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### Cover Page Footnote

This article is from an earlier iteration of *Diálogo* which had the subtitle "A Bilingual Journal." The publication is now titled "Diálogo: An Interdisciplinary Studies Journal."



Photo provided by Michael Rodriguez Muñiz. Courtesy of Batey Urbano Archives.

# SPANISH LANGUAGE use in CHICAGO

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## INTRODUCTION

The Midwest is home to only 9% of U.S. Latinos, but the 81% growth of the Latino population in the Midwest between 1990 and 2000 (Center for Family and Demographic Research 2002) was the largest reported for all United States geographic areas. Several language researchers have examined how much Spanish is being used by Midwest Latinos in Minneapolis-St. Paul, Iowa, and Northwest Indiana, but only two studies – Ramirez (1991) and MacGregor-Mendoza (1999) – have studied Spanish use in Chicago. This paper reports on the results of a language use survey completed by 815 Chicago Latino high school and college students.

## SPANISH-SPEAKING CHICAGO

In Chicago, the census-reported Latino population grew 38.1% between 1990 and 2000 (U.S. Census 2000). Chicago's 753,644 Hispanics constitute just 26% of city's population, but make it the third largest Hispanic city in the United States (U.S. Census 2000)<sup>1</sup>. The two largest Latino groups are Mexican (70%) and Puerto Rican (15%), forming the second largest U.S. Mexican population after Los Angeles and the second largest Puerto Rican population after New York City (U.S. Census 2000)<sup>1</sup>. Mexican immigrants began arriving to Chicago in the early 20th century to work in the steel, meatpacking, and railroad industries, and World War I saw the influx of large numbers of Mexican workers under the *bracero* program (Año Nuevo Kerr 1976). Puerto Rican immigration to Chicago, as to many other U.S. locations, began in the late 1940s, also linked to the steel industry and other blue-collar work, and was heavily encouraged by the Migration Division Office (G. Pérez 2001). According to G. Pérez (2001), Chicago is the only place where large numbers of Mexicans and Puerto Ricans of several generations live together, work together, and marry each other<sup>2</sup>. Approximately 52% of the 1990 Census-reported Mexican population in Chicago was born abroad, while 43% of Chicago's Puerto Ricans were born in Puerto Rico (U.S. Census 1990).

Chicago's 77 residential communities are notoriously segregated – 22 of them are over 90% African-American – yet no

TABLE 1  
CHICAGO'S SIX LARGEST HISPANIC COMMUNITIES

| Geographical Area             | Latino Population | % MX and PR, 2000 | % MX and PR, 1990 |
|-------------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| Lower West Side ("Pilsen")    | 89% (44,031)      | 92% MX<br>2% PR   | 95% MX<br>3% PR   |
| Hermosa                       | 84% (22,574)      | 50% MX<br>37% PR  | 35% MX<br>54% PR  |
| South Lawndale ("La Villita") | 83% (75,613)      | 92% MX<br>2% PR   | 93% MX<br>4% PR   |
| Logan Square                  | 65% (53,833)      | 50% MX<br>35% PR  | 40% MX<br>48% PR  |
| Humboldt Park                 | 48% (31,607)      | 51% MX<br>37% PR  | 38% MX<br>55% PR  |
| West Town                     | 47% (40,966)      | 53% MX<br>36% PR  | 52% MX<br>42% PR  |

SOURCE: Census 2000 and 1990

Chicago neighborhood reports a reported Hispanic population of over 90%. Chicago's five most concentrated Latino neighborhoods are displayed in Table 1.

However, there is likely considerable undercounting of undocumented individuals in official Census reports – Lowell & Suro (2002) reported that there are 4.5 million undocumented Mexicans in the U.S. – particularly in the Lower West Side and South Lawndale, which are two long-standing Mexican ports of entry to Chicago. These areas probably have higher percentages of Hispanic residents than those reported in Table 1. For example, one high school in this study has a Hispanic student population of 97.5%, most of which is Mexican. The communities of Humboldt Park, Hermosa, and Logan Square, whose Latino populations used to be at least 50% Puerto Rican, have seen an influx of Mexicans in the past decade. In total, almost 15% of Chicago's 77 residential communities have Latino populations of 50% or greater. Several suburban areas outlying Chicago also have considerable Hispanic populations, such as Cicero (77%), Carpentersville (41%), Berwyn (38%), and Elgin (34%).

Spanish does have considerable visibility and commercial

support in Chicago. One can be attended to in Spanish over the telephone and in person for many basic services including the Department of Motor Vehicles, police, hospitals, utility companies, banks, fast-food restaurants, supermarkets, many libraries, and both airports, either because Spanish service is officially offered by the organization or because it employs individuals who are Spanish-speakers. Spanish is also widely present in advertising, entertainment, and the arts. There are three widely circulating Spanish-medium weekly newspapers in Chicago, and inserted into these newspapers are Spanish-language ads for large department stores and supermarkets, and many billboards along the city's streets are in Spanish. There are also numerous smaller newspapers produced written totally in Spanish or bilingually, and several Chicago communities produce telephone directories in Spanish. National bookstore chains carry Spanish-language books, and many large supermarket chains carry tabloids, *People* magazine, and greeting cards in Spanish. There are three free-access Spanish-language television channels and nine radio stations in Spanish. The International Latino Cultural Center of Chicago hosts the annual Latino Film Festival, and Chicago's Pilsen neighborhood is home to the largest Latino art institution in the U.S. Mexican males are highly visible in the city's restaurant industry as kitchen help and busboys. Chicago has a number of Latino professional organizations and in 2003 there were many Hispanic elected and appointed officials including one U.S. Congressman, several state officials, eight city aldermen, and a Board of Education member. It is worth noting that businesses along 26th Street in *La Villita* (South Lawndale) produced more tax revenue than any other retail strip in Chicago except the upscale Michigan Avenue Mile (Robinson 1998).

