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## **Interlingualism: The Language of Chicanos/as**

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## CHAPTER FOUR

### Interlingualism: The Language of Chicanos/as

*Lilia De Katzew, California State University, Stanislaus*

Interlingualism, what we could call the language of Chicanos/as, is one of the most significant features that reveals their sense of identity in the United States. Chicanos/as' use of interlingualism reflects and influences the dynamic of their cultural, educational, socioeconomic and geo-historical experiences. Thus, the Chicano/a experience is constantly re-transformed and revitalized by their specific use of interlingualism, which is a blend and juxtaposition of Spanish and English often appearing in “subtle fusions of grammar, syntax, or cross-cultural allusions. Interlingualism is a linguistic practice highly sensitive to the context of speech acts, able to shift add-mixtures of languages according to situational needs or the effects desired” (Bruce-Novoa 50).

This linguistic practice rejects the argument of maintaining Spanish and English separate in exclusive codes, but rather it sees them “as reservoirs of primary material to be molded together as needed, naturally, in the manner of common speech” (Bruce-Novoa 50). Interlingualism is the “form of expression that is the true native language of Chicano communities, even if some members of the communities speak only English or only Spanish” (Bruce-Novoa 50). Interlingualism, however, differs from code-switching in that the latter “is a particular type of verbal interaction

characteristic of bilingual populations in the midst of social change” (Sánchez, *Chicano Discourse* 139) and is studied “to understand why people who are *competent in two languages* alternate languages in a particular conversation or situation” [emphasis added] (Reyes 77).

The purpose of this article is to provide a better understanding of interlingualism as the language of Chicanos/as. I first establish the lack of understanding and rejection of the Chicano language by institutions of higher education. I then analyze the syncretic process of interlingualism. I do so by looking at the historical, geographic, socioeconomic, political, educational, and cultural factors that have informed this process. I conclude by circling back to the role that educational institutions have thus far played in subtracting and denying legitimacy to the Chicano language that has consequently, negatively affected Chicanas/os’ sense of identity. I argue for the need to train educators to be culturally literate and sensitive and to understand the importance of interlingualism.

Chicanos/as’ use of interlingualism conveys a tension experienced due to living between two hegemonic linguistic and cultural worlds—Mexico and the U.S.—and moving between two languages— Spanish and English. A clear example of that tension can be found in the historical rejection of the Chicano/a language by most university language departments, specifically when they regard it as hybrid since English and Spanish are blended and often incorporate an array of Spanish expressions or words which reflect centuries’-old Spanish colloquialisms, pre-Columbian words, Caló, pachuquismos, linguistic expressions brought by recent rural Mexican immigrants, as well as invented or deconstructed English words which have been phonetically tailored to a Spanish sound (González 350-355; Mazón 2-5; Ortega 1-9; Hernández 9-16; Sánchez, *Chicano Discourse* 91, 128-130). Spanish language departments regard Chicanos/as’ language as bad language. It is perceived as an affront to the purity of Castilian Spanish and “it has been labeled as substandard or incorrect” (Hernández 19) and as a deteriorated dialect that is not acceptable to the Hispanic world (Campa 226).

Linguist Adolfo Ortega points out that Spanish language programs often over-stress the “correct language, at the expense of the ‘vernacular,’”

which he argues “may result in high-sounding or stilted speech to those concerned more for the message communicated than for the manner of communication” (Preface). Ortega further reveals that “today, grammatical ‘purists’ believe that Southwestern Spanish has little value and even less comprehensibility” (Preface). He posits, “Language, as it exists in a social setting, embodies the ‘life signs’ of a people with a common history, culture and mobility” (Preface).

Literary scholar Juan Bruce-Novoa argues that rejection of interlingualism also comes about because “the space between the languages is a forbidden zone of neither this nor that. Those who practice a type of speech located in the zone of mixture are linguistic outlaws for the purists at either pole” (33). Bruce-Novoa also holds that much of this rejection is based on the fact that linguistic science and structuralism have not only greatly influenced our cultural thought, but are also both examples of the intrinsic negativity found in binary constructs, where terms are defined by what they are not. Languages, therefore, are opposed in pairs, “and to be bilingual is to switch codes from one to another, not to mix them. Anything less than a complete jump from one pole to the other is termed ‘interference’” (33).

