

TRENDS IN SPANISH LANGUAGE CAPABILITY AMONG IMMIGRANT CHILDREN:
EFFECTS ON EVANGELISM

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ABSTRACT

One challenge for multicultural congregational outreach is the language barrier. Spanish is a growing language in the United States and is also on the rise within WELS congregations. As the church works with Latinos, it is unwise to assume that the Spanish language will always be the default mode of operation. Although immigrants will continue to come to the United States, there has been a shift in the growth of the Hispanic population. The majority of Latinos living in the United States have been born here. These generations that have been born in the U.S. also have their own preference and ability when it comes to speaking Spanish. This thesis looks at the data that has been collected throughout the U.S. shows the trends in Spanish-speaking capability among the subsequent generations of immigrant children. Once these trends are observed and factors determined, the church can have a better idea how to reach out to U.S.-born Latinos with the gospel.

INTRODUCTION

A pastor receives a call to a new, up-and-coming suburb to start an exploratory mission. As he sits down at his computer to do a demographic survey of his new mission field, he notices sixty-nine percent of the population identify themselves as Latino.¹ He excitedly begins to think about how he can reach out to the Hispanic population in his area. He plans on translating his welcome letter into Spanish, thinks about how he needs to develop an ESL² program to connect with the community, and all the other ways to incorporate Spanish into the plans for the church. As he reaches out into the community, he begins his conversations in Spanish, but only sees blank stares on the faces of those to whom he is speaking. He hangs sign-up sheets for his fall semester ESL program, but no one responds to them. The pastor begins to feel discouraged by the lack of interest from the Hispanic community whom he has been working so hard to reach. What could he be doing wrong?

It is frustrating when one develops a ministry plan, and it does not come to fruition. However, an important step in the process is to analyze the data completely. Part of looking at demographic data is to understand whom it is speaking about. Simply noting the breakdown of cultures within a given community will not paint the whole picture. There are a variety of factors

1. In this paper the terms “Latino” and “Hispanic” will be used interchangeably. There is no single Hispanic ethnic population. The term is used almost exclusively in the United States and would not be found in Latin America. For Latinos, they would associate themselves to their country of origin. They would refer to themselves as Mexicans, Colombians, and Puerto Ricans and not as Hispanics. The term Latino may be preferable for many because it specifies those individuals from Latin America. It has become commonplace for these two terms to be used interchangeably and so this will be the mode of operation going forward in this paper.

2. English as a Second Language.

that need to be taken into consideration so that the one gathering the data can see the people through the numbers. Some of these factors include economic situation, geographical setting, population projections, demographic maps, etc. Perhaps the most significant piece of the data for this pastor is the linguistic background of the people in his area. It is not a foregone conclusion that if a population contains a heavy concentration of Hispanics, they will prefer to speak in Spanish rather than English. For a variety of reasons, some of which will be analyzed in this thesis, some Latinos prefer to assimilate into the majority culture and lose the capability to speak in Spanish. The technical term for this shift is referred to as language loss or acculturation. One part of this thesis will present some of the factors which affect the likelihood of someone losing the ability to converse in their native tongue or the language of their ancestors.

This thesis will begin by looking at the number of Latinos living in the United States and their preference as it pertains to language use. A major focus of this thesis will also include dividing the numbers of Hispanics to fit into a corresponding generational age group. The differences among the various generations of Latinos living in the United States play a vital role in linguistic capabilities in English or Spanish. In this section of the thesis, some of the specific factors affecting the use of Spanish or English will be addressed and analyzed in more detail.

Once the data has been presented, the next critical step into understanding the linguistic ability of Hispanics is to look at traditional and modern models forecasting the continued loss or maintenance of Spanish in the United States. These models not only help to explain how immigrants from all sorts of different backgrounds in the past have acculturated into the majority culture, but they also help to predict the future trends among the subsequent generations of immigrant children. In this section, this thesis will also demonstrate how these trends are

currently affecting American culture and hypothesize how the sociolinguistic trends will continue to affect the ministry of the church going forward.

