

***El sendero torcido al español* [The Twisted Path to Spanish]: The Development of Bilingual Teachers' Spanish-Language Proficiency**

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Abstract

This paper describes the development of Spanish-language proficiency in bilingual preservice teachers at a university on the Texas–Mexico border. A survey with open-ended questions was administered to preservice teachers in bilingual and English as a Second Language certification programs. The purpose of this study was to investigate the paths that heritage Spanish-speaking preservice teachers take to become bilingual in a border community university. The analysis of their responses suggests that they are individuals negotiating their identities between language communities. The influences of community, family, and school on their Spanish-language development are presented. In addition, implications for improving Spanish-language proficiency for bilingual teachers are discussed.

Introduction

Native-Language Instruction

Research has shown the importance of native-language instruction in the classroom for English language learners (Greene, 1997; Thomas & Collier, 1997; Ramírez, Yuen, & Ramey 1991). In addition, federal legislation requires teachers to have written and oral language skills in the language of the child under the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, 2002). According to NCLB:

All teachers in any language instruction educational program for limited English proficient children that is, or will be, funded under this part are fluent in English and any other language used for instruction, including having written and oral communication skills. (p. 277)

However, the majority of teachers serving Spanish-speaking students are not proficient in Spanish, and nationwide there is only one bilingually certified teacher for every 47 English language learners (Escamilla, Chávez & Vigil, 2005; Kindler, 2002; Figueroa & García, 1994). In addition, many bilingual teachers do not feel that they have the language proficiency to teach across the curriculum, nor do they feel adequately prepared to fulfill the obligation of teaching content in Spanish (Guerrero, 2003b; Sutterby & Guerrero, 2003).

The language proficiency of teachers is one of the critical elements of bilingual education programs, as these teachers are required to teach across the curriculum in both English and another language. However, the development of language proficiency for bilingual teachers is rarely addressed in research. Most research has focused on developing programs for teachers to fill the growing need for bilingual teachers rather than how these teachers come to be bilingual in the United States (Sutterby & Ayala, in press; Riojas-Clark & Flores, 2002; August & Hakuta, 1997).

Teaching across the curriculum in Spanish requires specific academic language that differs depending on the content area. For example, mathematics and science have specific content-area vocabulary. In addition, these content areas require longer, complex phrases and use of the passive voice (Solomon & Rhodes, 1995). The unique features of content areas such as math and science make teachers less comfortable teaching in these areas, while they are more comfortable teaching in more conversational areas such as reading and language arts (Sutterby & Ayala, in press; Khisty, 1995).

Teacher training programs are an important part of preparing teachers to teach in bilingual environments. Increasing numbers of English language learners in schools require that teacher preparation programs train teachers to become effective instructors of children from diverse backgrounds. Bilingual teacher preparation programs especially must take into account the linguistic skills and attitudes that teachers bring with them to the classroom (Riojas-Clark & Flores, 2001).

Bilingual Language Development: Family, School, and Community

First language acquisition in a monolingual environment is a relatively simple, straightforward process in comparison to second or even third language acquisition (Puckett & Black, 1992). Several theoretical frameworks exist that explain the processes of bilingual development. One framework that explains Spanish and English development in the Hispanic community in the United States looks at how language and culture interact in creating an environment for bilingual development. The critical factors according to this framework of bilingual development are community, school, family, and individual variables (Merino, Trueba, & Samaniego, 1993).

The interplay of community, family, school, and individual learner variables creates the linguistic environment for the development of bilingualism. For bilingual development in the United States, linguistic environment will involve the access at home, at school, and in the community to both languages. However, the amount of Spanish language in the environment does not always equate to the amount of Spanish acquired; as Merino, Trueba, and Samaniego (1993) note, input does not necessarily mean intake. Consequently, bilingual speakers may have early access to the Spanish language at home, but not acquire the language as a young child. In short, the ability to use the language is governed by community variables, school, family, and individual differences that shape their acquisition of both languages (Kouritzin, 1999; Merino, Trueba, & Samaniego).

