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Katherine Christoffersen

Aubrey Villanueva

Ryan M. Bessett

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Student Perceptions of Community-Engaged Scholarship Courses

Developing a Sociolinguistic Corpus on the U.S.–Mexico Border

Katherine Christoffersen

Department of Writing & Language Studies, The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley

Aubrey Villanueva

Department of Linguistics, University of Colorado Boulder

Ryan M. Bessett

Department of Literatures, University of California San Diego

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Student Perceptions of Community-Engaged Scholarship Courses

*Developing a Sociolinguistic Corpus
on the U.S.–Mexico Border*

Katherine Christoffersen, Aubrey
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Abstract

Community-based sociolinguistic corpora are collections of informal interviews with community members who comprise an important dataset in sociolinguistics. Although some scholars have involved students in developing sociolinguistic corpora, few studies have examined students' perspectives on these projects. Furthermore, very few studies examine the perceptions of underrepresented college students who are themselves members of the surrounding community. The present study analyzes the perceptions of students involved in community-engaged scholarship (CES) courses at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley on the U.S.–Mexico border. In these CES courses, predominantly Mexican American students contribute to the documentation of language in South Texas through the Corpus Bilingüe del Valle (Christoffersen & Bessett, 2019). A qualitative analysis of 38 student responses reveals six significant themes: a greater knowledge of transcription, increased connection with one's own community, enhanced understanding from experiential learning and research experience, development of professional skills, a heightened appreciation of local language varieties, and pride in participating in a large-scale research project. These responses demonstrate the benefits of CES and serve to encourage sociolinguists to incorporate community-based corpora development in linguistics and language classes. More broadly, the results highlight the importance and impact of CES experiences for underrepresented college students, especially those incorporating course-based undergraduate research experiences.

Keywords: *sociolinguistic interviews, sociolinguistic corpus, language variation, community-engaged scholarship (CES), undergraduate research, community-engaged learning*

Las percepciones de los estudiantes sobre los cursos con investigación centrada en la comunidad

*El desarrollo de un corpus
sociolingüístico en la frontera entre
México y Estados Unidos*

Katherine Christoffersen, Aubrey
Villanueva, and Ryan M. Bessett

Resumen

Los corpus sociolingüísticos comunitarios son colecciones de entrevistas informales con miembros de la comunidad que comprenden un conjunto de datos importante en la sociolingüística. Aunque algunos académicos han involucrado a los estudiantes en el desarrollo de los corpus sociolingüísticos, pocos estudios han examinado las perspectivas de los estudiantes sobre estos proyectos. Además, muy pocos estudios examinan las percepciones de los estudiantes universitarios subrepresentados que son ellos mismos miembros de la comunidad local. El presente estudio analiza las percepciones de los estudiantes que participan en cursos con investigación centrada en la comunidad (CES por sus siglas en inglés) en la Universidad de Texas Rio Grande Valley en la frontera entre Estados Unidos y México. En estos cursos CES, los estudiantes predominantemente mexicano-americanos contribuyen a la documentación del lenguaje en el sur de Texas a través del Corpus Bilingüe del Valle (Christoffersen & Bessett, 2019). Un análisis cualitativo de 38 respuestas de estudiantes revela seis temas importantes: un mayor conocimiento de la transcripción, una mayor conexión con la propia comunidad, una mayor comprensión del aprendizaje experiencial y la experiencia de investigación, el desarrollo de habilidades profesionales, una mayor apreciación de las variedades de idiomas locales y el orgullo por participar en un proyecto de investigación a gran escala. Estas respuestas demuestran los beneficios de CES y sirven para alentar a los sociolingüistas a incorporar el desarrollo de los corpus comunitarios en las clases de lingüística y lengua. En términos más generales, los resultados resaltan la importancia y el impacto de las experiencias CES para los estudiantes universitarios subrepresentados, especialmente aquellas que incorporan experiencias de investigación en sus cursos de la licenciatura.

Palabras clave: *entrevistas sociolingüísticas, corpus sociolingüístico, variación lingüística, cursos con investigación centrada en la comunidad, CES, investigación de licenciatura, aprendizaje centrado en la comunidad*

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Introduction

The well-documented benefits of community engagement experiences have resulted in its incorporation across a wide variety of disciplines, from health care (Alexander et al., 2020) to aviation science (Belt & Sweetman, 2021) to statistics (Schanz & Giles, 2021). The field of sociolinguistics is no exception with plentiful examples of community-engaged scholarship (CES) or “research of mutual benefit to community and academic interests” (Delugan et al., 2014, p. 155). One way that linguistics and language courses have integrated CES is through the development of community-based sociolinguistic corpora or collections of informal interviews with community members. In these courses, students are trained in sociolinguistic methods as research assistants to conduct, transcribe, and analyze sociolinguistic interviews. Although personal experience and practitioner reports attest to the benefits of students participating in building sociolinguistic corpora, there has been little research documenting student perceptions. Additionally, there is a dearth of research on CES experiences involving underrepresented college students, including students of color, first-generation students, and low-income students. The present study examines the perceptions of underrepresented college students on CES courses where they participate in developing a community-based sociolinguistic corpus.

