

The Sanitizing of U.S. Spanish in Academia

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Abstract: *The rapidly increasing number of Spanish speakers in the United States has resulted in increased national linguistic tensions. Groups such as U.S. English aim to restrict the use of all non-English languages in general, and Spanish in particular; in certain public domains. At the same time, another group, which includes a nucleus of language scholars, is engaging in efforts to change or suppress the use of U.S. Spanish, particularly in the domain of education. In this article, the author asserts that the arguments put forward by the latter group are based principally on the attitudes of its leaders and not on carefully constructed linguistic bases. He offers an alternative model, one suggested by Cameron (1995), as a means of carrying out well-reasoned debate on the use of the Spanish language for academic purposes in the United States.*

Introduction

A commonly held precept in the field of linguistics is that no one language or variety of a language is inherently superior to another, in the sense that all are equally complex and equally useful for expressing a full range of the subtleties of human communication. Often, however, this theoretical perspective does not extend beyond the linguistic academic community. The public outrage over the Ebonics issue was but one manifestation of the “commonsense” belief that there do indeed exist certain varieties of a language that are “superior” to others. As Cameron (1995) asserts, there are those who manipulate this belief with the goal of advancing certain nonlinguistic agendas, be they conservative or liberal. Such manipulation was evident in the Ebonics dispute: The core of the public controversy lay much more in educational, ethnic, and racial issues than in a reasoned linguistic debate over the salient features of a group of American English dialects.

The tendency to polemicize nonlinguistic debates through language issues in the United States is by no means restricted to English, but extends to other languages as well. Perhaps the biggest public controversies on language use center on Spanish, the most commonly used U.S. tongue after English. According to U.S. Census Bureau and Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) data from the year 2000, this nation is the fifth largest Spanish-speaking country in the world, with some thirty-three million Spanish speakers (Villa, 2000). The importance of U.S. Spanish as an economic force and a cultural and societal resource in the Spanish-speaking world is undeniable. In spite of this, there exist factions in the United States that seek to either eradicate or restrict the use of native U.S. Spanish varieties in various contexts, that is, to “sanitize” them.

The title and content of this article are inspired by the analytical paradigm proposed by Cameron (1995), which she calls *verbal hygiene*. Her theoretical approach and analyses offer powerful tools for gaining a better understanding of what at first glance might seem a wholly contradictory set of attitudes toward U.S. Spanish. A principal goal of this article is to examine how the theoretical framework that Cameron proposes can serve to focus discussions on Spanish

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language use in one particular domain, that of the academic world.

Movements to Suppress U.S. Spanish

One faction that seeks to restrict or eliminate the use of Spanish in the United States consists of organizations such as “U.S. English.” This group, along with others, endeavors to establish the most widely spoken language of this country, English, as its only official governmental language, excluding all other languages from that particular domain. Researchers such as Gynan (1993), Zentella (1994), Thomas (1996), and King (1997), among others, have studied such organizations to better understand the underlying motivations for instituting the de facto national language as the official one. A common consensus arising from such research is that issues other than language usage spur such movements.

Gynan (1993), for example, writes:

At the outset of this analysis of the publications of U.S. English, it was hypothesized that a general fear, shared by many Americans and developed on the basis of personal observation and hearsay, of change brought by Hispanics to the United States was the driving force behind the policies proposed by the organization. This hypothesis has been confirmed at every level. (p. 31)

King (1997) states:

Language is a convenient surrogate for nonlinguistic claims that are often awkward to articulate, for they amount to a demand for more political and economic power (p. 56). . . . Official English obviously has a lot to do with concerns about immigration, perhaps especially Hispanic immigration. America may be threatened by immigration; I don't know. But America is not threatened by language (p. 58).

