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# Identity and Language Perceptions among Second-Generation Spanish Speakers in Miami

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UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI

IDENTITY AND LANGUAGE PERCEPTIONS AMONG SECOND-GENERATION  
SPANISH SPEAKERS IN MIAMI

By

Elizabeth G. Lanier

A THESIS

Submitted to the Faculty  
of the University of Miami  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for  
the degree of Master of Arts

Coral Gables, Florida

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Identity and Language Perceptions among Second-Generation  
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This study explored how second-generation Spanish speakers in South Florida imagine Miami in sociolinguistic terms, how linguistic identity is constructed within and outside of Miami, and how perceived language ideologies, labels, and stereotypes affect identity construction. The analysis was based upon semi-structured, open-ended interviews with thirteen young adults (ages 20-28) born in Miami, whose parents immigrated to the U.S. from a Latin American country. The theoretical framework relied upon Anderson's (1991) notion of imagined communities. Participants often contextualized their identity not only as English-speaking U.S. citizens, but also as members of their heritage country, and within the imagined Hispanic community of Miami, which was the main focus of this study. All the participants in this study affirmed that they were bilingual and referred to Miami as a Spanish-speaking community, either implicitly or explicitly. It was noteworthy that, for several participants, not being able to speak fluent Spanish caused embarrassment, feelings of guilt and discomfort, or social insecurity. In some cases, participants actively sought opportunities to increase their knowledge and use of Spanish. The one space that seemed to be dominated by the English language was school. Recalling their secondary schooling experiences in Miami, participants affirmed that social divisions based on language use (English vs. Spanish) and immigrant status served to isolate ESOL students. Participants' observations regarding their own experiences in

the U.S. beyond Miami suggested that there is greater use and broader social acceptance of Spanish in South Florida than in other areas of the country.

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

Miami's immigrant history is unique from other major U.S. cities with a large Hispanic presence. In 1960, Miami's metropolitan area consisted of 80% non-Hispanics (Gainsborough, 2008). According to the 2010 U.S. Census, Hispanics made up 64.3% of the population, and 51.2% of Miami-Dade was foreign born (Miami-Dade County, U.S. Census Bureau). Currently, Cubans make up the largest group of Hispanic inhabitants at approximately 856,000; Colombians are second at 114,700; Nicaraguans at 105,500; while Puerto Ricans, Hondurans, Dominicans, Mexicans, Peruvians, Venezuelans, Argentineans, and the rest of Latin America are represented in smaller populations ("Hispanic or Latino by Type: 2010," 2010).

Increased Hispanic immigration to Miami began with Fidel Castro's rise to power in Cuba. The first wave of Cubans to immigrate to Miami came between 1959-1962 and consisted of wealthy businessmen, elite Cubans, small business owners, and professionals (Nijman, 2011, p. 47). The first wave of Cubans "organized formal and informal networks of employment, mutual aid, social welfare, legal services, and media communication" (Resnick, 1988, p. 95). Resnick (1988) suggested that because of their light skin, work ethic, and ideology against communism, they were welcomed into the Miami community. The second wave, the "freedom flights," occurred from 1969 to 1973, and consisted of young, often poor, uneducated Cubans (Nijman, 2011, p.48). However, they "contributed to the continued maintenance of Spanish in the ethnic workplace and marketplace" (Resnick, 1988, p. 96). The third large wave of Cubans left from the port of Mariel in 1980 and was not received as well as the previous two. The 125,000 *marielitos*

came from the lower socioeconomic strata in Cuba and were not as highly educated; additionally, some (though a small minority) were regarded as criminals, which led many Cubans already established in Miami to stigmatize and purposefully distance themselves from the *marielitos* (Nijman, 2011, p. 56). During the 1990s, Cuban immigrants fleeing to Miami on small boats and makeshift rafts were given the name *balseros* (Lynch, 2009b, 26). They left Cuba out of desperation and similar to the third wave, the *balseros* were not as welcomed by the earlier Cuban immigrant arrivals. From 2000 to 2006, another wave of Cuban immigrants settled in Miami and faced similar treatment: “Miami-born Cubans of the younger generation, who differentiate themselves socially through the use of English and their more ‘American’ manner of dress, often refer to these recent arrivals pejoratively as ‘refs’ (short for refugees)” (Ibid.). Steady immigration from Cuba continues, and as this study will consider, the more recent arrivals still face stigmatization today.

In addition to a significant Cuban population, Miami has become home for other diverse Latin American immigrants who faced political or economic difficulties in their respective countries: the political conflict in Nicaragua during the 1980s and 1990s, the armed conflict in Colombia, the 2001 economic crisis in Argentina, and Hugo Chávez’s socialist presidency in Venezuela (Klee and Lynch, 2009). One participant of the present study stated that, “Every time there’s a crisis, you see a lot of people coming... Every time that happens, they’re gonna come here. This is the capital of Latin America, so they’re gonna come here.” Indeed, during the last two weeks of February 2014, some 19,800 Venezuelans arrived in Miami fleeing the ongoing violence, hyperinflation, and food shortages of President Maduro’s socialist regime (Armario, 2014). Moreover, as

Boswell noted, “Most Latin American immigrants to metropolitan Miami are moving in response to either differential economic opportunities (in their home countries compared to those in the U.S.) or to political strife” (1994, p. 41).

Miami has been called the gateway to the Americas, the de facto capital of Latin America, a Hollywood Latin America (Sinclair, 2003), a magnet for Hispanic immigrants (Boswell, 2000), and a *Latinopolis* (Yúdice, 2003), because of the city’s strong ties with Latin America, including trade and commerce, banking, the large presence of international and multinational corporations, tourism and continued immigration, Hispanic culture, and Spanish-language media (Fradd and Boswell, 1996; Lynch, 2000; Florida: Gateway to the Americas, 2004; Weiner, 2011; Hoyos, 2012; Nijman, 2012; Stace, 2012; The 10 Traits of Globally Fluent Metro Areas: Miami, 2013; Hanks, 2014). Miami also has a large Hispanic political base. Miami’s past five mayors have been Cuban. Luigi Boria, a Venezuelan native, is the current mayor of the City of Doral in Miami-Dade County (Sesín, 2014), and three out of the five current Miami delegates to the U.S. House of Representatives are Cuban-American (Girard, Grenier and Gladwin, 2012; Adams, 2012).

Because of its large Hispanic presence and close proximity to Latin America, Miami has become a haven for multinationals seeking to do business in Latin America and the Caribbean. General Motors, HP, Caterpillar, American Airlines, Mondelez (formerly Kraft), Hilton, Marriott, Microsoft, Western Union, UPS, Sony, FedEx, Visa, MasterCard, among others, all maintain their Latin America regional headquarters in Miami (Wentz, 2012; “The 2009 Who’s Here Multinational Economic Impact Study,” 2009). Overall, more than 1,1000 multinational corporations and 55 foreign consulates

operate in Miami (Facts and Figures: International Data, 2014). Within Miami-Dade County, there are over 240,000 Hispanic-owned businesses (“Profile of Hispanic-Owned Businesses, Miami-Dade County,” 2007). In terms of U.S.-Latin American trade, according to a 2004 report, Florida handled 53% of all U.S. exports to Central America, 48.6% of exports to the Caribbean, and 43% of exports to South America (Florida: Gateway to the Americas, 2004). To be sure, businesses looking to expand internationally “look at Miami as an ideal location because of the large network of [Hispanic] companies that are already in the county, the proximity to Latin America and the lowering of language barriers” (Hoyos, 2012). Much of the trade and commerce in Miami linked to Latin America relies upon use of the Spanish language.

In addition to Spanish use in the business sector, Spanish language is highly prevalent in public domains, the arts, and entertainment. Newspapers like *El Nuevo Herald* and *Diario de Las Américas* are commonly read, and Spanish-language versions of mainstream magazines are readily available for purchase in stores. Additionally, “Spanish-language media giant Univision has a big presence” in Miami, and “about 600 Telemundo employees—one-third of the staff at the Comcast-owned Spanish language network—are scattered around Miami, including President Emilio Romano” (Wentz, 2012). Aisle signs in stores are frequently posted in Spanish and English, store announcements are often heard in both languages, and Spanish billboard advertisements are seen all over metropolitan Miami. Some street names have taken on Spanish names, such as *Calle Ocho* (Southwest 8<sup>th</sup> St). Spanish can be heard almost everywhere in Miami: car dealerships, drugstores, real estate offices, banks, post offices, shopping centers, department stores, etc (Roca, 2005, p. 111). In sum, “the use of Spanish in

business, finance, trade, tourism, employment, education, mass communication, arts and entertainment, religion, and everyday social interaction in Miami's public domains" all play a role in explaining why bilingualism is so prevalent in Miami (Lynch, 2000, p. 280). Rather differently than in other major cities with large Hispanic populations – such as New York, Los Angeles, and Houston – Spanish is regarded as a prestigious language in Miami. Tobar pointed out that:

In Los Angeles, Spanish is the language of working people, appropriate for transactions at neighborhood *tiendas* or for *cotorreo*, bantering with family and friends; but *mexicanos* and *centroamericanos* leave their mother tongues at home when they go to the parts of the city where real money is made and spent. In Miami, by contrast, Spanish is the language of the elite; if you look the slightest bit Latino the *maitre d'* at a South Beach restaurant will probably address you with a *buenas tardes, caballero*, as will the clerk at the gift shop at a five-star hotel... In South Florida, Spanish is the language of commerce, culture, and thought (2005 p. 193-194).

Although Spanish is spoken freely in Miami, English is still the dominant language in the macro-level sense, and among those born and raised in Miami. As suggested by Blackledge and Pavlenko (2001), "language practices are bound up in relations of authority and power and larger socioeconomic and sociopolitical processes" (p. 246). The present study will show that the prevailing monolingual ideology in the U.S. beyond Miami still presents itself and affects Miami Hispanics and their willingness to use Spanish.

The theoretical framework of this study relies upon Anderson's (1991) notion of imagined communities. According to Anderson, the nation is an imagined political community that is socially constructed. He states that:

It is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion... it is imagined

as a community, because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship (p. 49-50).

In these terms, participants of the present study often constructed their personal sociolinguistic identities according to what they perceived as a national U.S. identity, i.e. as English-speaking. At times, they also positioned themselves as members of their respective heritage countries. Lastly, participants often constructed their identity within the context of Miami as an imagined Hispanic, Spanish-speaking community, a phenomenon that will be highlighted in this study.

The second chapter highlights previous research on language and identity among Latin Americans in the United States. The third chapter includes the methodology and participant information. The fourth chapter includes the results and discussion including belonging in Spanish in Miami and beyond. The final chapter offers concluding thoughts and suggestions for further research.

### **Research Questions**

This study seeks to address the following three questions:

1. How do second-generation Spanish speakers in Miami imagine the city in sociolinguistic terms?
2. How do they perceive their linguistic identities within and beyond Miami, in other parts of the U.S. and in their heritage countries?
3. In what ways do perceived language ideologies, labels, and stereotypes of Hispanics in the broader U.S. context affect the construction and negotiation of their identities as bilinguals in Miami?

The theoretical goal is to expand upon the idea of imagined communities in a local context, with a particular focus on the unique characteristics of Miami. Sociologically, the aim is to contribute to the existing research on the heterogeneity of Hispanic identity in the United States. Linguistically, the study seeks to shed light on the relationship between Hispanic identity and Spanish language use, including how perceptions affect linguistic identity construction.

## Chapter 2

### Previous Research

Presented below are the findings and implications of several qualitative and quantitative studies examining identity and language use among Hispanics in Miami and other U.S. cities. In the present study, the data generally suggest that the stereotypes of the imposed title “Hispanic” affect identity construction. Additionally, race-ethnic conflation often causes confusion among Hispanic groups in Miami, especially if they consider themselves “white,” but are told by non-Hispanic Anglos that they are not. The same tendency has been noted by other researchers in other U.S. urban settings.

In New York City, Oboler’s (1995) study addressed how the label “Hispanic” influenced identity. The author conducted in-depth interviews with twenty-one first generation Latin American immigrants and one U.S.-born Puerto Rican all living in New York. All participants were enrolled in an “English as a Second Language” class (ESL) directed by the author. All the participants worked in the garment industry, and most of their educational levels reached no higher than the tenth grade, although two participants had completed college education in their respective countries. The author’s goal was to investigate “how the specific label *Hispanic* resonated in the [daily] lives and self-perceptions” of the group of immigrants from various Latin American countries now living in the U.S. (p. 101; emphasis in original). Prior to conducting the study, Oboler’s primary assumption was that the participants “would not always choose to identify themselves primarily as Hispanic, since they do not necessarily share common national, social, or historical backgrounds” (p. 101). Oboler also explored how the label “Hispanic” would unite the participants against non-Hispanics and, at the same time,



separate them from their own personal experiences, national origin, and history. In addition, she examined the relationship between the ethnic label “Hispanic,” social class, and race categories.

The conflation of race and ethnicity often perplexed most of Oboler’s participants. Some participants seemed confused about why only non-Hispanic “Americans” could be classified as white and told stories of “very white,” fair skinned Hispanics not being able to label themselves as white (p. 129). Furthermore, they seemed to acknowledge a negative connotation of being black in the U.S., and they also attributed being white to having more social value. The middle-class participants and the working-class participants differed in their views of incorporation into the U.S.<sup>1</sup> Two middle-class college-educated participants felt that Hispanics had less access to the same rights and privileges as white middle-class Americans. When comparing themselves to the rest of U.S. society, both participants adopted the Hispanic label. However, both also seemed aware of discrimination and prejudice against Hispanics, in addition to positive and negative values of being identified as Hispanic. One participant acknowledged a benefit to formally identifying as “Hispanic” because of governmental policies and resource distribution. Another participant recognized the importance of ethnic terms in societal organization, but pointed out that the invented label “Hispanic” was used to separate Hispanics from others, at times in problematic ways. He expressed that Hispanics in the U.S. were not valued or appreciated enough or recognized for their achievements. The

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<sup>1</sup> When Oboler used the terms “middle-class” and “working-class” she was referring to the participants’ socioeconomic class in their respective countries prior to their immigration to the U.S. In the U.S., all participants “shared traditional working-class immigrant occupations in the garment industry” (110).

middle-class response to the negative connotations of the label was defined in a much broader sociological sense and compared to other groups in the U.S.

The working-class participants in Oboler's study discussed the term "Hispanic" in a more personal manner and were more reluctant to self-identify as Hispanic. A few participants were unfamiliar with the term, while some participants believed it to signify persons that spoke Spanish. However, most working-class participants preferred to be called by their national identity and mentioned negative attributes of "Hispanics" that were oftentimes assumed by others: noisy, uneducated, messy, drug-users, etc. Because they believed the label to denote negative, incorrect stereotypes and hold less social value, working-class participants distanced themselves from the term. Additionally, participants recognized it as a term that outsiders had given them: "'Hispanic?' That's what they call us" (p. 141-142). Although the participants "constituted a heterogeneous group of Latinos," there were limitations to Oboler's study. First, despite being a substantial contingent in New York, Cubans were not interviewed for the study, and therefore not represented (p. 110). Second, all participants shared the same occupation and ESL class, therefore limiting diversity of socioeconomic status among participants as well as linguistic knowledge. Only two participants represented the middle class (in their respective countries of origin), thus minimal emphasis can be placed on the significance of different opinions between the middle and working classes.