Literature Review

Community-Engaged Scholarship in Sociolinguistics

In 1990, Ernest Boyer called for “a scholarship of engagement” and challenged higher education to address societal problems by partnering with communities and broadening its view of scholarship to include discovery, integration, application, and teaching. This growing movement eventually led to the creation of an elective classification for “community-engaged” colleges and universities by the Carnegie Foundation (Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 2006). Today, many, if not most, disciplines across college campuses integrate some form of community engagement in courses, programs, or student experiences. Whereas all types of community engagement experiences include collaborations between universities and (usually local) communities, CES focuses on “the collaborative development and application of scholarly knowledge” (Gordon da Cruz, 2018, p. 149) in pursuit of a “scholarship of engagement” (Boyer, 1996).

The importance of CES in higher education is unsurprising, given the plentiful research documenting the many benefits of CES. These include making a significant impact, providing the opportunity to learn with and from communities, drawing on community experience, connecting research and social action, helping students develop new skill sets, and creating opportunities to reflect about societal consequences of the research (Bates & Burns, 2012; Gall et al., 2009). Other studies reveal high levels of student impact, including gains in academic and professional development, participation in research, presentation of research, and continuation in the discipline in graduate studies (Tremblay, 2017).

Even before the coining of the term CES, this type of work has been of central importance to sociolinguistics since the inception of the field. Sociolinguists have often called attention to the importance of connecting community needs and scholarship (Labov, 1982; Wolfram, 1993), working

models of CES that mutually benefit the community and academia (Rickford, 1997) through bilateral and synergistic relationships (Kendall & Wolfram, 2016, p. 145). Recent examples of CES in sociolinguistics include the creation of community videos and podcasts in Baltimore (Mallinson, 2011); a collection of linguistic landscapes in Hawai'i (Higgins, 2020, 2021); course projects where students investigate language in their own lives (Alim, 2010); programs where graduate students, undergraduate students, and high school students and classes develop sociolinguistic research (Bucholtz et al., 2011, 2015); projects involving community healthcare (Feuerherm et al., 2021; Martínez & Schwartz, 2012; Showstack, 2020); and a project on language in North Carolina including interviews, videos, books, and dialect curriculum (Reaser & Wolfram, 2007; Wolfram et al., 1993).

The integration of CES in linguistics courses helps students make connections between course content and lived experiences (Fitzgerald, 2010) and thus, “bring[s] linguistics to life” (Hudley, 2008). CES also supports metalinguistic learning (Arnold, 2019; Fitzgerald, 2010; Hudley, 2008) along with heightened self-determination (Bucholtz et al., 2014) and critical language awareness (Alim, 2010). Additionally, Hispanic college students in CES sociolinguistics courses develop an appreciation and understanding of language varieties including their own and a critical consciousness to challenge negative societal perceptions of U.S. Spanish (MacGregor-Mendoza & Moreno, 2016). These students also demonstrate increased pride for their own U.S. Spanish and a desire to maintain their Spanish-language skills, including for future career options (Pascual y Cabo et al., 2017). Although very few studies have examined the impact of students developing sociolinguistic corpora in a CES course, one academic poster about students working on the Corpus de Español en el Sur de Arizona (CESA; Carvalho, 2012) reveals that students develop heightened awareness of linguistic variation, increased appreciation of local language varieties, and new linguistic skills (Bessett et al., 2016).

Community-Engaged Scholarship Among Underrepresented College Students

There exists to date very little research on the benefits of CES among underrepresented college students (Schulzetenberg et al., 2020), a group that includes students of color, first-generation college students, and low-income students. These students are more likely to work a greater number of hours as students, live off campus, and have a longer commute to campus (Longwell-Grice & Longwell-Grice, 2007–2008; Martínez et al., 2009; Soria, 2015). These factors, among others, mean that these students face additional structural barriers to participating in community engagement opportunities that involve volunteerism. One alternative is to embed CES into students' coursework, which allows students to combine community engagement with their existing school time commitments. This is especially true when faculty keep these barriers in mind; for instance, they may provide flexible scheduling and transportation options as well as hybrid or online community engagement opportunities.

The extant literature does show significant benefits for community engagement among underrepresented college students. For instance, underrepresented college students who participate in CES demonstrate better academic outcomes (Schulzetenberg et al., 2020, p. 10), reduced achievement gaps (Scales et al., 2006), improved retention and graduation rates (Maruyama et al., 2018; Schulzetenberg et al., 2020), and improved overall student engagement (Patton et al., 2016). Although these outcomes hold for all student populations, these are particular concerns among underrepresented college students and thus stand to make a significant impact among this population. Moreover, community engagement can increase a sense of belonging for underrepresented college students who often experience a culture clash between experiences in their own communities and a more affluent campus culture (Gurin et al., 2002; Maruyama et al., 2018).

At Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs), research has demonstrated that community engagement is a vital aspect of an ideal HSI identity and mission (Dominican University Latinx Visioning Working Group, 2016; García, 2017; Vega & Martínez, 2012). Within the context of HSIs, research has shown that Latinx students benefit from community engagement experiences, especially experiences that provide opportunities to connect with supportive faculty mentors and their own communities (Morales, 2020).

This article presents findings from a study investigating how predominantly underrepresented college students at an HSI perceive their experiences in CES sociolinguistics courses.

