolment, an increase of 27.3% from the previous school year (NCELA, 2002). The nation's LEP enrolment is principally concentrated in the elementary school grades, and the highest numbers are in kindergarten to third grade (NCBE, 2000). Additionally, there is a population of native US-born language-minority students: about one third of LEP students enrolled in the US public schools are born in the United States (Fleischman & Hopstock, 1993 as cited in Macías, 2000). The increase in numbers of school-aged children speaking a language other than English in US homes is due to a variety of reasons, including immigration, birth patterns (Peyton *et al.*, 2001) and language maintenance efforts (Campbell & Rosenthal, 2000).

Yet, this steady increase in linguistic pluralism occurs within a context that does not necessarily support native language maintenance. The pull towards assimilation is strong, and the experience of language shift does exist in many language minority families (Veltman, 1988, 2000; Wong-Fillmore 1991). Additionally, as the US national mood shifts, there are declining resources within the schools for language maintenance. Changes in school language policy reflect changing US attitudes towards linguistic and cultural pluralism. Garcia (2000) offers a useful synopsis of how, in the last 20 years, there has been a general drift in the US away from policies supporting linguistic diversity in the classrooms. In the 1960s, US demand for equal educational opportunity and the emphasis on respecting and affirming students' languages led to school policy reform, including a renewed interest in bilingual education. In the 1970s, however, the pendulum starting swinging back from an appreciation of ethnic and linguistic diversity. In the 1980s, even though cultural and linguistic diversity increased, the emphasis on English language acquisition led to bilingual programmes that were remedial and transitional in nature. Two-way dual language programmes made a 'very limited comeback' in the late 1980s and early 1990s. And recently 'as the new millennium approaches', Garcia writes,

the education of U.S. language minorities has become even more conflicted. In the last five years, we have seen the passage of Proposition 227 in California, effectively ending all kinds of bilingual instruction in the state. And an attempt to claim Ebonics as a variety of African-American English has met with strong opposition. As the country has increased in language diversity, the movement toward Standards has taken afoot, effectively denying language differences and expecting the same level of standard English language proficiency of all. For example, in New York State, passing the English Language Arts Regents which requires a commencement level of standard written English will now be a requirement for graduation. (Garcia, 2000: 246)

In the above quotation, Garcia offers specific examples of declining US resources for language maintenance. The implications for continued linguistic diversity and minority language use in the US are great. Riverfront Hills, the location for the present study, on a small scale, mirrors the US language-use patterns.

Given the above discussion, a crucial question becomes evident. Why do Hispanic families in the United States choose to maintain Spanish as their heritage language across generations when there are opportunities and incentives to shift to English, as presented in hegemonic practices that permeate that society? By viewing US heritage language maintenance within the theoretical framework of awareness of the *paradox of linguistic hegemony*, scholars and educators can better explore the dynamics that lead to heritage language maintenance.

## The Study

This study asks, 'Why are individuals choosing to maintain their heritage language across generations when there are opportunities and incentives to shift from the heritage language to the dominant language, as presented in hegemonic practices that permeate society?' Therefore, it was primarily important to conduct this research in an area where there are educational 'opportunities and incentives' for language shift to occur. The opportunity would be the availability of second language instruction. The school district selected for this study has had an English as a Second Language (ESL) programme for more than 20 years. In order to acquire an historical perspective on the ESL programme, participants included two English as a Second Language teachers who have been teaching in the school district since the inception of the ESL program. Secondly, since this study seeks to understand these patterns within a hegemonic community, it was necessary to select a site that 'encouraged' the dominant language – where the encouragement took many forms. Finally, since this study sought to identify language patterns and attitudes over time, a site was necessary that has had a minority group for several generations. A detailed description of the research setting will follow to demonstrate how the community met these criteria.