In light of these limitations, Oboler acknowledged that the goal of the study was not to "interview a 'representative sample' of 'Hispanics' in the United States" and that no generalizations could or should be made. Oboler's study did contribute to the existing literature on Latinos' sense of self, and how ethnic classifications are perceived and

experienced (p. 103). The implications of this study were that although only a small sample group was interviewed, the label ‘Hispanic,’ and the stereotypes that come with it, “does not do justice to the variety of backgrounds and experiences of the immigrant populations” (p. 102).

Differences between middle-class and working-class participants were also noted among Cuban-American mothers in Miami. Lambert and Taylor’s (1996) study assessed 108 Cuban-background mothers’ bilingual language skills, the language skills of their second-generation children, and their attitudes towards multiculturalism. The authors correlated the latter with the mothers’ evaluations of their children’s language fluency and performance in school. The study revealed that both working-class and middle-class mothers believed their children should learn to speak English and that Spanish maintenance was important. However, significant differences were noted regarding the “modes of accommodation.” Lambert and Taylor found that among the 56 working-class mothers interviewed, the majority “oriented their children toward a ‘subtractive’ form of biculturalism and bilingualism” where English and the “American way of life” were emphasized more than Spanish language use. On the other hand, the middle-class mothers encouraged Spanish use, therefore promoting an additive form of bilingualism and biculturalism. One distinction related to personal and group identity emerged during an analysis of the factors correlated with the mothers’ self-respect. In working-class mothers, self-respect was only linked to one factor: their ethnic group’s economic status relative to that of other ethnic groups (p. 490). In middle-class mothers, self-respect was positively linked to a sense of intra-ethnic harmony as well, but other factors were also positively correlated, namely the mothers’ Spanish fluency and their offspring’s Spanish

fluency. Self-respect was negatively correlated with mother's English fluency and the length of family residence in the U.S (p. 488). In sum, "how mothers feel about themselves and how they attempt to accommodate both heritage and American cultures and languages appear to have a separate, distinct influence on children" (p. 490-491). Lambert and Taylor also added that, "factors outside family control—the public school system and life in a multicultural setting—also influence the Americanization of family members" (p. 491). In a multicultural city such as Miami, many factors, besides family, affect Spanish maintenance among children of immigrants.

Portes and Schauffler (1996) also addressed how language was adapted and preserved over time among second-generation youth in South Florida. They used a quantitative methodology and a multivariate framework. The authors noted that, in the U.S. setting, immigrant languages are usually lost over time because of pressures to speak English. However, the authors found South Florida to be somewhat of an exception. They discussed language assimilation throughout U.S. history, and how speaking English "became the essential part of 'real' Americanism" (p. 642). They noted that beliefs regarding bilingualism have changed over time. Previously, there were two main schools of thought: (1) genetic differences in immigrants deterred their ability to learn English, and/or (2) being bilingual and speaking a foreign language at birth stunted one's intellect. During the 1960s and later, new studies revealed quite the opposite, i.e. "true bilingualism" often correlated with greater academic achievement. Indeed, true bilinguals "were shown to enjoy a greater degree of cognitive flexibility and an enhanced ability to deal with abstract concepts than their monolingual peers" (p. 643).

Portes and Schauffler noted three determinants that affected the preservation of a foreign language: the community where immigrants live, parents' socioeconomic background, and the amount of time living in the U.S. They surveyed 2,843 eighth- and ninth-grade students (half female, half male) in Miami and Ft. Lauderdale, all second-generation youths from inner city and suburban schools. The study sought to determine whether South Florida was a "permanent linguistic enclave" of Spanish speakers or was in the beginning stage of "absorbing a large foreign influx which, in due time, will follow the time-honored pattern" of English monolingualism (p. 646). Their hypothesis was three-fold:

1. Language assimilation (English monolingualism) among the second generation would vary directly with the demographic dispersion of the immigrant group and with length of U.S. residence.
2. Bilingualism would vary directly with demographic concentration and economic diversification of the immigrant community and inversely with the length of U.S. residence.
3. Parental status would lead to greater English proficiency, but not toward greater bilingualism due to its contradictory effects on children's cultural adaptation (p. 645).

Their results greatly supported their three hypotheses. The amount of time second-generation youths spent in the U.S. was the strongest correlating factor with use of their parents' native language. National origin affected the youth's English ability: Cubans showed greater English proficiency; Nicaraguans showed the least. However, they mentioned that this finding was related to the amount of time spent in the U.S and they recognized that, at the time of their study, Nicaraguan migration was the most recent. The data also revealed that students in Miami schools retained more Spanish than students in Ft. Lauderdale schools. The authors found Latin American youths in South Florida were mostly bilingual, which supported the first two hypotheses by demonstrating

the “positive effects of immigrant concentration and a diversified ethnic economy on [based on] language preservation” (p. 651). The education of the mother and father were not significant indicators of whether the immigrant native language was retained. Lastly, Portes & Schaufler found that most students preferred speaking English over any other language. Length of U.S. residence and national origin were correlated with language preference. However, the amount of time spent in the U.S. was the strongest correlating factor. An unexpected finding was that female youths had a higher retention rate for the heritage language and were more likely to be bilingual than their male counterparts. Portes & Schaufler hypothesized that this tendency was “attributable to the greater seclusion of female youngsters in the home environment which exposes them to greater contact with parents” (p. 655). The authors concluded that nativist fears of “demise of English” in South Florida were exaggerated and incorrect (p. 658). The results showed that Spanish was maintained in areas where there was a great concentration of immigrants and of diversified economies. However, the authors suggested that without policies preserving bilingualism, those “enclaves will be engulfed... in the course of two or three generations” (p. 659).

The data of Porcel’s (2006) study seemed to reflect Portes & Schaufler’s prediction. The study reviewed positive and negative characteristics present in Miami that affected Spanish language maintenance and use among Cuban Americans. Positive factors included the large size and dense concentration of Cuban Americans, their political influence, and their “stratification profile.” Porcel defined Cuban Americans’ stratification profile as: educated, solvent, and white collar. In terms of education, more than 70 percent of the participants had completed high school, and 20 percent had

completed college. In terms of solvency, 50 percent of the participants earned annual incomes of \$35,000 or more. Additionally, many Cuban Americans held white-collar occupations – although many of them were underemployed professionals. Continued immigration, the market’s demand for Spanish speakers, bilingual education opportunities, and Spanish media resources were also references as additional potential factors of Spanish maintenance. Negative aspects included being from a “minority” immigrant background, varying reasons for immigration (Cubans who migrated for economic instead of political reasons), and anti-immigrant discourse. Porcel’s (2006) data was gathered from written questionnaires and oral interviews with 68 Cuban residents in Miami, the majority being Cuban-born<sup>2</sup>, representing a variety of social networks in Miami. The fact that only 20% of Porcel’s participants were actually born and raised in Miami is, of course, a serious limitation of his study. The two strongest correlations in Porcel’s study related to the educational system and nativity. The number of years the participant was educated in the U.S. was inversely correlated with Spanish language maintenance, as was being born in the U.S. Age was also a factor: the younger participants spoke less Spanish and were more competent in English. Contact age and language choice at home and with friends also contributed to whether or not Spanish was maintained. Porcel concluded that, “Miami Spanish is not a paradox at all” (p. 107), since mainstream U.S. ideologies of English pervade the city.

On a more micro-level of analysis, individuals who speak fluent Spanish in the U.S. may feel more of a right to claim ‘authenticity’ with regards to their heritage country, because of their linguistic expertise. Those individuals who struggle with

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<sup>2</sup> 79% were born in Cuba and 20% were second generation Cuban Americans, born to Cuban immigrants.

Spanish may feel more reluctant to claim either U.S. Hispanic membership or identity as a member of their heritage country. In the university setting in California, Scott Shenk (2007) explained how ethnic identity could be negotiated between speakers in authenticating discourse. Authenticating discourse was described as “part of an ongoing, ordinary interactional routine through which speakers take overt (authentication) stances... to display, impugn, vie for, and enact forms of ethnic identity” (p. 194). Scott Shenk’s study affirmed how the ideology of authenticity occurs in a localized, micro-level context among three Mexican-American college students. Establishing oneself as the “authentic Mexican” stemmed from ideological constructs of bloodline (having two Mexican parents), birthplace (being born in Mexico), and Spanish linguistic fluency. The author analyzed authenticating discourse that took place in three ordinary, playful interactions. Bela moved to California at a young age after being born in Mexico to one Mexican parent and one non-Hispanic parent. Rica and Lalo were born in California to Mexican immigrant parents. Consequently, all three students were deemed by each other as “on the margin” of being considered fully “Mexican,” and through dialogue positioned one another as more “authentic” or “inauthentic” (p. 199; p. 214).

In the first dialogue, Rica emerged as more authentic than Bela during a discussion of the pronunciation of a neologism that mixed Spanish and English. Rica authenticated her Mexican identity by emphasizing her pure Mexican blood because of her two Mexican parents. Meanwhile, she positioned Bela as “half-Mexican” because of her half blood. In the second example, Lalo positioned Bela as half-Latina and Bela challenged the authentic stance by questioning where Lalo was born, evoking the ideology of nationality. Bela, with Mexico as her birthplace, was aware that Lalo was



born in California and thus opposed Lalo's authenticating move. Lalo subsequently responded with the pure bloodline ideology, pointing out that even though he was born in the U.S., his blood was pure because of his Mexican parents. The third example took place when Rica made a speech error by pronouncing *jueves* (Thursday) as "*joves*." Bela emerged as authentic by highlighting this linguistic infraction and playfully demonstrated Lalo's "cultural inadequacy and inauthenticity", questioning his Mexican group membership and identity. Birthplace and bloodline were two aspects that Bela, Lalo, and Rico would never be able to change. Spanish linguistic knowledge, however, could fluctuate over time. To the participants who were on the margin with the other two unchangeable factors, Spanish language fluency was a crucial aspect for authenticating as Mexican in the U.S.

Because Scott Shenk's study was part of a larger research project, possible limitations may include the brevity of the conversations and the limited quantity. The three ideological constructs the author discussed were no doubt "reflexes of longstanding hegemonic structure" (p. 214). However, it would be informative to find out if other "prerequisites of group membership" emerged in additional conversations, such as the cultural constructs of dance, music, traditions, and perhaps even food. The implications of this study were that establishing oneself as authentic was not only initiated between dominant and subordinate groups, but also in a micro-level intra-ethnic context. Scott Shenk revealed how "authenticity is a social construct" (p. 214). Each member emerged as "authentic" and "inauthentic" at different times and in different contexts. Identity was fluid and negotiated, and furthermore, Scott Shenk suggested that constructing "locally defined, complex identities" might act as a "form of resistance to purist hegemonies" (p.

214). The latter suggestion is also echoed in Urciuoli's (2008) claim that Hispanic college students may find internal value in classroom Spanish that will empower them in the face of linguistic discrimination.

Urciuoli (2008) investigated linguistic identity by studying the complex relationship Hispanic students have with the Spanish learned at home and Spanish as an academic subject. Using excerpts from nine personal interviews with university students from working-class families, in addition to interviews from a senior thesis of one of her students, the author analyzed the following themes: language-culture conflation, language as cultural and symbolic capital<sup>3</sup>, and language as a way of reworking identity. In her findings, the misbelief that "if you're Latino, you naturally speak Spanish" becomes problematic, especially when participants reflected on their linguistic identity (p. 266). Participants who enrolled in a Spanish for heritage speakers class became much more aware (and oftentimes critical) of their own Spanish. Some students felt self-conscious because of their accent, dialect, and lack of "correctness." Oftentimes they perceived their Spanish as imperfect or not "correct" enough. Additionally, regional accents were deemed as "non-standard, thus reinforcing deficit-model judgments" and perceived as decreasing the value of their Spanish (p. 267). According to the author, students also began to differentiate formal Spanish from informal Spanish, appropriate and inappropriate ways of speaking, as well as colloquial and correct or "useful" Spanish.

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<sup>3</sup> Using Bourdieu's view of linguistic knowledge as capital, Potowski asserts that, "the language with valued cultural capital is English" (p. 183). Indeed, "other languages are not only not assigned as much value, they are often stigmatized and suppressed" (Ibid). Stigmatization and suppression not only occur from the majority language, but within the minority languages as well, as witnessed by Scott Shenk (2007), Oboler (1995), Lynch (2009a and b), Urciuoli (2008), and Bedolla's (2013) studies.

Urciuoli suggested that academic Spanish may be a “resource for reworking identity,” adding that, “students may be attracted to a ‘value added’ model that casts bilingualism as a social resource and contribution” (p. 261). She differentiated between *internal value* and *external value* attributed to Spanish linguistic knowledge. *Internal value* signified students’ “reinvented ‘educated’ version of one’s native Spanish” reinforcing a pan-Latino identity. *External value* implied the neo-liberal perspective of linguistic knowledge as a commodity and a “potential workforce asset” (p. 275). The study concluded that, “the *internalization* of correct Spanish can be empowering” and a safeguard against socioeconomic and racial discrimination (p. 276; emphasis added).

However, one should note that the binary distinction of ‘internal versus external value added’ that Urciuoli proposes may not be such in the minds of individuals. If participants consider bilingualism necessary for job opportunities (external value), less fluent Spanish speakers may be encouraged to sign up for Spanish courses or practice the language among peers. Students with different backgrounds or from other cities in the U.S. may have responded in different ways – such as in Miami. The implications of this study most importantly point to the language ideologies often held by Hispanics and non-Hispanics alike: in order to identify as Hispanic one must speak “perfect” Spanish; in order to authentically identify with one’s country of origin one must speak Spanish with the accent of that country; and “correct” and “valuable” Spanish contains few informal colloquialisms and forms deemed as “nonstandard.” These ideologies will be further explored in this study.

In a personal essay, “Learning to Forget,” Baez (2002) reflected on how his linguistic identity was affected by U.S. societal and institutional forces that favored

English. The essay began in New York City after his family's move from Puerto Rico. The education system, professors, and his peers (many of whom were Puerto Rican), all played a role in urging him to "forget" Spanish and learn English. The Spanish language was devalued, while the English language was consistently valued. Baez clarified that "forgetting" did not mean he was not able to speak, read, and write in Spanish, but that he had lost the confidence to speak it, along with losing the "sights and sounds" of Spanish. He stated, "I lost the intimacy associated with Spanish and the closeness to my family and past that it allowed" (p. 123). He "learned to forget" Spanish not only from his teachers, who urged him to speak only English, but also from his peers. Baez noted that, "...When they laughed at me, those other second-graders, they too expected me to forget Spanish and to learn English. By laughing at me, they reminded me that I was different. Ironically, many of them spoke Spanish" and were Hispanic (p. 125). While reading aloud in his fourth-grade class, Baez pronounced a word inadequately, which caused his classmates to react with laughter and name-calling:

I was told that I sounded as I 'just got off the boat' ... Note how effectively we were normalized into oppression by language... I was not yet American to those kids because I did not speak properly. We were all brainwashed to believe that English made us American (p. 126-127).

The language attitudes that Baez's study brought to light were also reflected in several of this study's participants regarding their experiences at school. These will be highlighted in the discussion.