Methods

Context, Participants, and Courses

This study was conducted in two CES courses at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley (UTRGV). UTRGV is located in South Texas along the U.S.–Mexico border. The surrounding community is predominantly Hispanic (91.9%; U.S. Census Bureau [USCB], 2020) and Spanish speaking (77.2%; USCB, 2019), and the students at UTRGV are 90.5% Hispanic (UTRGV, 2020). As such, students in these CES classes are representative of the university as a whole and predominantly Hispanic. Typically, out of a class of 30, there may be one Caucasian student or often none.

Both courses involve students in the development of the Corpus Bilingüe del Valle (CoBiVa; Christoffersen & Bessett, 2019), an online database of hour-long audio-recorded semi-structured sociolinguistic interviews. This project aims to document the language varieties of the Rio Grande Valley (RGV) while also providing a CES experience for students who are predominantly community members themselves. During training, students are given lists of example questions in Spanish and English, but they are instructed to not read any question or have any paper in front of them during the interview. Instead, they are to follow the conversational flow in order to draw out informal, casual speech styles (Labov, 1972). Students are encouraged to conduct interviews in Spanish or bilingually. After multiple rounds of revision and anonymization of the audio and transcript, the interviews are uploaded to the website, where the audio, transcript, and demographic and linguistic participant information are accessible pending a short “request access” form.

The first course titled “Intro to Border Languages” is an undergraduate elective that presents relevant sociolinguistic topics at the beginning of the semester. Students in the class complete relevant trainings¹ and later conduct, transcribe, and/or revise sociolinguistic interviews. At the end of the class, students analyze interviews in small groups, and they present their analyses to the class. The second course, “Community Language Project,” is an experiential, internship-style course. When possible, this course is cross-listed as undergraduate, graduate, and Spanish which provides a particularly rich learning environment. Community Language Project is a companion course that typically runs the semester after the Intro to Border Languages class. Although it is not limited to students who have taken Intro to Border Languages, these students are encouraged to enroll in the optional companion course that builds off their knowledge gained in the previous course. Students in the Community Language Project course review more specifics about sociolinguistic methods and several themes that are then analyzed together as a class. Students conduct, transcribe, and/or revise one or more sociolinguistic interviews and then analyze their interviews based on the selected themes, which they present for the class. For instance, in spring 2021, the class analyzed gender assignment of borrowings and attitudes toward code-switching (e.g., *los* keys vs. *las* keys). These courses have typically been conducted as reduced-seat or hybrid courses, with part of the work done during in-person classes and part of that online. However, due to COVID-19, one section shifted to completely online midway through spring 2020, and the fall 2020 and spring 2021 courses were also held completely online.²

Data Collection and Analysis

¹ All students involved in the project completed research ethics/human subjects training through the Citi Training Program. They completed a basic course and a Responsible Conduct of Research Course for Social and Behavioral Research.

² Seven responses (18.4%) are from the spring 2020 semester (halfway switch to online), five (13.2%) are from the fall 2020 semester (fully online), and 13 (34.2%) are from the spring 2021 semester. None of these students mentioned the modality of the interviews in their survey responses.

At the end of each course described above, students complete a low-stakes assignment in the form of a written reflection, worth 5%–10% of the total course grade. Students are instructed to write a minimum of 400 words on their experience with the course and the sociolinguistic interview project. In these reflection papers, the students overwhelmingly write that they find the CES experience to be meaningful, noting positive personal, linguistic, and academic outcomes. However, social bias is inherent in these responses (Bowman & Hill, 2011). After all, the students know their instructor will be reading and grading these reflection papers. For this reason, we created an anonymous survey since this has been shown to mitigate this validity threat (Albanese et al., 2006). The short anonymous open-ended survey was modeled on the written reflection paper instructions and included the following questions:

1. In which course did you participate in the CoBiVa?
2. Write a reflection about your experience with the project.
3. What did you like and/or dislike about the project, and why?
4. What are you taking away from this experience?
5. Optional: Please write any additional comments here.

We recognize the important concerns related to instrumentation and assessment tools developed by authors without reference to other surveys. However, in this case, we were interested in analyzing the students' reflection papers; in order to remove the effect of the professor grading these reflections, we created the short anonymous survey based on the reflection paper assignment, aiming to draw out personal open-ended qualitative data with specific references to course content and the specific CES project. This qualitative survey complements quantitative surveys on CES, such as the Civic Attitudes and Skills Questionnaire (Moely et al., 2002).

During fall 2019, spring 2020, fall 2020, and spring 2021, the survey was announced in classes and on Blackboard, and the survey description and link were sent through email. The survey was also distributed via email to students who had taken the course prior to fall 2019. In total, the survey was ultimately distributed to 82 students and was completed by 38 students for a 46.34% completion rate. This is a strong completion rate, given that the survey was completely anonymous and voluntary. Additionally, we are not certain that the survey reached students from previous courses who may not have had access to their UTRGV email at the time of receipt during fall 2019 because they may have graduated.

Survey responses were entered in the Dedoose (2018) qualitative data analysis software and analyzed through constant comparative coding cycles and thematic analysis (Saldaña, 2013). This approach includes the initial coding of the data using open codes, created as they emerge from the data to the researcher. This was followed by multiple iterations through the data by the three coauthors. These reviews and checks allowed the researchers to check and refine codes and discuss any differences.

