

Exploring Spanish Heritage Speakers' Coping Mechanisms to Manage Name-based Microaggressions

Spanish Heritage Speakers (HSs) in the U.S. can be the target of indirect acts of discrimination related to their ethnolinguistic identity (Ayón & Philbin, 2017). Name-based microaggressions are subtle insults directed at marginalized groups or individuals as a reaction, often unconscious or automatic, to their given name. This can include mispronunciation, renaming practices or indexical bleaching of an ethnic name (i.e., Bucholtz, 2005; Ayón & Philbin, 2017). Although it may seem harmless to a casual observer, students exposed to name-related subtle discrimination can experience feelings of othering, hyper-awareness, and unconscious internalization of harmful racial ideologies directed towards their ethnoracial group (i.e., Kohli & Solórzano, 2012; Ayón & Philbin, 2017; Bucholtz, 2016). Informed by Critical Race Theory and critical raciolinguistic scholarship, this study seeks to answer the following three questions: Do Spanish heritage speakers experience name-based microaggressions? What coping mechanisms do heritage speakers utilize to counteract name-based microaggressions in the educational setting? What specific strategies could be implemented in the SHL classroom to encourage student agency? To answer these questions, we surveyed a total of 95 college-age Spanish heritage speakers across the country. Participants were asked to complete an online Qualtrics questionnaire on their experiences with name-based microaggressions. This questionnaire consisted of eleven background questions adapted from the Bilingual Language Profile (Birdsong, Gertken & Amengual, 2012), and twelve critical questions about the topic under study. Furthermore, small focus groups and semi-structured interviews were conducted to expand on students' coping mechanisms regarding name-related microaggressive experiences. In line with previous research, preliminary findings indicate that HSs often utilize avoidance, internalization, and assimilation strategies to fend off uncomfortable interactions or feelings of distress. Other coping mechanisms include choosing when and where to assert their ethnolinguistic identity, and when/where to adapt to other's expectations of them. This study contributes to our understanding of Spanish heritage speakers' racialized realities and raciolinguistic microaggressions in the learning environment.

Keywords: raciolinguistics, microaggressions, Spanish heritage speakers, heritage language, critical scholarship