This rejection has in turn strengthened Chicano/a authors in their objective to preserve the language of Chicanos. Interlingualism can be found in most of the contemporary Chicano/a literature when “some Chicano/a writers write in English with Spanish words and phrases and others write in Spanish with English words and phrases” (De Katzew 111). For example, Tomás Rivera’s *...y no se lo tragó la tierra*, Rolando Hinojosa’s *Estampas del Valle*, Miguel Méndez’ *Peregrinos de Aztlán*, Alejandro Morales’ *Caras Viejas y Vino Nuevo*, and Erlinda Gonzales-Berry’s *Paletitas de Guayaba* are literary works written in Spanish with some interlingualism. On the other hand, other literary works such as Rodolfo Anaya’s *Bless Me*, *Ultima*, Estela Portillo Trambley’s *Rain of Scorpions*, Ron Arias’ *The Road to Tamazunchale*, Sandra Cisneros’ *Woman Hollering Creek*, *The House On Mango Street* and *Caramelo*, and Victor Villaseñor’s *Burro Geniuis*—among others—are written in English while incorporating some interlinguistic elements.

Not surprisingly, then, the purpose of these authors according to De Katzew is “to record Chicanos’ oral traditions in order to preserve them in a written form for future generations of Chicanos/as” (138). Moreover, their works reflect the importance of language as a feature of Chicano/a identity, which has put Chicanos/as at odds with an Anglo majority, especially since interlingualism has been characterized as inferior or as a hybrid from a purist binary perspective (De Katzew 138-9). And yet, the “hybrid” characteristic, or the “supposedly” impurity of the Chicano/a language reflects the cultural and racial hybridity of Chicanos/as, their *mestizaje*. Significantly, one of the most powerful messages that the Chicano Movement sent to all Chicanos was to take pride in their identity as *mestizos*—to find dignity in their hybridity—for in it lies the history, the culture, and the spirit of Chicanos/as (De Katzew 220-222).

Juan Bruce-Novoa maintains that interlingualism “is the true native language of Chicano communities” (50) and Gloria Anzaldúa echoes this statement when she says that language reflects life and that the Chicano language is not incorrect, that “it is a living language” (77). Anzaldúa expounds:

For a people who are neither Spanish nor live in a country in which Spanish is the first language; for a people who live in a country in which English is the reigning tongue but who are not Anglo; for a people who cannot entirely identify with neither standard (formal, Castilian) Spanish nor standard English, what recourse is left to them but create their own language? A language in which they can connect their identity to, one capable of communicating the realities and values true to themselves—a language with terms that are neither español ni inglés, but both. We speak patois, a forked tongue, a variation of two languages (77).

With 25 million Mexican Americans in the U.S., according to the 2000 U.S. Census, (U.S. Department of Commerce *The Hispanic Population in the United States*), the number of people in Chicano communities using an interlingual mode of expression is likely to be high. The use of interlingualism can also be found in the media in Spanish. Univision and Telemundo, the two major Spanish language chains, have grown expo-

nentially since the mid-1970s and Latino viewership has “catapulted Univision’s six o’clock news program into the lead” (Whisler and Nuiry qtd. in Hayes-Bautista 109). In California alone, where Chicanas/os comprise at least 77 percent of the Latino population, there are at least fifteen television stations transmitting in Spanish (Hayes-Bautista 109) and employing interlingualism.