The six significant and repeated themes that emerged from the data are “Understanding Transcription” (e.g., the participant expressed an understanding of the value of or time-consuming nature of transcription), “Engaging with One’s Own Community” (e.g., the participant described the experience of actively connecting with community members), “Experiential Learning and Research Experience” (e.g., the participant described the hands-on nature of the project or the benefit of being involved in research), “Professional Skills” (e.g., the participant described mastering certain skills such as transcription or interviews), “Local Language Varieties” (e.g., the participant described an increased appreciation, understanding, or awareness of local language variation), and “Importance of the Project” (e.g., the participant expressed that they enjoyed contributing to an important and established research project).

Analysis

In this section, we present our qualitative thematic analysis of the 38 student survey responses of six (6) themes identified in the dataset. Table 1 provides a definition and example of each along with the number of instances it was identified and coded within the dataset. The distribution column refers to the number

of interviews in which the code was identified. All survey responses included at least one theme, and most (37 out of 38) included more than one theme.

Table 1.

Thematic Analysis: Definitions, Examples, and Distribution

Theme	Definition	Example	Distribution
Understanding transcription	The participant expressed an understanding of the value of the time-consuming nature of transcription.	“Transcribing the interview allowed me to appreciate and value the interview even more.” (P05)	22
Connecting with one’s own community	The participant described the experience of connecting with members of their own community.	“I was able to spend some time talking about history and the life of someone who has live[d] here for a long time.” (P03)	14
Experiential learning and research experience	The participant described the hands-on nature of the project or the benefit of being involved in research.	“I would love to further work with projects like CoBiVa because I believe that field experiences are very important for students to gain more knowledge and confidence by engaging with our community.” (P20)	16
Professional skills	The participant described mastering certain skills such as transcription or interviews.	“Not only was I able to improve my transcribing skills as a researcher, but I was also able to learn how to edit at an advanced level, both transcription and audio files.” (P21)	25
Local language varieties	The participant described an increased appreciation, understanding, or awareness of local language variation.	“The main thing I am taking away from this experience is the deeper appreciation for language in the RGV.” (P17)	25
Importance of the project	The participant expressed that they enjoyed contributing to an important and established research project.	“I am happy to have been able to contribute to this project, as it is important to the study of the language used here in South Texas. ... It is good to be a part of something special like this.” (P26)	14

The following analysis is organized thematically. Specific excerpts are numbered and referenced within the text in order to thoroughly explain each excerpt. For transparency, we also include the numbers of the participants, such as P01. Quotes were selected for analysis based on their ability to demonstrate important aspects of each theme.

Understanding Transcription

Transcription in sociolinguistics refers to the process of typing a word-for-word script of an audio-recorded interview. Anyone who has transcribed before knows very well that it is a time-consuming process; for students, however, this is often a new experience. We expected students to comment on the tedious and time-consuming nature of transcription, and 18 survey responses mention this. For example, students describe the time (1, 2, 3) and focus (1) required for transcription. This alone is an important aspect of learning about sociolinguistic research, since many students may not initially recognize the time commitment required for such research. Yet, while the students recognize the “tedious and meticulous” nature of transcription, they also value the transcription process (4). For instance, in acknowledging the

importance of accuracy in transcription and transcription revision (1, 3), the students recognize transcripts as a tool for linguistic analysis and understand the importance of generating a faithful transcript to facilitate such research (Hepburn & Bolden, 2012).

1. I realized that the project in itself **would take up a large amount of time and focus** to edit in the proper manner. (P24)
2. There wasn't much that I disliked besides just being **a time constraint**, but more often than not, it was **just something that I needed to get used to**. (P37)
3. I'm sure we can all agree that **the time devoted to these transcripts** was a bit **long**. Even, so it's **extremely important to take your time** with these transcripts. (P15)
4. Transcribing the interview was a **tedious and meticulous duty**. However, transcribing the interview **allowed me to appreciate and value the interview even more**. (P05)

Although we expected comments on the monotonous and lengthy nature of transcription, we were less prepared for the positive comments of transcription described as fun, necessary, and important, expressed in 13 survey responses. In (5), the student describes transcription as rewarding, explaining that they were proud of the end result. Other students found joy in the process itself through interest in the subject matter discussed in the interviews (6) or simply enjoying the rhythm of transcription (7).

5. I enjoyed working on the transcription because **it was rewarding at the end**. The time put into the interview was a lot but **definitely something that I was proud of** at the end. (P29)
6. I liked revising the transcript, I thought it was **fun** and my **audio was funny** so it wasn't boring to listen to. (P23)
7. I've had some experience working with transcriptions and **I loved how I get to work with the same process again**. (P35)

Beyond enjoying the transcription process, students also recognized the importance of transcription and classify their time spent transcribing as necessary and/or important. Learning to value each interview is also a very valuable lesson (9) since each interview marks over one hour that a community member has shared their time, voice, and stories with us. Some students developed a greater understanding and appreciation for the role of transcription in the data's longevity, searchability, and access as well as gaining respect for the work that linguists do (9).

