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1

Understanding and Addressing Linguistic Aggressions in the Spanish Heritage Language Classroom

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Abstract: The intent of this article is threefold: (i) to provide a general overview of the field of Spanish heritage speaker bilingualism in the context of the United States; (ii) to contextualize the different social and linguistic practices that negatively impact heritage speakers' language use and sense of identity as legitimate speakers of the heritage language; and, last but not least, (iii) to identify and validate heritage speakers' emotional responses to some of these discriminatory linguistic dynamics. In examining these processes, we will pay particular attention to language shaming and the use of language mockery as forms of macro/microaggressions. Lastly, we draw from previous research about the reproduction of linguistic aggressions and racial normativity (e.g., Hill, 2008; Flores & Rosa's, 2015) to provide language learners and instructors with the means to identify, as well as the tools to act upon, some of the language dynamics that affect them.

Keywords: heritage speakers, language shaming, language mockery, bilingualism, microaggressions, linguistic aggressions

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1. Introduction

For quite some time now, the Hispanic/Latinx community¹ has been a driving force behind the United States' population growth (e.g., Krogstad, 2020). According to most recent reports, it represents approximately 18% of the nation's population as of 2020, increasing from 16.3% in 2010 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017 & 2021; Noe-Bustamante, Lopez, & Krogstad, 2020).² Although its growth has slowed down these last years, the upward trend is not expected to stop any time soon (e.g., Noe-Bustamante, Lopez, & Krogstad, 2020), with some estimates projecting it to be around 25% of the population by 2050, if not higher (e.g., U.S. Census Bureau 2017). These demographic changes have had a significant impact on all areas of American society. Linguistically, other than English, Spanish is now the most spoken language and the first taught 'foreign'³ language in postsecondary institutions (e.g., Beaudrie, 2011; Looney, & Lusin, 2019). Culturally, there is an evident market for Spanish-language media and entertainment. For example, renowned Hispanic artists like Shakira and Jennifer Lopez have demonstrated crossover appeal by co-headlining the Super Bowl LIV halftime show (Exposito, 2020). The latter singer also brought visibility to Latinos by performing during President Joe Biden's inauguration (Gold, 2021). Economically, the Latinx community has slowly but surely experienced positive changes as well. For instance, although there is still a considerable income gap between Hispanics and White Americans (Kochhar & Cilluffo, 2018), Hispanic-owned businesses in the country have seen a 14% increase from 2012 to 2017,

¹ For practical purposes, in this paper, we will use the terms 'Hispanic'/'Latinx'/'Latino' interchangeably to refer to individuals of Latin American origin or ancestry. However, we recognize that these are politicized terms with different histories and levels of acceptance in the community and in academia (e.g., Martínez & Gonzalez, 2021).

² We acknowledge that comparisons between 2010 and 2020 Census data must consider improvements to race-related questions in the recent Census.

³ Although it has been incorrectly classified as such, Spanish is not a foreign language to the U.S. Not only do millions of U.S.-born Americans speak Spanish, but the culture and language have been intertwined with American history for centuries (e.g., Alvarez, 2013).

which adds up to a total of approximately 34% rise in the last decade (Orozco et al., 2020). Furthermore, according to the Selig Center for Economic Growth, as of 2019, Hispanic consumers in the U.S. controlled approximately \$1.5 to 1.7 trillion in spending power which was larger than the GDP of Spain and Australia on that same year (Humphreys, 2019).

But while the presence and contributions of the Latinx community are felt throughout the country, the Hispanic youth are at risk for academic achievement disparities (e.g., Carreira & Beeman, 2014). Hispanic students are disproportionately outperformed at the middle and high school levels and have limited opportunities to enroll in advanced courses that would prepare them for postsecondary education. Furthermore, they often report experiencing discrimination and biased behaviors from their teachers and peers, directly impacting their academic performance and higher education prospects (e.g., Urbina & Wright, 2015; Carreira & Beeman, 2014). While possibly implicit and not intentional, these biases are still harmful, resulting in feelings of insecurity, academic inferiority, and overall inadequacy. Under these circumstances, it is not surprising to learn that although university enrollment rates among Hispanic students are currently at an all-time high, many end up dropping out before graduating (e.g., Gramlich, 2017). In fact, U.S. Hispanic students continue to be among the least likely ethnic and racial groups to graduate from high school, two-year, and four-year colleges (e.g., Astin & Oseguera, 2005; Fry, 2002; Samuel & Scott, 2014; Gonzalez, Ortega, Molina, & Lizalde, 2020). In addition to financial hardship, other significant stressors such as cultural, racial, and linguistic discrimination challenge their academic experience making it very difficult to succeed (e.g., Arbona & Jimenez, 2014; Cronin et al., 2012; Flink, 2018). Aware of this education gap and its ramifications, academic institutions and related organizations across the country are engaging with and investing in the education of Latinx students. For example, the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities

4

(HACU), an organization representing over 500 colleges and universities nationwide, offers scholarships, conferences, special events, employment, and internship opportunities to Latinx students (HACU, 2011). As the U.S. Hispanic community continues to grow and impact the higher education landscape, new opportunities will need to be made available in and out of the classroom to attend to students' personal, academic, and professional needs.

With specific regards to the field of Spanish language teaching and learning, academic institutions and educators across the country are adapting their curricula to offer courses to best fit the needs and preferences of so-called Spanish heritage speakers (e.g., Beaudrie, 2011). According to Guadalupe Valdés' often cited definition, a heritage speaker (HS) is a bilingual individual who grew up speaking and/or listening to a language at home, the heritage language (HL), that is different from the dominant societal language (Valdés, 2000 & 2001). While all HSs tend to possess a strong emotional or cultural connection to their heritage, not all can communicate using the HL (e.g., Polinsky & Kagan, 2007). While some can speak, read and write in the HL fluently, others may only have some basic (or even just receptive) lexical knowledge. This range of capabilities clearly illustrates the heterogeneous nature of HSs as a broad ethnolinguistic group with varied personal experiences and complex linguistic identities.

Having said that, HSs' discrete cultural and linguistic experiences differentiate them from other bilingual groups, particularly traditional second language learners. For example, since HSs are for the most part schooled (almost) exclusively in English, most typically have a firm command of the majority language. But because the acquisition of the HL usually occurs at home from early on and naturalistically, primarily through oral interactions with their relatives and without sufficient educational access, their proficiency and literacy skills in Spanish vary considerably, from (very) advanced to (very) limited (e.g., Montrul, Bhatt, & Girju, 2015). Regardless of actual proficiency, the language practices of HSs are often viewed in a negative

light. For example, the nonstandard linguistic features commonly observed in HSs' speech are often used as the basis for employing evaluative labels such as incorrect, inappropriate or not the 'real' Spanish, a position we find unjustifiable and difficult to accept. To be sure, mastering a language (any language) with limited exposure and opportunities to use it is undoubtedly an uphill task. For HSs, that task is made even more challenging with the additional weight of society's unattainable expectations for them. Generalized misunderstandings about what it means to be bilingual or about there being only one 'right' way to speak Spanish often instill in HSs deficient views of themselves as not being 'true' bilinguals or legitimate Spanish speakers (e.g., Potowski, 2002; Pascual y Cabo & Wilson, 2019). Such biased views shape their language ideologies and behavior in a society that predominantly favors English over Spanish.

6

Now that we have a better understanding of the profile of the HS, it becomes important to examine in further detail the personal and academic consequences of the discriminatory language-related experiences they often report (e.g., Carreira & Beeman, 2014). It is also equally important, if not more so, to consider what we as teachers can do to support HSs so they can better cope with these linguistic aggressions. With this in mind, the main goal of this article is to engage in a critical dialogue that acknowledges and addresses this reality in the context of the Spanish HL classroom as a way to validate their previous emotional experiences and potentially develop strategies that aim to manage distress. While we do not seek to examine the root causes of these aggressions, for they are out of the scope of this paper, we do explore the conditions under which discriminatory practices such as language shaming and language mockery occur. To this end, we will draw from previous important work about the reproduction of linguistic and racial normativity (e.g., Hill, 2008; Flores & Rosa, 2015; Pavlenko, 2002; Rosa, 2016ab) to provide HL learners and their instructors with the means to identify and act upon some of the

discriminatory language dynamics that affect them. But before this can be done in an effective way, we briefly consider the background that brought about (and still supports) current linguistic ideologies in the U.S.