Thomas (1996) notes:

Proponents of Official English have developed the wrong solution to the wrong problem. Legislating English as the official language of the U.S. is not about “preserving bonds” or “providing opportunities”; it is about restricting language rights, limiting access to education, impeding socioeconomic mobility, and ultimately making assimilation in the American nationality for specific populations more difficult. (p. 137)

Finally, Zentella (1994) observes:

[S]ome analysts came to blame ethnolinguistic pluralism for... political upheaval, instead of blaming the political, economic, and social inequalities that put

some groups at the mercies of others. I see the heat generated around discussions of French-only signs in Canada and English-only laws in the U.S. as *smoke-screens that keep both countries from resolving their underlying problems of inequality.* (p. 159; emphasis added)

In sum, these assessments indicate that organizations such as U.S. English, which aim to restrict the use of non-English languages in general and Spanish in particular, are motivated by concerns not of a linguistic nature. At one level, this is not surprising, as the majority of those involved in such movements are not trained language scholars and base their judgments on “personal observation and hearsay,” as Gynan (1993) notes, rather than on scientific methodology. What is surprising, however, is the existence of another faction that does indeed possess advanced language training and also seeks to change, suppress, or modify the varieties of Spanish spoken in the United States. A discussion of these works follows, after an introduction to the framework for examining the motives for using language as a proxy for debating nonlinguistic issues.

Verbal Hygiene

Cameron (1995) asserts that certain groups attempt to advance particular agendas by controlling or prescribing language use. This is by no means limited to any particular political or philosophical persuasion. Those on the left espouse “political correctness,” and would eliminate certain lexical items or phrases from the language due to, for example, gender or physical references. Examples would be the use of “server” for “waiter” or “waitress,” “chairperson” for “chairman,” “differently abled” for “handicapped,” and “vertically challenged” for “short,” to name but a few instances. As noted above, those on the right would implement an official governmental language to further conservative agendas, one of which is to gain control of the immigration of certain ethnic or socioeconomic groups.

This “verbal hygiene,” or the use of language as a proxy for pursuing some other agenda, is often implemented through what Cameron describes as an appeal to mass hysteria. Again, the national debate over the Ebonics issue is an example of this phenomenon. It is doubtful that the decision of one single school board in a nation of some 276 million people¹ would have a tremendous impact on the direction of public education in this country. Yet the outcry over this language issue reached across international boundaries, creating debates in the press, on radio, on television, and through the Internet. What was essentially a request for respect for a certain speech variety escalated into a war of words that crossed political and national spectra.

Cameron (1995) suggests that an important way to

understand such attempted language control is to understand the underlying motivations that fuel such debates. She notes that “arguments about language [have] provided a symbolic way of addressing conflicts about class, race, culture and gender. It is true that this symbolic deployment of language tends to obscure *the true source of disagreement and discomfort*” (pp. 216–17; emphasis added). In dealing with this obfuscation, she asserts: “The question... cannot be, ‘how do we get rid of verbal hygiene, and of the irrational impulses that lie behind it?’: for I do not think that we can get rid of them; at most we can try to become more critically aware of them and, if we think it desirable, to change the social conditions that give rise to or intensify certain kinds of desire” (p. 222). In working towards this goal, she proposes a set of ways to engage in an informed debate on language use issues.

(1) Cameron’s first recommendation deals with the relationship between language and values. She suggests that “one *can* legitimately make value judgements on the use of language.” Furthermore, “An acceptable public discourse of language and value must be accountable to certain norms that we demand of other public discourses — reasoned argument, logic, the marshalling of evidence, the making of relevant distinctions and so on” (p. 224).

(2) Cameron’s second suggestion refers to rules and reasons. Regarding rules that seem arbitrary, she asserts that “we should seek to know on what basis such rules have been promulgated, going on to judge each rule by the cogency of the argument advanced for it” (p. 225).

(3) The third recommendation addresses hidden agendas and vested interests. Cameron observes that “[m]ost of the verbal hygiene practices... are not about language at all, and therefore enquiring into the heart of the reasons for particular rules will not always take you to the heart of the matter. When evaluating any act or practice of verbal hygiene, we should ask ourselves what and whose interests it serves” (p. 226).