The community provides an important element in the development of bilingualism. One aspect of the community, language shift, is the tendency for languages to be lost across generations. Researchers in language shift originally described the process as taking place over three generations. The first generation spoke the mother tongue, while the second generation spoke both English and the mother tongue, and the third generation speaks only English (Pease-Álvarez, 1993; Portes & Rumbaut, 1990). “Bilingualism thus appears often to constitute a temporary condition for communities. One of the two languages, if it is perceived as predominant, will tend to take over as bilingualism becomes widespread” (Eilers, Oller, & Cobo-Lewis, 2002, p. 48). The shifting of language in communities may in fact be accelerating with increased mobility and technological advances. In many cases, even the second generation no longer speaks the mother tongue and communicates only in English (Fillmore, 2000; Kouritzin, 1999).

The role of families in the development of bilingualism is a complex one, however, little research exists on how families actually promote bilingual development in the home. Parents from many different backgrounds typically report that bilingualism is seen as a benefit for their children, seeing both cultural benefits and possible economic advantages to maintaining two languages (Lambert & Taylor, 1990; Lindholm-Leary, 2001). Maintaining a home language for families involves negotiating identities as the family language reflects core values, culture, and a feeling of belonging to a group (Mills, 2004).

Family and community groups have been at the center of a number of legal cases and community action groups that have challenged schools that made little effort to adapt programs for non-English-speaking students. These family groups have worked to promote effective first-language programs for their children while they develop English-language skills (Ovando & Collier, 1998).

Schools are an important influence on the development of bilingualism, but not always for all children. Bilingual education has frequently been an

area of conflict between the dominant Anglo-English society and Latino students. Efforts to include native-language instruction and the development of bilingualism for working-class children have been seen as subversive to American society. At the same time children of middle- and upper-class parents are applauded for efforts to achieve bilingual abilities (Cummins, 2000). Along the border, this means that teachers in public school classrooms are told “no Spanish after Christmas” in their bilingual classrooms, while children in private school are offered additional private classes in Spanish. The school’s role in this conflict has been to maintain the status quo with children being coerced into using only English in their instructional conversations at school (MacGregor-Mendoza, 2000; Sutterby, Ayala, & Murillo, 2004).

At the university level this translates into preservice bilingual teachers who do not have experience with academic Spanish in school. The continued development of Spanish-language proficiency for these preservice teachers is often not advanced greatly at the university level. Traditionally, university policies have worked against the use of languages other than English beyond the foreign-language program (Friedenberg, 2002). Most bilingual teacher preparation programs in the United States are not ready to deliver courses to preservice teachers in Spanish, even for methodology courses designed to prepare teachers for teaching in the bilingual classroom (Calderón & Díaz, 1993).

Preservice bilingual teachers in the United States often come from a community and school environment that has, at best, not supported their Spanish-language development and at times tried to eliminate it. Public school and university education has often been the instrument of this attempted assimilation, leaving many preservice teachers conflicted about their role as either supporters of students’ culture and linguistic background or as instruments of assimilation into United States English-dominant culture.

“The Wild Tongue”: Individual Identity as a Bilingual Speaker

Ethnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity—I am my language.
Until I can take pride in my language, I cannot take pride in myself.
(Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 59; see Anzaldúa for a description of the meaning
of “wild tongue.”)

The development of bilingual or bicultural identity has often been presented as a dichotomous relationship between the two languages, each representing the totality of the cultures of each language; however, linguistic identities are much more complex than are represented by just two languages. Post-structuralist conceptions of linguistic identity require analysis of linguistic discourse within the community, power relationships, the concept of multiple, fragmented, and hybrid identities, and the narratives people use to describe themselves (Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004).

