



Learn from the Experts: Collaborative Language Learning and Language Ideology Awareness

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Background

Despite the strong presence of Spanish speakers in the United States, especially in the Southwest, the language classroom is the only place in which many college students learning Spanish have access to the target language. Moreover, due to linguistic ideologies portraying languages other than English as antagonistic to the US national identity (Aceves et al. 2012; Achúgar and Oteíza 2009; Pavlenko 2002), these languages are not deemed as essential, nor is their use deemed as natural. Often, these harmful linguistic ideologies are disseminated by the very school system that teaches these languages, delegitimization of the use and knowledge of these languages (McCollum 1999). In the case of Spanish in the United States, it is crucial to find opportunities for Spanish learners to engage in meaningful ways with members of the Spanish-speaking

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community so that they have more opportunities to learn Spanish and develop a more objective view of the language through such contact.

Drawing on insights from the literature on service-learning (SL), language ideologies, and the teaching of Spanish in the United States, as well as from the author's ongoing experiences, this chapter presents the program *Learn from the Experts*. The program is an example of how universities may form partnerships with schools in their communities to foster collaboration between Spanish and English learners. In this program, Spanish learners from a university in South Texas collaborated with English learners from a high school in the community in classes designed to develop each of the participants' skills in the language they are learning. The chapter focuses specifically on the two main principles followed in the program design and explains how the program addressed the needs of the served population, as these needs were identified in the literature about Spanish language learners in the United States. The two main principles of the program were (1) the demystification of ideologies portraying Spanish as inferior to English and (2) the application of an SL approach as a form of fostering collaboration between experts in different languages.

The SL program *Learn from the Experts* was a partnership between a Hispanic-Serving university in South Texas and a public high school in the same community. In the program, each participant contributed their own expertise, which are their linguistic practices. The goals of the program were to promote proficiency in academic Spanish and English through collaborative learning processes between college students learning Spanish and high school students learning English, while at the same time demystifying ideologies portraying Spanish as inferior to English. Thus, lessons in the program were built around themes concerning language ideologies, language and power, and language policy. In this program, high school English learners met one-on-one once a week for ten weeks with Spanish learners from the university to help each other with their needs in learning English and Spanish. Spanish majors also participated in designing and teaching lessons and monitoring the interactions among the members of each group to guarantee smooth communications and collaborations. These participants are labeled monitors in the

program because of the role they play in monitoring interactions and learning processes.

Learn from the Experts provided English-speaking college students and Spanish-speaking high school students with an environment in which they must communicate using whatever resources they have. Participants worked in pairs with a speaker of the language they are learning to complete projects, such as bilingual posters, videos, interviews, and short stories, with the help of the more experienced partner. They worked on one project per meeting. The projects in which the participants engaged required them to rely on each other's linguistic knowledge while they also developed academic language. The themes of the projects related to aspects of languages, such as language myths, language policy, language and identity, and language ideologies. *Learn from the Experts'* first goal was to raise awareness about the relationship between language and power, a goal it shared with programs such as SKILLS (Bucholtz et al. 2015) and citizen sociolinguistics (Rymes et al. 2017). At the same time, it aimed at promoting language learning for different groups, a goal it shared with other SL programs (Cabo et al. 2017; Jorge 2006; Petrov 2013). However, *Learn from the Experts* combined these two goals, thus promoting language learning for different groups while educating its participants concerning the relationship between language and power and how beliefs about a language generally reflect beliefs about its speakers.

Demystifying Language Ideologies

In educational settings, ideologies depicting some linguistic practices as more appropriate or superior to others may undermine some students' linguistic practices in favor of assimilation (Cross et al. 2001), as well as the learning opportunities provided to them (Nieto 2000; Walker et al. 2004). Therefore, in the program *Learn from the Experts*, teaching students the value of different linguistic practices can be viewed as a matter of social justice. Although there is nothing intrinsic to a language that makes it superior to or more appropriate than other languages in certain places or situations, the systems of values and beliefs governing each society lead speakers to deem languages as of differing importance (Gal and

Woolard 2001; Woolard 1998). Uncovering these systems of values, or language ideologies, is crucial to understanding human interaction because these systems mediate between social structure and forms of talk (Schieffelin and Ochs 1986). In other words, language ideologies determine substantially not only which linguistic practices a society favors, but also which speakers are deemed as worthy to be heard (Lippi-Green 2012). Therefore, language ideologies regulate not only which linguistic practices are more acceptable and which speakers have more rights to discourse, but also which languages are more desirable to learn.