Although Spanish-speakers in Chicago may in fact be able to "...go through life without having to speak English at all" (Morgan 1985, quoting former Miami mayor Ferré), 46.4% of Chicago Latinos who reported speaking Spanish in the home said they spoke English "very well," while only 10% said "not at all" (U.S. Census 2000). Lack of English proficiency in Chicago almost certainly excludes individuals from higher-level jobs.

Surprisingly, there have been few publications examining Spanish use and maintenance in Chicago. Chicago was one of the ten U.S. cities in which Ramírez (1991) distributed language use questionnaires. Chicago adolescents reported higher levels of Spanish use with parents, with school friends, and during recreational activities than adolescents in the other nine cities in that study. They were also within the top three groups for Spanish use with grandparents, siblings, in the neighborhood, and at church. In addition, the Chicago group reported the highest levels of Spanish television, radio, and newspaper consumption.

Attempting to explain these findings, Ramírez (1991) noted that the Chicago group had been in the U.S. for an average of only 3.56 years and had received on average 6.92 years of schooling in Spanish, while the San Antonio, Texas and the Carson, California groups had been in the U.S. for an average of 15 years and had received approximately 2.5 years of schooling in Spanish (time in the U.S. and number of years of schooling in Spanish was not reported for the other seven cities). Despite the optimistic Chicago data and the positive attitudes toward Spanish expressed in all ten cities, the author concluded that in these cities, Spanish was used primarily for talking with parents and grandparents, and that Hispanic youth consume media mostly in English.

MacGregor-Mendoza (1999) studied the self-report data of 262 Chicago Mexicans who were high school students, college students, or high school dropouts. She found that high school

students reported using Spanish exclusively for almost 30% of their conversations, while college students and high school dropouts reported using more English. However, with increased academic levels, respondents showed greater willingness to incorporate Spanish in a wider variety of contexts and displayed greater loyalty to Spanish, although loyalty to English was also high, particularly among the dropouts. In addition to her primary conclusion that Spanish proficiency did not hinder academic achievement, MacGregor-Mendoza (1999) found that Midwestern Mexican youth prefer to use both languages rather than favor one over the other.

Chicago's large number of Hispanics, the fact this population includes approximately equal numbers of residents born in Latin America (41.4%) and born in the U.S. (Census Supplementary Report 2001), and its Pan-Latino heterogeneity all point to a pressing need to explore language practices of Spanish-speaking communities in the city. In this study, we distributed language use questionnaires to 815 students enrolled in Spanish for Native Speaker classes at eleven different high schools and two colleges. We asked the respondents to write the actual percent of Spanish and English they used with different individuals, such as their parents, siblings, cousins, and friends. Approximately half of the students surveyed were born in the U.S. and the other half were born abroad, reflecting the origins of Chicago Latinos generally. Of the students born in the U.S., over half of their mothers and/or fathers were born in Mexico<sup>7</sup>, and of students born abroad, almost 90% were born in Mexico. This large percentage of Mexican respondents makes our sample less heterogeneous than the Latino population in Chicago. Interestingly, approximately equal numbers of students were born in Ecuador and Puerto Rico, although Ecuadorians totaled just 1.2% of the Chicago population in the 2000 Census. Table 2 displays information about the ages at which students born abroad arrived in the United States.

**TABLE 2**  
**STUDENTS' AGE OF ARRIVAL**

| Age of arrival |              |               |                |               |
|----------------|--------------|---------------|----------------|---------------|
| Before 3       | 3-5          | 5-10          | Over 10        | Total         |
| 12.6%<br>(45)  | 8.7%<br>(31) | 19.3%<br>(69) | 59.4%<br>(212) | 100%<br>(357) |
| 7.1%<br>(1)    | 7.1%<br>(1)  | 14.3%<br>(2)  | 71.4%<br>(10)  | 100%<br>(14)  |
| 30.8%<br>(4)   | 15.4%<br>(2) | 38.5%<br>(5)  | 15.4%<br>(2)   | 100%<br>(13)  |
| 8.7%<br>(2)    | 21.7%<br>(5) | 30.4%<br>(7)  | 39.1%<br>(9)   | 100%<br>(23)  |

Of Mexicans, Ecuadorians, and Others, the majority arrived after ten years of age, but most Puerto Ricans arrived before the age of ten (and one third arrived before the age of three). Students who arrive after age ten probably have higher Spanish proficiency and use more Spanish than those who arrived before beginning school. Similarly, Casuso & Camacho (1995:352) suggest that most of the Puerto Rican population in Chicago is born in the U.S. and is assimilated to mainstream U.S. culture, while Mexicans are more oriented to Mexico and more Spanish-retentive. Since there were so few Puerto Rican and Ecuadorian respondents in our study, no calculations could be done according to students' country of origin, leaving an interesting area for future research.

Another way to examine the data in Table 3 is according to how long students have been in the U.S.