Interlingualism is then, “based upon syncretism, because the merging of Spanish and English reflects the historical and cultural synthesis of Chicanos’ Mexican and United States experiences into one environment” (De Katzew 110). As Octavio Paz points out, “the word syncretism says everything” (349) because all cultures are in a process of continuous change, feeding on the ruins of other cultures, much like “idols behind the altars” (Anita Bremen qtd. in Paz 439). Paz further elaborates this argument when he writes about the Spaniards who reached Mexico and encountered the Aztec society:

The version of Western civilization that reached Mexico was also syncretist. On the one hand there was Catholic syncretism that had assimilated Greco-Latin antiquity and the gods of the Orientals [sic] and barbarians; on the other hand, was Spanish syncretism. Centuries of struggle with Islam had permeated the religious conscience of Spaniards: the notion of crusade and holy war is Christian but also deeply Moslem (345).

Thus, the syncretic nature of language reflects continuous cultural changes linking past cultural nuances with present ones. Language, then, becomes a cultural tool with which individuals learn to communicate with each other. Not surprisingly, language is profoundly connected to identity. This connection implies that language is not only a way of speaking, of using words. A leading Mexican essayist, literary critic, poet, scholar, and diplomat, Alfonso Reyes argues that language is “a way of thinking, an implicit or explicit judgment of reality” (qtd. in Paz 164). Therefore, language not only conveys who we are, but it also expresses our own nature and reflects the soul of a nation, of a people (Paz 164).

Language, then, is not a static, rigidly bound form of communication.

“Words,” according to translation studies scholar Rainer Schulte, “have the potential of expanding boundaries of their lexical meanings and dynamics of semantic possibilities through their specific contextual placement” (xi). Schulte argues that there are hardly any changes of human emotions from one culture to another; what changes is how these emotions are placed within the natural environment of a country or a group (xiv). Language therefore is organic, fluid, and dynamic. As Octavio Paz beautifully puts it, it is “sounds and symbols, inanimate design and sheer magic, clockworks and a living organism” (165). Thus, the history and life experiences of people demand the creation of a form that will express their interpretation of their relationship with all others (Paz 165).

Interlingualism reflects Chicanos/as’ syncretic experience as U.S. citizens of Mexican descent in their process of acculturation, assimilation and/or resistance. This process began after the annexation of over half of Mexico’s territories by the U.S. as a consequence of the mid-19th century U.S. – Mexico War. At that time approximately 80,000 Mexicans inhabited the territories (Meier & Rivera 70)—now the U.S. Southwest—and the dialectical balance of their syncretic experiences as U.S. citizens of Mexican descent spilled into their language when English became the official language of their former country. Not surprisingly, the process of language deconstruction and reconstruction reflects the dialectic dynamic of how Chicanos/as translate their environment by continuously adding English and Spanish words into the syncretic equation of their language.

Although Caló and pachuquismos became more known in the 20th century, there were other distinctive speech patterns used by a Chicano/a population after the U.S. - Mexico War that had fallen in disuse in Spain by the latter 1500s as well as colloquialisms and misspelled words (De León 135). Historian Andrés A. Tijerina found in official correspondence between Tejanos of Mexican Texas some examples of terms which, by the end of the 16th century, were no longer used in Spain, such as *asina*, *ansi*, *naiden*, *lamber*, *trujo*, *escuro*, *vide*, *anque*, *adrede*, and *dijieron* among others (qtd. in De León 135). Tijerina also found modified words as part of the common vocabulary to suit the Texan uniqueness: *mesta* became *mesteña* and was later transitioned in pronunciation to *mestango* (65-78); *pelinegro* was altered to *pelegrino* and was used as a term of contempt of

the Anglo colonization in the 1820s and 1830s (qtd. in De León 135). Several White observers from that time called this language pattern “Mexi,” a Spanish patois which was widely different from the pure Castilian spoken by the Spanish (De León 135).