Since this was a community-based and home-based research project, this study was conducted by the researcher becoming immersed in the Hispanic community in Riverfront Hills, New York. In order to preserve anonymity, pseudonyms are used for the names of all individuals, places, and institutions. This study initially identified family participants through community organisations, such as Centro Civico, the After School Program through the City Housing Authority, the Head Start Program, a local church, and the YMCA summer day camp. As the researcher became more accepted into the community, research sites for observation and interviews included the 'East End' bodegas, the Latino record, CD and music store, neighbourhood gatherings, the community swimming pool and the homes of the participants.

Initial interviews using the screening questions were conducted with Hispanic parents of children both enrolled and not enrolled in ESL. The screening questions identified six Hispanic families as case-study participants for in-depth, semi-structured interviews. Of these six families, three families were selected who exhibit patterns of language maintenance, and three families which showed patterns of language shift. Participants in both groups of families included: (1) currently enrolled students (elementary, middle school or high school children); (2) parents; and, when possible, (3) siblings, and (4) grandparents of those children. Participants comprised a total of six families,

**Table 1** The families

<i>Family</i>	<i>Members</i>	<i>Relationship</i>	<i>First language</i>	<i>Language instruction</i>	<i>Home language*</i>	<i>Generation in US</i>
Hildago	Vivian	Mother	Spanish	ESL	<b>Sp &amp; Eng</b>	second
	Miquel	Father	Spanish	none	<b>Sp &amp; Eng</b>	first
	Richard	Child, 13 yrs	Spanish	ESL	<b>Sp &amp; Eng</b>	second
Morales	Juan	Grandfather	Spanish	none	English	first
	Jorge	Father, Juan's son	English	none	English	second
	Chelsea	Mother (non-Hispanic)	English	none	English	third
	Stacey	Child, 3 yrs	English	N/A	English	third
Martinez	Claudia	Mother	Spanish	ESL	<b>Sp &amp; Eng</b>	second
	David	Father	Spanish	none	<b>Sp &amp; Eng</b>	second
	Julia	Child, 9 yrs	Spanish	ESL	<b>Sp &amp; Eng</b>	third
Diaz	Vera	Mother	<b>Sp &amp; Eng</b>	none	<b>Sp &amp; Eng</b>	second
	Jose	Father	<b>Sp &amp; Eng</b>	none	<b>Sp &amp; Eng</b>	second
	Angel	Uncle, Jose's younger brother	<b>Sp &amp; Eng</b>	none	<b>Sp &amp; Eng</b>	second
	Max	Child, 17 yrs	<b>Sp &amp; Eng</b>	none	<b>Sp &amp; Eng</b>	third

\* Where participants are bilingual, the dominant language is indicated in bold font

with 24 individual participants. This paper focuses on four of these families (see Table 1).

## Methodology

Each of the families constituted a case study. Although case studies are not generalisable to broad categories or groups, case study and ethnographic approaches have a long tradition in qualitative research, and can be particularly illuminating for research in second language use (Miller, 1997). Interview protocols were used that elicit data related to the preliminary categories of language use, language attitude, language history and language choice. The study, including extensive community fieldwork, was conducted over two years (1996–1998). And within that time, the data were collected from families via intergenerational interviews during a one-year period. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the families, covering the topics in the interview protocols of language use, language attitude, language history and language choice. Interviews were primarily one-to-one interviews between the researcher and the individual participant. There were also several group interviews with each member of the family present.

Participants were offered the choice of conducting interviews in Spanish or English. All participants, with the exception of the Spanish monolingual grandmothers, choose to conduct interviews in English. The Spanish interviews were conducted with the assistance of a bilingual-bicultural translator who was a well-known, well-liked and trusted member of the community. This translator

often helped neighbours with interpreting needs for doctors and teachers. While there are advantages and disadvantages in using an interpreter, in this study using a translator had the positive effect of providing access to these participants, largely via the development of trust and welcoming into the community.

