

## Aquí el español es el dialecto: Home Country Language Ideological Continuities among Mexican Americans in New York City

Although indigenous languages (ILs) figure prominently in Mexico in present and historical memory (e.g., Hill 1986), research on shift and maintenance in Mexican American communities has largely been concerned only with Spanish and English (e.g. Rivera-Mills, 2012). There is consequently a lack of understanding of Mexican-Americans' full linguistic ecology (Mühlhäusler 1996) and what role this plays in language choice. This study therefore examines language ideologies of Mexicans in New York City within the context of multilingualism and multidialectalism.

Data were gathered through ethnographic interviews of 15 first and 5 second generation Mexican Americans living in or around New York City. Semi-structured Interviews ranged from 20 to 40 minutes. Participants, virtually all from Puebla State, were recruited by snowball method by the interviewer, a community member. Data were extracted by qualitative discourse analysis.

Non-IL speaking participants had family members who could speak Totonac, Nahuatl or Mixteco. Both they and IL speakers often displayed ambivalence towards ILs with nominally pro-IL essentialist discourses clashing with more cosmopolitan practices and ideologies that rejected them. An example of these contradictions was one participant who cast Nahuatl as her "real" language yet could not speak it, and for all participants ILs indexed rural lifestyles associated with ancestors. Shame was an issue for IL speakers. Some reported that other IL speakers would not use the language, although they claimed to be willing to; one stated that she could only speak her IL when recalling stories of her youth. Reports of discrimination in Mexican cities were common and associated with indigenous identities indexed by ILs.

ILs were often viewed as degraded, as *dialects* as opposed the Spanish *language*. Similarly, many believed that ILs lacked writing systems and so could not be taught properly. Interestingly, English literacy was similarly constructed as an insurmountable barrier but because of its difficulty as compared to Spanish.

No second generation participant spoke an IL. However, the contrasts between ideology and practice found with respect to ILs and Spanish in Mexico appeared repeated with regard to Spanish and English in NYC. One even said that in NYC, Spanish was the "dialect" and English the language. At the same time, second generation participants also essentialized their Spanish as unique within the Latin-American community due to characteristic indigenous words and slang. One said those features made his Spanish more masculine. Yet again, those views were belied by behavior and other attitudes. Many participants' Spanish was not especially Mexican but contained South American and/or Caribbean features whereas others sometimes hyperbolized Mexicanness with *norteño* variants alien to their Puebla origins. In both cases there were often expressions of linguistic insecurity about their heritage Spanish skills.

The second generation remains largely bilingual in Spanish and English. Nevertheless, the parallels with ideas associated with sometimes recent ancestors' shift from indigenous languages to Spanish is striking. It is (admittedly speculatively) hard to see Spanish language maintenance under this ideological template.

This research consequently argues in favor of viewing immigrant language ideologies as shaped ideologies from the home country.