2. To Speak or Not to Speak: Battling Linguistic Ideologies

2.1 English Language Hegemony

Although English is generally assumed to be the default language in mainstream narratives, political discourse, and popular culture (e.g., Prada et al., 2020), the United States has never been a monolingual nor a monocultural nation —by any sense of the word (e.g., Pavlenko, 2002). That said, those who have not spoken the idealized hegemonic English language have often faced negative consequences. Pavlenko (2002) connects this issue with English becoming the one and only language of American national identity after World War I. From that moment on, speaking English in the U.S. is generally considered a *sine qua non* condition to be regarded as legitimate U.S. citizens. This notion perpetuates negative views towards racialized languages and their speakers. This prevailing situation in U.S. society is often modeled by the dominant white English-speaking group's unsubstantiated opinions (and confirmation biases). Everyone is susceptible to this phenomenon, but visible ethnolinguistic minorities commonly experience the worst of it. Members of the Hispanic communities in the U.S., for example, have faced discrimination and even physical harassment for speaking Spanish (e.g., Macgregor-Mendoza, 2000). These kinds of hostilities are not new. Some are rooted back centuries (e.g., Lozano, 2018; Martinez, 2018), which is indicative of the magnitude of the problem. Nowadays, the reach of these aggressions is amplified by the presence of the media. And so, when a Spanish-speaking immigrant or their offspring (i.e., HSs) hear things like 'this is America, we speak English,' the message that is delivered is clear: not all languages are equal; languages other than English are NOT welcome. As alluded to

7

before, some HSs may therefore feel like speaking Spanish is something un-American. And so, such political or ideological tendencies perpetuate ethnocentric language ideologies limiting when, how, and who gets to be a legitimate participant in U.S. society. This was clearly illustrated in the 1980s by the English Only Movement, a political reaction against the influx of immigrants that advocated for English to be the only official language in the U.S. In addition to condoning and spreading linguistic prejudice, this movement was instrumental in shaping legislation that restricted the use of Spanish in the educational environment and beyond. All that effort aimed to soothe the alarmed voices of those who believed that this ‘English-Only’ mentality was essential to preserve American unity (e.g., Lieber, 2003). In this context, HSs face a two-front battle: as Carter (2018) notes, not only are U.S. Spanish speakers subjected to a hegemonic doctrine that favors spoken English with no trace of ethnic accents, but their ethnic communities also have linguistic ideologies of their own. They simultaneously feel pulled toward and pushed against their HL and culture (e.g., Lacomba, 2020). The following story is a perfect example of the linguistic tug-o-war that many of our students encounter in their everyday lives.

2.2 *The Case of Habla Texas and the Language Controversy*

Michelle Valles, a broadcast journalist and star of HBO’s *Habla Texas* series, shared the linguistic controversy she experienced while working as a newscaster in El Paso and Austin, Texas. While these two cities within the state of Texas share many characteristics, there were two entirely different sets of expectations regarding language. In El Paso, a city right in the US-Mexico border, pronouncing Spanish words like ‘Campeche’ and ‘Cancún’ with an English accent caused a stir amongst her Hispanic viewers. Some audience members would call the program to complain and call her a ‘sellout’ and ‘shameless’ for allegedly Americanizing those words and not representing the Hispanic community properly. In Austin, saying “*hasta mañana*” at the end of the newscast elicited such a negative response that members of her

English-speaking audience would send hate mail to the show telling her that they “expected their news in English” and to “go back to Mexico” (Ferrerias, Bardusco, & Hines, 2011).

Like Ms. Valle, our students grow up under constant linguistic pressure from both English and Spanish speaking communities that propels them in different directions. On one side, the dominant Anglo-speaking society demands their assimilation into the English-dominant culture and, in a way, punishes those who refuse to comply. On the other side, their home communities expect them to preserve their cultural and linguistic heritage (e.g., Marcantoni, 2015). With time, these opposite ideological pressures⁴ chip away at our student's self-esteem and lower their trust in their linguistic abilities, which may give rise to other emotional difficulties. For example, an all-too-common phenomenon experienced by many Spanish HSs is language anxiety. Language anxiety can be broadly described as a sense of insecurity, nervousness, and even fear when using the HL to complete educational, professional, or social tasks (e.g., Prada et al., 2020). Although this is still a somewhat understudied topic, the evidence so far indicates that HL learners tend to report high language anxiety rates when enrolled in Spanish language classes. This matter is particularly true for students in classes designed for traditional second language learners (e.g., Prada et al., 2020). Several studies point out that HL learners' anxiety seems particularly salient about their (self-perceived) lack of literacy skills (e.g., Tallon, 2011; Prada et al., 2020; Torres et al., 2020).