The interviews took place in a variety of settings throughout the community: in the participants' homes, outside in communal sitting areas in the apartment complex, in the community after-school day care centre, in a community church and in the participants' places of employment. Each participant was interviewed at least three times, each interview averaging an hour long, but no one interview was longer than two hours. Data from over 120 interview hours were audio-recorded, transcribed and, in the case of the Spanish interviews, translated.

Analyses developed a grounded theory for understanding the factors that are related to heritage language maintenance within a linguistic hegemonic community. During the data collection phase, data was coded according to preliminary categories in the data collection instruments. Data were analysed by analytic induction and constant comparison (Glasser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Categories were revised and expanded during the ongoing search for factors related to the recurring patterns within the language life-cycle.

For this paper, I provide a description of the sociolinguistic context of the research setting and the language-use patterns of four of the families. These recurring patterns of language use within the families are discussed as suggestive patterns of language maintenance or shift. Finally, the language choice data are presented and analysed within the theoretical framework of Spanish heritage language maintenance and the paradox of linguistic hegemony.

### **Riverfront Hills, USA**

The city of Riverfront Hills is located in Marshall County, a rural county located in upstate New York. The county is divided east to west by a major river and the river valley, with rolling hills rising from both sides of the river and the valley region. The county is comprised of one city (the city of Riverfront Hills), 10 towns, and 11 villages. Marshall County contains five school districts. According to the New York State Department of Education, all of the school districts are considered suburban except Riverfront Hills which is a City District, but not a large city district.

The population of Marshall County was 51,981 according to 1990 Census data. The population density is 128 persons per square mile, which is significantly less than half of the state's 381 persons per square mile and less than the upstate New York density of 227 per square mile (Marshall County Public Health Agency 1996). The following population characteristics of employment, race and age have demonstrated relevance in the lives and the perceptions of the participants in this study.

#### *Employment*

Historically, Marshall County dates back to colonial America. Riverfront Hills, the one city in Marshall County, originally grew up from the surrounding farms. With the industrial revolution, Riverfront Hills, like many small cities in upstate New York, became a small industrial city with a strong economy begin-



ning in the 1800s until its economic peak in the mid 1940s. The industry in Riverfront Hills consisted primarily of textile, glove, and rug factories. The early immigrants were of Polish, German and Italian descent. The employment opportunities in the large mills which had attracted the earlier immigrants were also the employment opportunities which attracted Hispanics. In the 1940s, Riverfront Hills saw an increase in the immigration/migration of Hispanics, seeking employment in the textile and rug factories. The majority of the Hispanics during this period were from Puerto Rico and Costa Rica.

The economy of Riverfront Hills was at its strongest in the 1930s and 1940s; however, as with many small, deindustrialising cities in the north-east United States, the economy began declining in the 1950s. Industries that had been the staple of the local economy began moving out of the area or closing down. Today, while manufacturing still accounts for 44% of the economy, there has been a shift from the dependency on a few large mills to smaller, specialised manufacturing companies (Community Development Initiative Program, 1997: 6). Thus, there is greater competition for the remaining unskilled labour jobs which do not require higher education or high literacy and technical skills.

Of the 24,234 persons in the labour force, according to the 1990 Census, 1898 were unemployed, yielding an unemployment rate of 7.8% in Marshall County. Statistics available from the New York State Department of Labor for the years 1986–1992 show the unemployment rate was 10% in 1992, an increase over the previous two years (Marshall County Public Health Agency, 1996). It is ironic that large scale Hispanic migration began simultaneously with the marked deindustrialisation of Riverfront Hills.

### *Race*

While the percentage of Marshall County residents who identify themselves as white decreased, the percentage of residents who categorise themselves as Hispanic has increased. The 1980 Census included 1590 Latinos living in Marshall County with 1402 residing in Riverfront Hills (6.4% of the city's population). During the 1980s the Hispanic population swelled. The 1990 Census revealed a total of 2703 Latinos living in the county and 2403 in Riverfront Hills – 11.6% of the city's population (Centro Civico of Riverfront Hills, 1991: 6). However, it should be noted that there is likely to be an under-count of minorities. According to Marshall County Public Health Agency (1996), the under-count is 5–7%. Yet, according to the Community Development Initiative Program (1997), the under-count in the 1990 Census could be even closer to 13%, given the number of Hispanics appearing in other types of statistical information, such as unemployment figures, school data and social service data.

