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A Qualitative Study on Language Assimilation in Latino Families

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By

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this project to my participants, who spoke to me so openly about their personal decisions.

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Abstract

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The purpose of this study is to explore language assimilation among Latino populations. This study aims to explore the decision making process of second and third generation Latino parents when deciding whether or not to teach their children Spanish, and explore how language patterns influence intergenerational relationships. This is a qualitative study using semi-structured interviews with six participants acquired through convenient sampling. The participants are Latino parents of adult children. An inductive approach was used to produce three major themes: Family and Community Influences, Intentionality and Regret, which together offer an understanding of the factors considered by Latino parents when making this decision, and offers insight into their residual feelings about their decision. This study's results indicate that social work practice should be better informed about the language assimilation process among Latino populations. It is important for social workers to understand that every Latino family has their own language assimilation process and language patterns. If social workers are unaware, it is possible to offend Latino families, and to unconsciously ascribe values surrounding language to Latino clients. Being aware and understanding this process can help social workers practice cultural humility, be more inclusive and less biased.

Introduction

Latinos are one of the fastest growing ethnic groups in the U.S. (Hopkins, 2015). They make up 17% of the total U.S. population, which makes them the largest ethnic minority group in the country, approximately 53 million people (Molina, Little, & Rosal, 2016). Latinos make up a significant portion of the populations often served by social workers (Furman et al., 2009). Therefore, it is important for social workers and other mental health practitioners to have some background understanding of this population and the unique factors that come into play when working with Latino families. Language is an important factor when working with this population. It is important for social workers to have an understanding of the decisions Latinos make around language and language patterns in order for social workers to be less bias and more inclusive when working with this population (Furman et al., 2009).

Language assimilation is the process in which members of immigrant groups learn English (Tran, 2010). The assimilation model proposes that ethnic immigrant groups will acquire English, and ultimately abandon their native language. Assimilation theory also suggests that native language maintenance steadily declines with a complete loss of the native language by the third generation (Lutz, 2006; Tran, 2010). It is important to point out that previous research has suggested a shift towards bilingualism as it has advantages, specifically in gaining employment and nurturing strong cultural ties (Arriagada, 2005; Bayley & Bonnici, 2009; Lutz, 2006). However, despite the shift towards bilingualism, the process of language assimilation is still very prevalent (Arriagada, 2005).

Due to the large number of Latino population in the U.S., the issue of language assimilation is important to research (Arriagada, 2005), especially within a social work context. There are many assumptions, accepted stereotypes, and biases that social workers can have when working with this population (Furman, 2009). It is important to understand that every Latino family has their own language assimilation process and language pattern, and that families may be in different stages of these processes. If social workers are unaware of a family's language patterns, it is possible for the family to become offended when spoken to in the incorrect language. It is also important for social workers to understand language assimilation, and the factors considered by Latino families, in order to not ascribe any values surrounding language to Latino clients. It is necessary to understand intergenerational relationships, and the influence that language has on these relationships. If social workers are not educated and aware of the vast differences that can exist in Latino families regarding language, stereotypes and biases of social worker's can decrease the effectiveness when working with families in this population (Furman, 2009).

Literature Review

Language assimilation. Previous research on the topic of language assimilation reveals that it is uncommon for native language to survive past three generations (Arriagada, 2005). Primary language patterns for immigrants involves learning English as fast as possible, and for their children to stop using their family's native language (Arriagada, 2005). The immigrant generation is usually monolingual, or dominant, in their country of origin's language. The U.S. born children of the immigrant generation is usually bilingual, in English and their parents' native language (Bayley & Bonnici,

2009). They often have better literacy skills in English due to attending English-medium schools. The second, and/or sometimes third, U.S. born children are monolingual in English, or at best, have very basic understanding and knowledge of the original native language (Bayley & Bonnici, 2009).

The change experienced as a result of being in contact with other cultures is known as acculturation. The process of acculturation involves changes in behavior, cultural identity, knowledge, values, norms, and language (Furman, 2009). The shift in language, also known as language assimilation, is the key issue being focused on. The process of language assimilation is considered to occur across generations, as people have more exposure to English, increasing both their chances and the pressure to speak English (Arriagada, 2005). Arriagada (2005), additionally argues that native language is lost due to English being accepted as the dominant language in public spheres, while the native language is limited to more intimate spheres, like homes. Bayley and Bonnici (2009) claim that the home is usually the last domain in which the native language experiences a shift. It is safe to assume that those who report speaking Spanish at home, speak English in all other domains, and use English in most of their communications (Bayley & Bonnici, 2009). Bayley and Bonnici (2009) offer an example of this process with a couple, Jose and Elena who only spoke English at home in order to make their children's transition into school easier, when their children grew older, they lacked Spanish proficiency (Bayley & Bonnici, 2009).

