

“¿POR QUÉ NO SABES ESPAÑOL?”: PRESSURED MONOLINGUALISM AND ITS IMPACTS ON MEXICAN AMERICANS

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The question of language diversity in US classrooms has been widely debated in the public sphere and among educators, including scholars and teachers of rhetoric, writing, and literacy studies. While many teachers, scholars, and administrators in higher education support multilingual education in theory, they struggle to know how to enact it. Compounding this challenge is the fact that negative attitudes toward and policies about multilingualism in the K-12 context influence some multilingual families to decide to raise their children to speak only English. Drawing on semi-structured interviews with family members and friends, the author examines the causes and consequences of monolingualism for Mexican Americans. The author argues that political and educational discourses pressure families to assimilate to a monolingual society and that “pressured monolingualism” weakens family relationships, ethnic identities, and cultures. This article concludes by considering why K-12 school districts should embrace multilingualism, how public attitudes can change, and ways those who’ve experienced “pressured monolingualism” can take advantage of the resources of higher education and university life to learn languages and explore and celebrate their cultures with others.

UN RESUMEN DE MONOLINGÜISMO INGLÉS

A little girl stands at the stove, helping her abuelita roll enchiladas for dinner. She always cherishes this time where she feels truly connected to her grandma and her culture. Her cousin taps her on her shoulder, telling her in Spanish that he wants to play the card game UNO but doesn't know the rules. “¿Puedes explicarlos?” The girl's face turns bright red, and her heart starts pounding. “No, no puedo.” A disappointed pause follows. “¿Por qué no sabes español?” her cousin asks. She looks

down at her feet and repeats what she always says when asked this. “No sé.”

A woman is in a Manhattan restaurant. She orders her food, comfortably speaking to the employee behind the register in Spanish. Suddenly, a man behind her starts yelling. He yells at both women for not speaking English, since this is America, after all. Other people in the restaurant call out his ignorance, but he continues to berate the women. “My guess is they're not documented. So my next call is to ICE to have each one of them kicked out of my country” (Karimi and Levenson).

Both of these scenes are true events — the former, a personal experience from my childhood, and the latter, an event that happened in New York last May. In the past few years, there has been an influx in news stories similar to that of the woman in Manhattan. In these stories, “real Americans” are angered by people speaking a language other than English and respond with public shaming and berating, demonstrating a renewed consideration of monolingualism in the United States. These instances exhibit a condescension towards minority languages, which is mirrored by the current presidential administration. In a 2015 GOP debate, Trump said, “We have to have assimilation—to have a country, we have to have assimilation...This is a country where we speak English, not Spanish” (Washington Post Staff). Administrative actions have mirrored this rhetoric, with the Spanish version of the White House website being taken down just after Donald Trump was inaugurated in January 2017 (O’Keefe). The site’s immediate disappearance left Americans without a source of official White House information translated into Spanish. And it is still missing, nearly four years later.

Taking a step back to look at an overview of the attitudes surrounding monolingualism versus multilingualism, there are a plethora of contradictions. On the one hand, instructors in higher education recognize and emphasize the importance of multilingualism and its educational benefits (“CCCC Statement”; Okal). However, strong (and perhaps outdated) misconceptions that multilingualism harms children still exist and circulate (Kroll and Dussias). Shifts in political power and clear sentiments

against Spanish-speaking Americans have also highlighted a desire for an English-only America (O’Keefe; Anbinder). Therefore, arguments against the use of native languages, especially Spanish, exist and greatly contradict the evidence-based arguments supporting multilingualism. As I observe these many conflicting perceptions, I’ve often asked myself, “How do parents make the decision of whether or not to raise their children as monolingual?” The way I not only enter this conversation but add to it is through my positionality as a Mexican American college student who struggles with her personal ethnic identity.

The little girl in the first story was me. Although my grandparents and dad are native Spanish speakers, I was raised monolingual and have experienced its impacts for the last 19 years. For me, not being able to speak Spanish has created a divide between myself, family members, and Mexican culture as a whole. This rift has led me to become curious about the complex relationships between monolingualism and ethnic identity. As someone who has been directly affected by the arguments and decisions surrounding language-learning in the US, I have a personal stake and desire to understand the pressures of English assimilation. My positionality allows me the advantage of bringing personal narratives to the existing conversation.