### *Age*

Consistent with state and national trends, Marshall County's population has shown a trend towards ageing. The median age in Marshall County in 1980 was 34.8 years, and in 1990 the median age increased to 36.6 (Marshall County Public Health Agency, 1996). Further, as the general population aged, the Hispanic population was increasingly represented in the 0–18 age group.

This brief background is important in order to frame the Hispanics' experiences in Riverfront Hills. When they migrated to Riverfront Hills, there were already established groups of Polish, German and Italian descent. Since the

Hispanic migration swelled at the same time as employment opportunities dwindled, Hispanics came into competition with these groups for employment. This competition has created ethnic conflicts. Finally, since the general population has aged, while the Hispanic population is young, it seems that these conflicts between Hispanics and the general population have played themselves out in the arena of the city school district.

### *The Schools*

Along with Hispanic migration, enrolment of Hispanic children in the Riverfront Hills City school district continued to grow from the 1940s to the 1960s. Historically, the school enrolment followed residency. Since many of the Hispanics settled in the poorer 'East End' area, while the earlier immigrants had settled 'up the hill', the schools were segregated not only by location but also by ethnic groups. In the early 1960s, the public elementary school in the East End was closed. The children were enrolled in the other elementary schools, and ethnic diversity in the public schools began to become more of an issue for the community.

Throughout the 1960s, there were no second language instructional services for speakers of a language other than English. The educational experience of the language-minority children was that of immersion in an all-English instructional environment. By the early 1970s, the school began to hire 'Teachers for Spanish Children'. Two teachers, Mrs Kapolski and Mrs Wekter, have been teaching language minority students in Riverfront Hills since the early 1970s. As Mrs Wekter states, 'I was hired as a teacher of Spanish children. Not "ESL".' The new 'teachers of Spanish children', most of whom had received formal training as Spanish teachers, began to develop a programme based on emerging ESL techniques, without native language support. Originally, the teachers used both English and Spanish when testing the children; however, the use of Spanish was quickly discouraged by the school board, and the children were tested in English only. The ensuing history of the Riverfront Hills school district is fraught with tensions between the dominant community and the Hispanic community. And the debate of Spanish use in the community also became a debate about Spanish use in the classroom.

In 1991, the ethnic strife that had existed for decades finally exploded in the city of Riverfront Hills. The classroom was the main arena. During a discussion about the New York State reformation of the Social Studies curriculum in order to increase cultural representation, a member of the Riverfront Hills School Board was quoted as saying:

But you have to understand that some contributions have been disasters. The Spanish people in South America, for instance, can't run a country without chaos. You don't find that in western civilisation because people there are reasonably intelligent and know how to do things. (*Riverfront Hills Herald* 28/7/91)

For months following, the local media reported the latest comment about Hispanic and non-Hispanic conflicts and how they were played out in the schools. Local politicians, school district personnel, school board members, and community leaders, representing 'both sides' each contributed what were

considered by the 'other side' to be extreme points of view. This was a volatile time. It was a time which residents of Riverfront Hills still recall with shame and anger. The situation seemed to reach the highest point of 'shame' when the New York State Department of Education 'descended' upon the community in order to investigate claims of racist practices in the schools. Heritage language use and second language instruction became a central issue in the investigation.