(4) Finally, Cameron’s fourth recommendation stresses due regard for facts. She notes that we must “bear in mind that disputes about language may turn on matters of fact as well as value, and that the arguments should be informed by an awareness of the facts. *It may seem astonishing... that such an elementary point requires any spelling out*; but in a lot of discourse on language (expert discourse included) there seems to be remarkable difficulty in disentangling the different kinds of statements... that can figure in an argument, and deciding what value to accord them” (p. 227; emphasis added).

In light of the four points of Cameron’s model, I will examine the publications of certain linguistic scholars to better understand their attempts to sanitize Spanish language usage in the United States.

Linguists and Prescriptivism

Again, a central tenet of linguistics is the equality between languages, or varieties of a language, for human communication. Another is the common distinction made between prescription and description. *Prescription* is considered the realm of those who write slanted, marginally informed guides on “correct” and “incorrect” language usage, whereas *description* represents a nonjudgmental, disinterested scientific approach to language study. In many linguistic circles, prescriptivism is anathema. For example, during a conference presentation of an earlier form of this article to a group of linguists of various theoretical backgrounds, I asked how many of those present regarded themselves as prescriptivists. Not a single hand was raised, and a rather sharp discussion about the appropriateness of employing the label “prescriptivist” with that group followed.

In reality, however, linguists can and do prescribe language usage, despite prescriptivism’s status as an unacceptable academic practice. As Cameron (1995) points out, those who specialize in the study of language are not immune to transgressing the very precepts they advance. Such is the case in the research of certain scholars who have published articles on U.S. Spanish. Regarding language instruction, for example, a spirited debate has existed since the early part of the 20th century over which variety or dialect should form the basis of Spanish language instruction and materials, and over who should teach the classes. Certain researchers hold that native varieties are (or were) not adequate for use in the academy and must be modified or abandoned by Spanish speakers entering academic realms. The literature produced by this group focuses on transforming native speakers of U.S. Spanish into better imitators of other varieties of the language and on instructing nonnative speakers or second-language learners in the use of a nonnative variety of “appropriate” Spanish.

Language scholars who have promoted such a view during this century include Espinosa (1921; 1923), Barker (1972), Torreblanca (1997), Hidalgo (1990; 1997), Porras (1997), and Valdés and Geoffrion-Vinci (1998), to name only a few who have published on the topic. García (1993), discussing this issue, notes that “Although of Hispanic descent, Aurelio Espinosa advocated against the hiring of foreign teachers and against a Latin American variety and even the concept of Latin America itself” (p. 76). For scholars such as Espinosa, the purest, most elegant, and most intellectually sound Spanish variety was Castilian. Those best suited to teach were nonforeign, and presumably non-Hispanic, instructors; García (1993, p. 76) quotes Espinosa as writing, “American teachers must do in the future 99 percent of the teaching of Spanish” (1921, p. 281).

This distinctly prescriptive preference for European dialects, and for non-Hispanic teachers of Spanish, held sway in the United States until relatively recently. García

(1993), citing Wonder (1965), observes: "In a 1965 article entitled 'The Bilingual Mexican American as a potential teacher of Spanish' *Hispania* finally acknowledged the Spanish of Latinos, and the importance that the language had in defining their personal and professional identity" (p. 78). That is, until recently, even native Spanish speakers not of European descent were suspected of speaking an inferior form of the language by major authorities on the teaching profession.

Using Cameron's analytical framework, one motivation for Espinosa's discouragement of foreign-born native Spanish speakers from teaching Spanish in the United States has easily identifiable underlying economic motives. Restricting foreign-born Spanish speakers' access to the classroom would guarantee more jobs for U.S. citizens trained as teachers, a motivation that would become even stronger as the Great Depression loomed. At the same time, there existed U.S. citizens who were native speakers of Spanish; these individuals would have been ideal candidates for training as language teachers. However, by reifying the Castilian variety, these potential teachers were excluded as well, based not on citizenship, but on the type of language they spoke. This had much less to do with economic factors than with social class structure, a point that I will return to.