Anzaldúa (1987) describes the multiple languages and identities that exist for Chicanos (the terms *Chicano* and *Latino* are used as they are referred to by the authors of the cited texts) in various parts of the United States. Depending on the social context of the conversation, Chicano speakers adjust their language and register to adapt to the situation:

Many Chicanos today live in the Midwest and the East. And because we are a complex heterogeneous people, we speak many languages. Some of the languages we speak are: Standard English, Working class and slang English, Standard Spanish, Standard Mexican Spanish, North Mexican Spanish dialect, Chicano Spanish, Tex Mex, Pachuco (called *caló*). (p. 55)

Zou (2002) describes the multiple linguistic identities that “can coexist within the same time period but become activated in different settings that are distinct and unique” (p. 252). These identities can be reflected through code switching or translations depending on the situation or context. Changing societal attitudes within and outside of immigrant communities are allowing some recent immigrants to comfortably maintain an ethnic identity while participating in mainstream American culture. “Belonging to more than one ethnic/racial group comes naturally and at times is indispensable in order to practice a profession or succeed in a given career” (p. 254).

On the other hand, young immigrants can also be under tremendous pressure to give up their ethnic identity in order to assimilate into mainstream American culture. On an individual level, Kouritzin (1999) documents first-language loss among immigrants. She found that the inner conflict to assimilate led to a negative image of the individual’s cultural heritage. She describes individuals wanting to have “white-sounding” names or having hostile attitudes toward people of their own culture.

Overall, individuals adapt differently to the forces of assimilation with some resisting assimilation, others embracing multiple identities, and others choosing to assimilate totally into U.S. culture. As the individual adapts to these different identities, then his or her language acquisition also follows his or her sense of identity.

Spanish in the Rio Grande Valley

Especially because like when I would go see my real dad in Mexico, he’d always call me Pocha, like I couldn’t really speak. . . . Grammar wise, I was a lot better in English. I wasn’t growing in my Spanish because I wasn’t exposed to it anymore, just at home. (Guerrero, 2003b, p. 657)

Along the U.S.–Mexico border, there exists a unique language environment where both English and Spanish have existed together in a

complicated interplay of culture and power for almost two centuries. The fluid nature of the border has led to a multicultural and multilinguistic society that has had its share of conflict that is not easily explained by typical U.S. classifications of race, ethnicity, or culture (Martínez, 1994).

The environment for Spanish-language development on the Texas–Mexico border has been one of conflicts between forces of assimilation and resistance to these forces. One of the key elements of the foundation of the Chicano movement has been the use of Spanish to resist cultural domination. According to Rosales (1996), “The hallmark of resistance still was the maintenance of Spanish . . . due to resistance to Anglo domination” (p. 18). The maintenance of Spanish was a way of resisting the emphasis of public schooling on assimilating Mexican immigrants.

On the other hand, linguistic tension also exists between U.S.-born Latinos and Mexican nationals. “Mexicans who visit the area call local Hispanics *pochos*, an unflattering reference to their inability to speak standard Spanish” (Richardson, 1999, p. 121). There is a constant influx of Spanish-speaking Mexican nationals to the Rio Grande Valley region as workers seek better economic opportunities. “Very soon the new worker will have to interact with *pochos*. . . . The association with the *pochos* is essential to retain one’s job and it is often a love-hate relationship” (Trueba, 1999, p. 155). This inflow of new immigrants also leads to tension between U.S.-born Latinos based on economic conflict, as bilingual Latinos are often put in charge of groups of monolingual Spanish-speaking workers. It also leads to a linguistic conflict as U.S.-born Chicanos are seen to speak a deviant form of Spanish (Anzaldúa, 1987).

Schools along the border have had a longstanding rule against the use of Spanish in the classroom. In 1968, Chicano students in Edcouch Elsa, a Rio Grande Valley border community, walked out of school because of the “No Spanish rule” (Rosales, 1996). There has been a longstanding conflict between the English- or Anglo-dominated schools and the students who were typically Spanish-speaking Chicanos. “At school the teachers would make fun of us for the way we pronounced words. It got to the point that I was ashamed of my parents because they could not speak English” (Richardson, 1999, p. 129).