The attaching of different values to different linguistic practices may also influence speakers' desire to learn and use different languages. In the United States, for example, although 22.8% of all students in public schools speak a language other than English at home (Center for Immigration Studies 2016), these languages are not seen as natural or desirable in the nation. This multilingual society faces issues regarding the acceptance of the different languages that make up its linguistic repertoire, as evidenced in the narratives of groups who are the target of language-based prejudice in different environments (Aceves et al. 2012; Ura et al. 2015; Valdés 2001). In the United States, language ideologies depict languages other than English as problematic and a symbol of non-conformity (Achúgar 2008; Achúgar and Oteiza 2009; García and Torres-Guevara 2010; Pavlenko 2002; Ricento 2005). Languages other than English are only seen as an asset when they represent the practices of White Americans, and monolingualism is only right when it is monolingualism in English (Flores and Rosa 2015, 2019; Schwartz and Boovy 2017). As a result, not only do Spanish speakers have inhibited opportunities to use Spanish, but also learners of Spanish have inhibited opportunities to be exposed to the language, from which they could benefit.

At school, the effects of language ideologies negatively portraying Spanish are further damaging to students. As a result of hegemonic language ideologies in the United States, according to which English is the natural choice in the country (Achúgar 2008), the educational system in Texas encourages the abandonment of Spanish and transition to English (Palmer 2011). Speakers have abandoned the use of Spanish even in bilingual programs as a result of teachers punishing students for using the language in class (Aceves et al. 2012), correcting their variety of Spanish

(McCollum 1999), or limiting opportunities for developing their home language. All of these actions may hinder academic success (Carreira 2013). The presence of ideologies depicting Spanish as deviant may result in several negative consequences for Spanish-speaking students and Spanish learners. For example, speakers of stigmatized languages are often seen as less intelligent (Giles et al. 1992). Another problem is that teachers may fail to provide speakers of languages other than English with the same opportunities as they provide other students, believing these speakers will not be able to take advantage of such opportunities (Walker et al. 2004). Language ideologies portraying Spanish negatively or English as superior to Spanish may have severe consequences for Spanish speakers and learners, especially in educational settings. Non-Spanish speaking students may not feel they can learn from such speakers or may think that their stigmatized language does not have any value. Therefore, educators must find ways to mitigate the effects of these language ideologies.

The portrayal of Spanish as inferior and its abandonment in the United States are not only detrimental for heritage Spanish speakers, but for English-dominant speakers as well. These ideologies may portray English as the only necessary language a speaker needs, which may lead students to forfeit language learning opportunities. Learning a second language has been linked to several advantages, from higher academic achievement (Cunningham and Graham 2000; Thomas et al. 1993) to more positive attitudes towards other languages and their speakers (McKenzie and Carrie 2018; Zeinivanda et al. 2015). Students may never achieve these benefits due to language ideologies portraying Spanish as unnecessary and inferior. Therefore, it is critical to find ways for students to question long-held language ideologies that lead them to neglect opportunities to learn Spanish in the United States (see also Thompson, this volume).

Unquestionably, educators must find ways to approach the issue of language ideologies portraying languages other than English negatively. They must find ways of exposing students to different realities and the characterization of languages other than English as positive and desirable. Through such efforts, Spanish-speaking students and Spanish learners can be allowed to understand the value of different linguistic practices, instead of acting according to harmful language ideologies and missing opportunities for language learning and maintenance. Programs like

Learn from the Experts teach students the value of different linguistic practices not only by legitimizing those practices through their adoption at school but also by presenting Spanish learners with facts about language that they can use to confront the language ideologies they have uncritically acquired throughout their lives.

Fostering Collaboration Between Experts in Different Languages

The program *Learn from the Experts* utilized service-learning (SL) methodology as a way to foster collaboration between English and Spanish learners while they also developed academic language. SL is a method of incorporating community outreach into educational experiences. Through SL, students may gain further understanding of and experience in their fields of study at the same time that they address needs identified in their communities and increase awareness of social responsibility through guided reflections of their experiences (Barreneche and Ramos-Flores 2013; Bringle and Hatcher 2000). According to the National Service-Learning Clearing House, SL programs have the potential to enrich the learning experience, teach civic responsibility, and strengthen communities (Ryan 2012). In sum, SL programs are an educational experience through which students develop a deeper comprehension of the class content at the same time that they develop social responsibility.