**TABLE 3**  
**NUMBER OF YEARS IN U.S. (STUDENTS BORN ABROAD)**

| Less than 3 years | 3-8 years      | 8-12 years    | Over 12 years | Total         |
|-------------------|----------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| 28.7%<br>(117)    | 35.1%<br>(143) | 15.5%<br>(63) | 20.6%<br>(84) | 100%<br>(407) |

Table 3 shows that the majority of the immigrants (28.7% + 31.5% = 63.8%) have been in the U.S. fewer than 8 years, indicating that Spanish in Chicago is bolstered by the arrival of young people from Latin America. In this paper we report language use according to the number of years that students have been in the U.S., so it is important to keep in mind that of all students who have been in the U.S. over twelve years, 17% (84) were born abroad and the other 83% were born in the U.S.

Table 4 presents the age at which U.S.-born students began learning English.

**TABLE 4**  
**AGE AT WHICH STUDENTS BORN IN THE UNITED STATES BEGAN LEARNING ENGLISH<sup>9</sup>**

| Began learning English... | Number of students | % of U.S. born students |
|---------------------------|--------------------|-------------------------|
| Before 3                  | 152                | 37.4%                   |
| Between 3-5               | 126                | 30.8%                   |
| Between 5-10              | 88                 | 21.7%                   |
| After 10                  | 27                 | 6.4%                    |
| No answer                 | 15                 | 3.7%                    |
| Total                     | 408                | 100.0%                  |

Of the students born in the U.S., 68% began learning English before five years of age, which is normally when children enter kindergarten. Zurer Pearson & McGee (1993) found that only 40% of the 110 surveyed Miami junior high school students had begun learning English before age 5, leading them to conclude that such students' homes were predominantly exclusive Spanish-speaking domains. In our study, almost 70% of U.S.-born Chicago Latinos learned English before age 5, with 37% reporting that they began learning English before age three, suggesting that they had learned it in the home. Therefore, among this population, there appears to be little evidence of a diglossic relationship in which Spanish is the only home language. However, it may also be true that more of the Chicago students attended English-speaking preschools than the Miami students. In either case, Bernal Enríquez (2000) argues that use of English in the home during the preschool years correlates to lower Spanish proficiency later in life (which is supported by Montrul 2002), making intergenerational Spanish transmission more difficult.

## FINDINGS OF SPANISH LANGUAGE USE

Table 5 presents findings of students' language use. Overall, students use Spanish 8.2% less often when speaking to their parents (74.8%) than their parents use when speaking to them (83.0), a trend also found by Elías-Olivares et. al. (n.d.) in Chicago, Hidalgo (1993) and Amastae (1982) in the Southwest,

and Zurer Pearson & McGee (1993) in Miami. This was true regardless of how long students have been living in the United States. The gap between parent and child Spanish use at its greatest when children have been in the U.S. for more than 12 years, which represents the very earliest stage of language shift. Recall that in this study, 82.9% of all students who have been in the U.S. for over twelve years were in fact born here.

**TABLE 5**  
**PERCENT SPANISH USE: PARENTS, SIBLINGS, BEST FRIEND, OVERALL<sup>11</sup>**

| Amount of time in U.S. | To parents  |      | Siblings    |      | Best Friend |      | Overall Daily Spanish Use |      |
|------------------------|-------------|------|-------------|------|-------------|------|---------------------------|------|
|                        | %<br>N=     | s.d. | %<br>N=     | s.d. | %<br>N=     | s.d. | %<br>N=                   | s.d. |
| Less than 3 years      | 88.6<br>116 | 20.3 | 77.2<br>114 | 26.0 | 77.6<br>123 | 27.5 | 79.0<br>126               | 19.4 |
| 3-8 years              | 86.8<br>141 | 18.4 | 63.6<br>136 | 26.4 | 65.3<br>150 | 29.5 | 64.3<br>152               | 22.4 |
| 8-12 years             | 86.2<br>63  | 19.7 | 45.7<br>62  | 29.0 | 44.0<br>65  | 32.1 | 45.7<br>66                | 22.1 |
| over 12 years          | 65.5<br>444 | 32.2 | 30.0<br>400 | 25.9 | 29.2<br>467 | 27.1 | 37.0<br>469               | 20.3 |
| Average                | 74.6<br>764 | 29.6 | 45.5<br>712 | 32.4 | 44.5<br>805 | 34.2 | 49.3<br>813               | 26.3 |
| p value                | <.001       |      | <.001       |      | <.001       |      | <.001                     |      |

Students averaged 46% Spanish use with their siblings. Lower Spanish use with siblings than with parents was also found in the Southwest (Floyd, 1982; Amastae, 1982; Hidalgo, 1993), in Miami (Zurer Pearson & McGee 1993), in New York (in four of the groups studied in García et. al. 1988), and in the Midwest (González & Wherret 1990; Elías-Olivares et. al. n.d.). But again, considerable differences in students' Spanish use with siblings were found for differing lengths of residence in the U.S., with longer residence correlating directly with less Spanish use. This appears to be another sign of language shift to English. Some students reported 80% or more Spanish use with one sibling and 30% or less with other siblings. One explanation for this variation in Spanish use among siblings is that respondents may use more Spanish with older siblings than with younger ones (Garland Bills, personal communication, 2003). This pattern was found by Skrabanek (1970), although Aguirre (1982) and Ramírez (1991) did not find considerable differences between Spanish use to older and younger siblings. Students in the present study were not asked to indicate the ages of their siblings.