The reification of European Spanish may now be in relative decline; however, the tendency to consider non-U.S. varieties as superior still remains in certain circles. Torreblanca (1997), for example, is very clear on the matter:

Cualquier angloparlante de los Estados Unidos, en cualquier parte del país, que quiera aprender español, debería elegir la variante de la lengua española hablada en México, en la Ciudad de México, pues esta variante le permitirá comunicarse, sin dificultad alguna excepto ocasionalmente en el léxico (este problema es insoluble), con el mayor número de personas en el mundo hispanico. Un hispanohablante nacido en San Antonio de Texas o en Los Angeles de California, debería también elegir el español corriente de la Ciudad de México si quiere engrandecer sus habilidades comunicativas en español. (p. 138)

[Any English speaker in the United States, in whatever part of the country, who wants to learn Spanish, should select the variety of the Spanish language spoken in Mexico, in Mexico City, as this variety will permit him or her to communicate with the greatest number of people in the Hispanic world without difficulty, except occasionally in the lexicon (this problem is insoluble). A Spanish speaker born in San Antonio, Texas, or in Los Angeles, California, should also select the common Spanish of Mexico City if he or she wants to increase his or her communicative abilities in Spanish.]

Earlier, Marie Barker (1972) openly categorized usages of Spanish by native U.S. speakers into two distinct categories: good and bad, or "se dice" and "no se dice." More recently, Hidalgo (1997), while expressing respect for native varieties, feels that they need to be "normalized" by the creation of dictionaries that would codify certain usages of U.S. Spanish speakers for the benefit of that group. Porras (1997) endorses a pedagogical program that pays close attention to academic and "upper-class" Spanish, the *norma culta* or "cultivated standard" of the language — along with U.S. varieties. So, in spite of a relative softening of certain negative scholarly attitudes toward U.S. Spanish, current manifestations of Espinosa's prescriptivism still persist. For example, Valdés and Geoffrion-Vinci (1998), citing Hudson (1994, p. 297) assert :

[O]ur research suggests that, in order for bilingual students to develop their approximative or learner varieties further, they should be exposed not only to written texts of a literary nature but also to examples of written and oral language that present clearly the *high varieties of Spanish* as they are typically used, that is, in contexts and situations in which language is "precise, logically explicit" and "minimally dependent on upon simultaneous transmission over non-linguistic channels or upon prior understanding resulting from the overlapping backgrounds of the interlocutors." (p. 495; emphasis added)

In sum, García (1993) notes that certain U.S. groups have used Spanish language instruction to further nonlinguistic agendas. She asserts that, in accordance with an unwritten Spanish language policy, "Spanish has been used as a *resource for their own benefit* by Anglos, Spaniards, Latin Americans and even Latinos during all [U.S.] historical periods" (p. 72). To this grouping must be added researchers of the school of thought mentioned above. This comes at the expense of native varieties: "In the United States, there has always been more attention paid to an elite Spanish foreign tradition than to a popular Spanish U.S. tradition" (García 1993, p. 72). The next question, then, is, What are the origins of such attitudes among language scholars?

The Sanitizing of U.S. Spanish: Historic Roots

Following Cameron's recommendations, let us bring some pertinent facts into the discussion of verbal hygiene to promulgate a reasoned debate. One fruitful area to consider is the history of the study of the Spanish language. In this scholarly tradition, the reification of a single dialect over other equally valid varieties is a prescriptivist tendency that stretches back in modern times at least to the reign of the Reyes Católicos of Spain, Fernando and Isabel. As part of

the consolidation of the Spanish crown and territories, these monarchs instituted the Castilian dialect as the national language, officially establishing the hegemony of one particular variety over others. Nebrija's grammar of that variety, commonly considered as the first modern grammatical treatise of a vernacular idiom, appeared in the momentous year 1492. Later, in 1713, the Real Academia Española was established, with a principal goal of maintaining the Castilian variety as the prestige form of the Spanish language. This goal is still expressed today on the organization's Web site: "*Su propósito [de la Academia] fue el de fijar las voces y vocablos de la lengua castellana en su mayor propiedad, elegancia y pureza*" [The purpose (of the royal Spanish Academy) was to "define the expressions and words of the Castilian language in its best propriety, elegance, and purity."] (<http://www.rae.es>). Thus, since the establishment of a politically unified Spanish-speaking nation, there has been a politically dictated tie between one variety of Spanish and the "standard" form of that language.