9

Whether in the Spanish language classroom, at work, or at home, HSs often report being criticized and looked down upon for how they speak the HL. This phenomenon, known as ‘language shaming’ (LS), is generally understood as the demeaning actions directed towards a speaker for the way s/he speaks or for the

⁴ To be clear, we do not pretend to state that these ideologies are solely responsible for such reactions. They are compounded with other important issues that we, unfortunately, do not have space to discuss here. For a comprehensive review, see Lynch (2018) and Carter (2018).

language they use. This form of discrimination is not always recognized as such because the shamers can be people of esteem. Frequently, the shamers are even close relatives (e.g., parents, grandparents) or official language agencies (e.g., ANLE) that are thought to be supportive of and to invest in the maintenance of the Spanish language in the U.S. (Lynch & Potowski, 2014; Carter, 2018). Well-intentioned but ill-informed teachers with traditional views of what is linguistically ‘right or wrong’ are also not exempt from this bias. For example, in a recent study investigating bilingual teachers' language attitudes, Roman et al. (2019) found that most teachers expressed negative views toward linguistic practices like code-switching, lexical borrowing, and semantic extension. Roman et al. (2019) recognize the adverse effect of such linguistic bias on students' self-esteem. Dismissing HSs' use of the language and expressions as ‘wrong’ or ‘incorrect’ can instill a profound sense of shame in them which, in turn, may precipitate a self-fulfilling prophecy effect: LS often results in low (linguistic) self-esteem, which can be the main impediment to using the HL or even developing a sense of belonging as a legitimate speaker of the language. Eventually, this complex situation can trigger abandoning the use of the HL altogether.

3. Breathing in the Smog: Linguistic Microaggressions

One can argue that the (un)official restrictions against the use of Spanish in educational settings (e.g., Lozano, 2018; MacGregor-Mendoza, 2000) as well as some of the social consequences of speaking Spanish in the public domain –such as Ms. Valles' hate mail– are examples of linguistic aggression. These linguistic aggressions can even turn physically violent, fueled by racial and classist bias, as seen in media sources (Levenson, 2020). But, as stated earlier, not all aggressions are so explicit. For example, members of oppressed groups often experience daily subtle and seemingly inoffensive forms of discrimination. These so-called

microaggressions are usually unconscious or automatic and can be verbal or nonverbal (e.g., Sue & Spanierman, 2020). Members of the U.S. Latinx communities face them every day. Some of the microaggressions that manifest daily for visible minorities include statements and questions such as ‘Where are you really from?’ ‘You are very articulate,’ ‘You speak good English,’ or ‘You don't speak Spanish?’ (e.g., Sue et al., 2007; Gómez Urzaiz, 2014). These examples appear harmless at first glance, but their actual message is not in what they say but in what they are *not* saying explicitly. Remarks about a person's ‘real’ place of origin or their surprising ability to speak English well, or even the expectation that they should speak Spanish, imply that they are placed in the position of the ‘other’ and are, therefore, not legitimately American. Additionally, remarks about a person being articulate suggest that members of other racial or ethnic groups are not articulate. Perhaps the most dangerous thing about these kinds of microaggressions is that they are not explicit stereotypes or slurs and are therefore hard to recognize; they are ‘invisible’ to those who would usually censor overtly racist remarks (e.g., Hill, 2008).