In the last section, there will be evidence of these trends within some Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS) congregations that are actively serving in a Hispanic community. Through interviews with pastors and lay members, anecdotal evidence will be presented that confirms the trends which are being observed in the United States, as well as examples that challenge the traditional way of analyzing the data. It is also in this final section of the thesis that this author will give his opinions on some practical ways in which pastors and others serving in Latino communities can apply the data into their own ministry context. This author does not claim to have all the answers and will simply present some ideas based on what other pastors are doing across the United States both inside and outside of the WELS.

Purpose

The goal of this thesis is to help equip pastors specifically, but also anyone who is actively working with a Hispanic community, to better understand how the linguistic preferences of those living around them will affect their ministry plan. The church has such an important message to share with the world. By better understanding the communities in which we serve, this thesis hopes to explain the complexity of language loss and maintenance and provide practical ideas for reaching out to everyone in the community. The goal is not only to help provide background data to facilitate the church's mission of reaching out to all nations but also to show how linguistic preferences factor into every facet of people's lives.

I hope that the data presented will also change how cultures are perceived regarding their linguistic preferences and abilities. Language permeates an individual's identity and is a

culture's way of expressing itself. As the data will show, language loss and maintenance are a sensitive subject for those within the minority culture and are also influenced by the majority culture's views on their mode of communication. There is a memorable quote from Theodore Roosevelt which marked the initial feelings of the nation concerning foreign languages being spoken within its borders. Teddy Roosevelt said, "We must have but one flag. We must have but one language... The greatness of this nation depends on the swing assimilation of the aliens she welcomes to her shores. Any force which attempts to retard that assimilative process is a force hostile to the highest interests of our country."³ While those may have been his personal opinions, the sentiment in the past certainly adopted some of his feelings toward foreign languages. Our current context, however, has seen a shift that is now not only accepting the Hispanic culture but also embracing it. This thesis will present the data for the reader to see what sort of information is needed to gain a fuller understanding of the culture to which he is ministering. It is with this information that the great commission which Jesus called each of his disciples to carry out can be done most effectively: "Go and make disciples of all nations" (Matt 18:19 NIV).

3. James Crawford, *Language Loyalties. A Source book on the Official English controversy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 85.

PART 1: SOCIOLINGUISTIC DATA

Breakdown of Latinos in the United States

It doesn't take an extraordinary grasp of culture in the United States to notice the growing number of Latinos pouring into the country, whether by legal or illegal means. There is an ever-increasing number of Mexican restaurants in our communities, the growing popularity of Latino music on the radio, and the prevalence of name tags at businesses that read *se habla español*.⁴ It is undeniably true that the Hispanic culture currently has a strong effect on American society, one which is likely to continue to grow. The effects of the Hispanic population are not being felt only along the southern border of the United States, but all across the nation. There has been a steady increase of people of Hispanic descent throughout all of the regions in the United States.

The Hispanic population in the United States is by far the largest growing group of people, making up 52% of all growth.⁵ This is due to both immigration of Latinos to the United States and the births of Latino babies here in America. The Hispanic population is also the second-largest group of people in the United States, making up about 18.5% of the total population, which brings the total number of Hispanics living in America to about 61 million people.⁶ The highest concentration of Latinos continues to be found in the Southwest region of the United States; however, that is not where the fastest growth of Latinos is being recorded. In

4. Spanish for, "I speak Spanish." This is the common phrase in which a business can alert someone who needs to do business with them in Spanish or who is capable of fulfilling that need.

5. Jens Manuel Krogstad, "Hispanics have Accounted for more than half of Total U.S. Population Growth since 2010," Pew Research Center, 2010, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/07/10/hispanics-have-accounted-for-more-than-half-of-total-u-s-population-growth-since-2010/>.

6. <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/dashboard/US/RHI725219>.

fact, the greatest growth of Latinos is found in the South, in states such as Georgia, Florida, and North Carolina.⁷ Steady growth is also being recorded in other parts of the United States.

Hispanics are not only the fastest-growing group in the United States when it comes to the numbers, they are also the youngest people group in America. About six in ten (61%) Latinos in the United States are under the age of thirty-five.⁸ The fact that Hispanics make up the youngest group of people found in the United States shows the potential for Hispanic influence to continue to affect American culture. These numbers show that the greatest growth of Latinos in America is not coming across the border like it once did; rather, they are being born here. U.S.-born Latinos account for 81% of all Latinos under the age of thirty-five.⁹ These numbers become important because they help explain the possible linguistic shift being felt within the Hispanic community.