As Table 5 indicates, language use with best friends, as with siblings, showed a steady decline according to the number of years students have been in the U.S. If we assume that students find their future mates from within their peer group, these findings suggest that these students will use mostly English with their future mates, although they may begin using more Spanish once they have their own children (c.f. Zentella 1997).

Students' Spanish use with siblings and with their best friend, which decline the longer students have been in the U.S., stand in contrast to their Spanish use with their parents. This difference is not very large for students who have been in the U.S. for less than three years, but it increases dramatically to the point that students who have been here eight years or longer report using Spanish overall only half as often as they use Spanish with their parents. Students' overall daily Spanish use, therefore,

depends significantly on their high Spanish use with their parents and other household adults. Their overall Spanish use very closely resembles their Spanish use with their best friend and with their siblings, suggesting that they spend most of their time speaking with these individuals. These findings also suggest that students who had been here fewer than three years at the time of this study will report much less Spanish use once they have been here over eight years.

Thirty-five respondents already had children. Their reported language use with their children is presented in Table 6.

**TABLE 6**  
**PERCENT SPANISH USE WITH CHILDREN**

| Amount of time in US     | To Children |
|--------------------------|-------------|
| Fewer than 3 years (N=1) | 10.0        |
| 3-8 years (N=5)          | 81.0        |
| 8-12 years (N=3)         | 58.3        |
| Over 12 years (N=26)     | 41.0        |
| Average (N=35)           | 47.3        |

Apart from the sole respondent who has been in the U.S. for fewer than three years and who reported speaking to her child just 10% of the time in Spanish, the other three groups of students reported speaking less Spanish with their children the more time they have been in the U.S. Therefore, children of fairly recent arrivals may hear Spanish consistently during their youngest years, but their parents' Spanish use may decrease with time. For example, children of the students that have been here between three and eight years may indeed hear 81% Spanish from their parents, but their parents' Spanish use may drop to 41% once they have been here over twelve years. It would seem that such children would develop fairly complete Spanish systems, but the children born to immigrants who have been here over twelve years (or to individuals who were born in the U.S.) receive on average less than half of their parental input in Spanish and probably do not develop high levels of Spanish proficiency.



University of Illinois students in class, *Spanish for Native Speakers II*. Photo by Kim Potowski.

Since students were allowed to list up to eight members in their household, we were able to compile the data in Table 7. Spanish use is reported to be 69.1% or higher with household adults (uncles, aunts, and grandparents). However, with cousins, who are probably close in age to the students, Spanish use was as

**TABLE 7**  
**PERCENT SPANISH USE WITH OTHER FAMILY MEMBERS LIVING IN HOUSEHOLD**

| Amount of time in U.S. | Cousin N=125 |      | Uncle N=96 |      | Aunt N=75 |      | Grandmother N=58 |      | Grandfather N=18 |      |
|------------------------|--------------|------|------------|------|-----------|------|------------------|------|------------------|------|
|                        | To           | From | To         | From | To        | From | To               | From | To               | From |
| Fewer than 3 years     | 81.1         | 79.4 | 87.5       | 85.5 | 95.9      | 89.4 | 89.3             | 96.5 | 66.7             | 100  |
| 3-8 years              | 77.9         | 78.8 | 80.3       | 87.6 | 75.3      | 67.7 | 90.0             | 93.5 | 90.0             | 55.0 |
| 8-12 years             | 58.8         | 74.0 | 75.6       | 83.1 | 78.6      | 73.6 | 100              | 100  | 85.0             | 85.0 |
| over 12 years          | 49.5         | 50.9 | 71.6       | 76.0 | 69.1      | 76.0 | 88.4             | 89.9 | 76.0             | 75.0 |
| Average                | 66.7         | 68.1 | 79.4       | 82.2 | 79.8      | 78.4 | 89.2             | 92.0 | 77.0             | 78.0 |

low as with siblings and friends for respondents in the U.S. over 8 years. According to Hidalgo (1993:48), "...Spanish use in the household (between adults and children and between children themselves) is a moderate predictor of the language to be used by future generation speakers," and in Miami, Lisandro Pérez (1996) found a direct correlation between living with a grandparent and immigrant youths' language proficiency. By this indication, there are signs of Spanish maintenance among this sample. However, students' lower Spanish use with siblings, cousins, and with their own children point to a shift to English.

## TELEVISION VIEWING, NEWSPAPER READING, AND MUSIC PREFERENCES

Students were asked to indicate whether they watched Spanish television and read Spanish newspapers "every day," "once or twice a week," "very rarely" or "almost never." These categories are problematic because "Every day" can mean once a day for 20 minutes or once a day for two hours, but the question as formulated does provide a general sense of frequency of interaction with these media<sup>10</sup>. Many adolescents and young adults identify themselves strongly through their musical preferences, so students were also asked to list the names of their favorite music groups. The results are presented in Tables 8 through 10.

**TABLE 8**  
**SPANISH-LANGUAGE TELEVISION VIEWING**

| Amount of time in U.S.   | Almost Everyday | Once or Twice a week | Very rarely | Never     |
|--------------------------|-----------------|----------------------|-------------|-----------|
| Fewer than 3 years N=118 | 77.1% (91)      | 13.6% (16)           | 8.5% (10)   | 0.8% (1)  |
| 3-8 years N=148          | 75.7% (112)     | 17.7% (26)           | 6.1% (9)    | 0.7% (1)  |
| 8-12 years N=66          | 63.6% (42)      | 21.2% (14)           | 15.2% (10)  | 0% (0)    |
| Over 12 years N=455      | 40.6% (191)     | 30.8% (140)          | 23.7% (108) | 3.5% (16) |
| Total N=787*             | 100% (436)      | 100% (196)           | 100% (137)  | 100% (18) |

\* Note: Totals are lower than N=815 because not all students answered this question.