8. However, transcribing the interview allowed me to **appreciate and value the interview more**. (P05)
9. I truly saw **value in learning how to transcribe interviews properly** in order to be able to reference later. I was also able to **gain admiration for linguists** who dedicate their lives to conducting sociolinguistic interviews and the **long journey that they must take to transcribe, analyze, and finally write out their findings**. (P10)

Engaging With One's Own Community

Thirteen survey responses referenced engaging with one's own community as an outcome of the CES project. Students frequently discussed a connection with either their participant or their community. In (10), (11), and (12), students remark on how the CES experience allowed them to get to know their interviewee more, learning a bit more about them and having fun in the process. In (12), the student describes the opportunity to discuss past experiences and get to know the participant on a deeper level, which is often not possible in shorter conversations. Holding a sustained conversation is unfortunately somewhat uncommon, and the hour-long interview, although intended to obtain less monitored speech, has the added benefit of allowing students to learn more about a friend or family member.

10. I liked how the project granted the **opportunity to get to know my interviewee better**. (P27)
11. I really enjoyed the project. Interviewing someone who I am close to really helped me pick their brain and **allowed me to get to learn more about them**. It was fun & something new. I had a lot of fun doing it! (P07)
12. I really liked **getting to know the participant on a deeper level** because we talk to each other frequently, but we never really talk about our past selves. This project gave us the opportunity to dig into those topics. (P04)

Students were encouraged to consider interviewing an older family member, as previous students have always described this experience as deeply personally meaningful, and the survey responses echo this sentiment. In (13), the student describes a different form of communication with a loved one, which allowed them to ask questions that they might have been nervous to ask or might not have thought to ask in a different conversational context. In (14), the student writes excitedly about interviewing and learning new things about their mother, such as her immigration story and experiences with linguistic discrimination.

13. I liked how it brought a **different form of communication between my loved one and I**. We got to chat about questions I'd be afraid to ask or wouldn't even think about asking. It was a fun experience! ... I also got to get to hear different **insights from my loved one** which I found to be pretty interesting. (P07)
14. Immediately, **I knew I wanted to interview my mother**; she has an impressive life story that deserves to be told. ... During the interview preparation, the sample questions seemed perfect, for **I was curious to find out her responses**. For example, the following question: "¿Cuáles fueron las circunstancias que te hicieron tomar la decisión de inmigrar a los Estados Unidos?" y "¿Qué tipo de dificultades sufriste por no saber hablara inglés?" [What were the circumstances that made you decide to immigrate to the United States? And, what type of difficulties did you suffer for not knowing English?] **I never had the opportunity to ask my mother** why we left Mexico back in 1979, and even though I have heard some of her stories, **I did not know** if she ever suffered for not speaking English ... the time went by too fast. My mother was willing to continue chatting with me, but I was forced to end the recording, when I saw the time was already over an hour. ... I can honestly say that the recording **shows a true and real conversation and a genuine person, my mother**. (P05)

Other students described engaging with their community in a more general sense. In (15) and (16), the students acknowledge the "funds of knowledge" existing in their community as contributing to their learning (González et al., 2006). This is precisely one of the goals of CES, recognizing that all communities have valuable, intrinsic knowledge, assets, and resources (Guajardo et al., 2015). Students share how the project and course helped them to learn more about their community (16, 17).

15. [The] CoBiVa project was a really interesting project, because **I have learned a lot from my community**, and I have seen more different points of view which is fantastic. (P02)
16. I went away from this project with a **little more of an understanding for the culture that produced me**. (P14)
17. I enjoyed my interview. I was able to spend some time **talking about history and the life of someone who has live[d] here for a long time** and was able to give some feedback on language back then and now. (P03)

Experiential Learning and Research Experience

Another common theme was the reference to the course's experiential learning design and the opportunity to participate in research; these aspects of the project were described in 18 survey responses. Many

students explained that the hands-on nature of the project deepened their learning experience. For instance, in (18) the student explains that they were able to engage with language in a new way, drawing a contrast between other common course assignments and the CES project's real-life implications. Other students report the importance of field experiences or community-based learning in allowing them to understand concepts more clearly, gaining confidence and knowledge (19) and tying together academic content (20).

18. I was able to **engage with language in a way that I hadn't really done before**. I was able to interview my friend about his experiences being an ESL language learner in the RGV and analyze his speech which has **more real-life implications as compared to analyzing a book or movie**. (P34)
19. I would love to further work with projects like CoBiVa because I believe that **field experiences are very important** for students to **gain more knowledge and confidence by engaging with our community** and how language is used. (P20)
20. I especially enjoyed **tying together learned content** throughout the course of the semester **and hearing it firsthand** with the interviewee. (P15)

Several students connected the quality of their learning experience with the experiential and hands-on nature of the project. In fact, the students advocate for the continued use of this method in these classes (21) and other disciplines (22).

21. [The project is] unique and **very hands on**. I felt like **I did learn a lot by being involved with the project. Please continue to use this method for future classes!** (P07)
22. **I cannot believe how much I learned** about language use and attitudes with conducting a sociolinguistic interview. I believe **this method of teaching (internship) should be used throughout all fields of study**. (P30)

Each student became an official research contributor or intern, and they were added to the CoBiVa website as part of the research team. They were encouraged to cite this on their resumés and use the instructor as a reference in seeking out job opportunities or pursuing future studies. Many students not only commented on the value of the research experience but also expressed a keen interest in continuing to work on the CoBiVa project (23) or similar research projects (24). In (25), the student credits the research experience with providing a passion to continue future linguistic research in the RGV.