The survival of 16th century words and speech patterns used by Chicanos/as can be traced back to the segregation practices experienced by Chicano communities after the U.S. – Mexico War. Segregation and marginalization influenced Chicanos’ speech patterns when they found “[their] lands gone, [their] religion seriously challenged, and [themselves] citizen[s] of a country whose language, laws, and social customs [they] did not understand” (Meier & Rivera 72). Spanish had become the language of the conquered and as such a new campaign to remove it from the public schools ensued, fueled by a nativist phenomenon that overtook the new U.S. Republic during the Americanization process (San Miguel 43). English-only policies “discouraged, inhibited, or prohibited the use of Spanish. In some cases, language designation was usually accompanied by discriminatory legislation against the minorities who spoke the language” (San Miguel 43).

Yet, Spanish was still spoken at home and some old distinctive speech patterns, expressions, and words were preserved because no new Spanish was being taught in schools (Valencia 7; Gonzales, María Dolores 21-24). Also the lack of any significant Mexican immigration during that time period halted the introduction of new Spanish speech patterns, words, and linguistic expressions to the Mexican American/Chicano population. Historian Guadalupe San Miguel, Jr. points out that although Spanish was banned from the public schools (from 1870 to the early 1890s), Mexican Americans from New Mexico, Texas, and California consistently resisted such legislation (43-51).

In the 20th century the “process of Americanization, English immersion, and the generally negative perception of the Mexican culture continued to guide education” (González Gilbert 73), a process that strongly relied on “IQ testing and heavy tracking into industrial education” (González Gilbert 73). Still, interlingualism survived and was retransformed, fueled by a continuous flow of Spanish-speaking Mexican immigrants who

entered the U.S. in increasingly large numbers before and after the turn of the 20th century. These immigrants were pulled out from Mexico to supply the labor demands of the burgeoning U.S. industrial society. Furthermore, over one million Mexican immigrants crossed over into the U.S. fleeing the 1910 Mexican Revolution (Meier and Rivera 123).

Even when Mexican immigration slowed as a result of the 1930s Great Depression, interlingualism was enriched by speech patterns found in the Caló that was practiced by a growing Mexican American population. According to Ortega, the linguistic roots of Caló can be traced to Spain's Golden Age, approximately from 1474 to 1640 (1). "Caló," like interlingualism, was a defiant sociolinguistic vernacular expression that emerged from the socially oppressed in Spain, and includes a diversity of influences such as the language of the Andalusian gypsies which had absorbed characteristics of other languages, including Arabic and Hebrew (Mazón 3; Kiraithe in Ortega, foreword ). Brought to the New World, Caló expanded with the linguistic contributions of "the indigenous peoples of the Americas, the shifts in meaning in words and phrases which already form part of Spanish lexicon and the contributions of English, as well as the words and phrases which appear to be *inventions* of Caló speakers" (Ortega ii).

Caló was transmitted by Mexican immigrants coming from the border towns, as well as from the central plateau states of Jalisco, Michoacán, and Mexico City. In their northbound trajectory, Mexican immigrants brought Caló to El Paso, Texas, historically one of the entrance points to the U.S. Southwest as well as the clearing house for Mexican labor. Caló later fused with the borderland Spanish and with the English language, acquiring new meanings and "shifting into new designations, such as Pachuco" (Ortega 10).

Pachuco language became a private language, an in-group argot exclusively spoken and understood by Pachucos. For Mexicans the Pachuco was a *pochó*, a U.S. born Mexican but alien to the U.S. and Mexican cultures and "fluent in neither Spanish nor English; a specialist in Caló, the argot of lumpen elements—an ideal subject for ethnocentric apologies or chauvinist attacks" (Mazón 5). Octavio Paz originally perceived the

Pachucos as youths of Mexican origin who belonged to gangs and could be identified by their language, behavior and distinctive clothing. The Pachuco, Paz argued, “has lost his whole inheritance: language, religion, customs, beliefs...Having been cut off from his traditional culture, he asserts himself as a solitary and challenging figure. He denies both the society from which he originated and that of North America” (15-17). Historian Mauricio Mazón states more explicitly that in “Mexico the Pachuco was perceived as a caricature of the American, while in the United States the Pachuco was proof of Mexican degeneracy” (5).