Because of the “No Spanish rule” in many border communities, students felt a personal conflict over their maintenance of Spanish. In addition, the lack of instruction in academic Spanish caused students to feel the need to give up their Spanish. These students developed Spanish at home and then lost it at school, leaving them with conversational ability in Spanish but very low levels of biliteracy (Sutterby & Ayala, in press).

Method

Survey Instrument

Preservice teachers answered seven open-ended questions describing their learning experiences with Spanish (see Appendix for the survey questions).

The open-ended questions were drawn from the research of Guerrero (2003a, 2003b), who created life histories of bilingual preservice teachers based on oral interviews. The open-ended questions were designed to reflect a narrative approach to language development in that it is a dynamic process that changes in purpose and meaning to the individual as he or she has different experiences. Identity narratives, the stories that we use to explain our identity, are socially constructed and allow the participants to self-name or self-characterize their experiences (Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004).

Participants

The participants in this study are cohorts of preservice teachers entering the early childhood to fourth-grade bilingual certification program at Border University (a pseudonym) located along the Texas–Mexico border. Each semester there are approximately 25–40 preservice teachers entering the bilingual education block of courses. The surveys were initially conducted in the fall semester of 2001 and continued for 4 semesters. Since the initial survey, 131 preservice teachers have taken the survey from the bilingual education cohorts. Of these, 96 grew up and were educated primarily in the United States.

All of the preservice teachers in the bilingual cohort self-identified as either Hispanic, Mexican national, or Mexican American. Unlike typical preservice teachers who enter their university training at the age of 18 and finish in 4–6 years, the preservice teachers at Border University who participated in this survey typically were older (an average age of 29), take longer to graduate, and often have children and families of their own (about 40%). The participants come from the geographic region around the university, and most are the first generation to attend college in their families.

Data Analysis

The narratives provided by the preservice teachers who were educated primarily in the United States were coded and grouped into themes (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The themes were then presented to the participants for additional commentary in order to increase trustworthiness through member checking. Finally, a peer reviewer made an independent review of the data analysis in order to confirm the selection of the themes. Quotations were drawn from the data to illustrate significant aspects of the participants' experiences. The themes that emerged from the data included the path that the preservice teachers took to developing Spanish, the role of the family, the role of the school, and the desire to help maintain Spanish in the community.

Findings

El sendero torcido [The Twisted Path]

El sendero torcido al español comes from the many respondents whose development of Spanish-language proficiency took a somewhat similar path. In many ways the preservice teachers who managed to develop Spanish-language proficiency in the United States took a twisted path in that they learned Spanish at home, then lost it at school and finally regained it through courses at the secondary and university levels. The following is one participant's experiences learning Spanish in the United States. This participant's narrative was echoed by many others who also were educated in the United States.

Home

Both parents spoke only Spanish and any time a teacher would send notes or visit our home, my siblings and I would have to translate for our Mom more so than for my Dad. My Dad would communicate in English only when it was necessary, otherwise he spoke only Spanish.

Elementary

I was told not to speak Spanish or I would be reprimanded. I struggled at first, but got through it okay.

University

I took two semesters of Spanish classes and did okay. It is somewhat more difficult because you get into the phase of punctuation and that was harder for me to master.

In looking at the descriptions of the path that these preservice teachers have taken to get to become Spanish speakers and wanting to become teachers in a bilingual program, we looked at the major components of family, school, and university/community. This path to Spanish was an important part of the participants' identity as they shaped their worldview based on this sense of struggle to maintain an identity as a Spanish speaker while trying to acculturate to U.S. culture.

La familia: Apoyar o impedir [The Family: Help or Hurt]

The role of the family was important for many participants' development of Spanish-language proficiency. Families frequently were reported as either supporting or impeding participants' development of Spanish through the choices they made about what language to use in the home and in what classes to enroll their children at school. One way parents impeded participants' development of Spanish was by refusing to participate in bilingual education. As one participant wrote, "Once I entered kinder[garten], my mother refused

to enroll me in a bilingual classroom and put me into an all-English classroom. I remember having trouble understanding English but I picked up on it pretty fast.”