Factors that influence language. The factors that influence native language preservation are numerous. Lutz (2006) claims that generation status, parent's English proficiency, parental income, parent birthplace, single parenthood, opportunities to speak

Spanish, and neighborhood and school context are all factors that effect Spanish proficiency (Lutz, 2006). Bayley and Bonnici (2009) similarly point to family context as a factor in preserving Spanish. Arriagada (2005) adds household size, learning Spanish as first language, and geographic location as additional factors that play a role in language preservation (Arriagada, 2005). Tran (2010) argues that along with the factors already mentioned, gender and ethnicity group size can also become factors.

Generation status affects English proficiency because according to Arriagada (2005), language rarely transmits past the third generation. Parent's English proficiency is an important factor because the Lutz (2006) study found that parent's English proficiency is negatively associated with children's Spanish proficiency. Parental income is also an important factor in Spanish preservation. As parent income increases, the chances of them speaking Spanish decreases (Arriagada, 2005; Lutz, 2006). Lutz (2005) claims that this is due to the entrance into American educational, social and economic spaces. As parents ability to speak Spanish decreases their children's knowledge of the language is quickly lost because these parents see English as a means to enter mainstream culture and succeed (Arriagada, 2005).

Parents' birthplace has a strong effect on children's Spanish speaking proficiency. Lutz (2006) found that parents' nativity is more important than the place of birth of the child in predicting Spanish proficiency, as they have foreign-born parents to speak to in Spanish. Similarly Tran (2010) claims that children with two foreign-born parents will be even more likely to learn the native language (Tran, 2010). Research also found that single parents have a tougher time preserving Spanish in the home than two parent families (Lutz, 2006).

The opportunities to speak Spanish are an important factor in native language preservation (Arriagada, 2005; Lutz, 2006; Tran, 2010). Arriagada (2005) claims that the presence of grandparents and other adult relatives who speak the native language connect the children to the language, along with values, and norms of the native country. Additionally, household size is important as well. The larger the household, the more opportunities the child will have to use Spanish within the family (Arriagada, 2005; Tran 2010). School and community environments are also significant in order to create more opportunities to speak Spanish, therefore strengthening it (Lutz, 2006). Tran (2010), agrees that the best way to preserve and retain language is by using the language frequently.

Additionally, ethnicity group size plays a role in preserving language. The high Spanish proficiency among Mexicans is in part due to the large size of the ethnic group, which increases the chances for Spanish use, therefore Spanish retention (Tran, 2010). Geographical location is also a factor; children who live in areas with high immigration are more likely to speak Spanish due to increased opportunity to use it (Arriagada, 2005). The proportion of Latino students in school was positively related to bilingualism because of increased opportunities to use Spanish (Arriagada, 2005).

Finally, family context affects Spanish usage and proficiency. Within the family context, gender also plays a role (Lutz, 2006; Tran, 2010). Spanish speaking opportunities are structured by gender along with family and neighborhood contexts (Lutz, 2006). Girls show higher rates of bilingual proficiencies than boys (Tran, 2010). According to Lutz (2006), this might be the case because women teach the native language to children in the home, and they may not encounter the same pressures to learn

English as men. Finally Arriagada (2005) states that children who learn Spanish as a first language are more likely to use and speak Spanish more than children who did not learn it as a first language (Arriagada, 2005).

Bilingualism. Previous research on immigrant groups suggests a trend towards bilingualism among Latino populations (Lutz, 2006). Several definitions of bilingualism exist. Active bilingualism is when an individual speaks and uses both languages, and passive bilingualism is when an individual is fluent in one language, but understands a second language (Lee, Shetgiri, Barina, Tillitski, & Flores, 2015). Research suggests that there are many advantages to bilingualism (Arriagada, 2005; Bayley & Bonnici, 2009; Lee et al., 2015). There are also perceived disadvantages to bilingualism (Lee et al., 2015; Tran, 2010).

Bayley and Bonnici (2009) found that bilingual individuals may have advantages in gaining employment, particularly in entry level positions that entail customer interaction. Studies suggest that that bilingualism preserves language and culture (Lee et al., 2015). Research has found that children in families with strong culture and language preservation, have academic advantages and have better career opportunities, which is supported by empirical evidence proving bilingualism can attract equal, if not better benefits to children (Arriagada, 2005; Lee et al., 2015). Other benefits include high self esteem, abstract thinking skills and academic success as it has been shown in active or fluent bilingual children (Lee et al., 2015).