The investigation sought to identify key issues which affected Hispanic students in the school. The investigation identified three issues which they referred to as 'language-related problems in the school system'. The first 'problem' discussed identifying students based on differences in their nativity and varying levels of their Spanish and English use at home. A second language-related problem was the lack of bilingual/bicultural staff within the schools system. And, finally, the third language-related problem in the school was a lack of respect for Spanish language and culture as represented in the treatment of students, and a lack of cultural diversity reflected in the curricula. The report documented:

Too often, Latino students are given the strong and intimidating message to, 'Speak English, forget Spanish!' In this sense, they are made to feel ashamed of their native language...[and] the absence of Latino and other minority educational information fosters in the children a sense of shame for their culture. (Centro Civico of Riverfront Hills, 1991: 10–11)

The strife over ethnicity and perceived prejudice in the community and schools tore apart Riverfront Hills for many months. Two positive outcomes were noted in the schools: a designation of a part-time ESL coordinator, and the hiring of a bilingual/bicultural Hispanic principal. However, at the time that fieldwork was conducted for this study, little had changed in the identified problems to improve ethnic relations in the school or the community: the ESL coordinator remained part-time, balancing teaching with administrative duties. Although the ESL programme developed a written philosophy and goals statement, as Mrs Wekter emphasises, the goal remains 'to provide ESL students with opportunities to become functional in regular English speaking classes within three years. The objective is to teach students to understand, speak, read and write English.' Further evidence that little had changed is that the bilingual principal had left his position just months afterwards, and no bilingual replacement had ever been made. Additionally, there were just three identified bilingual/bicultural staff members in the district, and one was aid funded through external grants. The school board continues to be primarily comprised of elderly non-Hispanics. In addition to the little change in the school system, residents note little change in the community. For example, the print media continue to be in English only. Just months prior to this field research, the afternoon Spanish television hours had been changed to the early morning hours of 2am, and the Spanish radio had been cancelled, in spite of a massive outcry from the Hispanic population. In fact, during this fieldwork, many residents expressed that, the media circus of 1990–1991 notwithstanding, little had changed in the realities of Hispanic experience within the community of Riverfront Hills.

## Family Portraits

It is within this milieu that this study explored the language choice and language attitudes of Hispanic families.

### Promises of English hegemony, or families shifting from Spanish to English

The families whose language patterns are suggestive of language shift discuss their attitudes and reasons beneath their choices. Hegemonic processes experienced by the individuals seem to affect the reasons underlying their choices.

#### *Hildalgo family*

Spanish is the first language of husband and wife, Miquel and Vivian Hildalgo. Miquel (first generation US) and Vivian (second generation US) spoke only Spanish with their infant son Richard (third generation US). Their intention was for Richard to speak only Spanish at home and then learn English at school. As Vivian states: 'I thought I was going to do with him, like they did to me. That I was going to keep him with the Spanish until he went to school, and my frame was, let the school teach him English, and I will teach him Spanish at home.' However, they reconsidered this decision when Richard began Head Start at about four years of age, and they realised that they would be putting him in the difficult position of being laughed at and teased in school – much as they had been. As Miquel explains, 'Richard spoke Spanish; he understood Spanish. Until he made it to pre-school. That's where we found he was in another world. All the other kids spoke English, and he didn't know anything. He froze; he didn't understand.' When their son Richard arrived in Head Start, Vivian and Miquel were forced to remember painful instances in their own growing up which were related to their speaking a minority language. For example, as Vivian recalls:

I was very shy. Very shy. Everything looked so different; I didn't understand. I was very frightened. And then you have teachers that don't make it any easier for you. And you have teachers that make an impression on you, that leave scars for the rest of your life. And I came across that type of teacher. But it was a scary experience, it was very frustrating for me. I can never say that I was an A student, because I had to struggle so hard, to keep the English language to understand. To understand social studies, understand math.