The attitude that “sink or swim” in English is the best way to succeed in school appears to be a common conception for many Spanish-speaking parents. In one case, a parent who was a teacher in a bilingual program refused to have his daughter participate in bilingual education. The daughter said:

My mother says that Spanish was my first language and that I refused to speak English. This, of course, was before I started school. What I recall is my Dad being against putting me in bilingual classes. He did not want me to have any bilingual classes at all.

On the other hand, many parents saw their role as enforcing Spanish at home, leaving English to the schools. Parents enforced the development of Spanish by emphasizing correct Spanish and by correcting their children’s Spanish. This method of enforcing correct Spanish had mixed results. As one participant wrote, “By the time I was in 5th grade I remember probably speaking 90% English and 10% Spanish, and half of the time my mother would constantly be correcting my Spanish (which I used to hate!).” Some participants viewed this constant emphasis on Spanish as a sign of caring and appreciated their parents’ attempts to enforce bilingualism. One participant described her experience:

As a child my parents would always speak to us in Spanish because they believed in dual language acquisition, Spanish at home and English at school. Also to my parents I cannot speak incorrect Spanish because they will immediately correct me. This also helped me acquire better speaking, reading and writing skills along the years.

Parents also enforced the Spanish-at-home rule as a sign of *respeto* [respect] for adult family members who did not speak English. For many of these participants Spanish is associated with family, while English is associated with the world of work or school.

My parents spoke only Spanish at home. My parents were very old fashioned. They did not want their children speaking English at home, they said only to speak it at school with our teachers. They had this idea that it was a lack of respect to speak English in front of someone that did not understand the language.

The home environment for Spanish was not always ideal. When the family had already progressed primarily into English-language use at home, the result was often a mix of Spanish and English, which is often locally called “Spanglish” or “Valley Talk.” This language in the Rio Grande Valley is often associated with less educated, working-class families. As one participant wrote:

My experiences with Spanish when I was a child were very limited. I spoke Spanish to my grandparents and English to my parents. I thought that I was speaking Spanish, but it turned out to be what is now called Spanglish (both Spanish and English). We were migrant workers and so a lot of my schooling was done in English speaking schools.

La escuela [The School]

The role of the school at the elementary level has been the primary tool of assimilation, as teachers and administrators see their role as enforcers of English in the schools. These participants frequently reported speaking some Spanish in informal settings, such as on the playground, with peers but rarely with teachers. One participant described her experience: "During my elementary school years, we were not allowed to speak in Spanish in the classroom. Students back then were told to speak only in English while in the classroom."

This level of enforcement often led to rules that forbid the use of Spanish in school along with punishments for not following this rule. As one participant wrote, "In my school here in Jonesville we were not allowed to speak Spanish in or out of class. If you were caught speaking Spanish you were in Big Big trouble not only by the teacher but the principal as well."

Another participant reported being belted by the teachers for speaking Spanish in school. Other punishments included time out, having to put your nose in a corner, and having to stay after school.

As children were not allowed to speak Spanish in the classroom, many felt pressured to give up their Spanish by peers and others at school. By middle and high school, many participants who had grown up speaking Spanish at home began to take Spanish classes at school, and also began to realize that what they knew about Spanish was not enough to make it in an academic environment.

A la universidad [To the University]: Secondary and University Schooling

Participants having taken Spanish classes in high school or entering Border University and taking them at the university levels often saw themselves as fluent Spanish speakers until they are exposed for the first time to academic Spanish. This first exposure to academic Spanish could be said to be a wake-up call for many preservice teachers as they have self-identified as Spanish speakers, and this identity was challenged for the first time when they took Spanish classes in school. One participant wrote:

I had a very hard time in my Spanish classes that were mandatory in high school. I remember failing Spanish I (one) with a 68 and my dad was very upset at me. That made me try harder and want to learn the

language that I knew I would need in the future. What is ironic is that my Dad is an elementary bilingual teacher.