In this paper, I argue that negative implications result from political and educational pressures encouraging Mexican Americans to assimilate to a monolingual society. These implications include weakened relationships with family members and tensions with their ethnic identity and culture.

To understand this research, it is essential to first understand the concept of monolingualism. English monolingualism, as defined by the *Oxford Handbook of Sociolinguistics*, is an ideology that advocates for English as the standard in society despite the fact that the United States does not have an official or national language (Ricento 529-530). It has also been referred to as a “monoglot ideology”: aggressively hegemonic and endowed with claims of superiority (Silverstein). Essentially, monolingualism places English on a pedestal. Not only that, but this concept rests on the belief that society is already, in effect, monolingual, thus denying the clear existence of language diversity in this country (Ricento).

In the following sections, I will first address the educational debates surrounding the use of multiple languages in the classroom. Then, I will explore the recent political shifts and the subsequent pressures stemming from them. The next step is to look at the varying impacts of monolingualism. Delving into the stories of my family members and a fellow Stanford student provides a qualitative cultural perspective on the issue and uncovers the implications monolingualism has on relationships, culture, and ethnic identity. Parts of these interviews will also be woven into the educational and political perspectives to remind ourselves of the individuals who have been/are currently being impacted. Finally, I’ll discuss why the implications discussed in this research even matter and what can be done in schools to address this issue.

METODOLOGÍA

My primary research consists of interviews I’ve conducted with my parents, grandmother,

sister, and friend and fellow Stanford student, Julian. I decided to make these interviews semi-structured, asking them some of the same predetermined questions, mainly about their upbringings and experiences with English and Spanish. My mom and Julian were both raised monolingually. Therefore, my interviews included the following questions:

1. “Was your parents’ decision to have you learn only English a conscious one?”
2. “How did being monolingual impact your relationships with your relatives?”
3. “Growing up, how did you identify ethnically?”

Since my grandma and dad both learned Spanish as their first language and are now bilingual, I asked them questions that related to their experiences with and perceptions of learning English:

1. “What do you think are the benefits of learning English?”
2. “What was your experience like learning English?”

Aside from preparing certain questions, I let the interviews veer off and flow naturally, almost like a regular conversation, since the subjects were all people I’m close to. This semi-structured approach allowed me to provide general themes to be explored while also tailoring my questions to the different contexts from which my interviewees came. A semi-structured approach also allowed new and interesting ideas to be brought up, some of which I hadn’t yet considered.

For the monolinguals I interviewed, the questions asked were first meant to gain background

information on the individual's experience with English and Spanish. Then, they brought up themes that were important to the research, like the connections between monolingualism to familial relationships and personal ethnic identity. For those who grew up with Spanish as their first language (and therefore aren't the central subjects of the research), I asked questions that touched more on their perception of learning English, as well as society's perception. As bilinguals, the responses that these people gave me helped supplement academic papers and news stories describing public opinions towards English and Spanish.

Once I conducted and recorded the interviews, I transcribed them. Then, I applied grounded theory coding in order to identify similar themes between the interviews. These links revealed common thoughts and experiences regarding monolingualism in Mexican Americans. An outside coder provided feedback on the themes I identified, further solidifying the findings from my primary research.

In regard to secondary research methods, I found many academic journals whose papers explore various topics surrounding language. These topics range from language policy in American schools to Standard English ideologies, sociological forms of capital, and attitudes towards bilingualism in the classroom. Secondary texts used in this paper also include online web sources, providing news stories, statistics, and institutional statements for higher education. To supplement the cultural findings I gained from my primary research, existing case studies and detailed personal accounts were analyzed. These included Christina Chavez's intergenerational study of the Fuentes family

as well as Mexican Americans sharing their experiences with language in a *Buzzfeed* video. The primary and secondary research done for this paper allows for a much more comprehensive view on the subject; having just one or the other would not have provided a complete argument regarding monolingual pressures and their subsequent implications on Mexican Americans.