In her ethnographic case study of a bilingual fourth-grade class in Colorado, Shannon (1995) argued that although English hegemony exists, it can be resisted. A Mexican-American fluent bilingual teacher in Shannon's study valued Spanish as much as English by ensuring that Spanish was used in discussions, explanations, books,

homework, and parent-participation. Furthermore, the teacher encouraged positive bilingual interactions and understanding between English-dominant students and Spanish-dominant students. Instead of a focus on English fluency, at the expense of Spanish, the overall aim was to promote bilingualism. The classroom atmosphere created by the teacher (with the help of the students) not only enriched the students' learning experiences, but empowered the Spanish-dominant students and respected their linguistic rights. The author concluded that, "High status for bilingualism motivates dominant-language speakers to learn and use the minority language" while "minority language children, on the other hand, in a counterhegemonic bilingual classroom, can confidently use their language in high-status ways equal to English" (p. 198). Shannon reiterated that minority-language use would not impede English-language acquisition, but would actually aid in its attainment since students were striving for bilingualism. Unfortunately, none of the participants of the present study were enrolled in elementary or middle school classes in Miami with teachers who promoted this sort of environment. What is interesting to note is that in Miami, Spanish is not a minority language, but actually the majority language. While the teacher in Shannon's study had to encourage bilingualism in the face of an English-speaking majority, factors unique to Miami could potentially allow for an appreciation of bilingualism given its Spanish-speaking majority. This does not usually seem to be the case, however. Such might be the paradox referred to by Porcel (2006).

Even in Miami, social divisions regarding language use emerge, not only with respect to Spanish and English, but also with respect to different varieties of Spanish. Lynch's (2009a) study in Miami's Cuban communities analyzed the pronunciation of

syllable- and word-final /s/ among older, Cuban-born, early exile speakers and younger third-generation Miami-born Cuban-Americans. Deletion of the final /s/ is a characteristic of Caribbean Spanish and according to previous research on linguistic change in a bilingual setting, one would assume that sibilant deletion would be greater among the younger generation. However, the study found that oftentimes the Miami-born grandchildren of the early exiles pronounce the sibilant more strongly than first-generation Cuban speakers. Lynch described the political and economic differences between the Cuban immigrant waves to Miami, and suggested that /s/ deletion might signal to others that they are recent arrivals, or the pejorative term “ref,” referring to “refugee” (p. 784). Therefore, in order for the Miami-born generations to avoid stigmatization and affiliation as a “ref,” they distanced themselves from similar common linguistic practices among more recent Cuban immigrants, in whose speech deletion is the norm.

According to Bedolla (2013), Latinos’ relationship to the Spanish language is associated with feelings of ethnic solidarity as well as social stigma, and therefore affects community cohesion. Bedolla’s study showed how various language attitudes influenced intra-ethnic identity. The study included 100 participants from two different communities<sup>4</sup> in Los Angeles. Participants ranged from first generation to “5+”, and the majority of participants were of Mexican origin. According to Bedolla, because of limited English ability, first-generation Latinos felt defenseless, insecure, frustrated, powerless, embarrassed, and unable to fully express themselves. Experiences included difficulty finding job opportunities, an inability to be very involved in their children’s education,

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<sup>4</sup> East Los Angeles and Montebello

and challenges getting through the daily tasks of life. Additionally, they suffered the psychological effects of low self-esteem and feeling less socially valuable. Bedolla emphasized that, “what is surprising is the frequency with which these negative experiences were the result of their interactions with *other Latinos*, not Euro Americans” (p. 272, emphasis added). It is perhaps no surprise that the first-generation participants “all felt strongly that their children should learn English well and as quickly as possible” (p. 273). Latinos’ perceptions of Latino stereotypes were consistently negative: “gang members,” “wetbacks,” “illegal aliens.” The author posited that because groups desired a positive social identity, many Latinos selectively dissociated themselves. They maintained a relationship with their ethnic identity, but distanced themselves from groups they believed were “perpetuating the negative image of their group, namely immigrants” (p. 276). Indeed, “since language is so integral to the ethnic identity of these Latinos, the fact that their language is stigmatized means that it negatively affects how group members see the language and those who use it exclusively” (p. 273).

At the same time, however, Latinos from later generations (3+) in Bedolla’s study oftentimes felt embarrassed or guilty about not being able to speak Spanish. I will note that, in the present study, some second-generation Hispanics in Miami were confronted with similar feelings. Bedolla acknowledged her sample was not statistically representative of the two communities, but tried to correlate language and intra-ethnic attitudes with political community cohesion by examining voter support for propositions affecting the Latino community. The author suggested that Latinos’ dissociation from immigrants negatively affected political community cohesion. Similarly to Porcel (2006), Bedolla emphasized Latinos’ relationship with the Spanish language as a “paradoxical

relationship.” However, unlike Porcel, Bedolla did not explore or analyze participants’ positive associations with the language. The author claimed that Spanish language knowledge was important to participants, but did not explore why and in what ways, beyond one quote stressing the importance of ethnic and familial ties. Lastly, by assuming that social identity was based on group membership, Bedolla’s approach did not take into consideration the heterogeneity within “Latinos” and assumed a more essentialist, static view of Latino cultures (Blackledge and Pavlenko, 2013, p. 244-245).

Blackledge and Pavlenko described an example of such an essentialist perspective:

Related to the essential equation of one language with one “people” is an insistence on the significance of the “mother tongue” as the only authentic language of a speaker, as if only the language learned at the mother’s knee could convey the true self of the speaker. The essentialized links between language ideology and speakers’ identities are plain here: if you are a speaker of language X, you must be an X sort of person (p. 246).

In order to move away from an essentialist view of identity, Potowski (2012) suggested some key approaches: performativity, ambivalence, hybridity, and communities of practice. “Performativity” refers to identities being performed through speech, gestures, and actions. Societal forces also play a role in identity construction. When identity is not being questioned or under attack, individuals may not consciously think about their identity, thus be “ambivalent.” Conversely, “when identity is somehow under threat or viewed as problematic by the hegemonic majority, identity is questioned and ambivalence often emerges” (p. 181). For example, “a person who speaks one variety of Spanish, or no Spanish at all, can have his identity as a Latino called into question” (Ibid.). To avoid such identity dilemmas, hybrid identities are created: Colombian-American, Cuban-American, Venezuelan-American, and so forth. However, hybrid identities are still influenced by society’s stereotypes and expectations. The last concept



highlighted by Potowski is communities of practice: a group of people that come together for a shared purpose, such as a running group, biker gang, or a book club. Communities of practice allow people to assume 'subject positions' according to the community. Indeed, "a fifty-year-old man who begins riding a motorcycle and becomes deeply involved with a motorcycle group" could be identified as a biker (p. 182). However, "does this man get tattoos because he is a biker, or does he become a biker through getting tattoos?" (Ibid.). Potowski aptly points out from the latter example that the concept of performativity should not be underestimated. In the present study, participants often "performed" being bilingual Spanish-English speakers and confronted varying language ideologies and expectations from various groups of speakers, as will be pointed out in the discussion.

Not only did the present participants face linguistic dilemmas, but they also dealt with multiple social and cultural identities. Along with socioeconomic factors, Oboler (1995) described two conflicting myths that must be considered as impacting the future generations' identity. First, was the myth of the homeland, i.e. when first-generation immigrants tell stories about their lives in their country of origin (p. 169). Those unique stories became an "important source of self-affirmation and identity for Latinas and Latinos growing up in this country" (p. 170). The second was the myth of homogeneity. Oboler explained that the labels Latino and Hispanic were "myth[s] that someday may indeed generate a 'generic Hispanic'" (Ibid.). The term Hispanic was "imposed from above, regardless of their own self-identification, their phenotype, or their English language skills" (Ibid.). It was challenging for Hispanics to claim their individuality when they were regarded as one homogenous group. The term 'Latino' began to hold certain

characteristics that many people tried to fit into. Stereotyping “reduces, essentializes, naturalizes and fixes ‘difference’” (Hall, 1997, p. 258). The stereotype of the ‘real Latino/a’ may cause Hispanics to try to conform to whatever that image may be and/or feel the need to defend themselves and explain why they may not necessarily live up to those assumed characteristics. With regard to linguistic competence, “they seek to explain to themselves and others why, for example, their parents did not teach them Spanish, or why they did not learn it by themselves, without a full understanding of the strength of the socialization forces in the society” (Oboler 172). Those Hispanics who do not dance, are too dark, are too light, are lesbian or gay, or don’t speak Spanish, may all feel marginalized because they do not fit the mold of the imagined “Latino” (p. 173). Oboler stated that, “Thus, the new generations end up doing to themselves what the society has done to all Latinos: they homogenize, they stereotype, they categorize—and ultimately they divide themselves” (Ibid.).

Oboler’s previous findings along with Potowski’s (2012) suggestion to move away from essentialist views of identity were also echoed by Cashman’s (2013) challenge:

To move beyond binaries such as gay/straight and male/female, warning that ‘static or fixed notions of Latina lesbian identities are likely to overlook or misread the wide variety of ways that individual queer Latina subjects negotiate nonnormative sexualities, identities, and practices’ (p. 6).

In sum, Hispanic identity should not be solely defined by distinct and separate categories such as ethnicity, gender, sex, nationality, race, but as complex, fluid, and relational; heterogeneity must not be ignored. Zambrana (2011) further urged that, “more nuanced and complex understandings of identity and more fluid notions of gender, race, sexual orientation, identity and class must be reformulated to expand the depth and breadth of

Latino lived experiences” (p. 245). As we will see, Hispanic identity in Miami is fluid and complex.

## Chapter 3

### Methodology

To capture the complexity—and at times contradictory nature—of second-generation Spanish-speaking identities in Miami, and to obtain a more intimate and personal account of the participants’ use of and relationship to language, a qualitative approach was taken. Creswell (2013) offered several reasons why qualitative research should be used:

1. We need a problem or issue to be explored. This exploration is needed, in turn, because of a need to study a group or population, identify variables that cannot be easily measured, or hear silenced voices.
2. We need a complex, detailed understanding of the issue. This detail can only be established by talking directly with people, going to their homes or places of work, and allowing them to tell the stories unencumbered by what we expect to find or what we have read in the literature.
3. We want to empower individuals to share their stories, hear their voices, and minimize the power relationships that often exist between a researcher and the participants in a study.
4. We want to understand the contexts or settings in which participants in a study address a problem or issue.
5. We use qualitative research because quantitative measures and the statistical analyses simply do not fit the problem. To level all individuals to a statistical mean overlooks the uniqueness of individuals in our studies. (p. 47-48)

The present author conducted in-depth, semi-structured, open-ended interviews with thirteen participants over a period of three months.<sup>5</sup> The shortest interview was 38 minutes and the longest interview was two hours and nineteen minutes. The interviews were conducted in English, however at times Spanish words or phrases were used. Each of the interviews was audio recorded and transcribed afterwards. Interview questions included topics such as growing up in Miami; language use growing up; language spoken in interactions with particular people and places; bilingual ability and fluctuation of

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<sup>5</sup> Pseudonyms are used.

ability over time; language preference; level of understanding, speaking, writing, and reading in Spanish; uncomfortable or difficult scenarios speaking Spanish; perceptions of the Spanish and English languages; school support for bilingualism; and how participants identified themselves linguistically, ethnically, and culturally.

Six of the participants were personal acquaintances of the present author and seven of them were referrals. Participants were all from Miami or had moved to Miami before the age of nine. All of the participants' parents were adult immigrants from Latin American countries. Participants' ages ranged from 20 to 28 years old. All but two participants were attending college. Twelve participants were single and one participant was married. Latin American countries (and regions) represented by participants included Cuba, Colombia, Ecuador, Nicaragua, Peru, Puerto Rico, and Venezuela. Table 1 details more of the specifics of each participant. Discourse analysis techniques (Creswell, 2013, p. 179-200) were used to identify recurring themes in the interviews and only the most salient themes were considered here.

Possible limitations of this study are the small sample size and the social homogeneity of participants in terms of occupation and age. However, the aim of the study was not to be statistically representative of all second-generation Hispanics in Miami, but rather to shed light on the ways in which they imagine Miami and construct their linguistic, ethnic, and cultural identities. Another limitation is the lack of information regarding socioeconomic class background of the participants. The relationship between participants' interview discussions and their socioeconomic status is not explored and should be given attention in further studies. To be sure, the answers given by working-class, less educated Miami Hispanics could have been much different

than the answers given by this study's group of predominantly middle-class, college students.

**Table 1: Participants' Details**

Participant	Birthplace	Parents' Country of Origin	Neighborhood Where Participant Grew Up	Occupation	Additional Notes
Ana	Born in Miami	Mother: Ecuador Father: Puerto Rico	Kendall	Student at Miami-Dade College (MDC)	Parents moved to U.S. as teenagers
Juan	Born in Miami	Mother: Cuba Father: Cuba	Sweetwater	Student at Florida International University (FIU)	
Alex	Born in Costa Rica	Mother: Nicaragua Father: Costa Rica Step-father: Colombia	Unknown	Security Guard	Moved to Miami at age 9 with mother and step-father
Jesse	Born in Miami	Mother: Peru Father: Cuba	Hialeah	Student at FIU; Previously attended Florida State University	Father moved to New Jersey at a young age; lived with mother growing up
Miguel	Born in Miami	Mother: Cuba Father: Cuba	Westchester	Student at FIU; Previously attended University of Central Florida	
Sage	Born in Miami	Mother: Cuba Father: Colombia	Unknown	Student at FIU	Father moved to U.S. in his 20s
Victoria	Born in Colombia	Mother: Colombia Father: Colombia	North Miami Beach/Sunny Isles	Student at University of Miami	Lived in Medellin before moving to Miami at age 5
Samantha	Born in Miami	Mother: Colombia Father: Colombia	Cutler Bay	Former student at UM; job-seeking	Born in Miami; moved to Medellin, Colombia; Moved back to Miami at age 5
Carmen	Born in Cuba	Mother: Cuba Father: Cuba	Coral Terrace	Student at UM	Moved to Miami at age 4
Elisa	Born in Colombia	Mother: Colombia Father: Colombia	Miami Lakes	Student at UM	Moved to Miami at age 9
Richard	Born in Miami	Mother: Venezuela Father: Venezuela	Kendall	Student at UM	
Paula	Born in Colombia	Mother: Colombia Father: Colombia	Pine Crest	Student at UM	Moved to Miami at age 7
Kevin	Born in Miami	Mother: Nicaragua Father: Cuba	Hialeah	Student at FIU	

## **Chapter 4**

### **Results and Discussion**

Part 1: *Belonging in Spanish in Miami*, considers participants' relationships with Spanish in the imagined Hispanic community of Miami. In the first subchapter, *Miami as a Hispanic Community*, participants describe the vitality of Spanish in Miami, the diverse makeup of the city, and how this diversity affects the construction of their own personal identities. The next subchapter, *Spanish Linguistic Insecurity and Reconnection*, describes the linguistic insecurity experienced by some when speaking Spanish, which in some cases leads to a desire to strengthen their Spanish language abilities. The third subchapter, *Language and Education*, explores how participants' identity is influenced by English language hegemony in the educational setting. The last subchapter, *Social Divisions*, discusses how language attitudes may lead some participants to dissociate from speaking Spanish and distance themselves from Spanish speakers.