A consequence of this tradition is that in the Spanish-speaking world, the language spoken in a nation's capital, in particular by the educated or economic elite of that city, forms the "standard" variety often referred to by those who study language. This tendency has been replicated throughout the Spanish-speaking world. There are 22 Academies currently in existence, including the Academia Norteamericana in the United States (<http://www.georgetown.edu/academia>). If the Real Academia Española no longer holds complete sway in language prescription, it certainly continues to be the central model for such purposes. Common terms in Hispanic linguistics such as *norma culta* and *norma rural*, while perhaps intended for purely descriptive purposes, nevertheless carry with them a certain value judgment regarding language varieties, "cult" being better and "rural" being less desirable (I return to this point below). It may well be the case that some of those in the field of Spanish linguistics, in spite of their training, continue to use this model for determining the "best" variety of Spanish to speak. This would appear to be the case in Torreblanca's (1997) prescription, mentioned above: He asserts that the variety spoken in the Latin American capital with the largest number of speakers is the "best" variety of Spanish.

The attempt to reify one spoken variety as a standard is not the only goal of organizations such as the Academies. Another major task of these organizations is to establish and codify the *written* form of the language as well. Thus it is that a particularly strong tie has been established between some spoken form of Spanish and its orthographic representation, such that a written form of the language has become intimately intertwined in the creation of the perception of what a standard variety might be. The impact

of this relationship on linguists cannot be underestimated. As Cheshire (1999, p. 130) notes in her discussion of standard English, "the most relevant aspect of our social background is that linguists have necessarily had many years of formal education and exposure to standard English. Standard English, as is well known, has been heavily influenced by written English." She continues:

In short, linguists have inevitably had a long-standing and intensive contact with standard English. The nature of standard English as primarily a written variety, together with the immersion of academics in written English, does not augur well for their recognition of structures that may be more typical of spoken English than written English. (1999, p. 131)

I have asserted elsewhere (Villa, 1996) that there are fundamental differences between spoken and written varieties of a language, a rather unremarkable distinction for the linguistic community in general. However, the observation that there are important differences between spoken and written language bears repeating. As Davis (1999) writes, "Another problem with the twentieth-century idea of standard English is that it is often unclear whether linguists are referring to a spoken linguistic reality, a written variety of English, or an idealisation" (p. 70). I assert that this is the case in many studies on U.S. Spanish; in mentioning "standard" or "academic" Spanish, little or no attempt is made to establish what type of language is referred to. This is certainly evident in the 1998 Valdés and Geoffrion-Vinci article; the authors repeatedly refer to "academic Spanish" without making it clear whether they refer to a spoken linguistic reality, a written variety, or an idealization. In the section titled "Academic discourse and Chicano bilinguals" (1998, pp. 477–78) they apparently intend to define a spoken linguistic reality, but do not define what that reality might be. They instead imply the tautological definition that "academic Spanish is Spanish spoken by academics," a rather unhelpful explanation for those interested in knowing precisely what academic Spanish consists of.