Subsequent Generations of Immigrant Children

Part of analyzing the data involves breaking the population down into different generational age groups. This is a common practice especially among those studying the social sciences. By categorizing the population into different age groups, scientists can begin to observe the various social trends within an age group. They observe the differences from the previous generation and compare them to the current societal trends. They can then take this data which they have

7. Luis Noe-Bustamante, Mark Hugo Lopez, and Jens Manuel Krogstad, "U.S. Hispanic Population Surpassed 60 Million in 2019, but Growth has Slowed," Pew Research Center, 2020, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/07/07/u-s-hispanic-population-surpassed-60-million-in-2019-but-growth-has-slowed/>.

8. Mark Hugo Lopez, Jens Manuel Krogstad, and Antonio Flores, "Key Facts about Young Latinos," Pew Research Center, 2018. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/09/13/key-facts-about-young-latinos/>.

9. Lopez, Krogstad, and Flores, *Key Facts about Young Latinos*, 2018.

observed from the various age groups and begin to hypothesize what the trends will look like in the future and discuss what is happening in the present which did not occur in the past.

The same is true when looking at the Hispanic population data. There are several different categories in which immigrant children fall. By looking at the first generation and then the subsequent generations, there are trends that can be observed, especially when it comes to language preference and capability of speaking Spanish and/or English. Also, since the largest group of Latinos living in the United States are thirty-five or younger, the trends which sociolinguistic scholars have been observing will only continue to rise.

Before looking at the data it needs to be clear what is meant when speaking of the different generational groups. In sociolinguistic studies, the first generation is those people within the population who immigrated to the United States from another country. After the first generation is marked the rest of them should make logical sense for the reader. The second generation is the children of the first, the third generation is the grandchildren of the first, the fourth generation is the great-grandchildren, and so on. These subsequent generations are where the data of this thesis will focus on the most. It is within these generational groups that the shift in linguistic trends is being noticed.

Language Preferences

Everyone has preferences when it comes to how they choose to live their lives, and the same is true for immigrants and their children when it comes to which language they choose to operate in. There is a staggering number of people living in America who speak some level of Spanish.

Approximately 37.3 million citizens have some degree of proficiency in the Spanish language, making the United States the fifth largest Hispanophone country on the globe.¹⁰

With such high numbers of people who speak Spanish, it is clear to see why the American culture has adopted many Latino customs and phrases. For example, every May people from all over the country gather to celebrate Cinco de Mayo,¹¹ the day on which Mexico defeated the French forces at the Battle of Puebla. While some in the United States mistake this celebration as the day Mexico won its independence from Spain, which happened on September 16th, 1810, nevertheless, people flock to the streets and celebrate the Mexican culture.

Also, from September 15th to October 15th, America celebrates Hispanic heritage month. During this month-long recognition of Latino culture, sports franchises change their names into Spanish, television specials and journal articles focus on the important influence Hispanics have had on society, and festivals are held to expose people to authentic Latino culture.

However, even though the number of people who speak Spanish in America is large, there is a shift occurring among the subsequent generations of immigrant children. These younger Latinos and those who have been born in the United States are more proficient in English than they have ever been. As of 2013, a record number of 33.2 million Hispanics living in the United States speak English proficiently.¹² This number is on the rise due to many different factors.

10. Marie T. Mora, Daniel J. Villa, and Alberto Dávila, *Language Shift and Maintenance Among the Children of Immigrants in the U.S.* (New Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2006), 239.

11. May 5th.

12. Jens Manuel Krogstad, Renee Stepler, and Mark Hugo Lopez, "English Proficiency on the Rise Among Latinos," Pew Research Center, 2015, <https://www.pewresearch.org/hispanic/2015/05/12/english-proficiency-on-the-rise-among-latinos/>.