#### **Part 1: Belonging in Spanish in Miami**

##### **Miami as a Hispanic Community**

All of the participants in this study affirmed that they were bilingual and referred to Miami as a Hispanic community, either implicitly or explicitly. The concept of Miami as the “midpoint” between Latin America and the rest of the United States, or the “capital” of Latin America, was frequently mentioned. Some participants remarked that when the question “Where are you from?” was asked in Miami, it really meant, “What Latin American country are you/your parents originally from?” – which reiterated the assumption that almost all Miami residents have some sort of Hispanic heritage or

bilingual ability. When participants discussed characteristics of Miami, they brought up the prevalence, vitality, and/or importance of the Spanish language, the diversity of Latin Americans, and the differences between Miami and the rest of the U.S. As reflected in the examples below, each participant viewed Miami as a “Hispanic” city and considered the ability to communicate in Spanish as a social necessity:

Sage: The majority of Miami – South Florida – you need Spanish.

Paula: In Miami, everywhere you use your Spanish.

Elisa: ... There’s parts of Miami that you need to learn Spanish. It’s become a need in some parts.

Miguel: Miami will always be a Hispanic community. It will always be, for the most part, Spanish first.

Ana: It’s always an advantage to be able to understand [Spanish] because we all are living in Miami, where everybody is of a diverse culture from many countries: Puerto Rico, Cuba, Colombia...

Sage: Miami is a really different place compared to a lot of different cities and a lot of different countries and stuff just because it’s so influenced by Hispanic culture.

When describing the makeup of the city, participants emphasized the diversity of people from many different Spanish-speaking countries and the mingling of Hispanic and American cultures.

A salient theme in the interviews was that of “difference” when Miami was compared to other cities or states (including North Florida). Miami was described as being much more supportive of the Spanish language, as well as more ethnically and culturally accepting of Hispanic citizens. Noting large Hispanic populations in New York and Los Angeles, some participants specified that Miami’s Hispanic residents represented a much wider variety of Latin American and Caribbean countries. As Paula stated, “In



some places you have Spanish-speaking people, but they're from one country or multiple countries, but not in the big broad range that we have here in Miami." Another participant, Richard, discussed the number of Hispanic politicians and businessmen and women in Miami; he directly contrasted it to Los Angeles, which he called an "Anglo-centric" city despite its large Hispanic population. Carmen compared Miami to other regions of the U.S.: "Miami's very multicultural and it's very, like, ethnically accepting... As opposed to going to like the Midwest or something, where it's not that diverse." After stating he enjoyed living in Miami because of the diverse population, Kevin compared Miami to North Florida: "Miami's more accepting. Miami's like the melting pot." Samantha made a similar observation: "You don't really see how different it is until you leave Miami and go to the United States. I guess it's more like a Latin American country, but even then, it's not a Latin American country. It's just like right in the middle of everything."

Many participants remarked on the large presence of Cubans and Cuban Americans in Miami – one participant even called Miami the "Cuban epicenter." Some emphasized the prevalence of Cuban Spanish in Miami, which held positive and negative associations depending on the participant. As Samantha stated, "Being here in Miami, you hear everything. You hear Spanish from everywhere, and mostly Cuban Spanish, cause there's more Cubans than anything else." Jesse commented on his political aspirations in the context of Cuban Miami:

I want to... get involved in campaigns and hopefully in the future run for office, but I want to run in my city and my city's Hialeah – so it's predominantly Cuban right now. So now, I wish I was a lot better at Spanish just because the population – the area that I live in – that's what they speak.

Hialeah is a city within Miami-Dade County. According to the 2010 U.S. Census, Hispanics made up 94.7% of the city and 93.1% spoke a language other than English at home, i.e. Spanish. Additionally, eleven out of the thirteen participants affirmed that they would like their children to be able to speak Spanish. The other two participants stressed the importance of bilingualism in any two languages, but Spanish did not necessarily need to be one of them.

Overall, it was clear that participants imagined Miami as a Hispanic community, and a city where Spanish is spoken. But how did this imagination affect their identity construction? Elisa and Richard's reflections suggested more of a pan-ethnic Hispanic identity uniquely situated in Miami. Elisa was born in Colombia and moved to Miami at age nine. When considering her identity, she stated, "I usually just say I'm from Miami, and people kind of already assume you're a mix. You're some funky combination. And even in the way I dance, I have a couple of Cuban moves, a couple of Puerto Rican." It seemed that given the majority of Hispanics in Miami, it was not uncommon to assume that someone was Hispanic. Additionally, because of the diverse representation of Spanish-speaking countries, a unique blend of Latin American ethnicities come together in Miami, while still maintaining distinct characteristics.

During a conversation with a Mexican friend from Doral, Richard also realized something unique about Miami:

We were having a conversation the other day how sometimes you just connect faster with people who are from Miami. And not people who are American. And not people who are South American. People who are from Miami... because they completely understand. They've been through it. And you have – you just have that certain automatic connection with them, just because you're from the same place. You've been through the same motions.

Richard separated Americans from Latin Americans, and identified something uniquely Miami-an. To him, it seemed “people who are from Miami” were those with Latin American backgrounds who had grown up in a bicultural, bilingual city with Hispanic and American influences. Miami often became an imagined Hispanic community where solidarity emerged among those who did not feel either solely American or solely Latin American. The Spanish language appeared to be a vital aspect of that imagined community.

### **Spanish Linguistic Insecurity and Reconnection**

Participants stressed the importance of knowing Spanish in Miami for multiple reasons: to interact with the multitude of Spanish-speakers living in Miami (friends, family, co-workers, and strangers), to increase job opportunities and occupational success, and to be able to teach children the language in the future. Participants noted that because of the widespread use of Spanish in Miami, deciding whether to speak in English or Spanish to greet or initiate a conversation with a stranger was often difficult. By way of example, Juan recalled a recent experience at a supermarket:

I didn't know whether to talk English or Spanish at a Winn Dixie, and I spoke Spanish, and she didn't talk Spanish. But I think that's more the city that we live in, because we live in a city that's so multi-cultural and everybody might talk Spanish, nobody might talk English.

With a city so inhabited by persons of Latin American descent, second- and third-generation Hispanics who are not fluent in Spanish may not feel they belong in this imagined Spanish-speaking city. Otheguy, García, and Roca (2000) brought up several considerations regarding the sociolinguistic context of Spanish in Miami:

First, the greater socioeconomic power of Latinos in Miami-Dade gives the Spanish language a greater role in public and official life than in any other U.S. context. Second, these second- and third-generation Cuban Americans, isolated geographically in the Florida peninsula, have little familiarity with monolingual contexts of language use... This context reinforces and assures maintenance of *receptive* bilingual ability across generations yet weakens *productive* ability in Spanish (emphasis added, p. 177).

Consequently, many participants in the present study pointed out their ability to understand Spanish while highlighting their struggles when speaking it. A damaging assumption that all Hispanics speak Spanish – or should, in order to be identified as fully Hispanic – was also a phenomenon that all participants had either experienced themselves or witnessed among others. As Urciuoli affirmed:

Language has a complicated place in these processes of identity formation. It occupies a place in the list of things one ‘has’ when one ‘has’ a culture. But the link is not a necessary one, it is not always there, and when it is there it may or may not signify belonging (p. 264).

Lack of ability in Spanish seemed to be a source of embarrassment, discomfort, and social insecurity for several of the present participants. After an uncomfortable or awkward interaction, tension and distancing often took place between those participants and friends, family members, and even strangers. Unfortunately, this pattern seemed to damage those participants’ self esteem when speaking Spanish, which often caused further dissociation from the language.

However, in some cases, participants were encouraged to reconnect with their heritage language as suggested by Lynch (2000). In what follows, observations from

some of the less secure Spanish speakers are compared with those of more secure Spanish speakers.<sup>6</sup>

Ana was born in Miami to an Ecuadorian mother and Puerto Rican father. Both of her parents moved to the U.S. as teenagers. She grew up with her mother who spoke predominantly English to her. She understood limited Spanish and had great difficulty speaking it. She recalled dating someone whose parents were from Uruguay and Cuba:

I would try to have conversation, and I would get stuck, or I felt like they're looking at me weird because I'm not pronouncing stuff correctly. So yeah, that to me is uncomfortable and that's the reason I try to steer away from strict Spanish-speaking families, but at the same time [those situations are] gonna happen.

Ana fully acknowledged that in Miami, Spanish language use is inevitable. However, she emphasized how uncomfortable she felt when she had to interact only in Spanish. She doubted her own Spanish-speaking abilities because of her lack of fluidity and ease when speaking, along with her pronunciation. Ana distanced herself from other Spanish speakers not only to escape judgment and “weird” looks, but also because she feared that if they spoke negatively about her, she would not be able to understand. Ana also mentioned she would not feel comfortable dating someone who was “too Hispanic,” but would also not want to date someone who was “only American”; she favored dating someone with a similar ethnic background and Spanish linguistic knowledge.

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<sup>6</sup> Participants were not given a test to determine their Spanish language knowledge nor were they asked to rate their bilingual abilities. However, participants were asked if and why they considered themselves bilingual, and whether they felt comfortable with reading, writing, understanding, and speaking Spanish. Participants were also asked to discuss any uncomfortable moments they experienced while interacting in Spanish. The terms “limited,” “less secure,” and “more secure” were not explicitly used by the participants, but through the participants’ narratives and responses, I was able to broadly distinguish participants who identified as less secure and/or less fluent, and more secure/more fluent Spanish speakers. More importantly, the aim of this section was to focus on how participants themselves perceived their Spanish abilities and language attitudes, and how the latter affected the way they constructed their identities.

Ana's preferences demonstrated the important role that language can play in determining intimate relationships. She described occurrences when others questioned her Hispanic identity and attempted to position her as less Hispanic. She witnessed comments directed at her such as: "Oh, you're Hispanic, and you can't even speak that correctly," which reflect language-culture conflation. Spanish-speaking Hispanics who made such condescending comments seemed to be demanding an explanation from non-Spanish-speaking Hispanics. This comment was reminiscent of Scott Shenk's study, in which it was noted that one participant's linguistic infraction "*joves*" instead of "*jueves*" was used by the interlocutor to deauthenticate the speaker's Mexican membership. Similarly, Ana's Hispanic identity in the present study was questioned, and the condescending remark insinuated her "cultural inadequacy and inauthenticity" because of a limited Spanish language knowledge (Scott Shenk, 2013, p. 212).

Feeling pressured to explain and defend herself, Ana tended to reply to such remarks by stating, "I'm from a Hispanic background, but I learned English properly throughout my whole life... I'm from Miami, born and raised. I was born in the United States." Ana responds by re-positioning her identity as a Hispanic, ethnically, but with national ties to Miami and the U.S. By using the term "Hispanic background," she evoked her family's heritage and culture. By declaring the U.S. as her birthplace, and affirming that she had been speaking English since she was born, she seemed to defend her linguistic knowledge and identity. Her response also revealed the blurred lines between "Hispanic" identity and "American" identity. She, along with the other participants, did not fit "neatly" into the categories of either "Hispanic" or "American," and the alleged characteristics and cultural stereotypes that make up each imagined

identity. Throughout the interview, she called herself part of the “Spanglish generation,” in order to refer to Hispanic people her age who grew up speaking English, along with varying degrees of Spanish language. When used by Ana, the term seemed to suggest a broader group identity that allowed her to be a non-fluent Spanish-speaker *and* still be Hispanic. In his book, *Living in Spanglish*, Morales (2003) aimed to establish the case for “Spanglish” as a new way of constructing Hispanic/Latino identity:

To almost everyone, Spanglish is an ugly word. In its most literal sense, Spanglish refers to a bastardized language, an orphan, a hybrid... When I speak Spanglish, I’m talking about a fertile terrain for negotiating a new identity... Spanglish describes a feeling, an attitude that is quintessentially American, but it is both older and newer. It is a culture with one foot in the medieval and the other in the next century; we straddle a broad swath of human history (p. 4-12).

The way Ana used the term “Spanglish” throughout her interview seemed to be a claim of ownership of her social and personal identity, especially her linguistic identity (cf. Morales). She also seemed to use it as an encompassing term for the many Miami Hispanics her age who may face the same linguistic identity struggles and discomforts in a city where Spanish is often deemed a necessary, majority language.

Ana’s comments revealed the vitality of both English and Spanish in Miami, and how at times Hispanic Americans struggle to please both groups of speakers’ orientations. At school, she and her friends would always communicate in English, unless they became friends with someone who had just moved to Miami from Latin America. Then, they would occasionally seek to practice their Spanish with that person. However, Ana called it a “competing battle” between the two languages because the student who moved to the U.S. would want to learn and use English. Because of the strong societal forces in favor of English, Spanish would eventually be less spoken between the friends

and the newcomer. Ana acknowledged pressure from both English and Spanish speakers: “The English person is gonna think the Spanish person needs to learn English and the Spanish person is gonna think they need to learn Spanish because of such a mixed culture” in Miami. She continued, “You always hear, ‘*Ay ¿por qué no hablas en español?*’ or ‘Why don’t they speak English?’”, emphasizing the inclusion and importance of both Spanish and English in Miami and revealing language attitudes and expectations from speakers of both languages.

Similarly to Ana, Juan described uncomfortable experiences interacting in Spanish. Juan was born in Miami to Cuban parents and was raised by his mother. Throughout his life, his mother spoke to him in Spanish, and he responded to her in English. Unlike Ana, his language attitudes differed and his linguistic insecurity was much more pronounced:

I really dislike going to a place in Miami where they don’t talk English... If we were at a fast food place or a super market – we live in Miami so I kinda – I don’t understand that, but I do accept it. But no, I’m not with it. If you’re going to hire someone in the United States, I think they have to have some level of English.

This excerpt reflected the prevailing ideology of an imagined linguistic homogeneity in the U.S. (Schmid, 2001, p. 9; Lippi-Green, 1997), i.e. in order to belong and work in the U.S., one must speak English. Juan continued, “I think there’s a comfort level in Miami that... everybody talks Spanish here. I don’t like it... Puts me in a spot where I have to talk Spanish.” These statements revealed a sense of dissociation from the Spanish language and Spanish speakers. Indeed, Juan later added that he purposefully chose to surround himself with English speakers and distanced himself from Spanish speakers. One of the reasons he was so uncomfortable was because of his limited linguistic



knowledge. When having to interact in Spanish, he stated that he felt frustrated because he could not communicate and get his point across, and he felt pressured from others who expected him to speak fluent Spanish because he is Hispanic.

At work, Juan handled phone calls from upset customers who often spoke to him in Spanish. When phone calls were in Spanish, he explained:

I can't think fast enough to get my point across... if I could talk English, I could explain what's going on... any situation at work when a customer is upset at something that was told to them and they only speak Spanish, I have to take those calls, but I don't feel at ease taking them... it's a lot harder to handle them than if I were to talk to an English customer.

It seemed that because Juan was Hispanic, his co-workers and manager assumed he spoke Spanish, and did not mind directing phone calls in Spanish to him. However, Juan did not feel confident speaking the language and, unfortunately, the more negative experiences that occurred, the more uneasy he felt about speaking Spanish, and the more he wished other Hispanics spoke to him in English. Although he emphasized his discomfort with Spanish, at the end of the interview he described his desire to be able to speak more Spanish:

Cause it's my language. It's where I'm from... And I am from a Spanish background so I should be – I should be better at the Spanish speaking... I've blurted out wrong Spanish words or put them in the wrong [order] – or I don't know, I add an extra letter to it or something. So it makes me know that I haven't practiced it. But yeah, I've been corrected before multiple times.