In sum, the history of the linguistic study of Spanish must be taken into account in understanding the approach that linguists use to research U.S. varieties of the language. That history has left us with certain realities, such as the existence of 22 Academies that attempt to standardize Spanish and the tendency to use written forms of the language as the benchmark for studying spoken forms. However, the existence of those 22 Academies only underscores the difficulty of establishing any one variety of the language as its spoken or written as a standard. As Phillipson (1999) observes:

[P]luricentricity is a term mostly used in linguistics to refer to the fact that one language has several centers from which norms for correctness emanate and radi-

ate, for instance, in the form of dictionaries and grammars. Thus German is a pluricentric language, with centers in Germany, Austria and Switzerland. The citizens of each of these countries look to their own centers for guidance (endocentric norms). By contrast, people in neighboring countries who speak German as a mother tongue, minorities in Belgium, Denmark, France and Italy... look to Germany for guidance (exocentric norms). (p. 102)

Every country that recognizes Spanish as a principal national language has its own center for establishing endocentric norms. In addition, countries in which Spanish is a minority language, such as the United States and the Philippines, have endocentric normative organizations. It is a fact, then, that the historic move to establish a single norm has in fact bred diversity, with no one geographic area dependent on exocentric authorities for establishing language usage. It may be, however, that certain linguists, academically socialized by the long history of Spanish language study, have not taken this plurality into consideration in their work on U.S. Spanish, and rely on the unsupported assumption that one “standard” form of the language, either spoken or written, does indeed exist.

Class Issues in the Sanitizing of U.S. Spanish

As noted earlier, social class in general is an important factor in understanding attempts to sanitize a language. In particular, academics’ attitudes toward social class are crucial in analyzing their research on U.S. Spanish. As previously observed, certain nomenclature used for descriptive purposes by linguists is not completely value free (e.g., the phrases *norma culta* and *norma rural*). Even more value-laden is the metaphorical terminology used by some linguists that features the terms *high* and *low*, as in “high register” and “low register,” “high language,” and “low language,” and so on.

Lakoff and Johnson (1980) have shown that certain types of metaphors signal important cultural and social beliefs and attitudes. They observe: “The most fundamental values in a culture will be coherent with the metaphorical structure of the most fundamental concepts in the culture” (p. 22). Such is the case for the “high–low” metaphor. In English, for example, Lakoff and Johnson assert that “high” is equated with “high status” and “good,” whereas “low” is equated with “low status” and “bad.” They offer the following examples (among others):

High Status is Up: Low Status is Down

He has a *lofty* position. She’ll *rise* to the top. He’s at the *peak* of his career. He’s *climbing* the ladder. He has little *upward* mobility. He’s at the *bottom* of the social hierarchy. She *fell* in status.

and

Good is Up: Bad is Down

Things are looking *up*. We hit a *peak* last year, but it’s been *downhill* ever since. Things are at an all-time *low*. He does *high*-quality work (p. 16).

Linguists who employ such terms in their research might argue that they use such labels in a specific manner that does not imply judgmental values, but, given the deeply imbedded cultural and social values embodied in such metaphors, there is no guarantee that the audience who reads their work shares this same degree of detachment. Thus, in speaking of “high Spanish” or “high register,” there is a distinct possibility that this will be taken to mean “high status” and “good,” even though this value judgment was not intended by the user of the high–low metaphor. The reverse is true, of course, for “low Spanish” or “low register”; these may be tacitly identified as “low status” and “bad.”

The use of this type of metaphor by certain language scholars is not inconsequential for studies on U.S. Spanish. For example, Varela (2000, p. 173) clearly establishes this bias when she writes: “*La mayoría [de préstamos] pertenece a un bajo nivel de hablantes con poca cultura que no hablan bien ni el inglés ni el español.*” [The majority (of loan words) is used by a low level of speakers with little culture who speak neither English nor Spanish well.] The juxtaposition of “low level” with “speakers with little culture” demonstrates a negative value judgment on the part of the researcher, further reinforced by her citing an unfounded popular myth that such individuals speak neither English nor Spanish “well.”