The Pachuco language became a language of resistance linked to “the movement of Mexicans from rural to urban centers, to a generational rebellion against both Mexican and American culture, to the influx of drugs, and to an enduring legacy of discrimination” (Mazón 4). According to Professor Rafael J. González, the “Pachuco dialect is mainly composed of Caló (the jargon of the Spanish gypsy much used by bullfighters), Hispanicized English, Anglicized Spanish, and words of pure invention, interspersed with words from the Nahuatl and archaic Spanish and held together by faulty Spanish sentence construction and grammar” (350).

This Pachuco subculture and language came about as the result of a dialectical and syncretic process in which the rebellion against both Mexican and U.S. cultures created a subculture that was different, defiant, marginal, and hybrid. The syncretic and hybrid elements of the exclusive Pachuco language can be traced back to fifteenth century Spain, according to historian Mauricio Mazón. He argues that the “pachuco youth of Los Angeles and the Southwest, however impoverished, were the heirs of a linguistic and therefore cultural tradition originating in fifteenth century Spain” (3). Not surprisingly, “when the batos of East Los Angeles talked about *la julia*, they meant to evoke the dread of the paddy wagon shared by their continental predecessors. And when the batos talked about calcos, most were probably oblivious of the fact that gitanos used the same words for shoes” (Mazón 3).

Thus the survival and evolution of the language of Chicanos/as—in spite of anti-Spanish language policies in the U.S.—can be traced to different geo-historical, economic, cultural, migratory, and educational patterns.

Even though generations of Chicano children in many urban areas of the U.S. Southwest (such as Los Angeles and San Antonio) were socialized only in English and lost much of the Spanish language in the process, they retained a level of interlingualism rooted in a linguistic historical memory in words such as *jefa* and *jefe* (mom, dad), *cantón* (home), *afilerear* (to knife), *la chota* (police), *calcos* (shoes), *carnales* (brothers or like-brothers), *feria* (money), *riatazos* (beating), *camotazos* (fights) or in expressions such as *puro pedo* (bullshit), *aguiluchas truchas* (watch out), a *chingadazos* or *chingazos* (submission by violence), *está a toda madre* (cool, great), *ahí te watcho* (I'll see you), and many others. Other clusters of Chicano populations in rural areas in South Texas, New Mexico, Colorado, California and some urban areas of New Mexico and Texas clung to Spanish as a unifying community factor that reinforced their identity and illustrated their resistance in the face of segregation and of racial and discriminatory practices that hindered their economic and educational opportunities.

With the great wave of Mexican immigration in the 1960s, the syncretic nature of interlingualism expanded when Spanish was reinforced and subsequently transformed by adding “loanwords.” Scholar Rosaura Sánchez explains that loanwords are “present in all languages of the worlds...The Spanish of Latin America and Spain include a number of loanwords from English. Only the degree of borrowing in the Southwest is higher, given the more intimate contact with the English language” (*Chicano Spanish* 234) in words such as *weekend*, *farm workers*, *kindergarten*, *hamburger*, and others. The borrowing of English words into new Caló linguistic nuances, what Rafael J. González identifies as “Hispanization of English words into Spanish nouns and verbs” (352), is a frequent linguistic process that is found in examples such as *trocas* for trucks, *dompe* for dump, *parkear* for parking, *fuliar* for to fool, and others. The Caló practiced in the Southwest is greatly influenced and regenerated by the continuous Mexican immigration coming from Mexico City, the central plateau, and from the poverty stricken rural Mexican communities.

Geography, as Octavio Paz frequently said, is the mother of history, and U.S. labor demands have lured Mexican immigration to the U.S. over a century. Mexican immigrants reinforce language (Spanish), religion, and

Mexican traditions in the Mexican American/Chicano communities. The impact of this continuous stream of Mexican immigration to the U.S. has also shifted the demographic, socioeconomic, and political realities of this nation. The recent 2006 immigrant marches uncovered those realities when millions of undocumented immigrants came out of the shadows to protest federal legislation proposals that would build more walls along the U.S.-Mexico border, make felons of all undocumented migrants and “make helping illegal immigrants a crime” (Prergamon 18A).