ESPAÑOL EN LA CLASE

In the educational sphere in the United States, conflicting ideas on multilingual programs have circulated in the past few decades. School administrations intensely debated bilingual education, particularly since the passing of Proposition 227 in 1998, where English was imposed as the primary and preferred form of instruction in California public schools (Garrity et al.). Over the course of 10 years, starting from the year before this legislation was enacted, 1997, the percentage of English learners in California that were taught in bilingual programs dropped from around 30% to 5% ("Proposition 58"). Proposition 227 was actually supported by a majority of California voters (61%), leading to its enactment and showing the prevalent negative opinion on the presence of Spanish in the classroom at that time (Garrity et al.). These viewpoints are highlighted in Christina Chávez's case studies of a Mexican American family living in Los Angeles. An education professor and Stanford alumna, Chávez gathered primary research by conducting interviews with multiple generations of the Fuentes family. Her goal was to explore the different experiences the family

members had with language, education, culture, etc. While the second generation was in school, much of the southwest imposed a “No Spanish Rule.” This prohibited the use of Spanish because of the belief that “speaking Spanish impeded children’s acquisition of English and American culture” (Chávez 124). This family faced the strong opinions that multilingualism intellectually inhibits children, and this “No Spanish Rule” clearly exhibited schools’ attempts to stifle the use of Spanish by their students.

Proposition 227 and the educational change it created sparked intense arguments regarding the place of native languages, especially Spanish, in school programs. There were people on one side praising English as the best way to assimilate students, while the other side found hard evidence supporting the effectiveness of multilingualism in the classroom and in other aspects of life (Espinosa; August and Shanahan). In 2016, Proposition 227 was overturned by Proposition 58 because of said effectiveness.

Although the discussion surrounding the use of native languages in K-12 education involves varying passionate arguments, position statements regarding diverse languages in colleges and universities have remained relatively consistent over the past few decades. The fields that specialize in higher education language pedagogy tend to support the integration of students’ native languages and dialects in instructional settings. A resolution written during the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) in 1974 lays out this progressive stance. The resolution, named “Students’ Right to their Own Language,” supports the use of a variety of languages in the classroom. It simultaneously

denies that “the myth of a standard American dialect has any validity,” emphasizing the idea that claiming certain dialects as “unacceptable” leads to social groups exerting dominance over others (“Students’ Right to Their Own Language”). Thus, the national organization rejects a “monoglot ideology,” and instead encourages multilingualism and diverse backgrounds. In this way, the resolution lays a solid foundation for higher education institutions to push back against English-only sentiments and pressures placed on Mexican American families.

Nearly 30 years later, in 2001, the CCCC released a “Statement on Second Language Writing and Writers” that expresses very similar principles to those from the conference in 1974. It recognizes that second language writers have become an integral part of higher education writing programs. Therefore, instructors need to understand and develop practices that are sensitive to their linguistic and cultural needs. The statement then lays out detailed guidelines for writing courses and programs regarding placement, class size, assessment, assignments, etc. (“CCCC Statement”). Seeing how higher education institutions are encouraged to celebrate diversity, one would expect native languages and dialects to be recognized and encouraged in the classroom. However, the unfortunate reality is that universities and colleges usually do not follow the practices recommended by national organizations like the CCCC. A huge gap exists between the promoted asset-based approaches and their lack of implementation. In reflecting on the Statement and actions that followed it, Geneva Smitherman, a member of the CCCC and the National Council of Teachers in English

(NCTE), explains that in terms of implementing the asset-based approach, “there was also lingering confusion” about how exactly to do so. She also addresses the nation’s movement to a more conservative climate after the Statement’s release: “Thus the mood of CCCC, as the mood of America, had shifted from change and promise to stagnation and dreams deferred” (Smitherman 24). As seen in the conflicting propositions in California, lower education schools have also certainly not implemented pedagogical changes to include diverse backgrounds, highlighting inconsistent support for languages other than English. Since K-12 schools are much more visible to parents, the administrative actions they take in regard to their curriculum will naturally have more of an impact on families than the actions of universities and colleges. Therefore, the past rejections of native languages in the classroom

perpetuate anti-Spanish sentiments, pressuring parents to choose monolingualism as the best choice for their child.