One of those factors has already been discussed. Part of the rise of English proficiency is due to the growing number of younger Latinos who have been born in the United States as opposed to immigrating from another country. Native-born Latinos now outnumber foreign-born Latinos almost two-to-one in recent years.¹³ Being born in America, these children have immediate contact with English unlike those who immigrate to the U.S. Another contributing factor to the rise of English proficiency in America is because immigration has slowed in recent years, leading to fewer Spanish-speaking new immigrants arriving.¹⁴ Other more nuanced factors contribute to the shift in language preference which will be looked at in more detail later on in this thesis.

Identity

An important factor to consider when looking at the sociolinguistic preferences among the various immigrant age groups is the effect language has on one's identity. Identity, in general, is such a personal topic and one that takes an individual time to build up and understand. One of the important components for finding one's identity for many Hispanics living in America is their decision to speak Spanish or English or both. The solution is not an easy decision to make.

In 2016, during the presidential debate in South Carolina, Senator Marco Rubio, in English, questioned Senator Ted Cruz whether or not he spoke Spanish. Sen. Cruz responded to him in Spanish and challenged Sen. Rubio to discuss their views of immigration while speaking

13. Antonio Flores, "Hispanic Population in the United States Statistical Portrait," Pew Research Center, 2017, <https://www.pewresearch.org/hispanic/2017/09/18/2015-statistical-information-on-hispanics-in-united-states/>.

14. Jeffery S. Passel, D'vera Cohn, and Ana Gonzalez-Barrera, "Net Migration from Mexico falls to Zero—and Perhaps Less," Pew Research Center, 2012, <https://www.pewresearch.org/hispanic/2012/04/23/net-migration-from-mexico-falls-to-zero-and-perhaps-less/>.

in Spanish. It appeared that Sen. Rubio's challenge was to call into question whether or not Sen. Cruz belongs to or identifies with the Hispanic community in the United States. It appears on the surface that familiarity with the Spanish language is part of being Latino.¹⁵

How strongly does proficiency in the Spanish language play into the identity of being Hispanic? The surveys would indicate that language is important; however, it does not necessarily define a person. In a survey conducted in 2016, 71% of Latinos said one does not need to speak Spanish in order to be considered Latino.¹⁶ While those numbers show that there is some understanding for people of Hispanic descent who are not able to speak Spanish, an overwhelming majority, 95%, say that Spanish is important for future generations of Latinos.¹⁷ Latinos are very passionate about their linguistic heritage and these numbers suggest that Spanish will continue to play a role in a Latino's identity even if they may not be able to speak it with proficiency. These survey responses help explain why Spanish has continued to flourish in the United States, unlike other immigrant languages which have died out after a few generations.

Part of formulating an identity based on language preference is the attitude behind the decision. One's attitudes toward a language play a major role in determining which language the person will choose to hold onto and which one they will let go of. This becomes extremely helpful in noticing the shift in immigrant children. Most Hispanics have a positive outlook on the English language for various reasons. First of all, they know that being able to speak the language of the majority culture will help them economically. It will also help them to assimilate

15. Mark Hugo Lopez, "Is Speaking Spanish Necessary to be Hispanic? Most Hispanics Say No," Pew Research Center, 2016, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/02/19/is-speaking-spanish-necessary-to-be-hispanic-most-hispanics-say-no/>.

16. Mark Lopez, *Is Speaking Spanish Necessary to be Hispanic*, 2016.

17. Mark Lopez, *Is Speaking Spanish Necessary to be Hispanic*, 2016.

into their new communities and build relationships with those around them. They also know it will help their status, as they will be accepted by those around them.¹⁸

Additionally, a person may choose to let go of their native tongue if there is a stigma attached to it. For example, the use of the German language in America during and after World War II shifted significantly. Since the enemy was German it became unwise and even dangerous for German immigrants to continue conversing in their native language. This stigma which was created because of the war would have huge implications for many Germans living in America and even for the Wisconsin Lutheran Synod as well.

Stigma can also be created because of the influence and personal feelings of the leadership. For instance, the Theodore Roosevelt quote at the beginning of the paper reflected the attitude of many Americans and their desire to have a monolingual society. In the United States, sociolinguistic scholars have noted the often-negative connotation with the Spanish language. Spanish has been portrayed in the media and literature as a secondary language and one that is used by the unintelligent, especially those Spanish speakers in the Caribbean.¹⁹ Through unfair portrayals of Hispanic culture by the media, the stigma was solidified among the American people. However, in recent times, there seems to be a subtle shift that has helped to soften the stigma behind speaking in Spanish.