Bilingualism is sometimes seen as harmful to a child's English learning. The perceived disadvantages that exist are potential language confusion and beliefs that bilingualism can cause language delays (Lee et al., 2015). Tran (2010) found that the

opposite is true, and it actually proves beneficial. Incentives for Spanish maintenance increase with the growth of the Latino population, and its political power (Tran, 2010). Another reason for bilingualism is the continuous immigration from Latin America makes it so that there is always a steady replenishment of Latino immigrants (Tran, 2010). Finally, loss of Spanish proficiency is often associated with loss of cultural continuity, and loss of intergenerational communication (Bayley & Bonnici, 2009).

Aims and Objectives

The intent of this study is to explore the multigenerational language patterns of Latino families, and to determine the different perspectives and decision making processes that are behind second and third generation Latino parents' choice to either teach or not teach their children Spanish. To answer these inquiries a qualitative study exploring the following research question will be conducted:

RQ1. What is the decision-making process of second or third generation, bilingual, Latino parents when deciding whether or not to teach their U.S. born children Spanish?

RQ1a. How do language patterns influence intergenerational relationships?

Methodology

To explore the language assimilation process of second and third generation Latino families, a qualitative study was conducted. The goal of the study was to better understand the experience of Latino individuals in terms of language assimilation. It aimed to understand the factors considered by Latino parents when deciding whether or not to teach their children Spanish. Another aspect of the study addressed the impact that language has on intergenerational relationships.

Participants

This study's participants were second and third generation Latino parents of adult children. The sample was comprised of four second generation and two third generation Latinos. The sample was comprised of 4 females and 2 males; their ages ranged from 36 to 77 years. All participants considered themselves to be Latino. Four of the participants had parents or grandparents from Mexico. One of the participants had parents from El Salvador, and one participant had one parent from Mexico, and one from El Salvador. All participants had one or more children aged 18 years or older. For a more information about participant demographics see Appendix A, Participant Demographics Table. All participants names included were given pseudonyms in order to maintain anonymity.

Sampling

Purposive sampling methods were used to collect this study's sample. A convenience sampling approach was used in order to access the first two participants. After accessing these participants, snowball sampling methods were used to increase participants that fit the criteria. In order to meet the criteria for participation in the study,

individuals had to be 18 years old or older, be a second or third generation Latino/a, and have adult children.

Data Collection

Data was collected through semi-structured interviews with six participants. The interviews consisted of 10 questions geared towards gathering in depth information about language assimilation, factors considered by Latino/a parents when deciding whether or not to teach their children Spanish, and the impact of language on intergenerational relationships (see Appendix B for questions asked). The interviews were conducted from December 2017 to March 2018. They took place in the participants' homes. The interviews lasted anywhere between 15 and 41 minutes. They were recorded, transcribed and coded. The interviews were transcribed by an audio and video transcription service.

Maintaining anonymity and confidentiality can present problems when it comes time to presenting the findings (Anderson, 2010). In order to avoid this, confidentiality and anonymity was kept at all times as participants' identifiable information was not collected during this study. Names were not collected on any forms, and audio recordings were kept on a password-protected computer. Transcripts of the interviews were de-identified by removing any identifiable information such as job titles, and addresses, etc. Each participant was assigned a numerical identification code to distinguish between interview recordings, and later given a pseudonym. Only de-identified information was used in the analysis of the study. De-identified data is to be kept by the investigator indefinitely. All participants were given consent forms prior to sharing any information. Participants were not financially compensated for their participation in the study. Each

participant was treated ethically and in accordance with the guidelines set by the Institutional Review Board of California State University, Northridge.

Data Analysis

A qualitative inductive approach was used to analyze the data derived from the interviews. Initial coding, followed by focused coding was used (Charmaz, 2006). Initial coding involved studying the data line by line, and remaining open to all the possibilities that can emerge from the data (Charmaz, 2006). After initial coding, focused codes were created by using the most frequent and most significant initial codes. Categories emerged through this data analysis process, after which, themes were developed.

The possibility of bias was addressed by including contradictory evidence and by utilizing respondent validation. Including contradict evidence ensured that research bias did not affect or change the perception of the data (Anderson, 2010). Responded validation is showing the participants the data and analyses and allowing them to give their feedback. This ensured that the researcher's interpretations were correct and unbiased, and also lent the opportunity to re-analyze the data if inconsistencies were discovered.