“Of the estimated 10.3 million unauthorized migrants who live in the U.S....57 percent comes from Mexico” (PEW Hispanic Center qtd. in Wagner 1A). Altogether, undocumented immigrants who make up about 4.6 percent of the total U.S. work force are mostly located throughout the Southwest and Florida. They are an economic force that generates billions of dollars worth of labor that feeds the U.S. underground economy. The worth of this shadow economy has been estimated at “about 970 billion dollars, or almost nine percent of all goods and services that are produced by the real economy” (Barron’s qtd. in Wagner 1A+). What is very significant is that most undocumented Mexican immigrants coming to the U.S. are young adults (Hayes-Bautista 8) who soon join the labor force while finding a home within the local Mexican American communities. As soon as cross-generational intermarriages occur between Mexican immigrants and more acculturated Mexican Americans, interlingualism evolves regionally and is constantly recreated by new generations, thus producing linguistic nuances that are still in the making.

Still, the ongoing debate today among academics in language departments and public school educators about Chicano/a Spanish speakers is still centered around the criticism that although the Spanish language has survived in the U.S. Southwest, it has done so “despite all the imperfections that characterize it today” (Campa 219) and only as a dialect “plagued with Anglicisms and syntactical forms derived from the English language” (Campa 226). Many argue that its use is counterproductive because it does not preserve “the Spanish language as an instrument of communication among Mexicans, Hispanos, and Chicanos” (Campa 226). Furthermore, the argument goes, in order to respond to attempts to reinstate the Spanish language among an ever-growing Mexican American population

in the U.S. Southwest, quality should come up to standardized expectations, namely, “use a language that is understandable and acceptable to both the Spanish-speaking and the English speaking world” (Campa 226).

According to this argument, the standardization of Spanish would consequently link all Spanish speakers in the U.S. given the fact that Spanish is the second language most spoken in the U.S. From the approximate 47 million Americans ages 5 and older who use a language other than English, Spanish is the language mostly spoken, according to a 2003 U.S. Census Population Report (U.S. Department of Commerce *Language Use, English Ability, and Linguistic Isolation*). This data reflects the demographic reality of a Latino population that is now the largest ethnic minority in the U.S. and of which people of Mexican descent comprise at least 66.9 percent (U.S. Department of Commerce *The Hispanic Population in the United States*).

While “academic/standard” Spanish ought to be taught in the schools, teachers of Chicano/a students need to understand that the Chicano language is vital, valid, and that it is to be recognized as a language used as a way of *communication* by millions of people in the United States, especially in the Southwest. Furthermore, Chicano children should not be put down for their use of Chicano language or interlingualism. As is, since the nineteenth century, the Americanization process in the U.S. has subtracted the Spanish language and Mexican culture from the public schools’ curricula.

This has had a cumulative negative impact on generations of Chicanas/os’ sense of identity because they cannot find themselves mirrored in the socio-historical fabric of the U.S.; they have been linguistically and culturally marginalized and regarded as “aliens” or “foreigners,” as the “others.” In addition, the pervasive legacy of deficit thinking has vindicated the system and its institutions and blamed the victims (Pearl 341). The many variations of deficit thinking based on heredity or cultural deprivation, environmental deficit or flawed character development has translated not only into Chicanos/as “unequal encouragement to succeed in the classroom” (Pearl 341), but also on a negative sense of identity given their experiences with institutional and socio-historical marginalization of Chicano/a language, culture, ethnicity, race, class, and gender.

Poet, writer, and scholar Gloria Anzaldúa illustrates how Chicanas/os' identities are affected by what she calls "linguistic terrorism"—the suppression of the mother tongue while crossing cultural and linguistic borders:

Chicanas who grew up speaking Chicano Spanish have internalized the belief that we speak poor Spanish. It is illegitimate, a bastard language ... Pena. Shame. Low estimation of self. In childhood we are told that our language is wrong. Repeated attacks on our native tongue diminish our sense of self. The attacks continue throughout our lives (80).