The large majority of students reported watching Spanish-language television almost every day. There is a decrease in

**TABLE 9**  
**SPANISH-LANGUAGE TELEVISION VIEWING**

| Amount of time in U.S.   | Almost Everyday | Once or Twice a week | Very rarely | Never      |
|--------------------------|-----------------|----------------------|-------------|------------|
| Fewer than 3 years N=116 | 9.5% (11)       | 26.7% (31)           | 40.5% (47)  | 23.3% (27) |
| 3-8 years N=148          | 10.8% (16)      | 27.7% (41)           | 45.3% (67)  | 16.2% (24) |
| 8-12 years N=65          | 7.7% (5)        | 30.8% (20)           | 33.8% (22)  | 27.8% (18) |
| Over 12 years N=453      | 3.5% (16)       | 24.9% (113)          | 51.7% (234) | 19.9% (90) |
| Total N=787              | 48              | 205                  | 370         | 159        |

reported Spanish language television viewing as students have been in the U.S. for a longer time, but even 40% of the students who have been here over 12 years watch Spanish television broadcasting almost every day. Only 2.3% of all students reported never watching it at all. This is unlike the findings of Zurer Pearson in Miami (1993) where 58% of junior high school students reported that they never watched television in Spanish.

The majority of respondents read a Spanish-language paper rarely or never, although adolescents are not generally large consumers of newspapers in any language. Fairly equal numbers of students in each category of length of residence reported reading it once or twice a week. The three major Spanish-language newspapers in Chicago are published weekly, so few responses were expected in the “almost every day” category. Better results would likely be obtained by asking respondents about reading in general, instead of limiting the question to newspapers.

Students were asked to list their two favorite music artists or groups. The groups were coded as either “Both Spanish,” “One Spanish and one English” or “Both English.” 11 Results are shown in Table 10.

**TABLE 10**  
**FAVORITE MUSIC GROUPS**

| Amount of time in U.S. | Both Spanish | One Spanish, One English | Both English | Total*     |
|------------------------|--------------|--------------------------|--------------|------------|
| Fewer than 3 years     | 62.0% (74)   | 20.8% (25)               | 17.5% (21)   | 100% (120) |
| 3-8 years              | 65.1% (95)   | 21.9% (32)               | 13% (19)     | 100% (146) |
| 8-12 years             | 41.5% (27)   | 29.2% (19)               | 29.2% (19)   | 100% (65)  |
| Over 12 years          | 35.3% (158)  | 25.4% (114)              | 39.3% (176)  | 100% (448) |

\* Note: Totals are lower than N=815 because not all students answered this question.

Students’ favorite music groups did not show the same trend as their reported language use, where time in the U.S. was directly correlated with less Spanish. Slightly over 60% of students who have been in the U.S. fewer than eight years reported that both of their favorite music groups sing in Spanish. Some of them reported that both of their favorite groups are English-medium, but even young people living in Spanish-speaking countries claim English-language groups as their favorite artists. Students in the U.S. over eight years had a more even distribution among “Both

Spanish,” “One Spanish, One English” and “Both English.” Only students who have been here over twelve years reported more “Both English” favorites than the other two categories. However, over a third of this group (35.3%) reported that both of their favorite artists sing in Spanish, and another 25% said at least one of their favorite artists did. This indicates that even students who were born in the U.S. or have lived here most of their life listen to Spanish music, an activity that promotes cultural and linguistic connections to Spanish.

## LANGUAGE ATTITUDES

We attempted to understand more about students’ attitudes about Spanish through questions about how important Spanish was in four different aspects of their lives: with family, in the neighborhood, at school, and at work. This set of questions was given to 450 of the 815 students. Findings are displayed in Tables 11 and 12.

**TABLE 11**  
**HOW IMPORTANT IS SPANISH AT WITH YOUR FAMILY AND IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD?**

| Amount of time in U.S.  | With Family |            |            | In Neighborhood |             |           |
|-------------------------|-------------|------------|------------|-----------------|-------------|-----------|
|                         | I           | NVI        | NI         | I               | NVI         | NI        |
| Fewer than 3 years N=80 | 92.5% (74)  | 6.3% (5)   | 1.3% (114) | 70% (56)        | 28.8% (23)  | 1.3% (1)  |
| 3-8 years N=98          | 86.7% (85)  | 5.9% (13)  | 0% (0)     | 67.3% (66)      | 28.6% (28)  | 4.1% (4)  |
| 8-12 years N=34         | 94.1% (32)  | 5.9% (2)   | 0% (0)     | 47.1% (16)      | 52.9% (18)  | 0% (0)    |
| over 12 years N=238     | 82.8% (197) | 15.5% (37) | 1.7% (4)   | 41.6% (99)      | 51.3% (122) | 7.1% (17) |