Results

Three themes emerged from data analysis conducted. The first theme was *Familial and Community Influences*, which encompasses the various factors that influenced participants' language patterns and ultimately influenced their decision to either teach or not teach their children Spanish. The second theme, *Intentionality*, includes the intentional choices made by parents when making this decision. Finally, the third theme, *Regret*, describes the feelings of those parents who did not teach their children Spanish. Out of the six participants, only two reported that their children were fluent in Spanish. One participant reported that only her oldest daughter speaks Spanish, while her three youngest children do not speak the language. Three participants reported that their children don't speak the language, but have some understanding of it when spoken by someone else.

Family and Community Influences

There were three main familial and community factors that were found to influence Latino parent's decision on language. The first factor was grandparent influence, the second was birth order influence, and the third was community influences. These factors influenced all the participants in different ways.

Grandparent influence. There were two participants, (Carlos, 38 and Brianna, 36) in this study, who were very confident in their children's ability to speak Spanish. Both of these participants had a strong presence of grandparents in the home while their children were growing up. Carlos explains, "My wife is from El Salvador. Her mom used to come visit really often when my kids were little. She would spend entire summers,

living with us. I think they learned a lot of Spanish from her”. Brianna’s in laws were also large factors in her decision to teach her children Spanish.

Brianna explains:

I have always lived with my in-laws, so I thought we'll need to (teach them) because they don't speak any English. Having them live with us, I think also helped them learn the language... they would only communicate to the kids in Spanish, so it did help them a lot.

Brianna thinks that this factor was very impactful; she explained that her nieces and nephews, who are the same age as her children do not speak Spanish, they only understand it. Paola, 52 also explained a similar pattern. She explained that one of her nephews speaks it more than her children because his Spanish-speaking grandmother lived in the house with him growing up, while her children did not grow up with their Spanish-speaking grandparents in the home.

Birth order influence. Birth order was another factor that was discussed as a familial influence. There was a clear trend among five of the six participants. They all discussed that birth order, specifically, the older children speaking Spanish more than the younger children. Alicia, 57, explained that the oldest children in her extended family speak it and understand it more than the younger children because they spent more time with their Spanish speaking grandparents, who had already passed away when the younger children were growing up.

Ricardo explains a very similar circumstance:

Yeah, they (the older grandchildren) were the first ones to go with their grandparents, and would get dropped off at their grandparents, they

(grandparents) spoke to them in Spanish. So they learned it more better, by the time my kids went through with their grandparents were done with babysitting. Gloria explained that her oldest daughter speaks Spanish, while her younger three children don't speak it. She attributes this to her oldest daughter having more contact with older Spanish speaking relatives.

Paola, talked about how birth order was a factor in her being less knowledgeable in Spanish than her older siblings, "But if I don't know it (Spanish), I think it's because I was the youngest, and then my older brothers and sisters were all speaking English. Then eventually I just didn't speak it that much anymore." Carlos also discussed his younger siblings not speaking Spanish as fluently as him, the oldest child in his family.

Carlos describes this:

I was the oldest child in my family. There are six of us, kids in my family. I can definitely see a difference between my and my younger sisters, particularly, the youngest two. They already spoke English when they started school. I think because the older kids were speaking it, they just kinda picked it up. They were never in E.S.L.¹, I don't think, and I was in E.S.L. till about 7th grade.

Community influences. All of the participants reported their communities as an influential factor in their decisions. Alicia, 57, Ricardo, 60, and Paola, 52 shared very similar experiences. They all grew up in neighboring communities in the San Fernando Valley, in Los Angeles; all of their children lack Spanish. They describe that the area they grew up in as predominately "Caucasian". They explained that outside of their homes, the opportunity to communicate in Spanish outside the home was almost

¹ E.S.L. is an acronym that stands for English as a Second Language.

nonexistent when they were growing up. They also explained how much their communities have changed from when they grew up to how their same communities are now.

Ricardo explains this shift:

Now today, there's more Hispanics around then when I was growing up. It's changed you know, from when I was growing up. You know, there's more Spanish speaking people around today then there was when I was a kid... I do a lot more Spanish speaking today than I did when I was a kid.

For Carlos and Brianna, this aspect of their experience was much different. Carlos and Brianna recall the neighborhoods that they grew up in as predominately Latino. Carlos explained, "My elementary, middle, and High school, were mostly all Latino". Brianna recalled that most of her childhood and adolescent friends were bilingual in English and Spanish. For her the opportunities to speak Spanish outside the home were plentiful.

Brianna explains:

We would communicate mostly in English, but often times, we would throw Spanish words and phrases into our conversations. And we all understood it, so it was fine. All of my friend's parents were immigrants from Mexico, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Puerto Rico, just from everywhere.

Similarly, Carlos recalls most of his peers, teachers, and school staff all speaking Spanish.