DISCUSIÓN

Going through the grounded coding process with the interviews I conducted, several major themes kept coming up, connecting the stories of my interviewees. I interviewed four people (my mom, friend, dad, and grandmother), with the first two sharing the common experience of growing up monolingual and the latter two growing up in Mexico and learning English once they came to the US. The key themes that stood out from the interviews are laid out in the grounded coding in table 1.

The first major theme I found was the idea of parents wanting a better life and easier experiences for their children. The main

Table 1: Grounded Coding Table

Code	Count	Example Quote
1) parents want better life/ experience for their kid	3	“[my parents] knew how hard it was for them to come to America not knowing English and having that language barrier be an obstacle to kind of achieve their American Dream . . . so they both made the decision to not teach me their languages.”
1a) knowing English = success	4	“when you speak English, the doors open for you in different ways.”
1b) learning a language later in life is hard	7	“If I was watching a tv show or listening to a song in Spanish it was really hard because it went so fast.”
2) not knowing Spanish inhibited relationships	3	“It was harder when I was younger, right. I couldn’t tell [my grandma] things or ask her things much because I couldn’t talk to her that well.”
3) language connects to culture	3	“I don’t think you can experience the culture without the language. They go hand in hand.”

motivations for parents wanting this for their kids brought up two subthemes: knowing English will bring you success and learning languages later in life is hard. The latter of these two was especially prevalent in the interviews, with all four interviewees expressing the difficulty of learning a new language, whether it was English or Spanish. The second common thread that arose several times was the fact that not knowing Spanish inhibited relationships. My mom and Julian both explained how growing up knowing only English limited their connections with family members. The last major theme from the interviews was the belief that language and culture are connected. The prevalence of these three main themes is not limited to my interviews; academics, authors, and more express these same themes in their work, showing that these ideas can be extrapolated to support the argument of this paper. The following subsections will dive deeper into each theme, synthesizing interviewee responses with outside secondary sources to explain the motivations behind and impacts of pressured monolingualism on Mexican Americans.

PADRES BIEN INTENCIONADOS

A common thread that I found throughout most of my interviews was the idea of parents wanting the best for their children. They do what they can to ensure an easier life and better experiences for their kids, and this concept rang true in the stories of almost all of my interviewees. In this case, a better life means learning English as early and as well as possible. One of the main reasons for this, as seen in my interviews, is that learning a language later

in life can be very difficult. In fact, the challenges of language-learning came up the most of all the codes in my grounded theory coding. The second reason that was also heavily discussed was the notion that knowing English equates to success. For various reasons, well-intentioned parents make decisions regarding the languages learned by their children, but these decisions may be misguided.

Mirroring past legislation against the use of native languages in K-12 schools, public sentiments that place English on the highest pedestal still linger to this day. Some parents in Mexican American households are convinced that their children will be academically inhibited if they teach them Spanish. Parents' decisions may be impacted by the misconceptions they hold about language development. Previous educational practices have led parents to buy into the supposed superiority of English because they associate it with economic success and cleverness. Terrance G. Wiley and Marguerite Lukes draw on the theories of French philosopher Pierre Bourdieu to compare knowing a standard language to a sort of currency: "Once standards for expected linguistic behavior have been imposed, privileged varieties of language become a kind of social capital" (515). In other words, knowing English, the "standard language," can equate to better test scores, economic advantages, and overall success. In the words of my *abuelita*, "When you speak English, the doors open for you" (Flores). At 20 years old, my grandma came to the US in search of a better life for her and her son. Because of the general expectation that people in America speak English, she felt and

feels that knowing the language is the key to getting opportunities and not being treated as inferior. This line of thinking supports Wiley and Luke's use of Bourdieu's "social capital" concept in a linguistic context.

When parents are faced with the idea from schools that their child will not be as successful if they do not completely assimilate to an English-only system, the decisions they must make in regard to monolingualism result. I interviewed a friend and fellow Stanford student of Mexican heritage, Julian Aguilar, who was raised intentionally with only English. Both of his parents immigrated to the US as adults—his mom from China and his dad from Mexico—and struggled greatly with a language barrier as they adjusted to an English-dominated society. Not wanting the same hardships for their son, they decided that he should learn English as well as possible, without an accent (Aguilar). In the same vein, my mother, a pediatrician, often comes across parents who hold the fear that their children will be at a disadvantage in the US if they do not make English the priority (V. Uribe). They fear that their children's English acquisition will be inhibited if they use Spanish in the household, so they hesitate to speak their native language. In their minds, and in the minds of many native Spanish-speakers in the US, English equals success. In fact, a survey of Texas adults showed that "Spanish-dominant speakers place a high importance on speaking English, more so than do English speakers . . . It is easy to see how immigrants are constantly reminded of the problems they face in the workplace and the public sphere without English proficiency" (Dowling et al. 356).