I=Important, NVI=Not Very Important, NI=Not Important

**TABLE 12**  
**HOW IMPORTANT IS SPANISH AT WORK AND AT SCHOOL?**

| Amount of time in U.S.  | At Work     |            |          | At School   |             |           |
|-------------------------|-------------|------------|----------|-------------|-------------|-----------|
|                         | I           | NVI        | NI       | I           | NVI         | NI        |
| Fewer than 3 years N=80 | 73.8% (59)  | 20% (16)   | 6.3% (5) | 78.8% (63)  | 20% (16)    | 1.3% (1)  |
| 3-8 years N=98          | 73.5% (72)  | 23.5% (23) | 3.1% (3) | 71.4% (70)  | 24.5% (24)  | 4.1% (4)  |
| 8-12 years N=34         | 76.5% (32)  | 23.5% (2)  | 0% (0)   | 61.8% (21)  | 38.2% (13)  | 0% (0)    |
| over 12 years N=238     | 82.8% (210) | 11.3% (27) | 0.4% (1) | 53.4% (127) | 42.0% (100) | 4.6% (11) |

I=Important, NVI=Not Very Important, NI=Not Important

There were two categories in which students’ length of residence in the U.S. did not affect their responses: with family and at work. The large majority of students feel that Spanish is “important” with their families; even of the 238 respondents who have been in the U.S. over twelve years, only four responded that it was “not important”. At work, approximately three quarters of the students said that Spanish was important. Interestingly, the group with the largest percent responding “important” at work (88.2%) were those that have been here over twelve years. Since

these students are already fluent in English, perhaps they feel more acutely the need for Spanish skills on the job. Students who have been in the U.S. fewer than twelve years are likely to be more focused on acquiring English in order to get a well-paying job.

As for the importance of Spanish in the neighborhood and at school, the longer students have been in the U.S., the less they rated Spanish as important in these two contexts. However, it was a pleasant surprise to find that half of the students who have been in the U.S. for over twelve years said that Spanish was important in school, which may be due in part to the fact that they were enrolled in Spanish for native speakers courses.

Another indicator of students' attitudes toward Spanish is whether they believe their own children will speak it. 544 students (67% of the entire sample) were asked, "Do you think your future children will know as much Spanish as you do?" and to explain their answer. Their answers were coded into one of four categories: *Yes, better than I do*; *Yes, I hope so/It depends*; and *No*. Results are reported in Table 13.

**TABLE 13**  
**"DO YOU THINK YOUR FUTURE CHILDREN WILL KNOW AS MUCH SPANISH AS YOU DO?"**

| Amount of time in U.S.     | Better than I do                  | Yes                                | I hope so/ Depends               | No                                |
|----------------------------|-----------------------------------|------------------------------------|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Fewer than 3 years<br>N=84 | 1<br>Row: 1.2%<br>Column: 2.2%    | 64<br>Row: 76.2%<br>Column: 16.8%  | 7<br>Row: 8.3%<br>Column: 24.1%  | 12<br>Row: 14.3%<br>Column: 13.8% |
| 3-8 years<br>N=84          | 4<br>Row: 3.6%<br>Column: 8.7%    | 76<br>Row: 69.1%<br>Column: 19.9%  | 7<br>Row: 6.4%<br>Column: 24.1%  | 23<br>Row: 20.9%<br>Column: 26.4% |
| 8-12 years<br>N=84         | 4<br>Row: 9.8%<br>Column: 8.7%    | 32<br>Row: 78.0%<br>Column: 8.4%   | 1<br>Row: 2.4%<br>Column: 3.4%   | 4<br>Row: 9.8%<br>Column: 4.6%    |
| Over 12 years<br>N=84      | 37<br>Row: 12.0%<br>Column: 80.4% | 210<br>Row: 76.2%<br>Column: 55.0% | 14<br>Row: 8.3%<br>Column: 48.3% | 48<br>Row: 14.3%<br>Column: 55.2% |
| <b>Total<br/>N=84</b>      | <b>46<br/>Row: 8.5%</b>           | <b>382<br/>Row: 70.2%</b>          | <b>29<br/>Row: 5.3%</b>          | <b>87<br/>Row: 16.0%</b>          |

The majority of students (78.7% of the group who answered this question) claimed that their future children will know Spanish (70.2%) or will know it better than the respondents themselves (8.5%). Students within all four categories of length of residence gave "Yes" as their most frequent answer. Some of their explanations were related to heritage, such as "It is important that they learn about their roots," and "They should speak Spanish because we're from Mexico and one should never forget where one comes from." Several students who had arrived within the last three years said that their children would have to know Spanish "or else they would be unable to communicate with me." Some students in the 8-12 year range, in addition to heritage-related reasons, gave more instrumental motivations for speaking Spanish to their children, such as "It is important in our society" and "It will help them in life." These responses suggest a desire to transmit Spanish to successive generations, but in order for students to carry through with these intentions, they must have sufficient commitment, Spanish proficiency, and support of their immediate community.

Almost half of those who responded "I hope so" or "It depends" were in the group of students who have been in the U.S. over twelve years, and the other half of these responses were evenly split between the two groups of more recent arrivals. These students did express a desire for their future children to



University of Illinois students in class, *Spanish for Native Speakers II*. Photo taken by Kim Potowski.

know Spanish, but they were ambivalent about whether this would actually happen. They cited reasons such as "I hope they will know more than me, but if I don't learn Spanish then I doubt they will," and "It depends on who I marry."

Overall, only 16% of the respondents said that their future children will not know Spanish as well as they do. The group that most frequently answered "No" (55.2%) were the students who have been in the U.S. over twelve years, but this corresponds to just 15.5% of all respondents in that group. Students from all four groups who answered "no" gave explanations such as, "I don't know Spanish well enough to teach it to my kid," "I use only English," "Each generation speaks less Spanish," and "In this country, English is more important." These young people seem destined not to transmit Spanish to their children, much as the majority of actual parents we saw in Table 9, where those in the U.S. over eight years averaged under 50% Spanish use with their children.