Intentionality

While most participants reported that often times English was more convenient, comfortable, and easier for them communicate in, there were also very intentional reasons for the decision they made when choosing to either teach or not teach their children Spanish. Those intentional reasons vary between the participants whose children speak Spanish, and those participants whose children don't speak Spanish. Participants also made intentional decisions about how to pass on culture through other avenues, not solely through language.

Bilingualism. Brianna and Carlos both attributed their decision to pass the Spanish language onto their children to wanting their children to be bilingual in English and Spanish. Both Carlos and Brianna spoke about the possible benefits bilingualism can have in her children's futures, specifically better career opportunities, higher wages, and better relationships with extended family members who only speak Spanish. Brianna explained that her daughter, 18, communicates closely with her husband's extended family living Mexico, "My daughter actually texts them more than my husband and I do. It's pretty funny actually, but if they didn't speak and write in Spanish they wouldn't get that opportunity to create these relationships with distant family members."

Relationships between grandparents and grandchildren. Specifically with the participants with bilingual children, future relationships with their Spanish-speaking grandparents were considered when making this decision. Carlos explained that he made it a point to teach his child Spanish because he didn't want his child to lose the stories that his parents and in laws had to share. He explained, "My kids would lose their stories. I mean, I would be able to translate them, but I feel like it wouldn't be the same. The

stories would lose part of their character.” Brianna describes the relationship between her children and her in-laws as “really close”. She explained “they feel comfortable with each other because they can hold a whole conversation together. And I think they spend more time together because of that.” Both Carlos and Brianna taught their children Spanish intentionally, in hopes that it would cultivate a closer relationship between their children and their grandparents.

Connection to Latino culture. For Carlos and Brianna the ability for their children to be able to connect to the Latino culture through language was an important factor that they considered. They both explained that they wanted to teach their children Spanish in order for them to be better connected to the Latino culture. Carlos described an old saying in Spanish that translates to “you have a cactus painted on your forehead.” He explained that this old saying means that people look at you, and they can tell that you are Latino.

He further explained:

I think when we see someone that looks Latino like us, we have a tendency to want to connect with them further, like we already have something in common, we’re the same. So sometimes saying that one Spanish word, helps you with that connection, and it’s a really cool thing that I wanted my children to experience too.

Brianna similarly explained that speaking the language helps her feel more connected to Latino people and Latino culture, and she wanted her children to feel a close relationship with their culture and their people. She intentionally made this choice in order for her children to be able to do this. She described wanting her children to be “able to

communicate in their language, and better understand them, their traditions, their past, and their struggles.” While Carlos and Brianna felt connected to their Latino culture through language, and strongly believed in passing that on to their children, Paola expressed her connection to the culture through language, but didn’t directly discuss passing that connection on to her children. She did say that speaking Spanish, “it’s that little gateway, makes you approachable, makes it feel comfortable. You know, people look at you and you’re human. You’re just like a regular person.”

Maintaining culture. Many of the participants expressed trying to pass on their culture through more than just the Spanish language. All participants discussed transferring culture to their children through various traditions, foods, religious rituals, and holidays. Alicia, Paola and Gloria, all discussed making traditional Mexican dishes and trying to teach those recipes and traditions to their children. Alicia discussed religious rituals passed on through her grandmother that she’s trying to pass onto her children. For example, she explained, “We do the ‘Novenas’, ‘Novena’ is like when somebody passes, and we pray the rosary and for nine days... That’s how the culture is maintained, and the kids are very well aware of that.”

Alicia also explained the tradition of lasting marriages:

My parents were married 63 years, yeah.... he passed about a year ago at the age of 91, and my mother is going to be 90, and my husband and I will be married 33 years. So I think that’s through tradition. They had struggles and my husband and I have had struggles, financially, matrimonially, whatever. It’s just part of life... you stick it out, and at the end, it’s going to be worth it. I hope that that’s something that we can pass on to our children. I mean, I’m not saying that they

should be in a marriage that's miserable, but you make it work. That's how we've always done it.

Gloria explained that she too has tried to pass on culture through other avenues. She discussed teaching her children to be respectful, like her grandmother taught her to be, "There was more respect with the grandparents whether they were right or they were wrong we respect them and nowadays they don't. They don't ... I don't know, it's lost. I think it's lost because of the language." Carlos explained trying to pass on culture through holiday practices.

Carlos describes this:

Like for Christmas, we open presents on the 23rd at midnight, the 24th, not on the morning of the 25th. We eat Panes de Pavo for Thanksgiving and Christmas, a typical Central American dish. We give kids little presents on January 6th, El Dia de Los Reyes Magos (The Three Kings' Day). Little things like that we do, so that our kids could hopefully do with their kids.