A common theme amongst Mexican American parents is that they simply want the best for their children. They hope that their children will have an easier experience than them and grow to be confident, successful members of society. Because of the pressures these well-meaning parents face, they believe that monolingualism is best for their children. While educators are realizing the importance of using multiple languages in the classroom, public attitudes and subsequent pressures have yet to catch up to the research. Furthermore, if K-12 institutions can more widely adopt the accepting sentiments and programs laid out by national organizations like the CCCC, parents could be more exposed to positive ideas surrounding multilingualism. Then, the pressures on Mexican Americans to raise their children as monolingual can hopefully be eased, avoiding the negative implications of fragmented relationships and cultural identities.

RELACIONES EN LA FAMILIA

When thinking of the benefits that knowing a language brings, the first thing that usually comes to mind is the ability to communicate with others. Naturally, this relationship came up consistently as I interviewed my mom and Julian, who both grew up monolingually, as well as when I remembered the struggles of communicating with family members throughout my childhood. This concept of lacking communication with relatives or peers because of monolingualism came up continuously, opening the door to understanding the impact of an English-only life on relationships.

For Mexican American families in the US, it's very common for at least some relatives to speak only Spanish. Because of this, not knowing the language can inhibit relationships with family members. This was certainly the case for me growing up. When we visited Mexico, I found it very difficult to speak to my cousins. I got by because I could understand them a bit and because children can have a knack for playing together without having to talk a whole lot. Even so, I felt a constant struggle when trying to communicate with my relatives, and I grew frustrated that I couldn't express my ideas or understand the jokes that were being made around me. Recently when we've visited, now that my cousins and I are older, it's even harder to avoid the fact that I can't speak to them well. Since many of us are around the same age, I feel even more disappointed that I am missing out on communicating and connecting with them effectively. Being part of such a proud Mexican family but not knowing Spanish has unfortunately led me to miss out on close relationships with my relatives. One of my interviewees, Julian, feels similarly, recounting how he couldn't understand his relatives at family reunions. Even though he was physically there, learning about the culture, he never felt "fully part of it" (Aguilar). The connection between him and his family was weakened as a result of the existing language barrier.

My mom, Victoria Uribe, is also part Mexican and grew up learning only English. When asked about how not knowing Spanish impacted her relationships, she recalled feeling limited when communicating with her grandmother, who knew very little English. They

would speak very simple sentences to each other, and my mom would get used to saying brief phrases like "Cena lista!" when dinner was ready, but she still couldn't talk to her that well. "It was harder when I was younger, right. I couldn't tell [my grandma] things or ask her things much because I couldn't talk to her that well." Even later, when my mom was in college, she'd write short letters to her grandmother but feel frustrated that she didn't know Spanish better (V. Uribe).

In Chávez's case study of the Fuentes family, the third generation of children who grew up in the US did not acquire the ability to speak Spanish growing up. One member of the family, Erica, recalls not being able to communicate with her grandmother as a result. Since she could never understand what her grandma said to her, her father always had to translate between the two, which made Erica feel "kind of awful" (Chávez 126). In all of these cases, not knowing Spanish led Mexican Americans to miss out on important relationships with their families. Similar stories can be told by many others who grew up without learning their native language, and the negative implications this monolingualism clearly has on familial connections are truly sad.

The relationship between language and connection through communication may seem like a very simple concept. However, this does not lessen the impact that weakened familial bonds have. By examining the individual yet similar stories of myself, my mom, Julian, and members of the Fuentes family, the unfortunate distance between monolinguals and their Spanish-speaking relatives is made clear. The

way that monolingualism can lead to inhibited relationships is an important ramification in the lives of Mexican Americans, and it's one of the main reasons why societal pressures to learn only English are so harmful.