When applied to language programs, SL approaches may provide students with opportunities to engage with language users in different contexts, and, as a result, develop language skills that would be harder to acquire in traditional classrooms. Therefore, several programs all over the United States, as well as in other countries implement different forms of SL (Bringle et al. 2006; Cabo et al. 2017; Pellettieri 2011; Petrov 2013). Jorge (2006), for example, designed and implemented a language and culture learning program in which non-heritage language learners would visit Latinx families in a nearby community and engage in different conversations and activities with them. For the students, it allowed for language development and an enhanced understanding of sociocultural

issues. Families receiving students benefited from the broadening of their social relations with people from outside of their communities, the development of their self-worth and esteem, and financial compensation. In such programs, there are both short-term and long-term benefits for the university and the community. In SL programs, students serve the community, gain experience, and potentially become more aware of and engaged with finding solutions for the needs of their communities.

In an SL program designed for heritage language learners enrolled in a Spanish program, Cabo et al. (2017) had college students, following a previously designed lesson plan, teach Spanish to children in after-school programs. As a result of the program, some of the college students were able to ascertain their desire to become teachers, and all of the students gained experience as instructors. This program provided the college students with more opportunities to use Spanish outside of their homes, something they declared they did not do before, and boosted their linguistic confidence, particularly in public spaces. For the community, the benefits included learning Spanish and finding role models who are pursuing higher education. Petrov (2013) also reports on the teaching experiences her students, Spanish learners enrolled in a university, were able to achieve in an SL program in which the students served in different agencies that provide services for the Latinx community in Chicago. The author found that the students were able to practice their language and gain networking and interpersonal skills. The students in this program also reported that they were able to provide role models for other Latinxs in their community and act as evidence that Latinx students can go to college, which benefited the community. These programs are an essential source of development of a wide range of skills that students need to become global citizens engaged with the transformation of their communities into more socially just places.

Nevertheless, Leeman et al. (2013) have warned about a tendency of some SL programs to treat the community as a simple commodity to serve the interests of the language learners. In this commodification process, communities are interpreted as resources for language practice, rather than places with needs and aspirations. In this way, only students can benefit from such a relationship, and the benefits are not as robust as they can be in two-way relationships. Educators must avoid these types of

SL as they do not have the potential to promote sustainable community engagement. Burgo (2016) presented an exemplary illustration of how universities can implement SL programs to strengthen the connection of the university with the community by implementing a reciprocal model of tutoring. In this project, students enrolled in a US institution visited a Latinx community center once a week to teach English and American culture and, in exchange, learn the language and culture of Spanish speakers. This project, as well as others previously mentioned, models an effective way to exchange resources with the community, instead of treating it simply as a resource for language practice.

Many of the SL models developed so far that value Spanish speakers' linguistic practices lead the speakers to deem their language practices as assets, while also providing them with opportunities to practice the language and reflect on their role in the community. However, these SL models lack fundamental principles that are crucial for developing a more objective view of language and gaining a more critical view of how speakers' linguistic practices may be used for the discrimination and exclusion of certain groups. Most of the current models of SL for language teaching focus either on language learning or on sociocultural awareness. For some communities, however, this may not be feasible since school personnel may not understand the importance of a program whose goal is to raise speakers' objective view of language. The program *Learn from the Experts* offered academic language development for English and Spanish learners, while also creating conditions for language learners to understand and criticize relationships between different linguistic practices and power in our society. The following section presents how the program *Learn from the Experts* led participants to the demystification of long-held linguistic ideologies portraying Spanish as inferior to English while serving the community's language learning needs by applying an SL approach as a form of fostering collaboration between experts in different languages.

The Program

In the fall semester of 2018, the SL program *Learn from the Experts* was implemented as a partnership between a Hispanic-Serving university in South Texas and a public high school in the same community. In the program, each participant contributed with their expertise (i.e., their linguistic practices). Besides the advantage of having students being tutored by more experienced speakers, this practice also served as a way to bolster a traditionally marginalized group by showing them how university students need and want to learn something in which they are the experts. The goals of the program were to promote proficiency in academic Spanish and English through collaborative learning processes between college students learning Spanish and high school students learning English, while also demystifying ideologies portraying Spanish as inferior to English. Thus, lessons in the program were built around themes concerning language ideologies, language and power, and language policy.