These are the many ways in which participants attempted to teach their children about the culture.

Feeling ashamed and different. Alicia, Ricardo, and Gloria all expressed feeling different from other people due to their Latino ethnicity and to their language differences. Because they already felt different, their use of Spanish decreased intentionally, as they were trying to fit in as much as possible, and language was one controllable factor. As previously discussed, all three of these participants grew in communities that were primarily white. Alicia recalls not wanting to feel different as a child, and even retells a story about her slightly older sister.

Alicia recalls:

I can remember my sister saying one time when we were real young, she said, "Mom, get me some soap. Get me some, that special soap." She didn't want to be brown. She didn't want to be dark, and she wanted to scrub the coloring off, and my mom says, "There's no soap that's going to take that off. This is who you are"

This story depicts how badly her sister wanted to be like those around her. Alicia explained that she never felt discriminated, ostracized, or left out of anything, but that her sister did feel that often, "Everybody else around her was white, and we're dark. So she didn't like that. She was a little hesitant and I think didn't feel secure with herself." They could not control their skin color, but they could control the language they spoke. Gloria, like Alicia's sister also experienced discrimination. She recalled her father trying to buy a house in a better neighborhood and not being able to, "...they wouldn't let him because he was Hispanic, because he was Mexican." Alicia explicated that because there were only about 10 Latino children in their whole school, she felt a sense of shame and embarrassment when speaking Spanish, so she intentionally chose not speak it, "It was almost kind of like you were embarrassed to speak the language."

Ricardo also mentioned not wanting to be different. He explained that back when he grew up, it was not common to encounter many Spanish speakers. He only spoke Spanish at home, and as soon as he left his home, he spoke English. He stated "...it's changed you know, from when I was growing up. You know, now there's more Spanish speaking people around today than there was when I was a kid. Now you're not really different if you speak Spanish." Gloria alluded to the same pattern; at home with her grandparents, sometimes Spanish was spoken, but as soon as she left her house she didn't

speaking it at all. Gloria attributes this to her mother's language patterns. Gloria revealed, "When my mother went to school she had to speak English. They were not allowed to speak Spanish. They would get in trouble with the teachers sometimes even get hit because Spanish wasn't allowed. They had to learn English." She explained that her mother was so used to not speaking Spanish outside the home, that it made her get used to it too. The use of only English outside the home was a very intentional choice.

Gloria is 77, she came from a slightly older generation compared to the rest of the participants. She explained that times were different then. She described feeling offended when people assume that she only speaks Spanish. She explained that she purposefully throws advertisement flyers in Spanish when they come in the mail because the advertisers assume that because she has a Spanish last name, she must need advertisements in Spanish; it makes her angry that they assume that she doesn't speak English.

Gloria's words were:

Don't assume because you think I'm Latina that that's all I speak because I don't. I will correct them by the way that I answer...I'm proud to be an American and I'm proud that I can speak English and I'm proud that I can speak Spanish... this is the United States and don't just assume because my last name is Latino or Hispanic or whatever, don't assume that we don't know English. It makes me feel like I'm stupid. I get offended, yeah...

Gloria talked about being just as American as a white person, and she feels less than when people assume that she only speaks Spanish. She is very intentional with her choice to speak Spanish as this choice holds many feelings for her.

Regret

As mentioned previously, four out of six participants in this study made the decision to not pass on the Spanish language. Alicia, Ricardo, Gloria, and Paola all expressed feeling regret over the decision that they made years ago, “I should have talked to them in Spanish more than I did, they would know more.” They all feel like being bilingual could benefit their children as adults, specifically with connection to their culture, and to get better job opportunities. They all shared a hope that their children would bring it amongst themselves to learn the language as adults. Ricardo and Paola also expressed that they believe their children would have had a stronger relationship with their grandparents, if they had made more of an effort to teach their children Spanish.

Alicia and Paola both felt like they didn’t know enough Spanish themselves to properly teach their children, but both expressed regret for not trying harder. Alicia said:

Looking back, I think it was remiss of me not to have my kids take the language. We are a melting pot... There's different dialects; you have Nicaraguan, you have Salvadorian, but if you have that base, I think it would really make a difference. So I wish I would have. It is kind of sad. I can't look back.

Paola also talked about her belief that language adds to culture, and that she thinks that everyone from Latino backgrounds should have some understanding of the Spanish language. Feeling this way now, she regrets not passing on the language to her children.