In another instance, Valdés and Geoffrion-Vinci (1998), discussing the language usage of “Chicano” bilinguals, write:

As might be expected given our previous discussion of class-based language differences, we conjecture that the linguistic repertoire of most ordinary Mexicans who emigrate to the United States are generally made up of mid to low registers of Spanish. This is important to our understanding of the Spanish spoken by Chicano bilingual students, because it is these registers that serve as the models of language as students acquire Spanish in their families and in their communities. (p. 477)

The situation described by these researchers is by no means unique to those whose country of origin is Mexico; with the exception of the initial immigrants from Cuba in the late 1950s and early 1960s, the majority of Spanish speakers who settle in the U.S. are “ordinary,” a euphemism employed to avoid such terms as “campesino,” “peasant,” or “working class” — the “low” social classes.

As a result, research such as that of Valdés and Geoffrion-Vinci (1998) and Varela (2000) assigns a value to U.S. varieties of Spanish based on social class, as opposed to linguistic features. It is not clear if this tendency reflects such researchers' own socialization or their attempt to impartially categorize class structure. In either case, though, it must be recognized that the class structure of U.S. Spanish speakers cannot be defined by those of other Spanish-speaking nations. While a detailed discussion of the socioeconomic and political status of U.S. Spanish speakers falls well outside the scope of this article, I will note that, according to figures from a variety of government sources, U.S. Hispanics' consumption of U.S. goods and services nationally is currently some 400 billion dollars, more than triple that of the rest of the Spanish-speaking world (Villa, 2000). The candidates engaged in the last presidential race eagerly sought U.S. Spanish speakers' votes, using Spanish in their addresses to that audience. At a state level, in New Mexico, native speakers of varieties of U.S. Spanish (i.e., "ordinary" language or "mid to low registers") work as doctors, lawyers, bankers, politicians, administrators at all levels of government, clergy, university professors, media personalities, and captains of industry; in sum, in positions commonly associated with speakers of the *"norma culta."*

The operative idea of the 1998 Valdés and Geoffrion-Vinci article, and of research of its kind, seems to be that changing speakers' language, that is, "sanitizing" it, will change their social status, thereby advancing their educational possibilities and by extension their social and economic opportunities. However, this reflects no particular linguistic reality. In the chapter titled "the new Pygmalion," examining issues in both gender and class, Cameron (1995) invokes the "Eliza Doolittle fallacy" — that changing one's speech patterns will change one's fate in life. She asserts, as do the linguists cited above who discuss the U.S. English issue, that there are forces at work other than linguistic factors that result in the educational, social, or economic disadvantages of certain speech communities. Resolving those problems, then, is not a matter of changing language, but rather of working toward ameliorating those conditions that create the social and economic disadvantages experienced by a particular group.

The relationships among social class, language varieties, and how linguists' attitudes are shaped by those factors form a highly complex topic, and the ideas presented here are only a step toward a better understanding of these dynamics. However, attempts to better comprehend these relationships are significant for many reasons, among which is deciding how best to educate U.S. Spanish speakers in their heritage language. The largest single "market" for Spanish language study in the United States consists of those who possess some communicative competency in the language, in part because much less training is necessary

for such individuals to engage in advanced language classes, be they in literature, linguistics, or culture. Institutions that recognize the value of the heritage language skills of potential Spanish-language students are likely to reap the benefits of increased enrollments, and, due to national demographic changes, will have an increasingly large "market" for their Spanish-language courses.

Therefore, it is hard to understand why certain researchers would wish to restrict the entry of such students into their language programs by implying, either implicitly or explicitly, that the students' language is "low" or bad. This could possibly cause negative affective reactions among heritage language students and reduce their enrollment in language programs. As Pérez-Leroux and Glass (2000) note, "An instructor may speak derisively of particular words, pronunciations or grammatical structures that are native to some students, thereby alienating these students or leading them to underestimate their own language skills" (p. 59). More research in this area is needed, to avoid counterproductive stances such as those represented by the 1998 Valdés and Geoffrion-Vinci work.