ESPAÑOL, IDENTIDAD, Y CULTURA

The relationship between language, identity, and culture are heavily intertwined. Changes in one affect the others, and both Julian and my dad believe strongly in this connection. Additionally, academics have recognized close ties between the three concepts. With this relationship, while positive developments can be compounded, unfortunately, so can the negative.

From a cultural perspective, the ramifications of not knowing the language of your family can be serious. After all, language has always been an integral part of one's identity, and for people of color, one's cultural identity. Gloria Anzaldúa describes this deeply rooted relationship, saying that "Ethnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity—I am my language" (Anzaldúa 39). Echoing this sentiment, when I asked my dad about the role of language, he insisted that "I don't think you can experience the culture without the language—they go hand in hand" (J. Uribe). With this closely intertwined relationship, the lack of ability to speak Spanish in a Mexican American household can lead to a fragmentation with one's culture because of the social interactions, forms of media, and pieces of literature that are inaccessible. The CCCC explains this relation well when it says, "Since dialect is not separate from culture, but an intrinsic part of it, accepting a new dialect means accepting a new culture; rejecting one's native

dialect is to some extent a rejection of one's culture" (CCCC). Julian's parents, who raised him to be monolingual, only wanted the best for their son's future. He understands where his parents were coming from, but he feels like he lost something growing up despite their good intentions since he "never really felt immersed" in the Mexican culture (Aguilar). In other words, because his parents rejected the idea of their son learning Spanish, there was a rejection of sorts of the culture his dad grew up in. This rejection kept Julian from forming deep roots with his Mexican heritage.

Through conversations with others and watching YouTube videos, I've learned that Mexican Americans, including myself, sometimes feel like they are not "Mexican enough." Unfortunately, these judgments sometimes come from within the Latinx community. BuzzFeed, a popular news/media platform, released a video this year called "Struggles of Not Feeling Latino Enough." Many of the people in the video bring up the fact that one's knowledge of Spanish is a huge factor in whether or not someone else considers them Latino. One woman, Maya Murillo, didn't speak Spanish growing up, and as a result, faced backlash from her own community. She recalls how her Latinx friends would ask her, "Oh you're Mexican? Why don't you speak Spanish? Why don't you know this this and that?" and this caused her to feel really insecure about her place in her own culture ("Struggles of Not Feeling Latino Enough"). Her monolingualism led her to question her ethnic identity and validity as a Mexican.

My mom grew up in a small town in Montana where she wasn't exposed to Spanish in

the household. While her mother integrated parts of Mexican culture into her childhood (playing *lotería*, making Mexican food, talking about her experiences in Mexico), she did not feel connected to her Mexican side. In fact, she completely disregarded that part of her identity, considering herself to be white until she went to college (V. Uribe). When I heard this, I was shocked that she simply ignored half of her family's lineage without much thought. By identifying herself as white growing up, my mom clearly lacked meaningful ties to her Mexican side and exhibited a fragmentation between her self-perception and her true ethnic identity.

While these are just a few examples, I believe that looking at specific people brings a whole new perspective to the existing discussions regarding native languages. The fragmented experiences Julian, my mom, and I have had with Mexican culture and our ethnic identities resulted from our monolingualism. Thus, without these narratives, scholarly discourse misses an essential piece to the linguistic puzzle. Looking at historical trends and quantitative data is essential in research, including in the subject of multilingualism, but hearing the stories of individuals—real people who are at the center of the research—is unparalleled. Qualitative research, and case studies specifically, provide such powerful and direct views into the real-life impacts of the topic at hand.

It is also important to recognize that while language is a strong pathway to culture, shared language does not always lead to shared culture. Cultural identities are so nuanced that people who speak the same language can still

have vastly different experiences and perceptions of their ethnic selves. For instance, Julian is part of a Latinx service club at Stanford called Hermanos, and he explained how there seem to be “two types of Latinos” within the organization. Coming from a low-income background himself, he feels more connected with the people who are from rougher neighborhoods, like Richmond or Oakland, who didn't necessarily grow up “culturally Mexican.” So, while there is a direct and clear relationship between language, identity, and culture, there is not a single linear path between all of them, and it is important to remember this complexity.