23. I would love to **continue working on this project in my future work here at the university**. (P17)
24. Being able to work on a part of this project **made me want to [do] something similar in the future**. (P33)
25. The experience gave me an insight and **passion for studying languages, especially in our unique region**. (P38)

Several other students also expressed their desire to study linguistics in graduate school, viewing this as a possible future career option (26, 27). This aligns with studies that have shown that undergraduate research experiences result in more students continuing with research in their undergraduate career or in graduate studies (Corwin et al., 2015). Furthermore, when we consider that this study includes mostly underrepresented college students, this outcome is especially significant and crucial for increasing diversity in higher education (Tienda, 2013).

26. The information that I learned from this course, and the experience of revising different transcripts have allowed me to be able to make different types of observations about someone's language, but most importantly, **they have motivated me to continue learning more about this**

topic and any others that relate to language use and structure. Learning about sociolinguistic interviews and revising several transcripts have **most definitely inspired me to pursue a Master's in Linguistics in the near future.** (P08)

27. I was also really happy to participate in this project because it made me experience a little bit of sociolinguistics, and **it motivated me to pursue my career in the field of linguistics.** (P11)

Professional Skills

In 25 distinct survey responses, students mentioned the development or refinement of certain professional skills as an outcome of the CES project. The skill sets mentioned by students include conducting interviews, transcribing interviews, practicing Spanish, developing “soft skills,” and learning new software and technology. Below, several students describe the value of learning transcription skills as well as improving written Spanish abilities.

28. I personally have never done **transcript editing**, so this was all brand new for me. (P16)

29. Apart from getting learning **experience with transcribing**, I was able to get **great practice in my written Spanish.** ... I had never had **proper training in transcribing interviews** before this project. It is a **valuable tool to have when conducting primary research in any field.** (P10)

30. Not only was I able to **improve my transcribing skills** as a researcher, but I was also able to learn how to **edit at an advanced level**, both transcription and audio files. (P21)

Many students mentioned transcription and editing transcripts as new skills (28). The student in (29) states that “it is a valuable tool to have when conducting primary research in any field.” Through this remark, the student recognizes that their experiences and skills gained in the CES project make them a stronger candidate for future academic endeavors in a variety of disciplines. Several responses also mentioned the opportunity to practice written Spanish (29). Each student in the class was given the option to choose Spanish or English for their interviews, transcriptions, and revisions as a part of the translanguaging pedagogy employed in the class (Christoffersen & Regalado, 2021). As such, Hispanic students who may not have taken any Spanish classes previously were able to practice and improve their written Spanish in a low-stakes environment.

Several students also mentioned learning how to use different software, such as Audacity, an open-source digital audio editor, for the anonymization of interview audio files. Below, students describe how they appreciated learning the additional skill of editing audio files using Audacity (31, 32). The second student is particularly enthusiastic about the program and mentions that they will transfer these skills to another course in the subsequent semester (32).

31. Thanks to the opportunity to work on the CoBiVa project; I was able to **earn experience in using programs such as Audacity** to edit interviews. (P11)

32. **I really enjoyed using Audacity, that program is awesome** and I really recommend it to future users. In fact **I'm going to use it on a project I'm going to be working on this semester** so I'm happy about that. (P01)

Students also referenced the development of soft skills (Schulz, 2008), such as communication and listening, in the interview context. In (33) and (34), students mention developing communication skills such as listening, patience, and not interrupting. These soft skills are valuable for shaping an individual's capacity for developing relationships as well as filling the critical need for these uniquely human skills in the workplace (Börner et al., 2018).

33. The interview taught me a few things. I learned how to **be patient and listen to others without interrupting them** and I learned how some people may feel about language. This is useful in everyday life. (P26)

34. I enjoyed the experience conducting the sociolinguistic interview as part of the CoBiVa project. It was something I had never done and is something that has helped me be a **better listener and communicator**. (P36)

Appreciation of Local Language Varieties

One of the most important findings of this study is that most students expressed an increased awareness and appreciation of local language varieties, revealed in 25 distinct survey responses. Some student responses reveal an increased awareness and understanding of how language varies by speaker, context, or region. In (35), for example, the student describes understanding their participant's linguistic repertoire and language use while also acknowledging its variation based on situation and context. In (36, 37), the students recognize the unique characteristics of language in the RGV, specifically in the context of the border, and how this language is tied to their identity. In (38) and (39), students explicitly mention their increased appreciation and valorization of the language of the RGV as an outcome of the class.