In this program, high school English learners met one-on-one once a week for ten weeks with novice-low Spanish students (ACTFL 2012) from the university to help each other with their needs in learning English and Spanish. The program also included monitors, that is, Spanish majors who participated in designing and teaching lessons and monitoring the interactions among the members of each group to guarantee smooth communications and collaborations. While all Spanish learners in the program were novice-low, having no functional ability or communication skills in the language, (ACTFL 2012), the group of English learners was heterogeneous in their English speaking and writing and Spanish writing proficiency, as displayed in a pre-assessment conducted with each student individually.

The program was an extra credit opportunity for all students involved. Non-Spanish-speaking university students received extra credit towards their Spanish class, while Spanish-speaking high school students received additional credit towards the English classes in which they were enrolled. Each semester, the Spanish instructors at the university advertised the program in their classes and explained that enrollment and participation

were voluntary and that they could earn up to 15% of the course grade from participating in the program. The teachers at the high school identified the English learners they believed could benefit from the program. Then, the *Learn from the Experts* program coordinator, who is also the author, had a one-on-one meeting with each of the students to explain how the program works, ask if they wanted to participate, and, if they indicated that they wanted to participate, assess their speaking and writing skills.

The students were constantly encouraged to communicate using whatever linguistic practices with which they were comfortable, while they also expanded their linguistic repertoire. Appreciation for the minoritized language was a crucial goal of the program. Because the heritage speakers were speakers of Spanish, having them as the experts teaching university students Spanish fostered appreciation for the linguistic practices of a traditionally marginalized group. At the same time, English-speaking Spanish learners used their developing resources in Spanish to communicate with Spanish speakers. This way, they were exposed to new practices in Spanish while they were also asked to confront facts about language with their long-held language ideologies.

The Spanish-speaking English learners were late arrivals to the United States from different Spanish-speaking countries. The program was built to support their bilingual development by recognizing the linguistic assets they brought with them and to help them understand the value of the linguistic assets they had to offer to the program. The program also considered the translanguaging nature of their linguistic practices. In other words, the program applied a pedagogy that allows students to deploy and leverage their full linguistic repertoire. The decision to apply the translanguaging pedagogy to the program was based on the fact that, besides speaking Spanish from birth, the heritage Spanish-speaking students live in a city where 36.9% of the population speak a language other than English at home (U.S. Census 2018). Additionally, these students are exposed to English at school, adding to their linguistic repertoire.

Lessons in Action

The lessons focused primarily on leading participants to contest prejudices students may have about their own and others' linguistic practices. The themes for most lessons came from monitors' suggestions after working with the students and encountering specific issues about which they wish students were more critical. One example is present in the lesson *Language Myths We Live By*, a lesson developed by the author with the help of the monitors. In this lesson, each Spanish learner received a piece of paper with a language myth such as: "Young people are destroying proper English and proper Spanish," "You need to study grammar to claim you know a language," and "Some languages have no grammar." Each English learner received a fact about language contrasting one of the myths the Spanish learners received, such as "Languages change all the time, and different generations use different variations of the same ever-evolving language," "All speakers of a language have intrinsic and implicit knowledge about how it works," and "Every language has its own grammar or set of rules and speakers' linguistic practices follow those rules." The program coordinator asked each student to write if they agreed or disagreed with the statement they had and to think of an example that proved or disproved it. The program coordinator and the monitors walked around the room, asking if students needed any help understanding the sentences or writing their opinions and examples.

When students were done, the program coordinator, who is also the author, explained that in our society, we have ideas in which most speakers believe and that guide how we think and act concerning other speakers and their ways of speaking, but that these ideas are not necessarily correct. She gave an example of how Spanish in the United States is considered a foreign language even though it is the home language of around 13% of the population. She then asked students to decide if the statements they received in the beginning of the class were language myths or language facts. Students were then asked to find the statement that contradicted the statement they had. In other words, if they were given a myth, they needed to find the student who had the fact contrapositing their statement. When they found their partner, they were asked to work

with that partner and explain what a language myth was and why the specific myth they had was not a fact. They were also asked to think about how believing in such a myth could be harmful to some speakers. During the activity, Spanish learners needed to rely on the Spanish speaker's linguistic knowledge to complete the task. In addition, English learners needed to rely on the English speaker's linguistic knowledge to write in English. Monitors walked around the room, offering help and making sure students were not merely completing the task in the language with which they were more comfortable.

In all activities, each member of the group had shared responsibility with and was dependent on others to complete their tasks. As students worked on the project, they needed to discuss and plan what they wanted to write in Spanish and English. While they wrote the Spanish portion, college students needed the help of the high school students' linguistic knowledge. Since the experts in this situation were the high school students, this interaction may have demonstrated to all involved the value of Spanish.