To summarize the data on attitudes, the respondents generally felt that Spanish was important with family and at work, but less so in their neighborhoods and in school. They overwhelmingly expressed a desire for their children to know Spanish, although actual language use with children, as seen in Table 8, indicates that intergenerational transmission is unlikely.

## SPANISH PROFICIENCY

Students were asked to rate their own global Spanish and English proficiency as *excellent*, *very good*, *good*, *not very good*, or *bad* and indicated whether one was their stronger language or if they were equally strong (Tables 14 and 15). Clearly this question did not allow students to reflect on their specific abilities in reading, writing, listening, and speaking in Spanish. For students in the U.S. over 8 years, there was no strong correlation between reported English proficiency and reported Spanish proficiency. That is, knowing more English did not necessarily correspond to knowing less Spanish, since 87.3% of respondents in the U.S. over 12 years said their Spanish was at least "good." This suggests that we cannot assume that use of or proficiency in English is not accompanied by use of and proficiency in Spanish.

As might be expected, the large majority of students in the U.S. under eight years reported that Spanish is their stronger language, while 61% of the students who have been in the U.S. over twelve years claim to be English dominant.

Travel to Spanish-speaking countries provides opportunities



**TABLE 14**  
**SELF-REPORTED LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY**

| Amount of time in U.S.       | SPANISH       |                |                |               |             | ENGLISH        |                |               |               |               |
|------------------------------|---------------|----------------|----------------|---------------|-------------|----------------|----------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
|                              | Excellent     | Very good      | Good           | Not very good | Bad         | Excellent      | Very good      | Good          | Not very good | Bad           |
| Fewer than 3 years<br>N= 119 | 30.3%<br>(36) | 12.6%<br>(45)  | 21.8%<br>(26)  | 8.4%<br>(10)  | 1.7%<br>(2) | 4.2%<br>(5)    | 5.9%<br>(7)    | 17.6%<br>(21) | 57.1%<br>(68) | 15.1%<br>(18) |
| 3-8 years<br>N= 151          | 31.1%<br>(47) | 36.4%<br>(55)  | 29.1%<br>(44)  | 2.6%<br>(4)   | 0.7%<br>(1) | 4.6%<br>(7)    | 15.9%<br>(24)  | 43.7%<br>(66) | 28.5%<br>(43) | 7.3%<br>(11)  |
| 8-12 years<br>N= 66          | 21.2%<br>(14) | 42.4%<br>(28)  | 34.8%<br>(23)  | 1.5%<br>(1)   | 0%<br>(0)   | 15.2%<br>(10)  | 43.9%<br>(29)  | 34.8%<br>(23) | 6.1%<br>(4)   | 0%<br>(0)     |
| Over 12 years<br>N= 464      | 6.5%<br>(30)  | 30.6%<br>(142) | 50.2%<br>(233) | 11.4%<br>(53) | 1.3%<br>(6) | 37.5%<br>(174) | 41.6%<br>(193) | 19.8%<br>(92) | 1.1%<br>(5)   | 0%<br>(0)     |
| Total N= 800*                | 127           | 270            | 326            | 68            | 9           | 196            | 253            | 202           | 120           | 29            |

\*Note: Total is lower than N=815 because not all students answered this question

**TABLE 15**  
**SELF-REPORTED LANGUAGE DOMINANCE**

| Amount of time in U.S.       | English        | Spanish        | Equal          |
|------------------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| Fewer than 3 years<br>N= 121 | 9.1%<br>(11)   | 83.5%<br>(101) | 7.4%<br>(9)    |
| 3-8 years<br>N= 145          | 2.8%<br>(4)    | 77.9%<br>(32)  | 19.3%<br>(28)  |
| 8-12 years<br>N= 66          | 28.8%<br>(19)  | 31.8%<br>(21)  | 39.4%<br>(26)  |
| Over 12 years<br>N= 465      | 61.3%<br>(285) | 8.2%<br>(38)   | 30.5%<br>(142) |
| Total N= 797*                | 319            | 273            | 205            |

\* Note: Total is lower than N=815 because not all students answered this question

**TABLE 16**  
**FREQUENCY OF TRAVEL TO SPANISH-SPEAKING COUNTRY**

| # of years in U.S.       | 2x per year | 1x per year | Every 2 years | 3 times or more | 1-3 times    |
|--------------------------|-------------|-------------|---------------|-----------------|--------------|
| 12 or more<br>(N=471)    | 0.8%<br>(4) | 13%<br>(60) | 8%<br>(39)    | 39%<br>(186)    | 21%<br>(100) |
| Fewer than 12<br>(N=344) | 3%<br>(12)  | 4%<br>(13)  | 1%<br>(4)     | 7%<br>(23)      | 63%<br>(215) |

for students to further develop their Spanish proficiency. Table 16 displays how often these respondents traveled to the countries that their families were from.

Table 16 shows that of students who had been living in the U.S. for twelve years or more, fully 80% reported having visited a Spanish-speaking country at least once: slightly over 20% visit once or twice a year, almost 40% reported having visited anywhere from three to ten times during their lives, and 21% reported visiting one to three times. The length of these visits lasted from two weeks to three months, with an average length of visit of one month. The fact that approximately 40% of this group, whose average age was just 17.3 years, had spent a month in a Spanish-speaking country 3 or more times in their lives (and many of them had gone between 5 and 7 times) indicates fairly frequent contact with monolingual varieties of Spanish, which likely has the effect of increasing students' proficiency and domains of use.