11

The educational context does not exempt Latinx students from these sorts of aggressions. Even the most experienced teachers, regardless of the subject being taught, could be unconsciously participating in speech acts that conceal some kind of discrimination towards their students. To be sure, we educators may have the best intentions in mind, and our comments may therefore not be intentionally racist or classist, or otherwise oppressive. Still, it is the impact on the students, not the intention, that really matters here. The seemingly contradictory idea that we, language educators, could have the best of intentions while simultaneously (and perhaps unintentionally) participating in oppressive behavior towards our students can be best expressed with Beverly Tatum's analogy:⁵ microaggressions are like

⁵ Beverly D. Tatum is an author, psychologist, and educator who specializes on the psychology of racism. The analogies attributed to her in this paper appear in her 2017 [2003] book *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?: And Other Conversations About Race*.

polluted air or smog; it is everywhere, and we are constantly breathing it in (Tatum, 2018). Unaware of the extent of its presence and its toxicity to those around us, we sometimes breathe it out too (Tatum, 2018).

Whether consciously or unconsciously, these microaggressions reproduce and perpetuate social inequalities, strengthen racial hierarchies, and expand them to linguistic systems, accents, and discourse practices. In turn, these ideologies lead to different expectations for Latinx racialized students (Flores & Rosa, 2015). Teaching under the misconceived yet widely shared assumption that there are good and bad languages or appropriate and inappropriate ways of speaking passes those ideas on to the students. Those assumptions can have long-lasting and long-reaching effects (e.g., Flores & Rosa, 2015). For example, young HSs often express negative notions about their HL, undervalue their linguistic skills, and prefer linguistic prescriptivism. Behavior like this can impact their performance in class as well as their sense of self-efficacy as they become adults. In a survey of Spanish-English bilingual teachers, some of whom were HSs, Briceño et al. (2018) reported that most HSs felt that their Spanish language knowledge was insufficient and not ‘good enough’ to perform as bilingual teachers. Furthermore, some were also concerned with their Spanish variant and their ability to teach the ‘proper’ Spanish (Briceño et al., 2018).

Considering this, we should ask ourselves whether and the extent to which HL teachers (and the field of Spanish language education in general) contribute to this pollution (e.g., Parra, 2020, 2021). To be clear, while we do not have definitive answers to these questions, we –like many others before us– contend that some pedagogical practices are counterproductive. Practices that promote the study of Spanish in the U.S. as a foreign language or concealed under covert monoglossic ideologies that hold some varieties as inherently superior or more desirable than others, work against our best interests to preserve positive linguistic, social, and racial dynamics in the HL classroom (e.g., Villa, 2002; Pascual y Cabo & Prada,

2018). We ought to reflect on our own implicit biases to avoid being complicit in creating a hostile and stressful environment for our students. Additionally, and equally importantly, we, too, ought to help Latinx students reflect and be critical about subtle behaviors that normalize ideologies which harm their own linguistic and socioaffective practices. The perspectives Latinx students possess of themselves inform their worldview and what they believe is possible in terms of their own lives. By challenging traditional language-deficit frameworks, we can reframe the very systems that limit the promise and potential of so many HL learners.

4. Mockery and the Racialization of the Spanish Language

While overt racism is generally neither accepted nor supported today, another form of covert discrimination that is more than rampant in U.S. popular culture is Mock Spanish (MS). Simply put, MS is the use of linguistic and symbolic elements from Spanish for the social benefit of English speakers (e.g., Hill, 2008; Schwartz, 2019). As its label indicates, MS usually takes the form of *a priori* humorous expressions. Despite its apparent appeal for comedic value, MS is fundamentally seeded with hidden classist and racist messages with little recognition of its potentially damaging effect on the U.S. Hispanic communities (e.g., Hill, 2008; Zentella, 2003). MS perpetuates linguistic ideologies and racial aggressions by treating the language as unsophisticated, casual, and vulgar. As is the case with other forms of microaggressions, MS may be neither intentional nor malicious. In fact, mock Spanish users do not necessarily mean to be racist.

However, the speaker's intention has nothing to do with the consequences of the action. By using the language as cheap entertainment or using it to insult others, the implicit message is that Spanish is not meant to be serious. As Hill states in her (2008) book *The Everyday Language of White Racism*, Mock Spanish “is available for

joking and for insult; it cannot lend gravitas or sophistication” (p. 147). What message does this convey to HSs about their home language? For once, it seems unfair (for lack of a better word) that primarily English speakers are free to utilize the language for levity without any social judgment when society criticizes Hispanics for using it in public. Mock Spanish's danger lies in how difficult it is to identify because it relies on implicit preconceived stereotypes. It appeals to the negative stereotypes about the Hispanic community present in society but not necessarily openly expressed out of fear of censorship. The ‘funny’ aspect is in the joke behind the joke. Saying something like ‘cinco de drinko’ to commemorate Cinco de Mayo⁶ is only ‘funny’ if you have the implicit knowledge that the purpose of the holiday is mainly to “have an excuse to drink tequila on a Monday morning at work” (CNN, 2014). It is not always meant to celebrate Mexican heritage. The message that Mexican heritage equals drinking tequila at all hours is doubled down if you follow it with an ‘olé’ and say it while wearing a giant sombrero.