Y AHORA, QUÉ?

Now that I have discussed the negative implications of educational and political pressures on Mexican Americans to assimilate to English monolingualism, what comes next? What should be done to address the anti-Spanish sentiments permeating our society? Should schools even try to make changes that contradict these public opinions? The CCCC sums up this dilemma that English educators face regarding curriculum: “until public attitudes can be changed—and it is worth remembering that the past teaching in English classes has been largely responsible for those attitudes—shall we place our emphasis on what the vocal elements of the public think it wants or on what the actual available linguistic evidence indicates we should emphasize?” (“Students' Right to their Own Language”). I argue that the latter option is the right path to take. The best course of action for K-12 schools is to

encourage the use of native languages in the classroom and thus promote multilingualism.

As described before, the CCCC released a Statement on Second Language Writing and Writers in 2001. The Statement details specific guidelines for higher education institutions to adapt their writing courses so that they are sensitive to the different linguistic and cultural needs of students whose first language isn't English. For instance, in regard to classroom size, the CCCC recommends having smaller classes (15-20 students) so each student has more time for direct feedback with the teacher. When creating assignments, "instructors should avoid topics that require substantial background knowledge that is related to a specific culture or history that is not being covered by the course." When it comes to assessing the writing skills of second language students, the statement encourages teachers to base their grading on the effectiveness for readers. It endorses the idea of assessing using multiple measures and providing multiple prompts for writing assignments ("CCCC Statement").

These examples of adjustments show that national organizations encourage an asset-based approach to language diversity in universities and colleges. The goal of these clearly laid-out strategies is to be inclusive of students whose native language isn't English. If K-12 schools were to adopt similar beliefs and guidelines to those detailed in the Statement, Mexican American parents would have a clearer view of the ways educational institutions support the use of native languages. They could see that multilingual students are equally valued in schools. With this increased

visibility and encouragement, parents would perhaps feel less pressure to assimilate their child into an English-only society. Then, fewer children would have to deal with the familial and cultural ramifications that come with being a monolingual Mexican American.

At this point, while monolingualism has been shown to contribute to fragmented family relationships and ethnic identities, some may still wonder about its wider relevance. Why should entire school systems make such big changes for just a portion of the population? For starters, a huge number of people in the US have a stake in these policies and practices. In California, 39.1% of the population is Hispanic or Latinx ("QuickFacts California"). While my research focuses on Mexican Americans, it's easy to see how many people from other Spanish-speaking backgrounds can be affected by monolingual pressures as well. Hopefully, realizing the difficult personal impacts monolingualism can have is a step towards institutions placing equal value on diverse languages.

Aside from the call to action for K-12 schools to encourage multilingualism, the *understanding* one gains from this research is a huge takeaway. Simply listening to personal stories and learning about negative experiences resulting from pressured monolingualism can catalyze steps towards implementing systematic change and encourage empathy. In such a tense political time, this incredibly diverse country has shown a lot of hate and anger when it comes to differences. I believe that differences should not only be tolerated but celebrated. This includes Americans who only speak English, Americans who only speak their

native language, and everyone in between. If we can begin to have more understanding and more empathy for each person's identity, we may be able to function as a more accepting, unified country.

Mexican Americans have faced a multitude of pressures to assimilate to a society that promotes English above Spanish. In my life and others' lives, these pressures have led to a fragmented experience with Mexican culture and personal ethnic identity. But, for the people whose interviews we examined, their stories are far from over. Once my mom got to college, she joined Chicano organizations to learn more about her culture and people like her. She even wrote an article in medical school talking about her strengthening relationship with her Mexican heritage. She also started learning

Spanish in college and became fluent by using it in her job on a daily basis. My friend, Julian, has taken two introductory Spanish classes at Stanford so far, and he plans on continuing with the language next year. Through this, and by joining a Hispanic service club on campus, he already feels more in touch with his Mexican roots.

I hope for the encouragement of language diversity so that these sorts of cultural connections can be made even sooner. This way, Mexican American children can learn and be taught Spanish with pride. Then, that little girl playing UNO with her cousins can respond confidently.

“¿Por qué no puedes hablar español?”
“No sé.” “Sí, yo puedo.”

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