Many preservice teachers report that their classes are very difficult and find reading and writing academically in Spanish to be difficult. Although their oral language makes them appear to be fluent or near-fluent speakers, their experiences reading and writing are extremely limited. As one participant wrote, "Here at the University, I had problems . . . I really didn't think I was going to have a hard time with those (Spanish) classes since I spoke Spanish most of the time." The first experience in academic Spanish often challenged these preservice teachers.

The university was a whole new story. The Spanish classes that I have taken here have really helped me out with my Spanish. I thought that I was okay until I learned that I needed a lot of help, especially with writing in Spanish.

In addition to the challenge of academics in Spanish, there is also the challenge of interacting with professors and peers who have grown up in academic-Spanish environments. This often led to a conflict between U.S.-born Spanish speakers and Spanish speakers with educational experiences in Spanish-speaking countries. Academic professors at the university often create classroom climates that intimidate U.S.-born preservice teachers.

I took two Spanish courses at the University level because I was required to take two foreign language courses. I can recall being completely terrified in each class because the expectations were so high. My professors assumed that because I was Hispanic I was proficient in Spanish. That was not true.

This classroom climate can run from being seen as challenging to open hostility between Mexican nationals and U.S.-born Latinos. Because the preservice teachers are Hispanic or Latino, there is an expectation that they should be able to communicate effectively in academic Spanish even though these preservice teachers have had few academic experiences in Spanish.

I feel that people look at me differently because I don't speak Spanish and I am Hispanic. I feel that I have been treated unfairly for that reason. I have people say that we may think we are too good to speak that language or that we think it is an inferior language. That is not true.

Un deseo perdido [A Lost Wish]: Maintaining Spanish

Participants who were struggling with maintaining their Spanish often expressed a sense of loss for not taking the opportunity to acquire Spanish while they were younger. The participants often described a particular point when they realized that English dominated over Spanish in their communication.

The peer pressure of just speaking English even to my mom got the best of me. Spanish was seen as an inferior language, so even if I spoke it with my mother I felt ashamed and inferior so I only spoke English to her (which she had begun to learn along the way) and would either translate if she didn't understand or just get frustrated and just yell out everything in Spanish (I hate myself now for doing that) but I didn't value the beauty of speaking two languages back then.

This unfulfilled desire is often expressed as a sense of what could have been if they had taken the opportunity to learn or maintain Spanish.

To me, speaking and learning Spanish is a great deal. After all, it is my first language. I would have loved, as a child, to have been taught Spanish as well as English in school. I feel that children loose [sic] their Spanish language because schools did not make an effort to teach and keep the home language. Had I been taught in Spanish, I think I would have been better at it now.

This often led them to express a desire not to allow their own children to follow the twisted path they had taken. They also saw their role as a model for the students in their classrooms and their own children to become fluent users of academic Spanish. As one participant wrote,

I have decided to teach my children Spanish and try to have them maintain it. I do not want to be one of those bilingual teachers that speak terrible Spanish. I feel that the students do not benefit from those teachers.

Many have concerns that their children will not be able to become proficient Spanish speakers, for example:

I am a third generation Spanish user. This means that my children are fourth generation and sadly, Spanish is nearly fossilized in my home. I realized the importance of being bilingual too late for my older children (15 and 12). My younger children (8 and 6) venture to speak Spanish once in a while but not enough to acquire it.

Summary and Discussion of Findings

The preservice teachers at Border University who have had experiences learning Spanish in the Rio Grande Valley on the U.S. side of the border often took a twisted path to Spanish acquisition. These preservice teachers grew up speaking Spanish at home and then lost that language when they got to school. The experiences are similar to those described by Guerrero (2003a) in that most preservice bilingual teachers in the United States learned their Spanish at home and found little if any support in the schools. Families may encourage Spanish development at home by enforcing the use of "correct"

Spanish at home while reinforcing the role of the schools as an English-only environment. These preservice teachers are often surprised when they take their first courses in academic Spanish, and they realize their reading and writing ability has not been developed.