35. The COBIVA project was very insightful, not only did we get to learn about the **different speech patterns of the bilingual speakers in our community** but also a little bit about those interviewed to better understand their **linguistic repertoire and languages used either on a daily basis or for certain situations (such as Spanish strictly at home and English at school, etc.)** (P12)
36. This experience was very educational. **I feel better about code meshing and code switching**. I now realize that those of us that live along the border with Mexico do have a **unique way of speaking and that it is part of our identity**. (P36)
37. Language is **so different among people** and it is interesting to hear and listen to how people communicate with each other. **Language varies among all language groups** and it is a way for all of us to have an **identity**. (P16)
38. The main thing I am taking away from this experience is the **deeper appreciation for language in the RGV**. I didn't really have one before starting this project or taking the ENGL 4370 class with Dr. C but I am really grateful for it. (P17)
39. The biggest take away is the appreciation for **our unique ways of speaking in our area**. (P38)

Still other students move beyond recognizing and appreciating local language varieties to developing critical language awareness (CLA). CLA, a pedagogy employed in these CES courses, encourages students to examine language ideologies and how they are related to social, historical, and political contexts and how these are embedded in conceptualizations of power and prestige (Holguín Mendoza, 2018; Leeman, 2018; Leeman & Serafini, 2016). For instance, in (40) the student challenges a standard language ideology (Lippi-Green, 2011) or a belief that there is one true ideal form of a given language. Destabilizing the pervasive notion of a standard language is a central goal of developing community-based corpora projects. Instead of one simple exemplar or model, sociolinguistic corpora provide many voices through audio files, showcasing variation and providing an opportunity to critically examine language ideologies (Christoffersen, 2019; Christoffersen & Shin, 2018). Similarly, in (41), the student recognizes standard language ideologies in the sociolinguistic interviews, citing examples of how participants were told the way they speak is incorrect or improper or that code-switching is ugly. They also recognize that these ideologies are rooted in societal discourses and have an immense impact on individuals' language use and attitudes. The ultimate goal of CLA is that students will take action to challenge negative evaluations of local language varieties, and in (42) the student vows to "change erroneous perceptions of bilingualism wherever [they] can." Some of the pervasive negative evaluations about bilingual language varieties include the false notions that code-switching is indicative of a lack of proficiency in one or both languages. Other negative discourses delegitimize local terms such as *parqueadero* for parking lot (instead of *estacionamiento*) or *biles* for bills (instead of *factura*). Standard language ideologies prioritize certain types of Spanish (such as the Spanish from Spain) as the one "true"

or “real” Spanish, and many students grow up with a negative perception of their own language, having been told that the words they use are not words at all. Through CLA approach to sociolinguistics, students learn that all language varieties are valid and equally correct and proper, and these students can work to change these “erroneous perceptions of bilingualism,” which delegitimize code-switching and other features of language along the U.S.–Mexico border.

40. The experience that I’m taking from this project is the **language of our community and how now I can learn from others’ languages and not believe [it] is an incorrect form of speaking.** (P02)
41. In the case of those who would only codeswitch a few words, I noticed that all of them, at some point in their lives, have been **told that the way they speak is incorrect or not proper**—which somehow has affected their language use. These participants **believe that there is a proper way of speaking** and that mixing two languages at the same time makes their language “ugly.” The comments made from these participants about their own language **made me realize how big of an impact society can have on someone’s language use and attitude.** In the case of these participants, it has made them believe that the way they speak is “**incorrect**” and should be changed in order for them “to sound more educated.” (P08)
42. But perhaps the most valuable knowledge that I take from this experience is **how people think of bilingualism** in the valley. I am **happy and more confident to rely on my Spanish** when I need to since I now know that there are people out there who speak in favor of the use of both languages. Thanks to the project **I will do my best to change the erroneous perceptions of bilingualism whenever I can.** (P11)

Importance of Project

Finally, 14 survey responses referred to the importance of the project itself as personally motivating and rewarding. In (43), the student states that they enjoyed contributing to a special project, and (44) similarly expresses feeling like they were a part of something bigger than themselves, which was distinct from their experiences in other courses. In (45), the student describes the formal study, documentation, and preservation of their community’s language as validating, and they express pride in participating in this large-scale sociolinguistic research project.

43. I am **happy to have been able to contribute to this project**, as it is **important** to the study of the language used here in South Texas. ... **It is good to be a part of something special like this that will benefit those who study language.** (P26)
44. I started to feel like I was **becoming part of something bigger than me or any other parallel course.** (P21)
45. The CoBiVa project is such a **wonderful initiative that makes me feel so validated.** It is so fascinating seeing how **the language I hear every day**—the language which is seldom depicted in a positive and accurate way in media—**be the subject of a formal study and considered worth documenting and preserving.** Being part of this project has really fulfilled my desire to be more involved in sociolinguistic research. ... I am taking away **a sense of participation in the documentation of the language that surrounds me and that is part of my life.** (P28)

Discussion and Conclusions

A thematic analysis of 38 anonymous open-ended interviews revealed multiple benefits for students developing a sociolinguistic corpus in CES courses. These include a greater understanding of transcription (represented in 22 interviews), heightened engagement with one’s own community (represented in 14 interviews), increased understanding through experiential learning and research experience (represented in 16 interviews), development of professional skills (represented in 25

interviews), an increased awareness and appreciation of local language varieties (represented in 25 interviews), and a sense of pride in contributing to an important, large-scale sociolinguistic research project (represented in 14 interviews).

Several of these findings coincide with other research on CES, which have demonstrated that CES provides students opportunities to develop professional and research-related skills (Corwin et al., 2015; Krim et al., 2019) as well as research experience (Tremblay, 2009). Since the beginning of the project in 2017, over 140 students have participated in CES courses working on the CoBiVa, and of those, 15 students were later hired on as research assistants for 34 semester-long positions. Of these students, nine chose to continue in further graduate studies, which is another important outcome of CES experiences (Tremblay, 2009). At an HSI like UTRGV, this holds special significance as all of the aforementioned research assistants and graduate students are Hispanic. So, this CES project is successfully recruiting more diverse students into the field of sociolinguistics (Fitzgerald, 2010).