14

It should be clear by now that Mock Spanish (MS) is an instrument of appropriation of the Spanish language for the amusement of a mostly English monolingual audience (e.g., Hill, 2008). MS takes many forms. Sometimes it is simply the addition of the Spanish suffix ‘-o’ to an English word, such as ‘no problem-o’, or the exaggerated over-pronunciation of Spanish words to inspire mockery or entertainment (e.g., Hill, 2008). MS can also take the form of euphemisms. That is, using Spanish words that are distasteful, insulting, or scatological instead of their English equivalent. When you use a word like ‘cojones,’ ‘caca,’ or ‘loco’ instead of ‘balls,’ ‘shit,’ or ‘crazy,’ it sends the idea that Spanish is the language of vulgarity and that English should be preserved as a more sophisticated language (e.g., Hill, 2008).

⁶ Contrary to popular belief, this is not a major holiday in Mexico. It’s mostly celebrated in the US and does not commemorate Mexico’s Independence Day, which is celebrated each year on September 16th or on September 27th.

Additionally, a neutral or positive word in Spanish can sometimes be re-purposed to mean something usually hostile or insulting (e.g., Hill, 2008). The classic example is the expression “*hasta la vista, baby*,” made famous by Arnold Schwarzenegger's phrase in the 1991 film *Terminator II: Judgment Day*. In the movie, the phrase is used to express violence and deceit, reinforcing preconceived and implicit stereotypes that Spanish speakers are ‘treacherous’ (Hill, 1993). An interesting anecdote about this phrase is that William Wisher (Co-Writer), and James Cameron (Director, Producer, and Co-Writer), neither of them Spanish speakers, used it in their everyday lives and then decided to incorporate it into the script. As Mr. Wisher said in an interview with the Independent, they had no idea that it would become “an iconic piece of dialogue” (Loughrey, 2017). Yet, Ms. Valles, the Latinx bilingual T.V. broadcaster we presented earlier, experienced criticism for saying “*hasta mañana*” in her program. This contradiction brings up a good question with a sentiment that may echo in the minds of many of our HL learners: How come Arnold Schwarzenegger gets to say “*hasta la vista, baby*,” and it is trendy, but Ms. Valle cannot say “*hasta mañana*”? The answer to this question cannot be found in the language itself, as the two expressions are practically the same. Crucially, what differentiates them is the social categories constructed by the ethnocidal position⁷ of the speaker and listener (e.g., Flores & Rosa, 2015). That is, Ms. Valle—a visible minority—is not Arnold, nor Mr. Wisher, or Mr. Cameron. They can use for personal gain what she cannot use for personal expression. In other words, these categories not only frame speakers as either (non)white, (non)native, or (non)immigrant, they also motivate the perception of language practices as being ‘good or bad’ or ‘appropriate or inappropriate,’ an evaluation that often is determined by those in power.

⁷ ‘Ethnocide’ refers to the erasure or the destruction of a culture while keeping its people.

5. Addressing (Micro)aggressions in the Spanish HL Classroom

Whether it is due to language shaming, language mockery, or other types of raciolinguistic discrimination, Spanish HL learners frequently face oppressive (micro)aggressions that affect their view of their HL as well as their self-esteem and self-efficacy. To advance Spanish HL education, we (SHL educators) ought to take stock of the opportunity and responsibility we are privileged to have. Because oppressive practices tend to devalue non-dominant languages and justify keeping a group in a subordinate position, we cannot just gloss over issues of social or racial injustice to be laser-focused on teaching language from a traditional grammar lens (i.e., subjunctive vs. indicative, preterite vs. imperfect). Instead, we ought to assist our students in exposing the social, racial, and linguistic ideologies present in these aggressions. By giving students the resources to identify linguistic expectations and to respond to such discourse, we are helping them make sense of how ideologies impact their use of Spanish and their lives more generally. Consequently, they can develop their critical language awareness and a favorable opinion of Spanish and of themselves as legitimate speakers of the language⁸.