Although Juan was born in Miami, he used the phrases “my language” and “it's where I'm from” to refer to the Spanish language and Cuba. These phrases reflected a personal attachment to his heritage language and his parents' country of origin. By using the word “should,” Juan implied that it was his social obligation to speak Spanish better. Reminiscent of the arguments of Scott Shenk (2007) and Urciuoli (2008), Spanish

language knowledge among the present participants was often viewed as an essential criterion to claim full “Hispanic-ness.” Being corrected in a language Juan believed he should know was not only disheartening, but also caused Juan to distance himself from other Spanish speakers in order not to feel ostracized for being unable to communicate adequately. The latter quote (above) is reflective of Juan’s contradictory views on the Spanish language: on one hand, Juan viewed Spanish as an important part of his ethnic identity, but on the other hand, there was a sense of detachment or dissociation from the language. Juan’s observations demonstrate the complex relationship between Spanish language ability and personal identity in Miami. Clearly, Juan had a desire to learn more Spanish, and for him, perhaps that increased language ability would lend itself to a greater sense of belonging in Hispanic Miami.

Sage called it a “hindrance” when she could not speak “perfect Spanish” to someone, although she could “manage” to speak Spanish sometimes. Similarly to some other participants, her comprehension of Spanish was stronger than her speaking abilities. Sage was born in Miami to a Cuban mother who moved to the U.S. at the age of two and a Colombian father who moved to the U.S. in his 20s. Her mother often translated for her when people spoke to her in Spanish, even though she stated she understood, but could not respond in Spanish. Similarly to Juan, she had experienced uncomfortable scenarios while speaking Spanish at work. She stated,

Usually the times I get most freaked out about it is at work and if somebody starts speaking to me in Spanish, I’m just like, oh gosh, I hope they don’t ask me some complicated question or something like that ‘cause then like I kind of struggle a bit trying to explain something.... I guess like once I get through it I’m just like, yay, I got through it. Went over that hill. But like for those three minutes it’s just like, oh gosh, I wish I spoke more Spanish.

Sage would dread moments when others addressed her in Spanish, especially if she did not understand the content. Specifically, the above quote revealed how linguistic insecurity can significantly affect one's sense of self: speaking Spanish is something she has to "get through" and at certain times may "freak her out." She compared speaking the language at work to going over a hill, as if it were a laborious act that should be rejoiced once completed. It was in those stressful times that she wished she spoke more Spanish.

Sage's reaction to overcoming her linguistic insecurity was not one of contempt for the Spanish language, but one of a desire to know more Spanish. She also stated that she did not respond in English to Spanish-speaking customers, but tried her best to speak in Spanish. Sage's example suggested that in Miami, it was necessary to speak in Spanish during numerous everyday interactions, including with customers at work. When Spanish and English speakers are together in a group, Sage said during interactions she tended to "stick with English" and if "somebody's having a conversation in Spanish" she would "sit there and just, like, listen quietly and eavesdrop a little bit." When asked to explain why, Sage responded that she had "never been that confident with speaking Spanish" and always felt "really awkward." Not only did she struggle with knowing the right words to say, she was self-conscious about her accent. She continued, "I just feel really awkward speaking Spanish, cause I don't really have like a Cuban accent and I don't really have a Colombian accent. It's more like an American accent speaking Spanish". She said that because of her perceived "American" Spanish-speaking accent, her friends and mother sometimes make fun of her: "Whenever, like, I try speaking Spanish, they're like, 'you speak like a *gringo*' and I'm like, okay thanks". Condensing statements from friends and family make her less comfortable speaking Spanish and more self-conscious of her

accent. Such statements also reveal the relationship between accent and belonging. If Sage's accent were either more "Colombian" or "Cuban," and less "American," she stated that she would perhaps feel more a part of the Miami Hispanic community, especially among her friends and family. Therefore, not only is Spanish language proficiency deemed by other Spanish-speaking Miami Hispanics as a critical aspect of membership, but as we will see below, it also seems that having a distinguishable accent from one's heritage country is an important criterion for belonging.

Like Juan and Sage, Kevin also struggled with speaking Spanish at work and at social gatherings with friends and family. Born in Miami to a Cuban father and a Nicaraguan mother, Kevin preferred speaking English. He told of a particular time when he attended a birthday party with extended family members who were mainly Spanish speakers:

I [felt] awkward—out of place—'cause they're different from me. I feel like they really are different.... Everybody there [at the party] is like Cuban as shit. So everybody is having their own conversation and I feel like I'm totally out of the loop right now. So I wanted to go chill with my little brother who's like 12 years old, and my cousin. Like I kept amongst my family instead of trying to like mingle, 'cause I feel like I have nothing to talk to you about. I have nothing in common with you in that sense. Like they have a different life style, and communicating is sometimes a little harder 'cause it's not my main language... I prefer just chilling in the back and like not having to think about what I'm gonna have to say.

Kevin oftentimes felt pressured to speak Spanish at social gatherings as in the above example, not because of close family members, but because of extended family and their friends whom he did not know. When he was in those types of social gatherings, he noted that he tried to speak in Spanish as little as possible: "[I] try to keep it straight and forward. Try to avoid [speaking Spanish] as much as possible... That's what you gotta do. It's really awkward." It seemed that Kevin's family was aware of his limited Spanish

ability and therefore he did not feel uncomfortable with them. However, he felt uncomfortable and out of place when other people assumed he spoke fluent Spanish or when other Spanish speakers made him feel like he should speak more fluently. Clearly, Spanish ability was intricately bound up with Kevin's sense of belonging in such settings, fairly commonplace in Miami.

Some participants offered opinions regarding Hispanics with limited Spanish-speaking ability. Richard, born in Miami to Venezuelan parents, explained that:

You have pressure from elders to know Spanish if you're Hispanic. It's okay not to know Spanish if you're not Hispanic. But if you're Hispanic, and you don't know Spanish, you're gonna get funny looks, you're gonna get laughs, you're gonna get jabs, you're gonna get it all.

Richard told the story of his Cuban friend who moved to Los Angeles for college and decided to enroll in Spanish classes. Richard noted that his friend was unable to communicate with his grandmother and other family members because she did not speak Spanish, which is what spurred her to sign up for the language class in college. He remarked that, "She felt kinda like they were like kind of judging her like, 'hey come on get in touch with your roots,' ya know?"

Acknowledging the critical role Spanish played in constructing their own identities in daily interactions in Miami, six participants stated that they had decided to actively pursue strategies to increase their Spanish language ability (cf. Lynch 2000). Two participants stated they would like to improve their Spanish, but were not pursuing anything. Two other participants stated they were extremely fluent in Spanish and therefore no reconnection seemed necessary. The remaining three participants did not mention pursuing such opportunities. Jesse started actively practicing Spanish more with

his Cuban-American girlfriend when they both realized that their careers would depend on ability to speak the language:

We use little words, especially now because she's getting into the medical field and she's being forced to really practice. Just like me – we both know Spanish. We know it pretty good, but is it super perfect? No. So now lately, we're trying to practice with each other – just because our careers – our future careers – this is like what it's asking us to do.

When Samantha and Richard were in middle and high school, they noticed that many students their age did not want to take Spanish classes. They both experienced a renewed interest in Spanish as adults entering the workforce, after realizing that they were not as fluent as they should be for professional purposes (cf. Lynch 2000). As Kevin explained, “I graduated high school, worked in the sales industry, retail industry, and I was like, oh crap! I need Spanish again.” Because he was no longer in high school, and not currently enrolled in college, he listened to the radio, TV, and read newspapers in an attempt to refresh his Spanish abilities.

Samantha, who frequently visited her family in Colombia while growing up, began to forget how to communicate certain words and phrases, so she signed up for Spanish classes in high school instead of taking a different foreign language class. She recalled that:

I chose to stick with Spanish. And then I became very interested in learning how to speak the language better again, and reading in Spanish... I wanted to speak English well and Spanish well. So since high school, I keep on doing that. I practice. I'd say I read more books in Spanish than I do in English.

Anytime Elisa traveled back to Colombia, she would tell her family to help her with Spanish. She also explained how she and her brother would challenge each other in Spanish conversations, “We'll try to have conversations – like not the usual sibling

conversations – we’ll try to take it to the next level – like some subject we learned about in some science class – in Spanish.” Paula took Spanish literature classes in college in order to maintain and improve writing and reading skills. Richard also chose to take Spanish classes in school after he had trouble communicating in Spanish with his family.

In sum, just as speaking English is often perceived as a condition for belonging in the U.S., participants conveyed that Spanish language ability seemed to be a requirement for belonging in Hispanic Miami. Several participants noted feeling marginalized by other Hispanics in Miami because of their limited Spanish abilities. They expressed feelings of doubt, embarrassment, and self-consciousness while speaking Spanish, and described uncomfortable moments interacting in Spanish with peers, extended family members, and strangers. Those participants also stressed their greater passive ability contrasted with their limited speaking ability. Acknowledging the critical role Spanish played in their own lives, some participants decided to actively reconnect with their heritage language. For all of the participants of this study, the pursuit of opportunities to learn Spanish formally was confronted by the hegemony of English in educational settings in South Florida.

### **Language and Education**

All of the participants discussed the abundance of settings in Miami where Spanish is not only an accepted, freely spoken language, but also the preferred, majority language. Spanish was described as being predominant in many restaurants, cafés, grocery stores, shops, bars and clubs, and some places of business, in addition to specific geographical areas and neighborhoods of Miami. However, the one space that seemed to

be dominated by English and a monolingual ideology, at the expense of Spanish, was school. Schmid (2001) pointed out that the U.S. “spends thousands of dollars and hundreds of hours of effort to teach college students a second language,” and businesses prefer hiring bilinguals (Schmid, p. 99). Consequently, “there are very contradictory goals in the United States – English monolingualism for the immigrant masses and bilingualism or multilingualism for domestic elites” (Ibid.). A few participants of the present study explicitly acknowledged those contradictory goals. As Shin (2013) noted, “It is ironic that while the nation has such a pressing need for citizens who can function in languages other than English, those who already possess such linguistic and cultural knowledge are pressured to lose it” (p. 76). This phenomenon is particularly ironic in South Florida.

Lippi-Green called education “the heart of the standardization process” (1997, p. 65). Drawing on Foucauldian theory, Lippi-Green offered her opinion on dominant institutions and language ideology:

Dominant institutions promote the notion of an overarching, homogeneous standard language. That language is primarily white, upper-middle class, and middle American; it is often claimed to be “unaccented.” But of course it is accented, like all other language varieties. It just happens to be the accent of the mainstream. Whether the issues at hand are larger social or political ones or more subtle, whether the approach is coercion or consent, there are two sides to this process of standardization: first, *devaluation of all that is not (or does not seek to be) politically, culturally, or socially mainstream*; and second, *validation of the social (and linguistic) values of the dominant institutions*. The process of linguistic assimilation to an abstracted standard is portrayed as a natural one, necessary and positive for the greater social good (Lippi-Green, 2012, p. 68).

With this second process of standardization in mind, the “validation of the social (and linguistic) values of the dominant institutions,” this section highlights participants’ opinions on whether they believed Miami’s education system promoted bilingualism and



whether Spanish was valued. Participants' responses ranged from describing the flaws they found with the education system in general to the specific sorts of Spanish classes offered. The widespread influence of an English monolingual ideology was a particularly salient theme in their observations.

A limited number of bilingual and immersion schools exist in Miami, but instruction is delivered mostly—if not exclusively—in English in the great majority of South Florida schools, with the exception of separate ESOL classes for newcomers. Roca (2005), a Cuban-American professor from Miami, identified the challenges that she and her partner had while raising their son to be bilingual. She expressed her frustrations with the education system in Miami and with families who did not prioritize Spanish language knowledge. She wrote that:

You might assume that in an area teeming with Spanish-speakers, educating one's child bilingually would be a snap.... It's not that easy. The fourth-largest school district in the nation has other priorities, including funding problems and overcrowded schools. This does not mean that bilingual education is unavailable, but parents who want bilingual schooling options have to work for them, live in the right district, and endure long waiting lists (Roca, 2005, p. 113).

As Roca pointed out, most schools in Miami do not support bilingual programs. None of the participants of the present study had attended a bilingual school, although every school offered Spanish language classes. Almost all participants stated that once they started attending school, they their use of Spanish declined, in favor of English.

Participants recalled how ESOL was stigmatized at their respective secondary schools. Participants who were born in Latin American countries and then moved to the U.S. – along with a few Miami-born participants – were placed in ESOL classes. During the interviews, those who had been enrolled in ESOL classes when they were younger

tended to boast about the brevity of their time in the ESOL class, and emphasized the speed with which they began speaking exclusively English at school. These comments implicitly affirmed that having spent little time enrolled in an ESOL class was an impressive and proud accomplishment. Kevin explained that when students at his high school were only able to communicate in Spanish, “That’s when you start getting a title. That’s when you start going to ESOL. There’s literally a division between English and Spanish classes. You wanna be in Spanish classes? You get sent to ESOL. Which is a title. So you’re not normal.” Alex bragged about transferring out of ESOL after only a year and a half. He compared himself to some of his other Spanish-speaking classmates: “Up until high school, like in ninth grade, there were still kids that were in my class in third grade that were still in ESOL. Like, dude come on. It’s not that hard.” Juan commented, “I lost the Spanish language pretty easily” and that after a year and a half in ESOL, “I was just English speaking after [that].”

The importance of mentioning the rapid loss of Spanish and the speed with which English was acquired supported the idea that dominant institutions, such as schools, promote a monolingual, standard language ideology (Lippi-Green, 1997, p. 64). English was valued as the language of preference, and Spanish was devalued. As echoed by Shannon’s (1995) findings on English hegemony in the educational setting, Hispanic students in Miami did not want to be perceived as un-American, and learning English was an important aspect of feeling like they belonged in U.S. society. Maintaining their heritage language while learning English did not seem very feasible or advisable, nor was it socially supported by their peers or teachers. Some participants seemed to view acquisition of English as a zero-sum game, i.e. in order for English to be learned and

spoken at school, Spanish must be eliminated. Along with ESOL stigmatization, participants recalled ostracism and name-calling sometimes when students spoke in Spanish at school. Speaking in Spanish seemed to signal an individual's status as an immigrant. As Lynch (2009a and 2009b) observed, in order to avoid stigmatization and affiliation as a "ref" or refugee, Miami-born Cubans rely upon language to distance themselves from more recent immigrant arrivals.

Some participants of the present study were concerned with the perception of bilingualism and the types of Spanish classes offered. According to Victoria, bilingualism was supported in Miami, but with an emphasis on Spanish speakers learning English, i.e. maintaining Spanish was not prioritized. Victoria expressed concern over her younger sister's education. She was a fifth-grader taking ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages), but was no longer enrolled in any Spanish language classes. Because of budget cuts, there were Spanish classes for English speakers, but no Spanish classes for Spanish speakers, which Victoria thought was detrimental for her sister's (and Hispanic peers') linguistic development. She observed that even though her younger sister was maintaining Spanish at home by speaking it with family, formal education was equally as important because she needed to practice grammar and learn how to write the language properly. Victoria emphasized her desire that schools promote formal learning of Spanish among Hispanic students, "because they might know how to speak it, but it won't be much use for them" if they cannot also learn it formally. She concluded that although some schools in Miami promote bilingualism, they did it in terms of English speakers learning Spanish, and not native Spanish speakers maintaining, practicing, and expanding

their Spanish knowledge. She stated that: “I feel like I wish they’d promote Hispanic-ism.”