Although it would be easy to point the finger at parents for not reinforcing Spanish in the home and for refusing bilingual education, we feel that these families are making choices that at the time seem like they are in their child's best interest. These families often receive a great deal of misinformation about bilingual education and make their choices based on this information. As González (1992) suggests, parents make great sacrifices to give their children the opportunity to succeed and often equate success with the rapid acquisition of English.

At the secondary and university levels, these preservice teachers often encounter professors and classmates who were educated primarily in Spanish, and they often feel their level of Spanish is inferior. These experiences often lead these preservice teachers to express a sense of loss for their opportunity to learn Spanish as a child. In some cases this motivates them to become role models for Spanish speakers for their own children and for their students.

We have also found that schools continue to emphasize English even after years of research indicating the importance of bilingualism and biliteracy for children's economic success. This is often due to the culture of schools as described, which appears to create an environment where all parties are seeking to encourage assimilation into English-speaking U.S. culture (Cummins, 2000). Rather than take advantage of children's skills and abilities that they bring from home, the school system continues to enforce assimilation. In addition, the people who succeed in school are often the ones who hold the values of assimilation, as one participant wrote:

To start with I am against bilingual programs . . . students should be in the program only until they can speak the English language proficiently. Many of the students come out knowing little or nothing at all.

Bilingualism is critical for social development of children because there can be serious consequences for not developing both languages. As one participant from the English cohort wrote in her response to the survey question:

I moved to Corpus Christi, Texas where my grandfather and grandmother lived. My grandmother spoke English and Spanish and my grandfather only spoke Spanish so it was very hard for me to communicate with my grandfather. The only way I could communicate with my grandfather is by telling someone else to tell him something and to have someone else hear what he said in order to translate it back to me.

This participant's inability to communicate in Spanish means the loss of family values and culture, which are often transmitted from one generation to the next. As suggested by Mills (2004), the family language is an important way of transmitting culture and values. Avoiding this real loss should always be taken into consideration when planning bilingual education programs so that if possible this loss does not reoccur.

Conclusions

This research has been extremely useful to us in helping to prepare preservice teachers in that it has helped us become better aware of their linguistic background. It has also helped us become more aware of the path that these preservice teachers take on their way to our classrooms. In order to prepare teachers to teach across the curriculum in Spanish, we at the university level need to ensure that our preservice teachers have access to academic Spanish.

At the university level, we also have begun to realize that preservice teachers need more experience with academic Spanish. We offer content-area courses in Spanish in order to ensure that our teachers have access to academic Spanish. These content-area courses provide the opportunity to develop the vocabulary and linguistic skills required to teach in all the content areas.

We also have had to work on making sure our classroom environments are accepting of both heritage speakers of Spanish and speakers who have been educated primarily in Spanish. As educators at the university level, we want to affirm the importance of supporting bilingualism and biliteracy for all of our preservice teachers, both native speakers of Spanish and heritage speakers of Spanish.

Universities working to prepare preservice teachers for bilingual classrooms should take into consideration the findings of this research. First, access to academic Spanish should be included in all bilingual teacher education programs because most heritage speakers feel uncomfortable teaching in Spanish. Second, universities should be aware that the university climate is at times not accepting of heritage speakers of Spanish. Creating supporting environments is important in helping preservice teachers develop their Spanish-language proficiency. Finally, effective bilingual programs like dual-language programs might reduce the loss of academic Spanish for heritage speakers. Further research should be conducted into closing the gap between the development of Spanish at home and the university setting through effective bilingual programs.

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Appendix

Open-Ended Survey Questions

Describe your learning experiences with Spanish as a child at home.

Describe your learning experiences with Spanish in elementary school.

Describe your learning experiences with Spanish in secondary school (middle and high school).

Describe your learning experiences with Spanish at the University level.

Describe your current level of exposure and use of Spanish at home.

Describe your current level of exposure and use of Spanish in the community.

Describe how important is Spanish for you personally in your work and home environments.