Photo provided by Michael Rodriguez Muñiz. Courtesy of Batey Urbano Archives.

“Chicago adolescents reported higher levels of Spanish use with parents, with school friends, and during recreational activities than adolescents in the other nine cities in that study. They were also within the top three groups for Spanish use with grandparents, siblings, in the neighborhood, and at church. In addition, the Chicago group reported the highest levels of Spanish television, radio, and newspaper consumption.”

## CONCLUSIONS

The present study of language use patterns in Chicago, like many others in the United States, points to shift from Spanish to English. The longer respondents had been living in the U.S., the less Spanish they used with their siblings, friends, and overall. Despite high levels of Spanish proficiency and claims that they would teach Spanish to their children, respondents who actually had children reported low levels of Spanish use with them, boding poorly for intergenerational transmission of the language. The respondents born in the U.S. who claimed high Spanish ability were raised by parents who were born abroad; however, this group speaks to their own children in English 60% of the time. Although there is potential for individuals to use more Spanish when they become parents, as well as for Spanish to be transmitted through contact with grandparents and other adult relatives, it is valid to question whether these respondents' children will receive a critical mass of Spanish input in order to develop communicative abilities in the language. As found by Attinasi (1985) in Northwest Indiana, the threat of language shift to English is palpable among this Chicago sample.

The only factors that appear to slow down this shift include the fact that students claimed allegiance to Spanish-language music artists and high levels of Spanish proficiency and bilingualism, even those born in the U.S. or living here over twelve years. In addition, Spanish use with parents and other household adults was relatively high. More importantly, there is a sustaining effect of the continuing influx of young Spanish-speaking immigrants to Chicago. These students offer their U.S. born counterparts the possibility of recontact with Spanish-dominant interlocutors, but only if they interact with each other rather extensively. These recent arrivals boost the appearance of Spanish-speaking teenagers in the city.

As has been previously noted by Pedraza (1985) and others, long-term ethnographic data and recorded interviews in Spanish are necessary to determine the vitality of Spanish in a given area; only then can we discern the degree of Spanish maintenance and shift and, in conjunction with community members, determine whether a program of language planning can be implemented successfully.

In the U.S., the identity of many Latino groups has grown independent from the Spanish language. According to Fasold (1984), a successful language planning policy includes measures to influence people's self-identification so that the identity of the target language population becomes desirable. Yet is it feasible or even desirable to encourage identification with Latin American countries of origin among youth born and raised in the United States? Spanish maintenance advocates run the risk of misplacing our good intentions if we do not understand the beliefs, aspirations, and attitudes toward Spanish of bilingual individuals and communities.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Other groups include Guatemalan (1.8%), Ecuadorian (1.2%) and Cuban (1.1%).

<sup>2</sup> See Rua (2002) on the cultural experiences of the children of these Mexican-Puerto Rican unions, an area which merits linguistic research.

<sup>3</sup> A pilot questionnaire attempted to elicit this kind of data by asking students to indicate under what circumstances they used each language with each person. Some students offered appropriate answers such as "At home" or "When we go to the

store," but the majority of responses were like "When I'm talking," indicating that students did not understand what was being asked of them, so the question was eliminated.

<sup>4</sup> Gender was not correlated to reported Spanish use in this study.

<sup>5</sup> We do not report school locations according to the city areas listed in Table 1 in order to preserve the anonymity of the schools.

<sup>6</sup> It is possible to speak 100% in Spanish with a given individual, but only talk to that person very infrequently. We asked students to estimate how many hours per week they spoke with each person they listed, but these estimations did not appear to be reliable.

<sup>7</sup> The Mexican parents were from the following states: Michoacán 21%, Guerrero 14%, Jalisco and Guanajuato, 12% each.

<sup>8</sup> Of the students who reported the Mexican states in which their parents were born, 21% were born in Michoacán, 14% in Guerrero, and 12% each in Guanajuato and Jalisco.

<sup>9</sup> Some students may not remember accurately the age at which they began learning English, which may explain some of the 26 students who say they were born in the United States but did not begin learning English until after the age of ten.

<sup>10</sup> There were almost no differences between reported language use "to" and "from" siblings, so we report language use as "with" siblings. The questionnaire used the term "with friends," assuming that friends use similar language patterns with each other.

<sup>11</sup> One-way ANOVAs conducted on the data in Table 7 revealed that all four groups were statistically different from each other ( $p < 0.01$  for all): Parents =  $F(3, 760) = 39.038$ ; Siblings =  $F(3, 708) = 124.258$ ; Friend =  $F(3, 801) = 130.732$ ; Overall =  $F(3, 809) = 168.415$ . Additionally, a Pearson correlation showed that reported Spanish use was highly correlated across all interlocutors.

<sup>12</sup> The same problem can be attributed to language use self-reports of Spanish use such as the one used in Hidalgo (1993) with a five-item frequency scale including "every day, a few times per week, a few times per month, almost never, never," because an answer of "every day" can mean the respondent says just one sentence per day in Spanish.

<sup>13</sup> Artists who sing in both Spanish and English, such as Marc Anthony and Shakira, were coded half of the time as "Spanish" and half of the time as "English".

<sup>14</sup> Once such students reach adulthood, they may have spent enough of their formative years in the U.S. to be considered G2, but most of our respondents were still teenagers.

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