Because several of the university students mentioned to the program coordinator that several of the high school students had been victims of linguistic prejudice at school, the coordinator and monitors designed a lesson based on the short story "Es que duele" (It's that it hurts) from the book *Y no se lo tragó la tierra* (And the Earth did not Devour Him) by Tomás Rivera. The lesson included an activity in which the groups read the adapted short story with the help of each other (since it is a bilingual short story) and then participated in a guided discussion. The discussion was guided with questions such as, "Is the problem that the main character is facing one that students from schools in our community face?" and "Who decides who has an accent or which language is appropriate in each situation?"

After some discussion, the students concluded that accents and language conventions are arbitrary and do not respect matters of social justice. As the students discussed the short story, the monitor in charge of the lesson, a Spanish major from the university, wrote the keywords and expressions students mentioned on the board. The students were then given informative flyers from different programs whose objective was to inform the population and solve or prevent a problem. For example, one

of the brochures informed the reader about workers' rights. Another one of the flyers brought information about LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer or questioning) rights. The program coordinator asked students to describe the structure of the texts they saw. They mentioned that all of the flyers brought concise details on what the problem was, as well as suggestions of what victims could do. The program coordinator then asked students to design a bilingual flyer raising awareness of language prejudice.

As illustrated, all lessons in the program followed the principles of valuing Spanish, teaching participants to appreciate the language, and promoting collaboration between learners and experts in a language. The practices rooted in the principles of the program offered support to the students' linguistic development, which is likely to advance their linguistic and academic achievement (Cummins 2000). Students in the program had the opportunity to develop not only skills in another language but also to develop as bilingual speakers who can efficiently communicate in the different contexts in which they socialize and understand language variation and ideologies. Through programs such as *Learn from the Experts*, emerging bilinguals receive support in the language that they are learning, while also understanding that their linguistic knowledge is necessary for other students.

Conclusion

This chapter presents a model for an SL program that can be implemented in partnerships between universities and high schools to support academic language development and foster a more critical view of language ideologies and appreciation for Spanish among the participants. The decision to design and implement the program *Learn from the Experts* resulted from the observation that college students learning Spanish had limited or no opportunities to develop their skills in Spanish outside of the classroom despite living in communities with high percentages of Spanish speakers, as is the case for many cities in Texas. At the same time, high school students learning English in those same communities could also benefit from more exposition to English. Moreover, previous

literature has reported on the negative impact that language ideologies may have on languages and its speakers and learners. In the face of the opportunities such reality offers, this chapter presented a program model through which students learning different languages could collaborate as experts in their own languages, acquire an additional language, and be guided through questioning their own language ideologies.

The program was designed based on the goals of demystifying long-held linguistic ideologies portraying Spanish as inferior to English in the United States and applying an SL approach as a form of fostering collaboration between experts in different languages. Language ideologies, the systems of values that lead speakers to assign different levels of importance to different linguistic practices, may influence which opportunities learners decide to use. In the United States, learners may forfeit opportunities to learn Spanish due to ubiquitous ideologies according to which English is the only language speakers need to know (Achúgar and Oteiza 2009; Pavlenko 2002). In the program, lessons were planned so that participants understood the bias and prejudice behind these language ideologies and the benefits of knowing more than one language. This was implemented through activities that fostered participants' critical view of language ideologies.

Another principle the program followed is the application of an SL approach. College students who participated in the program had the opportunity to serve English learners in their community and reflect on the importance of such work. They took on the role of language experts who taught English to English learners, while also being learners benefiting from experts in another language. The collaboration between the groups learning different languages also helped the Spanish speakers understand the value of their language to others in the community.

Programs like *Learn from the Experts* have the potential to not only benefit college students learning Spanish but also support schools in addressing emerging bilinguals' linguistic and academic needs, which should enable them to benefit more from their schooling experience. Because this model places Spanish speakers learning English as language experts and presents them with university students who want or need to learn their language, it raises awareness about and appreciation for their linguistic practices. The university students who engage in this model of

learning can also benefit since participation provides them with exposure to and tutoring in the language that they are learning. The process also exposes them to a reality with which they may not have been familiar and, thus, fosters civic responsibility. Moreover, programs like *Learn from the Experts* have the potential to make students aware that Spanish is an essential linguistic practice, and this understanding has the potential to lead society to view this practice as an asset in the education of English and Spanish speakers in the United States.

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