Paola explains:

This is our culture, and that is where we came from. I think it's important to be able to speak it to some capacity. I think when I do meet someone and they don't

understand it, it's almost like you feel sorry for them. Like oh bummer...this is something that you should know a little bit about.

Alicia discussed feelings of regret, as both she and her children feel disconnected from the Latino community because of their lack of proficiency in Spanish. She felt particularly disconnected around her husband's extended family, as many of them speak Spanish fluently. She predicts that her children might feel similarly.

Alicia explained:

I mean, when I'm around functions at my husband's family or just friends and you're around that people that have that language, there is a disconnect, but thank god I understand it more than I speak it. I was able to always get backup from my husband. He would always kind of, correct me. But, I feel a disconnection there, when I'm in that environment. I can imagine that my kids feel it too...

With feelings of regret, came feelings of hope. Alicia, Paola, and Ricardo, all expressed wanting their children to learn the language as adults. Alicia states:

...But moving forward hopefully they have enough in them to take classes and learn it. You got to learn it. Hopefully, if my daughter goes back to school, she can take some night classes or whatever... we have so many tools that it would be so easy for someone to try and learn the language.

Ricardo also has the desire for his daughter to learn the language now, as an adult, "I think she can learn it now. My daughter is really smart and I think it would help her get promoted at her job because she could serve more Spanish-speaking clients."

Gloria, Ricardo and Paola all felt regret in this decision, specifically when evaluating their children's relationships with their parents. They all described thinking

that their children would have had stronger relationships with their grandparents, if they would have taught them Spanish. Gloria expressed that her parents spoke English, but she still felt something was lost. Ricardo described the relationship between his children and his parents, “Close, but I think my kids would have been a lot closer with their grandparents if we would have probably taught them more Spanish.” While Paola spoke about the conversations between her children and her parents being limited, but still feels like they have close relationships:

The conversations are definitely limited based on the fact that my kids don't speak it well enough...but I mean, what can do you. It is what it is. And my kids know that my parents love them even though they can't maybe communicate with it. Or communicate more than that. But they know that they're cared for and that they're loved, and since they were very little that they were a huge part of each other's lives.

Discussion

This study used a constructivist grounded theory analytic approach to explore the decision making process of second and third generation Latino parents when deciding whether or not to teach their U.S. born children Spanish, and how this decision can influence intergenerational relationships. Although the participants of this study were influenced by similar factors discussed in previous literature, the qualitative inductive approach assisted in identifying additional factors considered by Latino parents when making this decision.

Previous research identified generation status, parents' English proficiency, parental income, parent birthplace, single parenthood, opportunities to speak Spanish outside the home, and neighborhood and school context as factors that affect Spanish proficiency (Bayley & Bonnici, 2009; Lutz, 2006). This study found many similarities and overlaps in factors that influence language patterns in Latino families. Similarly to previous literature, this study found evidence of parent's English proficiency, opportunities to speak Spanish outside the home, family and community context as factors that influence language patterns and language assimilation (Bayley & Bonnici, 2009; Lutz, 2006). In contrast, this study introduced additional factors that influenced their decision; parent's Spanish proficiency, children's birth order, connection to Latino culture, a feeling of shame felt by the participants for being different, maintaining culture, feelings of regret, and a sense of hope that their children will learn the language as adults.

In this study, the participants who taught their children Spanish had better Spanish proficiency themselves, while those who did not teach their children Spanish reported not being proficient enough themselves to feel confident teaching it to others. This study also

discovered birth order to be a significant factor as many participants explained that older children in the family spoke Spanish better than younger children in the family. The results also identified connection to the Latino culture as a factor influencing parent's decision as some participants intentionally taught their children Spanish to fortify their connection to the Latino culture. Feelings of shame were also discovered as a factor influencing this decision. Some participants reported not wanting to feel different from those around them. In an attempt to be more like those around them, Spanish was not spoken. Although the participants' decisions were different, most expressed the idea of maintaining culture. Some chose to maintain culture through language, while others used food, religion, holidays and other traditions.

This study's findings support the findings of previous research, while also adding to the literature about language assimilation among Latino populations. This study advances the research on language assimilation by adding the emotions felt by parents after making the decision on whether or not to teach their children Spanish. Those who chose to teach their children Spanish felt good about their decision. They felt satisfied that their children would reap the benefits of being bilingual. The parents that chose not to teach their children Spanish, all expressed feelings of regret, and feelings of hope that their children could still learn Spanish as adults.

Limitations

Although generalizability is not the purpose of qualitative research (Anderson, 2010), this study's sample size was small by qualitative standards. Small sample size is a limitation because although the information received is detailed and in-depth, it only

gives a small snap shot, and doesn't inform on larger patterns that may be deduced by examining more perspectives.