Shin (2013) suggested that, “attitudes toward bilingualism and bilingual people vary widely depending on who the bilingual is and the circumstances of his/her bilingualism” (p. 2). Shin continued:

While the bilingualism of a Haitian immigrant to the U.S. may be frowned upon as evidence that he has not yet fully integrated into mainstream American society, the bilingual abilities of a native English-speaking Anglo American who has learned French as a foreign language may be prized as a valuable asset (p. 2-3).

It was unclear whether or not the school of Victoria’s younger sister held this view of bilingualism, although it could be a contributing factor. The assumption that Hispanics “already know Spanish” may be another reason why the school was no longer prioritizing Hispanics’ learning of Spanish (besides attributing it to budget cuts). Indeed, another participant, Sage, pointed out that since it was assumed that most Hispanics spoke Spanish, there was little to no focus at her school on maintaining Spanish language knowledge among Hispanics. She also affirmed that the primary language focus was on learning and speaking exclusively English.

Richard agreed with Victoria’s suggestion of promoting “Hispanic-ism.” He mentioned a friend who would like to start a Hispanic school in Miami: “In Miami... you have like Hebrew Sunday schools, you have Korean schools, but you don’t have Hispanic schools. You don’t have like a Cuban school, or a Colombian school. So [my friend] wants to start a Hispanic school... to practice Hispanic stuff, or to learn Hispanic culture, and go over Hispanic history.” Richard’s idea suggested a longing to learn about participants’ respective pasts and their parents’ country of origin. Perhaps Richard and

his friend believed that such a school would allow Hispanic students to have a deeper understanding and appreciation of their ethnic and cultural heritage, relate better to each other in terms of a shared identity, and have significant positive impacts on self-esteem.

Some participants noticed more specific flaws in class content or foreign language requirements in school. Samantha, a Colombian student who moved to the U.S. when she was five, took Spanish classes in elementary school, “but nobody really got anything out of them.” She mentioned the other students she went to school with “took Spanish classes up to fifth grade... and they still don’t speak Spanish because it’s only up to when you’re 11 years old, and then they’ll never take Spanish again unless it’s for high school.”

Although Juan took Spanish classes in school, he stated that he did not learn conversational Spanish that would have been useful for him during daily interactions in Miami. He explained that, “I think most Spanish classes are like writing and reading, not like everyday language that would help me.” Perhaps the classes Juan took were classes that Victoria’s bilingual sister would have benefitted from, but Juan, who as mentioned previously struggled with conversational Spanish, did not learn the types of language content that would meet his social needs in Miami.

Paula also suggested that language learning was promoted too late in school, and emphasized that the easiest way for Hispanics to maintain their heritage language was to take Spanish classes from an early age. She explained:

I think it’s funny, because at the beginning, they’re like ‘No! English!’ And then when you get to high school, they promote learning a different language. And in college, promote a different language. But then you’ve lost the age where [Hispanics] had that opportunity to keep their Spanish.... So I think schools promote it too late in some cases. They should probably promote it in elementary while they’re growing up.... I definitely did get the vibe they didn’t want me to speak Spanish – only English at school.

Kevin echoed Paula's perspective: "You'd be surprised. They're actually like English, English, English, English. 'Cause everything is English [at school], so to speak. 'Cause there's only one class in primary school where you're actually, like, Spanish, and it's Spanish [class]." Perhaps it was assumed that Hispanics would maintain their heritage language through family interactions and speaking at home, and therefore, a Spanish class for Hispanics was unnecessary. Or perhaps it was assumed that Hispanics would (and should) completely lose their heritage language altogether. Samantha recalled that "all of the teachers were Hispanic," but they never spoke Spanish to the students. She added, "I don't know if they were allowed or not allowed, but they didn't; I never heard a teacher outside of the Spanish classroom speak Spanish." It seemed that teachers either did not feel comfortable using Spanish with students who may benefit from it, or perhaps were not permitted to interact in Spanish with students. As mentioned previously, this view likely stemmed from a standard English language ideology (Lippi-Green, 1997, p. 64-65) and an imagined U.S. national identity by which all citizens should speak English and abandon their heritage languages.

Jesse also affirmed that, "school is only English." Although most of his friends growing up were Cuban or Peruvian, he explained, "when we went away to school – it was always like, you know, everybody's like speaking English in school... so that's how we meet friends in school, so we speak English in school and stuff like that and it just got stuck and I really don't speak Spanish to my friends." Classes were taught in English and students, no matter what ethnicity, were urged to speak to each other in English. Students, especially younger ones, were affected by the common belief that in order to become "fully" American, they must learn accentless English and stop using the heritage tongue

(Lippi-Green, 1997 and 2012). Jesse also began to feel much more comfortable speaking in English, rather than in Spanish, because he took public speaking and debate classes. He went on to say, “I did all these things that forced me to communicate publicly in English. So I feel like my English has gotten way better, right? But therefore, my Spanish has diminished because I haven’t been using it as much.” Jesse suggested the importance of practicing language and speaking publicly. He may not have felt as comfortable speaking Spanish publicly, because he never had to speak it in front of large groups of people, like he did with English in debate and speech classes. Valdés (2000) noted that “different speakers use different *registers* (language varieties associated with particular contexts) in different situations” (emphasis in original, p. 105). Registers range from high level varieties used in formal education settings, to midlevel varieties, and low-level varieties used in everyday casual conversations. As Valdés further stated:

In addition to the general inventory of registers and levels of language, there are other differences between persons who have acquired their first language in a monolingual context and persons who have acquired it in a community where two languages are spoken (p. 107).

Understandably, Jesse may have had low and midlevel registers of Spanish, but not high level registers of Spanish as he did with English; therefore, he did not feel as confident speaking Spanish in formal settings where high level registers were expected.

Richard affirmed that his school could have done more to make students bilingual. He also spoke about the positive aspects of being assigned to read books “that talk about the difficulty of being in that mix between the English and the Spanish”, such as *How the García Girls Lost Their Accent* and *House on Mango Street*. He stated that the books:

were clearly geared to us so it would help us go through the emotions of being – hey I’m Hispanic – and help those who weren’t Hispanic kind of understand where we’re coming from. And it was – I think it’s a good thing. I think it was a good educational subject for us.

Pavlenko (2006) argued that bilingual and multilinguals’ perceptions of self vary. Those individuals could feel like language, culture, and personalities were a unified package or conversely, that they embodied distinct personalities, emotions, and experiences. The books Richard read at school may have helped him view his bilingual self as more of an integrated self. Richard also explained that:

In a certain way, it was culturally acceptable and respectfully suggested that you should speak English, and that you should be more American.... The books we read, support[ed] the idea [of biculturalism], ‘cause, you know, they would tell you about the struggle of being in between both. But they also made it seem like it wasn’t a good thing to do... It wasn’t a good place to be in I guess. Like it wasn’t a good situation to exist in.

The previous quote reflected Lippi-Green’s assertion that dominant institutions in the U.S., such as schools, promote the values and language of mainstream, monolingual society.

### **Social Divisions**

Because English was the formally accepted and preferred language at school, students who strayed from that linguistic practice by speaking predominantly in Spanish were often stigmatized and branded with pejorative names. Hispanic English-dominant students, at times, dissociated from their heritage language or culture and from other Spanish speakers in order not to be negatively identified by others. Indeed, speaking in Spanish was often not socially acceptable or desirable for the study participants for various reasons. As Shin (2013) posited, “The languages involved in any bilingual



situation almost never have the same status—one variety is perceived as having greater prestige and value than another” (p. 3). This claim is also reminiscent of Bourdieu who discusses language and power:

Integration into a single ‘linguistic community’, which is a product of the political domination that is endlessly reproduced by institutions capable of imposing universal recognition of the dominant language, is the condition for the establishment of relations of linguistic domination (p. 429).

Several participants discussed the stigmatization students faced if they spoke Spanish at school, including being called “refs” and regarded as un-American. Many participants also described how the English language was valued more at school. When Kevin was younger, he “didn’t really wanna speak Spanish” because “when you’re in school, it’s like if you speak Spanish, you feel like you’re outcasted in a sense, ‘cause they’re like oh, you speak Spanish, you’re right off the boat.” Speaking Spanish at school seemed to be synonymous with being a recent arrival, or “ref,” whether or not that was in fact the case. To most participants, speaking Spanish at school was not viewed in a positive light, was considered as inability to learn English, and a signal of non-conformity to the imagined national identity. At a young age, Kevin was already aware of those pervasive ideologies, and dissociated himself from the Spanish language.

Similar to some of the participants of Lynch’s (2009a and 2009b) studies, Kevin also distinguished between two different types of Cubans and sought to distance himself from the most recent immigrants, i.e. a distinction was drawn between those Cubans whose families moved to Miami immediately after Fidel Castro took control and those that “grew up with Fidel,” whom Kevin called “refs” who are “right of the boat”. He viewed the latter as more arrogant and cocky, with different mannerisms. He explained

that: “They come to America and they think they’re *el papi chulo*”. Kevin added that they tended to speak Spanish extremely fast and he had a hard time understanding them.

Kevin may have felt like he did not identify with Cubans who had recently moved to Miami not only because of his limited Spanish capabilities, but also because they were less accepted within Miami. He chose to classify them as very different sorts of “Cubans” than his parents and himself. Like Kevin, Juan chose not to speak Spanish or hang out with Hispanics that mainly spoke Spanish at school to avoid social stigmatization. In high school, Juan stated he did not really care about whether or not he spoke Spanish. He acknowledged, “I think I was part of like – I don’t want to say disrespecting – but not wanting to be a part of a Spanish [speaking] group. I don’t know. I hope I didn’t make fun of them or anything, cause that’s where I’m from.” Juan may have not wanted to be identified as a Spanish-speaker in the school context in order to distance himself from more Spanish-speaking recent arrivals. As suggested by Lynch (2009b), “Miami-born Cubans of the younger generation,” like Juan, “...differentiate themselves socially through the use of English and their more ‘American’ manner of dress” (p. 26).

Richard further described why Kevin and Juan – along with other participants – chose to speak English and distance themselves from Spanish speakers. Richard’s school was 96% Hispanic, according to him. However, “speaking Spanish wasn’t cool. It wasn’t cool. And everyone spoke – even though a lot of people were Hispanic –English at school.” He goes on to explain:

The kids who spoke Spanish, we used to call them ‘refs.’ ‘Refs’ as in ‘refugees.’ That’s the name we had for people who spoke Spanish... It’s just they were new arrivals, or like, people who hadn’t acclimated into American culture. So it was kind of like the thing. There was a certain cultural riff between you and them.

Because of the association between speaking Spanish and being considered a “ref” (cf. Lynch 2009a and 2009b), many Hispanic students exclusively spoke English at school in order to not be identified as a “new arrival” or as someone incapable of speaking English. If aspects of a student’s identity were stigmatized, he/she may distance himself/herself from others (like recent immigrants). Negative expressions like “ref” or “right off the boat” were established and “used by immigrants to describe recently arrived members of their own groups.” Indeed, “By distancing themselves from the more recent arrivals, the earlier immigrants negotiate a new identity, one that is not so stigmatized in the society” (Shin, 2013, p. 99). Richard was Venezuelan, not Cuban, which suggests that it is not only second- and third-generation Miami Cubans who actively differentiate themselves from the more recent immigrant arrivals.

In most situations, (primarily anywhere in Miami outside of the school setting), participants felt insecure, embarrassed, and guilty when they could not comfortably communicate in Spanish. Miami was imagined as a predominantly Hispanic community where Spanish language fluency could be used to establish authenticity. In spite of this, in the educational setting, which seemed much more reflective of the imagined U.S. community where English monolingualism pervades, Spanish use was greatly linked to participants’ sense of belonging and the socioeconomic and cultural dynamics of immigration.

## **Part 2: Belonging in Spanish Beyond Miami**

Participants not only discussed belonging in the Miami community, but also how they constructed themselves, and were constructed by others, in U.S. society beyond

Miami. As stated previously, major differences were noted between Miami and the rest of the United States. Geographical areas frequently compared included: North Florida versus South Florida, rural Florida versus urban Miami, and the rest of the U.S. versus Miami. The theme of identity and movement emerged upon analyzing the transcribed interviews, therefore the original interview questions asked of the participants did not directly relate to this theme. A question included during the interviews that subsequently opened the door for this discussion was: “What do you think society’s attitude is towards speaking both Spanish and English?” Although it was not an original focus of this study, participants commonly referenced Miami in relation to the rest of the U.S. The first subchapter, Language Perceptions, discusses participants’ experiences while traveling beyond Miami and describes various perceptions of language, ethnicity, and culture of non-Hispanics. The second subchapter, Negative Labeling, includes stereotypes, assumptions, and race-ethnicity conflation faced by some of the participants. The third subchapter, Accent Stigmatization, discusses participants’ experiences with accent and belonging.

### **Language Perceptions**

Several participants noted how they perceived U.S. language ideologies at the national level, beyond Miami. Perceptions regarding bilingualism, English-only monolingualism, and Spanish beyond Miami are examined. Three other participants (Miguel, Carmen, and Richard) commented on those perceptions during their interviews also, but much more briefly. Therefore, the focus for this section is on three participants

who had rather pronounced experiences regarding language ideology when traveling beyond Miami: Paula, Jesse, and Kevin.

Paula, who moved to Miami from Colombia when she was 7 years old, stated that Spanish-English bilingualism among Latinos was not valued as much in the U.S. compared to other types of bilingualism. In her view, the languages that made one “bilingual” reflected the amount of money one would be paid at a job and the way he/she would be treated when speaking that “foreign” language around English-speakers in the U.S. According to her, certain languages were deemed as more prestigious, and other languages, like Spanish, were stigmatized. She reasoned that: “It’s more of like the culture or the background that we have [in the U.S.]. We’re still not very accepting of Spanish-speaking people, which is awful. We should have already accepted that.” Because of the latter, she expressed feeling extremely uncomfortable speaking Spanish around non-Hispanics because they “don’t like it... they look down upon speaking Spanish... they’ll look at you strange.” She did not specify whether those types of occurrences happened in or outside of Miami but one assumes she meant outside of Miami.

The way Paula perceived others’ language ideologies affected the way she viewed and constructed her linguistic and ethnic identity. Indeed, during interactions, people are “not only exchanging information with their interlocutors; they are also constantly organizing and reorganizing a sense of who they are and how they relate to the social world” (Norton cited in Shin, 2013, p. 112). Paula continued to say:

I think it’s awful. I think they shouldn’t... discriminate against speaking Spanish... People should be able to express themselves in the language they choose to express themselves. Especially in our country which is – talks about freedom and talks about liberty of expressing yourself and that

we shouldn't discriminate against others because they speak a different language.

As a way of confronting language discrimination in the U.S. and defending her identity, Paula brought up the fundamental political freedoms in the amendments of the Constitution. This framework allowed her to belong in the U.S., and also still preserve her ethnicity and heritage language. Paula expressed the hope that, in the future, the U.S. would become more inclusive, but she doubted if that would happen because according to her, "our history has sometimes been on the shady side in terms of accepting others from the outside." When she discussed U.S. perceptions she used inclusive pronouns such as "we" and "our" which suggest she very much felt a part of U.S. society. However, she also used the phrase "others from the outside", which suggested that while she identified as a member of the U.S., she acknowledged that speaking Spanish or being Hispanic might categorize one as an "other" or an "outsider." Similar to the other participants, Paula specifically observed contrasting ideological perceptions based on geography. She considered South Florida more open to Spanish-speakers, and affirmed that speaking Spanish in "Northern Florida – it would be very different. Like, they are not pro-Spanish speaking individuals." It seemed that Paula felt fully accepted in Miami for two important aspects of her identity: speaking English and Spanish, and being a U.S. Hispanic American.