This sense of legitimacy can be solidified, for example, through community engagement. Research has shown that interacting with the target language outside the classroom can facilitate transformative educational experiences for students (e.g., Lowther Pereira, 2015, 2018; Pascual y Cabo et al., 2017, and others). These collaborations promote opportunities for HL learners and their communities. That is, learners can benefit from participating in an active environment with practical applications and meaningful interactions. Meanwhile, the community benefits from having critically aware students who can become agents of change and potentially

⁸ For more on this issue we refer the reader to previous work by Jennifer Leeman (2018), Claudia Holguín Mendoza (2019), as well as Sara Beaudrie and colleagues (2020).

motivate further generations of HL learners to invest in the language. For these opportunities to bear fruit, current HL learners ought to become conscious of the oppressive ideologies that have produced their racialization and the construction of their language as inferior or inappropriate (Flores & Rosa, 2015). It is not until they become critically aware of these issues that they will be able to help their communities challenge the structures of power that maintain current racial and socioeconomic hierarchies and linguistically make them invisible and unimportant.

HSs may take their first steps to develop critical language consciousness in the heritage classroom. As educators, we should guide HL learners in their developing of critical language awareness (e.g., Leeman, 2018; Holguín Mendoza, 2018; Beaudrie et al., 2021). To this end, the learning environment is to remain a place free of judgment and primed with multiple occasions to explore their Hispanic culture and language practices. To strive for a positive learning environment, students and teachers must actively filter out microaggressions and harmful social, racial, and linguistic ideologies from the classroom space. Going back to the smog analogy from section 3, microaggressions are pervasive yet difficult to identify or avoid altogether. However, we can work collectively to reduce the effects of these microaggressions. The main question becomes, how can we mitigate and minimize their impact in the classroom? Here are some suggestions for teachers and students:

a) Be aware of your own biases

Regardless of how unbiased we may think ourselves to be, we must recognize our status as cultural beings who are constantly exposed to potentially harmful ideologies regarding race, ethnicity, language, gender, sexuality, and religion (among others). We may have preconceived and implicit biases, stereotypes, and assumptions regarding the world around us. We ought to take a moment to reflect and identify what these are and how we consciously or unconsciously reproduce these biases in our daily lives. For instance, in the

case of SHL teachers, it is good to think about our lesson plans and the examples we use in class. If we talk about ethnic, racial, or linguistic groups, what type of language are we using to talk about them? What assumptions are we bringing to the classroom? Part of the process could be to write down what we know about language or linguistics communities and critically question how we came to have that knowledge or belief. Knowing about our implicit biases or prejudices can help us avoid unintentionally adding them to our lessons and negatively impacting the students' self-esteem or their language learning experience.

b) Be aware that your identity (and your ideologies) might impact others

Post-structuralist research proposes that identity is fluid, and people constantly negotiate their identity through discourse in specific social contexts (e.g., Showstack, 2012; Bucholtz & Hall, 2004; Pavlenko, 2002). For instance, some students may feel that their identities as Latinxs or HSs are directly related to their language proficiency, therefore classifying themselves and others as either more or less legitimate Latinxs depending on their self-perceived proficiency (e.g., Showstack, 2018). Students with internalized monoglossic linguistic ideologies can also construct their identities according to an ideal of 'proper' or 'formal' Spanish, where they could come to think of regional variants and, themselves as speakers of these variants, as 'deficient' (Showstack, 2018). Our classroom interactions may implicitly reproduce hegemonic ideologies (Showstack, 2012). Therefore, we must be aware of how we potentially play a role in supporting that reproduction. Critical language awareness is a tool to empower students and help them construct positive identities of language expertise and ownership (e.g., Leeman, 2018; Holguín Mendoza, 2019; Beaudrie et al., 2021).

c) Establish group norms for interacting

From the beginning, establish open lines of communication and clear rules of engagement for the group. Prioritize a supportive environment that is accepting of linguistic variations. HSs reflect the language they learn from the speakers in their communities, which are often diverse hubs of multiple Spanish variants. Emphasize the legitimacy of those variants and encourage students to respect each other's linguistic practices and experiences. Learn to identify and address microaggressions as they occur. For instance, suppose that a class discussion over an exercise turns into a conversation that reproduces stereotypes about a particular group. Instead of encouraging that discourse, steer the conversation back to the critical awareness territory. Point out some assumptions made along the way, how they support existing power inequities, and how the reproduction of stereotypes can be harmful to others. It is essential to establish an inclusive and supportive environment. Part of that effort is recognizing that what may seem inoffensive to you can be offensive to others.