Conclusion

U.S. Spanish speakers face a double jeopardy related to their bilinguality. At one level, they face strong, vocal, public disapproval of Spanish ("This is America, speak English"), promulgated by organizations such as U.S. English. Legislation like California's Proposition 227 seeks to eliminate whatever minimal formal training in their heritage language they might receive through bilingual education. At another level, they are confronted by certain language experts who either explicitly or implicitly assert that their Spanish language skills are inadequate for any meaningful educational experience and are best reserved for talking with grandma and grandpa back home.

An achievable solution to this sanitizing of Spanish in academia, one well within the grasp of language scholars at all levels, is to engage in the "acceptable public discourse of language and value" among ourselves as researchers and teachers, as Cameron (1995) suggests. This entails not only pursuing the traditional types of research and publication characteristic of the field, but also recognizing the extra-academic attitudes we bring to our studies. For example, I have written elsewhere (Villa 1996; 1997b) that U.S. Spanish varieties are completely adequate for academic instruction. This assertion is based not only on empirical research on U.S. Spanish regarding the expression of subtle and complex communicative expressions such as those of epistemic and deontic modalities (Villa 1997a), but also on the fact that I am a member of a U.S. Spanish speech community referred to as "ordinary."

The stories of survival my father told me of his family picking cotton in the West Texas fields and still not earning

enough to put a nickel's worth of salt in the beans, of weathering the virulent racism of the high plains of Eastern New Mexico in the beginning decades of the twentieth century, have lent a heroic aura not only to my grandparents and their ultimate success in this society, but to their way of speaking as well, which consisted of perhaps the "lowest" variety of Mexican Spanish of northern Guanajuato. These facts inescapably enter into my research agenda, and are part and parcel of the direction and shape it takes. They are also a major factor in the decision I've made, as a linguist, to exclusively speak that "low" Spanish with my sons since their birth, with no fear of damaging their academic futures. In short, these observations are cards that I lay on the research table to clarify at least part of my academic agenda.

I am not suggesting with these assertions that language scholars who research U.S. Spanish engage in the kind of soul-baring confessions typical of daytime talk show circuits, but rather that they consider what impact such facts have on their academic research, their publication programs, and their teaching. Doing so can only sharpen and refine research on U.S. Spanish and its place in academia. As an example, I return to Valdés and Geoffrion Vinci (1998), who write, "In sum, our research in the present study *directly implies* that current popular pedagogical approaches to the teaching of heritage languages — to the degree that they involve primarily the use of mid- to low-registers — may be in need of serious reexamination" (p. 495; emphasis added).

With this statement, they suggest a sweeping reconsideration of curriculum design, presumably nationwide in scope, based on a study that examines the speech of a total of 16 individuals. This type of generalization cannot by any stretch of statistical science be reasonably supported; it appears to reflect those researchers' attitudes toward U.S. Spanish varieties as opposed to a careful scientific conclusion drawn from an adequate sampling of data. Paying close attention to the facts at hand, and to the values brought to the academic discourse on language use, can help avoid such methodological lapses.

In conclusion, among the pertinent facts (see, e.g., Villa 2000; 2001) are that heritage Spanish speakers in the United States:

1. Form the largest minority language group in this nation;
2. Generally speak some popular variety of Spanish — of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Dominican, Central American, or other origin — that is as linguistically valid as any other dialect of the language;
3. Have a significant economic presence among the world's Spanish speakers, and;
4. Represent a tremendous resource to the field of language research and education.

Engaging in an academic exchange that encourages well-reasoned judgments on U.S. Spanish based on these and other facts, as well as considering the values held by researchers and educators toward heritage Spanish, can only improve academic debates on this topic. Such efforts may also help to dispel commonly held popular myths about U.S. Spanish and to develop appropriate materials and curricula for its teaching, among other advantages (see, e.g., Nichols & Colón, 2000; Villegas Rogers & Medley, 2001). If these goals are achieved, U.S. Spanish language programs will reap increasing educational dividends as the heritage Spanish language community grows throughout the twenty-first century.

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Notes

1. Population figures are from the most recent estimates of the U.S. Census Bureau, available at <http://www.census.gov/>.

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