Other significant themes from the survey responses were more specific to the context and content of the specific CES course. For example, many students described a better understanding of and respect for linguistics research, often discussing their new skills such as transcribing, interviewing, or editing audio. Although we initially imagined that students would only reference the transcription process negatively, we found that students frequently understood the value of transcription and even had fun with the process.

Arguably, one of the most important findings includes students' increased awareness and appreciation of local language varieties. The development of community-based corpora connects the classroom and the community. Engaging with the local community leads to a greater exposure to and understanding of sociolinguistic variation (Burns, 2021). That is, these students learn that there are many different styles of language which may vary in structure, words, and pronunciation and that all of these varieties are valid. Furthermore, these types of courses offer students the opportunity to challenge the false notion of one idealized standard language, develop a critical consciousness, and experience pride in their language (MacGregor-Mendoza & Moreno, 2016; Pascual y Cabo et al., 2017). In the context of an HSI where almost all students in these courses are bilingual and/or Hispanic, this is especially meaningful. Pervasive negative hegemonic perceptions of bilinguals as deficient or less proficient "semilinguals" surround these communities, often resulting in linguistic insecurity or perceptions that bilingualism or local varieties of Spanish at the border are "incorrect." This theme demonstrates that students are destabilizing these unfounded notions and recognizing that all languages vary and that the local bilingual language at the U.S.–Mexico border is a beautiful linguistic variety worthy of study and not any less valuable or "correct" than others. Furthermore, since students are encouraged to interview in Spanish or bilingually, this provides an opportunity to challenge the hegemonic norm of English-only in higher education (Rodríguez et al., 2021).

Finally, students expressed a great deal of enthusiasm for the project in general and the opportunity to participate in a large-scale project with an impact beyond the semester that was described as "validating." The students in these CES courses know that their names will be listed on the CoBiVa website and that the interviews will be integrated into the digital archive. This project provides additional value and significance to their time and work since it has a concrete deliverable and output that will benefit researchers and the community (Gall et al., 2009; Morton et al., 2019).

CES courses are based on sound pedagogical practice, grounded in situated learning and communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). Central to the "community of practice" framework, students engage in various authentic and meaningful research activities, developing an understanding of sociolinguistic research practices. Positioning students as apprentices within the classroom and larger community of practice allows them to transition from legitimate peripheral participation to central membership, from closely mentored and scaffolded activities to active analysis and leadership roles.

The "critical" approach from the CES courses described here addresses recent calls for "critical service-learning" (Mitchell, 2008). However, as "critical community-engaged scholarship" (Gordon da Cruz, 2017), the project avoids some of the problems of the "service"-oriented terminology and mindset. The students are not positioned as "serving" the community. Rather, the community is the source of rich data and highly sophisticated bilingual language practices, an asset for students to explore, develop, and

valorize. The students themselves are positioned as research assistants and provided with documented research experience. As a primarily local commuter campus, students are studying their own friends and family members, their own community, their own lives, language, and selves; the relevance of the project leads to an increase in critical consciousness related to local language varieties. These courses are created for the primarily Hispanic population of UTRGV, unlike other courses where these underrepresented students' perspectives may be an afterthought. So, although the findings of this study contribute to the broader literature on CES demonstrating its value and many beneficial outcomes, its primary benefit is the qualitative analysis of the perceptions of underrepresented college students about their own CES experiences and one possible model for decolonizing service-learning and CES (Dillon et al., 2018).

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About the Authors

Dr. Katherine Christoffersen is an associate professor of Applied Linguistics at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley. She holds a PhD in Second Language Acquisition & Teaching and an MA in English language and linguistics from the University of Arizona. Her research examines bilingualism in the community and the classroom using discourse analytic and ethnographic research methods. She has published on language and identity, language ideologies, code-switching, translanguaging pedagogy, and other related areas in venues such as the *International Multilingual Research Journal*. She is also the cocreator of an online accessible database of sociolinguistic interviews titled Corpus Bilingüe del Valle (email: utrgv.edu/cobiva).

Aubrey Villanueva is a graduate student in the MA Linguistics program at the University of Colorado Boulder. She is a proud native of the Rio Grande Valley and holds a BA in English with a concentration in Linguistics from the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley (UTRGV). During her undergraduate studies at UTRGV, she was a research assistant on the Corpus Bilingüe del Valle. She is currently studying language discrimination in social interaction through the Corpus for Language Discrimination (CLDI), which is currently being developed at UC Boulder.

Ryan M. Bessett is an associate teaching professor of Spanish and the Spanish-language academic coordinator at the University of California San Diego. His major research interests center around language variation and change, Spanish in contact, bilingualism, Spanish as a heritage language, and Spanish phonology. He is especially interested in the Spanish spoken around the U.S.–Mexican border and through variationist methodology differentiating contact-induced change from language-internal variation. He has published on language contact and language variation at the U.S.–Mexican border as well as language choice in the U.S. Southwest. He is also the cocreator of the Corpus Bilingüe del Valle (utrgv.edu/cobiva), a sociolinguistic corpus documenting the Spanish and English spoken in the Rio Grande Valley of Texas.