When her son started school, Vivian reconsidered her approach of speaking only Spanish at home: 'That opened my mind, and I says, no. I can't do that to him. I will start him at home, because I would never want my son to be sitting in the classroom where he's considered an idiot. I just didn't want that for my son.' Once Richard started pre-school, Vivian and Miquel immediately switched their home language to '90% English'. They both believe that Richard's childhood experiences will be more positive if his home language is consistent with the language of the school. As Miquel affirms: 'He's going to make all his education in English. English is his primary [language].' While Vivian and Miquel continue to use Spanish with each other and with friends, they speak predominantly in English to Richard. While they do not deter him from speaking Spanish with his friends, and while they hope he 'picks up' Spanish, they emphasise that English

is his primary language, and his most important language, because it is the language of the school.

The Hildalgos have decisively shifted from Spanish to English because they do not want their son to experience humiliation, and they believe school will be a better experience, socially and academically, if his primary language is consistent with the dominant language. In order to help their son adapt to the overall English-speaking community in school and the neighbourhood, they have decisively changed their home language-use patterns from Spanish to English. The reasoning behind this complex and difficult decision is that given their own difficulty with fitting in at school, they put more emphasis on English language acquisition and much less emphasis on Spanish language maintenance.

The shift from Spanish to English can be a deliberate choice, as exemplified by the Hildalgo family. However, even if the shift is not deliberate, but occurs 'naturally' by unplanned circumstances, English dominance, if not English monolingualism, is seen as preferable by families who are shifting from Spanish to English. This may be seen in the second case-study family to be presented: the Morales family.

### *The Morales family*

After moving from Puerto Rico to Riverfront Hills when he was about eight years old, for the greater part of his childhood, Juan Morales grew up in a monolingual English household because his father was married to a non-Spanish-speaking woman. Juan recalls difficulty in school associated with the shift from Spanish to English:

It was hard; it was really a struggle, because all I knew was Spanish, and then I was learning how to speak English...Everything was, everything was really a struggle for me, because I started in one language, and I had to gradually move into another language, and I had to do it, something you have to do. It was rough; it was hard.

Even though his mother, who is a Spanish monolingual, came to reside in Riverfront Hills, Juan never relearned Spanish. By the time Juan had become a father himself, he had lost most of his Spanish proficiency, remembering only a few words. Juan comments that he saw no importance in Spanish for his children, 'being that everything in school is English'. Most notably, Juan Morales seems to have internalised the negative associations with Spanish that he experienced in Riverfront Hills. Juan shakes his head and remarks:

A lot of them don't want to fit in, they just want to, they think they own Riverfront Hills, these drug dealers they come over here, *unbelievable*. They should at least try to blend in and get along. Lot of people don't. Getting along with other people, that's how it is. Which I realized that a long time ago. You got to get along with somebody, want to get anywhere, you know, you got to get along, it's, a basic thing. English is part of that.

For Juan, even though he is Puerto Rican, he 'feels funny' when people will speak Spanish. He says that using Spanish is rude, and is to blame for conflicts between Hispanics and non-Hispanics. Further, Juan associates the Spanish language with a host of stereotypes and social ills. As he describes:

**Juan:** If they're being taught too much of one language, and not enough of another, you know, then they're going to lose something, you know. They're not going to pick up on the American language [English], they're just going to stay basically with the Spanish, which is what they do. And that hurts them. 'Cause when they go to school, and all they're talking is Spanish, and they don't want to learn the English language, *they don't* want to learn that English language, of course they have programs they can learn anything they want.

**R:** Why do you think that is? Why would...

**Juan:** Ignorance, really their ignorance. They just want to stick with one language, and the hell with English, stick with Spanish, and that really knocks the hell out of them, because I've seen kids that they come from Spanish-speaking families like that and all they want to do is speak Spanish, and when they go to school, they don't want to learn that English language, even though they have people to teach them.

**R:** And what happens to those kids?

**Juan:** Those kids wind up, they drop out of school, girls wind up pregnant, very young, at a very young age, and that happens a lot. That's no good, that hurts them.

Juan also states that only one of his children wanted to learn Spanish – his eldest son, Ricardo. Ricardo is in prison now for a drug-related offence. And Juan states with intentional irony, 'Ricardo is picking up Spanish now. He's picking it up now. But you don't want to pick it up in jail [half-hearted, sad laugh].'