Anzaldúa argues that "ethnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity" (81). This idea is best captured by her words: "I am my language" (81). Language, therefore, is a critical variable to one's sense of identity because, as Rosaura Sánchez points out, language is for Chicanos/as "a sign of community, a product of the community, a reflection-refraction of the material culture of the community" (*Chicano Discourse* 17-18). Overcoming "linguistic terrorism," will, then, be possible when educators are trained to be culturally and linguistically sensitive and literate.

Today, the reality is that we still find a great number of educators who are culturally and linguistically illiterate despite constructive efforts otherwise. For instance, the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) has expressed concern since the early 1970s "about a tendency in American society to categorize nonstandard dialects as corrupt, inferior, or distorted forms of standard English, rather than as distinct linguistic systems, and the prejudicial labeling of students that resulted from this view" (NCTE Position Statement). One of its constituent groups, the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) has attempted to bring about teachers' respect and understanding of students' dialects and cultural diversity. In 1972 the CCCC Executive Committee passed a resolution on "students' rights to their own patterns and varieties of language" in which they strongly urged teachers to "have the experiences and training that will enable them to respect diversity and uphold the right of students to their own language" (*Students'* 3).

Yet, according to Professor of Education, community activist, and scholar Leodoro Hernández, many language departments still actively engage in denying any legitimacy to interlingualism, the language of Chicanas/os. He states that in his 28 years as an educator, he has found that Spanish language departments in particular have not acknowledged interlingualism, the language of Chicanos/as, as a legitimate situational language; rather, it is regarded as a bastardized dialect at best. According to Hernández, the expectations for Chicano/a students have been to reject anything that does not fit Castilian Spanish.

Such expectations deeply affect Chicano/a students' sense of positive identity: not only is the language that they, their parents, and their community speak not socially recognized, but it also carries an academic/institutional stigma. Moreover, Hernández frequently encountered Spanish language departments that downgraded Mexican literature as well by identifying it as "non-canonical" when it was compared to Iberian literature. Ironically, Hernández was invariably asked by school administrators and Chicana/o students to be the keynote speaker at Chicano commencement ceremonies since, unlike his colleagues who spoke Castilian Spanish, he had the ability to effectively communicate with the Chicana/o graduates and their parents because he "was able to speak the same way as Chicanas/os do; that is, [he] spoke the language of Chicanos/as" (Hernández, personal interviews). Hernández argues that variations in language (dialects) are a normal organic process. He maintains that as a result of the historic isolation which occurred in the U.S. Southwest, the manner of communicating in one geographic area gains more prestige than the dialects developed in other areas. The greater the prestige the more desirable it becomes to learn or use the dialect. However, greater prestige is not the same as universal appropriateness. In the case of Chicanos/as, the "standard Spanish" from Spain (Castilian) or even from Mexico has been imposed by many as the power dialect and anything less than that has been labeled as substandard and incorrect. Interlingualism has thus been identified as the language spoken by the uneducated.

Educators have missed an important principle that if two or more people communicate, their language system has validity (Hernández 18-19). In the U.S. Southwest millions of people use interlingualism and their sys-

tem of communication is legitimate for their purposes. In fact, public servants who work in *barrios* are inadequately trained when they study only the “standard” Spanish (Hernández 18-19). Therefore, it is important to recognize the validity and use of the vernacular Chicano language—interlingualism—not just that of standard Spanish. Validation of interlingualism, however, will only be possible if educators are trained to re-read the multicultural experiences of their diverse student populations. Ultimately, educators must be not only culturally sensitive, but also culturally literate. Paulo Freire puts it best when he argues that “the successful usage of the students’ cultural universe requires respect and legitimation of students’ discourses, that is, their own linguistic codes, which are different but never inferior. Educators also have to respect and understand students’ dreams and expectations” (127).

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