Kevin, born in Miami to a Cuban father and Nicaraguan mother, also discussed language discrimination in the U.S. He stated that, "In American society, if you speak Spanish, you could pretty much get looked down upon." Through interactions, Kevin was able to observe others' perceptions of language: English language superiority, the pervasiveness of the standard language ideology (Lippi-Green, 1997), and the

stigmatization and devaluation of the Spanish language. In the U.S., oftentimes speaking Spanish is “largely considered a socially subordinate language to English” (Niño-Murcia and Rothman, 2008, p. 27). Additionally, “the prevailing attitude of the American public is that the bilingualism of immigrants is a problem and a sign of resistance to integration into the mainstream society” (Shin, 2013, p. 75). Because of xenophobia and an imagined linguistic homogeneity, when outside of Miami, Kevin may have felt less inclined to speak in Spanish and express pride in his ethnic heritage. Out of the thirteen people interviewed, twelve affirmed Miami’s exceptionalism with regard to Spanish language acceptance. Kevin stated:

In Miami you have to speak Spanish. But everywhere else, they don’t have you speak – I think that’s a little biased, because that actually gives us a disadvantage in a sense in the international markets because all the people in Europe are speaking English, plus their native languages. Us – we’re English. And we’re stubborn. And it’s really a one-track mind that’s set to only teach our kids English and not a second language. Doesn’t really apply here in Miami, but overall, it’s pretty bad.

Kevin acknowledged a different outlook on bilingualism. He believed that beyond Miami, the U.S. was not very open to bilingualism, but in other countries, especially in Europe, the learning of multiple languages was promoted.

However, an underlying theme, whether Kevin was aware of it or not, was the dominance of English on a global scale. He mentioned that people in other countries would speak their native language, *and learn English as well*, which denotes a linguistic hierarchy where English is at the top. He did not say “learn another language,” but specifically pointed out that English was the second language that was promoted. Even though he believed other countries were more accepting of bilinguals, the English language seemed to be internationally (and nationally) prioritized. In this regard, Kevin

viewed knowledge of English as a commodity, reminiscent of Bourdieu's theory of knowledge as symbolic power.

Language ideologies in the U.S. affected the construction of Jesse's identity as well. He attended Florida State University in Tallahassee before moving back to Miami to finish college at Florida International University.<sup>7</sup> He compared how varying groups in these two places reacted when he spoke Spanish and when he spoke English:

Whenever I'm with a crowd of Hispanic people [in Miami], and I'm speaking English to somebody else, like those Hispanic people end up being like – like they get super proud, especially if they know me. Like they get super proud, you know like they just get filled with pride... When I'm with Hispanic people, especially with my mom, cause my mom's English is not like that well, but then when I speak English in front of her like the family like she looks at me with these goo-goo eyes... But then when I'm in an all-white environment speaking Spanish, I've noticed sometimes that like that makes them feel uncomfortable... When I'm in an all white environment [in Tallahassee], and then like I speak a little Spanish or something – like then they start to think that maybe you're not like not like you know – they think they're better than you – more superior – and then it kind of bothers them sometimes.

Similarly to Kevin, Jesse acknowledged English superiority in the U.S. When Jesse spoke English, he was always accepted. Around groups of Spanish-dominant Hispanics, especially his mother who lacked English knowledge, speaking English was viewed as an achievement. Others' pride in Jesse's language "achievement" positively reinforced speaking English. He seemed very aware of the signals and treatment he received from various groups of people when speaking one language or the other. When he spoke in Spanish, it was not regarded as a marker of success among his Hispanic family members and friends. When compared to Lambert and Taylor's (1996) findings, this may suggest

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<sup>7</sup> It is interesting to note that during the 2012-2013 enrollment year at Florida State University, Hispanics made up 14.8% of the student body. Conversely, during the 2012-2013 enrollment year at Florida International University, Hispanics made up 65.7% of the student body (Forbes: Florida State University; Forbes: Florida International University).



more of a working-class mentality where a subtractive form of bilingualism was encouraged. Moreover, when Spanish-speaking interactions occurred while English speakers were present, Jesse was aware of an uncomfortable tension, unequal power relations, and a feeling of inadequacy.

Jesse also emphasized differences in the makeup of Miami and Tallahassee. When he described his adjustment to living outside of Miami he stated, “I was taken out of Miami that was Hispanic, diverse, whatever, and I was placed in an all Anglo population,” which again referenced the idea of Miami as a Hispanic community. It is also important to note that Jesse stated he experienced and observed discrimination “one hundred percent” more in Tallahassee than in Miami and because of that, he would “probably never move” from Miami. This statement further illustrates the inclusiveness of the Miami community felt by many of the participants.

Jesse illustrated a scenario that occurred while he was studying at FSU in Tallahassee. Ultimately, negative language ideologies and ethnic stereotypes lead to a loss of Hispanic identity and dissociation:

I’m with a buddy of mine and he’s Hispanic, so like how I told you since we’re the only Hispanics up there [in Tallahassee], you know we mostly – sometimes – we’d speak Spanish to each other, but I remember there was this one time – where I knew that the group of kids around us – they were kind of racist – they were like a bit, you know – so it was like one of those like – just to avoid problems. You know what I mean. Like I felt like I had to like not speak Spanish, just because I knew like the moment they would – the moment they would start saying something stupid to me – I would probably crack – probably flip out. And then I know my buddy was the crazy one too so it was more like – like he would talk to me in Spanish – he didn’t know the guys – he would talk to me in Spanish – and I knew the guys were a bit on that side – so I’d laugh – I’d say a word in Spanish – and then you know kind of try and switch it back up to English – you know what I mean? And that was one time that I felt very uncomfortable speaking Spanish. It was just because of that kind of, you know, attitude.

When Jesse was surrounded by non-Hispanics who were not accepting of Spanish speakers, he distanced himself from the Spanish language by trying to communicate predominantly in English with his friend, even though his friend was speaking to him in Spanish. Depending on the situation, he may have chosen to identify as more “American” or as “Hispanic.” Indeed, Jesse stated that at times he felt more comfortable showing a different side of his identity to avoid being discriminated against and maintain a sense of belonging:

I mean cause people sometimes want to fit in, but then like when you try to fit in with everybody, I feel like you don't have your own character. You know you lost your identity. But I mean you know it happens – like when I was in Tallahassee, for example, I always wanted to identify with you know with everybody else – with the majority. But then when I'm down here [in Miami], it's my family you know, but I feel like that happens a lot. Like you can't find your identity when you're young. And when you start getting older, you start realizing. But even though – like I could be 30 years old, but if I'm in like an all American, all white society, I wouldn't be flaunting my culture. But the answer to your question is yeah, [I do sometimes prefer one identity over the other]. It depends on who you're with, really, and sometimes you just want to be accepted.

When Jesse lived and studied in Tallahassee, the majority of people around him were not Hispanic. He experienced a sense of identity loss that did not occur when he was in Miami, surrounded by Hispanic Americans.

### **Negative Labeling**

In addition to pernicious language ideologies, a few of the participants were aware of inferior labeling outside the context of Miami. Negative labels included: stereotypes and assumptions, imposed titles, and race-ethnic conflation. Extensive research has already been conducted addressing Hispanic discrimination and negative labeling in the United States; therefore, the aim of this section is not to provide further

analysis of this phenomenon. Rather, the focus is on some of the participants' individual experiences outside of Miami, which reflected Miami's inclusiveness of Hispanics, contrary to the majority U.S. context beyond South Florida.

One of the stereotypes described was the homogenization of Hispanic Americans outside of Miami. Kevin mentioned that according to most people in the U.S. (excluding Miami), a Hispanic or Latin American was a "Mexican person right off the border" and that "most Americans think there is nothing beyond Mexico." When others assumed Kevin was Mexican, his Cuban-Nicaraguan identity was denied and made invisible. This assumption seemed to occur only when he was elsewhere in the U.S. beyond Miami. Furthermore, Kevin stated that when he is in Miami, others do not assume his ethnicity is Mexican, and affirmed that there seems to be a greater geographical knowledge of Latin America among people in Miami.

Another participant, Miguel, discussed assumed characteristics of Hispanics in the U.S.:

I don't wanna say I only think of myself, but I only think of us as the community – I don't really think of what other people think of us. Even though what other people think of us, like, probably isn't good... There [are] people that are just like, 'I don't like Hispanics. They're rude, they're in your face, they're hot heads.'

According to Miguel, Hispanics in U.S. society are a discriminated group and he would rather not think about the assumptions others may have regarding people with whom he identified. To him, Hispanics are not just a categorization of citizens, but are close family members, friends, relatives, and people he interacts with every day. He explicitly called Miami a Hispanic community.

In addition to stereotypes and assumptions, participants were aware of titles imposed upon them based on their ethnicity. Kevin asserted that, beyond Miami, “If they find out you’re Hispanic, you’re considered a minority automatically – so to them you’re less intelligent.” The word “minority,” for him, seemed to denote second-class citizenship and intellectual inferiority. Additionally, as previously stated, the term Hispanic was “imposed from above, regardless of their own self-identification, their phenotype, or their English language skills” (Oboler, 1995, p. 170). The term “Hispanic” seemed to divide and categorize people, not always in a positive light. Kevin gave an example of Gabriel Iglesias, a California native of Mexican descent who is regarded as a “Hispanic comedian.” Kevin explained:

They give you a title automatically. Just for being from somewhere else – or having some type of culture somewhere else other than American, so you get a title. And titles are not good. Titles are bad things here in the United States, cause they don’t consider you normal after that. Like you’re not from here.

“They” seemed to be U.S. society as a whole, and not individuals living in Miami.

Paula disapproved of the labels imposed by others in U.S. society and pointed to the problem of categories. Even though labels exist, it did not mean that they were welcomed and adopted by her. She contended:

I don’t like any of the category terms that they put on us. Like some people feel like they don’t belong to either one of them... Some of them don’t fit into those categories. So why should we categorize people, knowing that some of them don’t want to go into those groups? I think the whole ‘Asian’ or ‘Hispanic’ or ‘Latino’ terms are awful to categorize people in, because they might belong to more than one. Or they might not like those terms for them. So I really don’t like those categories... I don’t like terms... because we’re not separate. We’re all humans. We shouldn’t really separate them into different ethnicities or groups or categories.

Paula did not view ethnic labeling as a positive way of categorizing individuals, perhaps because of Kevin's reasoning that "titles" were "bad things" in the U.S. Titles seemed to signify "difference." Additionally, she pointed out that those titles could be inaccurate, and/or simply undesirable. Paula's quote also affirmed Oboler's (1995) finding that the label "Hispanic" could be viewed as a title imposed by mainstream U.S. society.

Not only were ethnic terms imposed, but racial ones as well. Several participants discussed instances when ethnicity and race were treated as one concept instead of two. There also seemed to be an underlying theme of white prestige and idealization in the broader U.S. context. Carmen described a scenario where non-Hispanics outside of Miami would ask what her ethnicity was, to which she responded "Hispanic." Then they would ask her what her race was, and when she responded "white," they would tell her "No, no, no, you can't be white and be Hispanic... 'cause you're Hispanic, so you're not white." She responded to such comments by questioning their validity: "Well, why can I not?" She also added, "Well, what am I? Because I mean, I'm just like the palest person I know." She stated that their argument made no sense. It seemed that beyond Miami, when someone was labeled as Hispanic, they may no longer be considered "white," no matter the phenotype of their skin.<sup>8</sup> The participants in Oboler's (1995) study in New York faced similar confusion. What is important to highlight is that although she was bombarded with ethnic-racial conflation, Carmen remained firm in her stance regarding who she believed she was. Overall, she maintained ownership over her racial identity,

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<sup>8</sup> It should be noted that on the 2010 U.S. Census, individuals could choose to be classified as both "white" and "Hispanic" (Hixson et. al., 2010). This change could have long-term effects on the way Hispanics self-identify and could also affect society's perceptions and attitudes toward the racial and ethnic categorizations of Hispanics.

even while others outside of Miami attempted to position her as “not white” because she was Hispanic.

Kevin was also bothered by the assumption that “Hispanic” could equal “not white.” He stated, “Sometimes, when you wanna bubble in the Hispanic thing, you’re like, do I really wanna put that in? Or should I just put white? Cause I can go for white too. Doesn’t really apply here a lot in Miami, but up North it really does apply.” This quote not only demonstrates ethnic-race conflation, but also highlights differences between Miami and the rest of the U.S. As Zambrana (2011) noted:

In Miami, with its high concentration of Cubans, an extraordinary 87% of all Latinos self-identified as white in 2005, while in New York with its eclectic mix of Latino nationalities, and where Puerto Ricans and Dominicans were the most numerous nationalities, only 36% of all Latinos considered themselves to be white in the same year” (p. 373).

Kevin, Carmen, Paula, and Miguel’s observations suggested that although Hispanics in the U.S. beyond Miami may confront negative labels, Hispanics in Miami do not confront them on a regular basis. Besides negative labels, some participants experienced accent stigmatization when speaking English or Spanish outside of Miami.

### **Accent Stigmatization**

The importance of accent and belonging became apparent during some participants’ interactions. Accent stigmatization when speaking English beyond Miami was discussed by two of the participants. Lippi-Green (2012) dismissed the notions of a standard or unaccented language; everyone reflects some “accent” or variation while speaking. She distinguished between native English speakers’ accents (for example, in

geographically different areas of the U.S.) and native speakers of languages other than English. Lippi-Green later noted that: “When immigrants become bilingual... the question is no longer *which language*, but *which English* or... *which accent* and ultimately, which race, ethnicity, religion, worldview” (2012, emphasis in original, p. 250).

In Miami, Richard always regarded Spanish as a valuable asset that had “never in any way, shape, or form been a negative.” Beyond Miami, Richard did not encounter much appreciation for his bilingual abilities, but instead faced hostility towards his “Miami accent” while speaking English. He stated:

In rural areas you’ll find people who will be very, ‘Where are these Hispanics from?’ You’ll find those people. I remember going through a trip in the South, you know Georgia’s really Southern, and they’ll see you as outsiders, once they hear your accent. And they’ll pick it up quick ‘cause they’re so used to their Southern accent that anything from outside – anything from Miami – they’ll recognize Miami.

Using a geographical comparison between Miami and the rest of the U.S. (in this case, the Southeastern U.S.), Richard expressed experiencing discrimination based on his accent when speaking English. Richard’s accent was used by non-Hispanics to mark him as an outsider.

Carmen did not feel like she had an accent while speaking English, but stated that when she traveled in the U.S. beyond Miami, non-Hispanics pointed it out to her. She described: “Growing up here [in Miami] a lot of people speak Spanish, and a lot of people have kind of like an accent too, and then you don’t even notice it. And then when you go, like, up North people are like, ‘oh you have like a Miami accent’ and I’m like, ‘Oh. What does that mean?’” When she traveled outside of Miami, Carmen became more cognizant of her accent when speaking English. When others suggested she had a “Miami

accent,” it did not seem to be a positive comment, but a judgmental remark that distinguished her accent as a “nonnative” U.S. accent. To be sure, “For many Americans, there is a conviction that national identity and speaking accentless English are inseparable” (Schmid, 2001, p. 98). Speaking English with an accent may have caused Carmen to feel marginalized by those in U.S. society that hold the latter conviction, however that conviction did not seem to exist in Miami. What did exist was the importance of accent and belonging in Spanish when participants’ spoke about their heritage country. As Lippi-Green noted, “... we are not the only nation that promotes the idea of a standard, homogeneous language” (2012, p. 253).