Thus, it seems, families that exhibit patterns of language shift stress the importance of English over the importance of learning Spanish. Thus, they raise a child who is English dominant or, if need be, a child who is English monolingual.

### **Seizing the opportunities of both languages, or families maintaining Spanish with English**

Conversely, the families who maintain Spanish at home with their children respond differently to the legitimation of English and ideological forces at work in Riverfront Hills.

#### *The Martinez family*

Claudia Martinez's grandmother and mother emigrated from the Dominican Republic to New York State. Claudia was born and raised in Brooklyn, New York but has lived the greater part of her adulthood in Riverfront Hills. Claudia's first language was Spanish; and she has always spoken only Spanish at home. She is fully-bilingual in both reading and writing. She attended community college in Riverfront Hills and received an Associates Degree in Human Services. She is the Family Coordinator with the Head Start Program in Riverfront Hills. Claudia has six children. When their children were born, Claudia and her first husband made the decision to give the children Spanish as their first language and to continue to speak only Spanish to them even after they began school. David Martinez is Claudia's second husband. He was born and raised in New York City. His mother, who was born in Puerto Rico, presently lives nearby in Riverfront Hills.

David is a minister in a Christian Church. Now, with their eight children, David and Claudia speak predominantly in Spanish.

Both David and Claudia are involved in their children's education, supervising homework, attending parent-teacher conferences, maintaining a strong, close-knit family relationship at home, and discussing the language and cultural choices with their children. They are both concerned that they and their children may be subject to racial prejudice in the community. They discuss these issues as they feel it is appropriate with their children, particularly the older ones. They emphasise with their children the importance of maintaining their heritage language and culture, while simultaneously also succeeding in the mainstream culture.

Claudia Martinez is very concerned with the prejudice in Riverfront Hills towards Hispanics and the Spanish language:

People would hear us in the store, and they would see us, and say, oh you have eight kids, you know and the way that Hispanic people, especially here in Riverfront Hills, are looked at, it's like, just like to sit home and see soap operas, don't clean their house, just eat and get fat and grow old and die, and be on welfare all their lives, not true. It's all not true.

Using Spanish in public places will cause people who overhear to respond, and the families feel that the negative responses are a reflection of racial and ethnic discrimination. In Riverfront Hills, the use of Spanish in public is negatively perceived, and so too is the use of Spanish in the schools negatively perceived – permeating all levels from the classroom to the school board. And for Claudia, this reflects racial discrimination against Hispanics and the Spanish language. She angrily asserts that there are those 'that believe that we're good for nothing'. She further asserts that if Hispanics maintain their culture and language – while also succeeding in the mainstream – that 'someday these people will give us the benefit of the doubt not to judge us so quickly'.

Knowing both languages gives her an advantage that a monolingual person does not have. Claudia discusses how this belief has influenced her parenting and raising of bilingual children:

They know, they know. And because they know that, I guess because we have told them this, and they realise where they are, and where they stand. They're going to make their best, so when their little friend who's blonde with blue eyes doesn't get into the honour roll, they do. And what they're doing is telling these people, the school board, or whoever, well that professor or teacher who might be, didn't believe, you didn't believe in me when I came here the first week, but hey, look at me now.

In response to perceived linguistic and ethnic prejudice that she has experienced in Riverfront Hills, Claudia Martinez has decided not to strip her children of Spanish, but conversely, to raise bilingual and bicultural children who embrace their heritage language and culture. It is in bilingualism and biculturalism that she hopes that her children will have both access to school and job opportunities that English proficiency promises to give them, and also the connection with and pride in their Hispanic heritage that Spanish proficiency may promise.