19

d) Acknowledge oppression of groups other than your own

People have overlapping social identities, and many experience oppression or discriminatory practices based on one or more of their identity markers (YW Boston Blog, 2017). For example, markers like 'women' and 'Hispanic' do not exist in a vacuum. Students are likely to face prejudice from multiple sources directed at various aspects of their identity. Consequently, teachers and students must consider that each life experience is unique and should be acknowledged. We must avoid 'gatekeeping' who is or is not oppressed based on our personal biases. Gatekeeping causes division and reproduces the very racial and socioeconomic hierarchies of power that we want students to challenge. Audre Lorde, an American poet, wrote "there can be no hierarchies of oppression" to explain how different aspects of her identity were irrevocably

linked, and assault to one was an assault to the other (Lorde, 1983). Likewise, we should discourage classroom discourse that classifies some identities as better/worse or more/less oppressed than others. We walk through life very differently and face challenges that are entirely our own. Let's support each other on that walk rather than be obstacles in each other's development.

- e) Don't ask students to represent the perspective of an entire identity group

Some educators, particularly those who teach mixed Spanish language classes, may feel inclined to ask their HL learners to represent the perspective of the whole HL speech community. And although members of a shared identity group tend to have lived many of the same experiences, they are still individuals with unique characteristics, challenges, and emotions. Surely, many of our HL learners will have similar experiences, but we should not place on them the burden of representing an entire community, linguistically, culturally or otherwise. Not only does such a request put unnecessary pressure on the HL learners, but it is likely to lead to faulty generalization, where one group of people is stereotyped based on the thoughts or actions of the few. We ought to keep those dynamics out of the classroom and encourage positive and respectful linguistic interactions.

Before concluding, we would like to acknowledge that while this article provides a critical understanding of linguistic aggressions as well as some general ideas to minimize their impact in the Spanish as a heritage language classroom, it does not present specific suggestions for curricular reform. Clearly, if we aim to address these issues, then additional work is needed at the curricular level. We hope the insights presented herein inspire future research and practice in the areas of curriculum design and development.

6. Conclusion

Students do best when they feel valued, cared for, and empowered. Unfortunately, young Latinx students do not always feel such support (e.g., Carreira & Beeman, 2014). In fact, they often report experiencing discrimination and biased behaviors from their teachers and peers. These biases result in feelings of insecurity, inferiority, and overall inadequacy. Under these circumstances, it is not surprising to learn that they continue to be outperformed academically and that many end up dropping out before graduating (e.g., Gramlich, 2017; Astin & Oseguera, 2005; Fry, 2002; Samuel & Scott, 2014). The combined effects and repercussions of such experiences are akin to a death by a thousand cuts, academically and personally.

We believe that for Latinx students to feel supported, valued and empowered in our classes we ought to start by identifying, acknowledging, and dismantling the raciolinguistic ideologies they experience on a regular basis. With this general goal in mind, our efforts have been centered on engaging in a dialogue that acknowledges and addresses Spanish HSs emotional responses to some of the discriminatory linguistic practices they face daily. Drawing from previous work about the reproduction of linguistic and racial normativity (e.g., Hill, 2008; Flores & Rosa, 2015), we have shown that HSs are subjected to (micro)aggressions that perpetuate social inequalities and feelings of linguistic inadequacy. These experiences negatively impact their connection to the HL and their sense of belonging to a cultural and linguistic community. We offer some strategies to manage microaggressions in the learning environment and student distress. Breaking away from the limitations of traditional language-focused instruction and providing HL learners as well as their instructors with the means to identify, and the tools to act upon, some of the discriminatory dynamics that affect them can transform SHL classrooms into spaces through which the principles of social justice can be enacted authentically.

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32

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