Samantha faced identity confusion because of others’ authentication and deauthentication of her Spanish linguistic identity and her Colombian-American ethnic identity. She was born in Miami, moved back to Medellin, Colombia where her family was from, stayed there until she was five years old, and then returned to Miami. She explained that Colombians born in Medellin were given the name “*paisas*” which also indicated a distinct *paisa* Spanish-speaking accent. During conversations with acquaintances and introductions to Colombian strangers in Miami, both groups would automatically identify her as a *paisa*, reinforcing that identity for Samantha. However, when she would travel back to Colombia, people from Medellin did not tend to identify her as a fellow *paisa*, but as an “American.” Furthermore, Samantha’s Medellin friends would call her a “*gringa*” and would remind her that she did not live in Colombia. Using the term “*gringa*,” which suggested her U.S. birthplace and current residence, along with her less-than-*paisa* accent, they positioned her as an outsider of not only Medellin, but of Colombia, while simultaneously insulting the way she spoke Spanish. For Samantha, and



her Medellin peers, a significant link existed between accent and belonging. She stated that she wished she had a stronger *paisa* accent in order to be identified as someone from Medellin. Although other groups positioned her identity as *either* American *or* Colombian, she self-identified as both American *and* Colombian. Samantha further explained how confusing it became for her in Miami to explain her background to her closest group of Colombian friends growing up. She stated:

It got complicated because I had a group of friends from high school, they were all Colombian, and a lot of them were from Colombia, like born in Colombia. They lived there most of their life and they moved here when they were like ten, thirteen years old. So for some reason they had all assumed that I was born in Colombia. So one day, like, it came out that I wasn't born in Colombia, I was born here in Miami, and they're like, 'You're not Colombian. You're American.' And it was kind of half joking, but at the same time, there is kind of like that mentality that, you know, you weren't born here [in Colombia], so you're American. You're not full Colombian. So I'm like, okay. So sometimes I don't know what to say.

This quote suggests that Samantha had not only experienced identity confusion with her Medellin friends in Colombia, but also with her closest Colombian friends in Miami. According to her Miami Colombian friends, her Spanish-speaking ability and accent were not what is called into question, but her birthplace – an aspect, as Scott Shenk pointed out, she had no way of changing. Her Medellin friends called her *paisa* identity into question primarily because her accent was not deemed *paisa* enough – choosing instead to call her *gringa*, which seemed to conjure the image of an Anglo-American attempting to speak Spanish. It is no surprise that when other people asked her where she was from, Samantha was not sure about how to answer: “because depending on who you're talking to, they will tell you like, you're not Colombian or you're not American.” According to Pavlenko's (2006) analysis on bilinguals and multilinguals'

sense of self while speaking in various languages, Samantha may have faced some psychological turmoil when language identity was regarded as a dual or illegitimate one (p. 25).

Samantha also touched on non-Hispanics outside of Miami. She stated that when she has told non-Hispanics in the U.S. beyond Miami that she is American, after they ask where she is from, she has been questioned about her Spanish-English bilingualism. Non-Hispanics told her that because she spoke Spanish, she was “not American,” to which she responded: “I guess I’m Colombian then – I don’t know.” Samantha experienced being positioned as American and un-Colombian in Medellin and sometimes Miami, to being positioned as Colombian and un-American in the U.S. beyond Miami. As stated by Hall (1997):

“If someone’s membership in a particular (target) collective is granted, one’s belonging becomes stabilized. However, if the recognition of one’s status as a member is denied or challenged, a retreat to previous modes of ‘belonging’ may be chosen... thus reinforcing the feeling of remaining in-between various collectives and not belonging to any of them... (p. 104).

Regardless of how others position her, Samantha’s agency must not be ignored. When asked how she would self-identify, she stated:

I would say American Colombian, but I honestly feel more Colombian than American – just not Colombian enough for the Colombians and not American enough for the Americans. But I do feel more Colombian, because my traditions are more Colombian. I value – not that Americans don’t value—family, but you know, like, I was telling you, family life is the most important thing for me. I love being with my family. I listen to [Colombian] music more, and that’s more my culture.

She discussed the difficulty of explaining her identity to others, but also recognized that other Hispanics in Miami may face the same struggles:

Because people will see either black or white – like you’re either American or you’re Colombian. There’s no – with most people – there’s no gray area

– at least like, with who’s asking you. And to go into the explanation, you have to explain a lot. Like, you know, ‘Oh well I’m American because I was born here and I grew up here, but I’m Colombian because of all this other stuff.’ ...I mean everybody here in Miami might feel that way, because like I said, Miami’s the mid-point. So living here you kind of get a little bit of American life, you kind of get a little bit of your culture, like your family’s culture. So you’re kind of somewhere in between.

Once again, Miami was imagined as a community where Hispanic immigrants could belong – unique from Latin America, while also unique from the rest of the U.S.

Alex suffered a loss of Costa Rican identity due to linguistic insecurity, and rigid perceptions of identity, language, and culture. Unlike Samantha, Alex self-identified as “more American.” He moved from Costa Rica to Miami when he was nine years old, but he felt like he had lost his Costa Rican accent and that he was not “up to date” with current terms and colloquialisms. Since he last visited, the phrases had evolved so much that when he spoke to his Costa Rican friends, they told him “Dude, we haven’t said that in ten years,” causing him to be more self-conscious of his Spanish. Alex explained how awkward Facebook conversations could be, and how even more awkward phone conversations could be. While pretending to have a phone conversation with a Costa Rican friend he stated, “It’s like uh, I don’t have your accent anymore. Please don’t kick me out.”

Alex seemed to view his Costa Rican identity as something that could be taken away from him, and regulated by others (cf. Scott Shenk, 2007). His accent became a marker for exclusion and inclusion (Lippi-Green, 1997). He affirmed that:

...I’ve pretty much lost my accent – my Costa Rican accent. I’ve lost – you know – like the lingo from Costa Rica, a lot. So when I speak to friends from Costa Rica – even like chatting online – it’s kind of awkward. Like I want to be Costa Rican, but it’s like I’m more American if anything now.

Alex's association of his accent and vocabulary knowledge with his identity was apparent. He also seemed to seek affirmation of his Costa Rican identity by other Costa Ricans. He did not receive that type of "authentication" that was necessary in order for him to consider himself Costa Rican, or having a Costa Rican accent. The way he phrased the last two sentences also suggested Alex viewed his ethnic identity in either/or terms: The more American he was, the less Costa Rican he was. While living in Miami, he did not feel as comfortable speaking in Spanish, either. He affirmed that:

I'm more shy about [speaking Spanish]. Again 'cause I lost my accent. I'm not like up to date with the language – the lingo. So I'm very, very shy about it. Even here [in Miami], people are not Costa Rican, but I'm still shy. Like I'll talk to them in Spanish, but I'll be kind of like 'uhh, I hope I don't sound stupid'.

Linguistic insecurity and an indistinguishable accent may have been the main explanations for Alex identifying as American, but he also touched upon other reasons:

I feel more of the American side. I'm very Americanized... I listen to country music. It's all I listen to... I actually don't like [music in Spanish]. I don't even dance. I'm all country. I ride horses... No Spanish TV. All American pretty much... My wife is American, like super white, like English/Polish background, so I mean, like, she has not even one lick of Spanish in there.

This affirmation revealed again the rigid dichotomy between the American and Costa Rican identities for Alex, and which characteristics supposedly constitute those identities (cf. Cashman 2013, Blackledge & Pavlenko 2001, and Potowski 2012). At the conclusion of the interview he stated: "I've realized that I've lost my Latin base very much. But it is what it is. I still love my country... [I've lost the] accents, lingo, music, pretty much everything. I'm just proud that I was born over there. Proud of my country."

It seemed that Alex's primary sense of Costa Rican identity relied on his Spanish language knowledge, especially an identifiable Costa Rican accent and Costa Rican colloquialisms. Although he stated that he had lost his "Latin base", he seemed to feel a deep sense of loss in relation to his native country of Costa Rica that he claimed through the use of the possessive pronoun "my." His use of the phrase "it is what it is" seemed to suggest that he had come to terms with a realization of identity loss, and that it was simply out of his control.

In sum, various participants were confronted with damaging language perceptions and ethnic stereotypes by non-Hispanics beyond Miami, which often lead to a loss of Hispanic identity and at times dissociation from the Spanish language. Moreover, imposed labels affected how participants positioned themselves within broader U.S. society and further reflected the idea of Miami as an imagined Hispanic community. In the U.S. beyond Miami, English was prioritized by non-Hispanics and influenced participants' comfort level with speaking in Spanish. A significant link also existed between accent and belonging not only when participants spoke English beyond Miami, but when participants were communicating in Spanish with Hispanics from their country of origin.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Conclusion**

Participants overwhelmingly imagined Miami as a Hispanic community. Hispanics that did not feel completely comfortable speaking Spanish were often positioned as less in tune with their heritage country or Hispanic culture. Some participants were encouraged to reconnect or improve their Spanish language abilities in a city where Spanish is deemed a necessity for a variety of factors. An area where the Spanish language was not considered prestigious was in the school setting. English, the hegemonic language of the imagined national community, reigned supreme throughout the education system, and therefore greatly impacted students' perception of bilingualism and identity. Once enrolled in school, the prevalent feeling was that Spanish language use diminished at the expense of English. Social divisions and stigmatization regarding ESOL, Spanish use, and recent arrivals occurred in school, further complicating participants' perceptions regarding Spanish and ethnic identity. When participants traveled to or spoke about the U.S. beyond Miami, it became clear that they perceived Miami as more culturally, ethnically, and linguistically accepting than other areas of the U.S. The importance of accent and linguistic identity was also noted, whether it was having a distinguishable accent originating from one's heritage country or the stigmatization of speaking an "accented" English. As Baez emphasized, "language," and I would argue, language perception "sets up conditions for belonging and exclusion" (123). Indeed, in Miami and beyond, there were spaces of belonging and not belonging in Spanish; there were spaces of belonging and not belonging in English. Participants continued to negotiate their identity within these imagined spaces.

Future research should consider the relationship between Miami bilinguals' perceptions and attitudes regarding language and identity, and their socioeconomic status. Additionally, future sociolinguistic studies in Miami should include other Hispanic ethnicities besides Cubans. Most Miami Cubans do not travel back to Cuba, and may not experience Spanish in a monolingual context. However, individuals from Colombia, Costa Rica, Venezuela, etc. may travel back to their heritage countries and be exposed to contexts where Spanish is the main language spoken in interactions; instances of recontact with the heritage language may be greater upon their return to Miami. Future studies should continue to shed light on the complexities of Spanish preservation and transmission in the U.S. context (cf. Carreira 2013).

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## **Appendix 1: Semi-Structured Interview Guide**

1. How was it growing up in Miami? Were you born here? Where are your parents from?
2. What language did you speak growing up? What language do your parents speak? To each other/friends/out and about/to you.
3. To whom do you speak the most Spanish?  
When/Where do you speak the most Spanish? Why?  
How do you feel about that?
4. Do you consider yourself bilingual? Why or why not?  
Has your bilingual ability changed over time?
5. Do you prefer speaking one language over the other?
6. How would you describe your level of understanding, speaking, writing, and reading?
7. How do you feel when you don't understand something? Examples?
8. Tell me about how you handle situations where Spanish speakers and English speakers are together in a group (work, school, at home).
9. Tell me about your friends/gf/bfs. Are most of them from Miami?  
Do some of them speak Spanish and English? Tell me about your interactions with them.
10. Tell me about language spoken at family/friend events (birthday parties, reunions, holidays etc). Why?  
    Prompt: Were there any difficulties? Tell me about those.
11. Has social media changed the way you communicate?
12. Have you ever felt uncomfortable speaking English or Spanish?  
    Prompt: If so, what was it like?  
    Prompt: What did you think then?  
    Prompt: What do you think now looking back on the situation?
13. Has your trade off between Spanish and English changed since you were little?
14. How if at all, have your thoughts and feelings about speaking Spanish and English changed since you were young?
15. Tell me about your experience with the education system here. Do you feel bilingualism is supported in school?

16. Tell me about any problems you have encountered speaking English or Spanish.

Prompt: How do you feel about them?

Prompt: How do you handle them?

17. So your parents are from \_\_\_. Have you visited (country where mother is from)? How was your time there? Have you visited (country where father is from)? How was it there?

18. How do you identify yourself? (culturally/ethnically)

Do you consider yourself “Hispanic” or “Latino” / both / neither? Why?

19. Are there times when identities conflict or you prefer one over the other? Why?

20. What do you think society’s attitude is towards speaking both Spanish and English?

21. Do you want your kids to speak both languages? Why or why not?

22. Do you think being bilingual is important? Why or why not?

23. Do you think language helps define who you are? Why or why not? How?

24. Is there anything that you might not have thought about before that occurred to you during this interview?

25. Is there anything else you think I should know to understand how language has played a role in your life?

**Appendix 2: Consent to Participate in a Research Study**

eProst ID: 20130450

Approved

Approval Date: 8/13/2013

Exp. Date: 8/12/2014

**Bilingualism and Identity among Young Adults in Miami**

*University of Miami*

**Consent to Participate in a Research Study**

**The following information describes the research study in which you are being asked to participate. Please read the information carefully. At the end, you will be asked to verbally agree if you would like to participate.**

**Purpose of Study**

You are being asked to participate in a research study. The purpose of this study is to better understand how language (Spanish and English) has been and is a part of the lives of young adults in Miami.

**Procedures**

You will be interviewed for about an hour to an hour and a half. Questions will include details about your interactions between family, co-workers, friends and your own personal views and feelings about speaking Spanish and English. The interviews will be tape recorded for the sole purpose of transcribing the interview.

**Risks/Discomforts**

There are minimal risks for participation in this study. You may feel emotional discomfort when answering questions about personal views.

**Benefits**

No direct benefits may be promised to you for your participation in this study.

**Confidentiality**

All information provided will remain confidential. After the interview is transcribed, the tape recordings will be erased. The recordings will be transcribed within a week from the interview date or sooner. Participants' names, places of work, friends' names, and family's names will all be changed.

The researchers will consider your records confidential to the extent permitted by law. Authorized University or other agents who will be bound by the same provisions of confidentiality may also review your records for audit purposes.

**Compensation**

To thank you for your time and participation, you will receive a \$15 gift card to Starbucks.



**Right to Decline or Withdraw**

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You are free to refuse to participate in the study or withdraw your consent at any time during the study. You may choose not to answer specific questions or stop participating at any time.

**Contact Information**

Elizabeth Grace Lanier (713-516-1364; eglanier@gmail.com) will gladly answer any questions you may have concerning the purpose, procedures, and outcome of this project. If you have questions about your rights as a research subject you may contact Human Subjects Research Office at the University of Miami, at (305) 243-3195.

**Participant Agreement**

I have read the information in this consent form and verbally agree to participate in this study. I have had the chance to ask any questions I have about this study, and they have been answered for me. A signed copy of this form will be provided to you for your personal records.

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**Signature of person obtaining consent**

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**Date**