### The Diaz family

Vera and Jose Diaz are both second-generation US mainland Puerto Ricans, born and raised in New York City. Both say that they were 'totally bilingual, ever since I can remember'. They married in New York City and have lived in Riverfront Hills for approximately 23 years. Vera received her Associates Degree in Social Work and Human Services and works for a state senator in the state capital. She is fully bilingual, with self-reported equal competence in reading and writing in both languages. She is heavily involved in the Hispanic community in Riverfront Hills, serving as an advocate on behalf of her neighbours who are less educated, have less English fluency, and have less access to systems of information and power, such as the school board and local and state government agencies. Jose works as a supervisor in a successful construction company. At work he speaks only English; he will use Spanish when absolutely necessary. But, as a Hispanic, bilingual supervisor of both Hispanic and non-Hispanic staff, he often feels 'between a rock and a hard place' when language and culture seem to become an issue in his workplace. Jose identifies himself as a Puerto-Rican American, and tries to pass on 'both identities' to his children. Their home language choices are very deliberate, and they have always discussed their choices with their children: they speak both Spanish and English, but heavily emphasise Spanish over English in the home. They actively seek means of bringing Spanish from the outside world into their home through the media.

Vera and Jose have also emphasised to their children the importance of both maintaining their culture and language, and also succeeding in the mainstream. And succeeding in the mainstream, *as an Hispanic*, is the most effective means of responding strongly to hegemony within the schools and community. Their 17-year-old son, Max, is an honours student taking Advanced Placement (AP) courses. He will also be taking college-level courses during his senior year in high school. He feels that at school he is seen as an enigma because he is Hispanic and an honours student. While this angers Max, he states directly that he has learned the lessons of pride and self-worth from his parents:

I know they [the teachers in school] were surprised with my last name, and they don't like it that the lower-class citizen could do better than them, 'cause that's what they consider Puerto Rican students. Like lower class. A lot of the majority are held lower than the others, and they're held there, if they're there, they're just there because that's normal for them, you know? They don't know what it's like to go ahead of themselves, and look down at everybody else, they don't know what that's like. It's really tough, you try to stand up, and they try to hit you back down. Like my mother had said, they took the Spanish channel off, and they put really obnoxious hours for the Spanish channel, seven at night, to six in the morning. So I mean, I, in this community, I've always grown up with that, so you know, just from my parents, I have learned to ignore them, just don't even think about it, let it get me mad 'cause they're not worth it.

The Diaz family's decisions are very much based on the desire to succeed, and being bilingual and bicultural is part of that success, for them, in Riverfront Hills.



## Discussion and Conclusion: Family Language Choice

The four families in this study base their complex but different decisions of language use on a straightforward and shared desire: they wish for themselves and for their children a chance of a better life, a chance for better educational, economic, and social opportunities. Each of the families sees language as playing a role in reaching these desires. Each of the families recognises the importance of English proficiency for advancement in, for example, education and employment. However, families who are shifting to English seem to view the simultaneous maintenance of Spanish as potentially blocking the achievement of these goals. On the other hand, the families who have decided to maintain Spanish seem to challenge the legitimisation of English by challenging the very notion that English needs to supplant Spanish. They counter this legitimisation of English by emphasising that Spanish is just as important for achieving the promises of a better life. These families seem to understand that their opportunity, and their children's opportunity, is in learning English and in maintaining Spanish. Their opportunity is in accessing English and in retaining their ethnicity. The families who are maintaining Spanish at home suggest an awareness of the paradox of linguistic hegemony – that the promises of 'English-only' can actually only be yielded by bilingualism, by becoming fluent in the dominant language and by maintaining the heritage language and culture. It is because of these families, and their chosen path of language use, that Riverfront Hills continues to see the growth in heritage language speakers: native-born speakers of a language other than English.

Given the rising numbers of heritage language speakers in the United States, social and political hegemonic forces notwithstanding, it is crucial that a framework of resistance to linguistic hegemony be established which takes into account the paradox of linguistic hegemony as an explanatory dynamic between heritage language maintenance and successful resistance to linguistic hegemony.

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