Another limitation of the study is that all of the participants were from the same geographical location in the Los Angeles area. This limits the presence of diverse experiences as all participants share a similar community environment, which may result in similar community influences. In addition, only two groups were represented in this sample: Mexican and Salvadorian.

Additionally, qualitative research is heavily dependent on the individual skills of the researcher, and the researcher's ability to not be too easily influenced by personal biases (Anderson, 2010). Because of the researcher's inexperience doing and writing qualitative research this could constitute a limitation of this study.

Implications

This study brings forward important implications for social workers and social work practice. As previously mentioned, Latinos make up a significant portion of the populations often served by social workers, therefore it is important for social work practice to be informed about language assimilation among Latinos in order to practice cultural humility, and not offend any Latino clients. As found in this study, a person can feel offended when there are assumptions made about the language they speak. It is important to prepared with paperwork and information in English and Spanish in order to individually and properly serve a particular client. Having in depth background information about language assimilation can help social work practice be more inclusive and less bias (Furman et al., 2009). It is also important for social workers to understand

intergenerational relationships, and have some information about how language can potentially influence those relationships.

This study prompts questions for further research studies and calls for replication with alternative demographics. First, it would be informative to ask the children of this population how they feel about their parent's decision on language, and explore how this decision impacts them. Second, how do grandparents perceive their children's decision on either passing or not passing on the language? These studies can provide additional perspectives on the topic of language assimilation among Latinos. Replication of this study with different Latino groups is needed, as this study did not account for Latinos of multiple countries, this can include people from Puerto Rican, Dominican, Argentinian, Brazilian, Columbian, Uruguayan, Peruvian, Chilean, Cubans, Costa Ricans, Venezuelan backgrounds and more.

Conclusion

This study aimed to explore the language patterns of second and third generation Latino parents, and determine the factors considered when making their decision to either teach or not teach their children Spanish. Previous research has determined many factors that are consider in this decision, while this study added additional factors that are much more complex and nuanced.

Three themes emerged from this study. The first, was *Familial and Community Influences*, these particular influences play a vital role in parent's decision on language, particularly grandparent presence, birth order, and other community factors, like the opportunity to speak Spanish outside the home were discussed. The second theme, *Intentionality*, discussed the intentional aspects of their choice, like wanting bilingual

children, wanting to create stronger connections to grandparent and to the Latino culture, trying mask the fact that they felt different, and wanting to maintaining Latino culture. And lastly, *Regret*. This theme encompassed the feelings of regret felt by those parents who did not teach their children Spanish. Participants expressed wanting closer relationships between their parents and their children, they identified bilingualism as a beneficial tool, and they all hoped that their children would seek opportunities to learn Spanish as adults. These findings show complexity of the decision-making processes Latino parents undergo regarding language assimilation, and the feelings associated with that decision. These results additionally demonstrate the importance of social workers practicing cultural humility with this population surrounding language.

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Appendix A

Participant Demographics Table

Name	Age	Gender	Country	Spanish Speaking	Generation	Age of Children	Spanish Speaking Children
Alicia	57	Female	Mexico	Limited	Third	28, 26	No
Ricardo	60	Male	Mexico	Yes	Second	35, 29, 25	No
Gloria	77	Female	Mexico	Yes	Third	59, 57, 54 52	Older children only
Paola	52	Female	Mexico	Yes	Second	29, 28, 16	No
Brianna	36	Female	Mexico/ El Salvador	Yes	Second	18, 12, 2	Yes
Carlos	38	Male	El Salvador	Yes	Second	18	Yes

Appendix B

Interview Questions

Question 1: What generation are you? Where were you born? Where were your parents born? How many children do you have? How old are they?

Question 2: How well do you speak Spanish? Do you children speak Spanish? If so, how well or fluent is it?

Question 3: How did you make your decision to teach or not teach your children Spanish? What were some factors that you considered?

Question 4: What were some of the societal pressures you felt to assimilate?

Question 5: How do you think your extended family views your choice to teach or no teach your children Spanish? How is your decision perceived?

Question 6: Is the Spanish language a large factor of cultural identity to you? To your family? How does speaking Spanish add or take away from your cultural identity?

Question 7: Does speaking Spanish make you feel better connected to the larger Latino culture? Or Does not speaking Spanish make you feel less connected to the larger Latino culture?

Question 8: How do you view your relationship between your children and their grandparents or older members of your family that speak predominantly Spanish?

Question 9: How often do they interact? Are their conversations limited due to language barriers?

Question 10: How do you think this relationship would be different if your child spoke or did not speak Spanish?