Talking with a WELS pastor in the Milwaukee area, he vividly recalls his early days after immigrating to America and remembers trying to speak only in English to avoid such a stigma. However, this pastor believes that the stigma is wearing off and more and more people are willing to embrace the Latino culture and welcome those who speak their native tongue. He

18. Jorge Porcel, *Language Maintenance and Language Shift among US Latinos*, (West Sussex, UK: Blackwell Publishing, 2011), 638.

19. Jorge Porcel, *Language Maintenance and Shift*, 639.

thinks this is now the case because of the prevalence of influential Latinos in Hollywood and across the world of athletics. People such as Shakira, Alex Rodriguez, and Antonio Banderas have opened the door to more Hispanics finding fame in America and have helped to break down the stigma of the Latino culture which was once widespread in the United States. He believes that as these famous Latinos continue to build an Anglo fan base, more people will be open to the Hispanic culture and strive to understand and even welcome it.

Hispanics, however, have mixed attitudes when it comes to speaking in Spanish. On the one hand, it is the language of their ancestors and their culture. It is a way to hold onto their roots as they seek to establish new roots in a new country. They are also able to stay connected to their cultural traditions which they have brought with them. These are some of the positive reasons why Latinos today hold onto their Spanish-speaking capability.

However, there are negative aspects to maintaining their native language. Some view the maintenance of the Spanish language as a hindrance to their progress in assimilation. Others have had people lash out at them for speaking Spanish in public and that negative social stigma pressures them to learn English.²⁰ It is for these reasons that Latinos struggle with their identity as they grapple with which language to hold onto and which one they are willing to let go of. It appears that many will opt for some form of bilingualism, but even those who are capable of speaking in both languages struggle to identify as Latino or American, especially in the third and fourth generation immigrant children who have been born in America.

There is also an identity struggle when it comes to being a foreign-born or native-born Latino. It has been observed that there is also a negative stigma created between Hispanics based on where they were born. For example, Orlando Crespo, a Hispanic ministry leader, reveals the

20. Jorge Porcel, *Language Maintenance and Shift*, 639.

tension that often arises between Latinos who have immigrated to the United States and those who have been born here. He writes about the “false measures” which Latinos use to define if one truly fits into their cultural group. Such false measures would include the following: physical features, cultural habits, geographic parameters, religious parameters, and of course language use.²¹ If one does not fit into the right categories, one runs the risk of losing their title “Latino.” This is a continuing problem for many Hispanics and contributes to the complexity of answering the question, “Where do I fit in?”

The struggle of young Latinos knowing where they fit into society is referred to as “living in the hyphen.” Sociologists use this terminology to demonstrate the tension an American-born Latino faces. There are many differences between American-born Latinos and those who immigrate into the United States. Some of those differences are linguistic; others are not affected by language but by economics, education, or even geography. These differences will be elaborated on later in the thesis. What is important to note here is the role these differences play in a person’s identity. They seemingly have a foot in both worlds. On the one hand, they want to remain faithful to their ancestors’ heritage, but on the other hand, they want to fit into the majority culture which surrounds them, the one to which they were born. An American-born Latino described these feelings in this way: “I gradually became more and more aware of the many things that I was not: I was not and would never be, even if I wanted to be a regular U.S. American. Yet neither would I be a *puro mexicano*.”²² This person certainly sees himself as “living in the hyphen” and not being able to fit completely into one culture or the other, and he is not alone.

21. Daniel A. Rodriguez, *A Future for the Latino Church: Models for Multilingual, Multigenerational Hispanic Congregations*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2011), Kindle location 479.

22. Daniel Rodriguez, *A Future for the Latino Church*, Kindle location 301.

As one plans ministry within a Hispanic community, they will need to take into account the importance of identity for an individual. This is especially important for those Latinos who are part of the third or fourth generations and may be struggling to identify with one or more cultures. These feelings go beyond which language an individual holds onto or allows to let go; it involves all of the various factors which have been mentioned above.

PART 2: SOCIOLINGUISTIC MODELS

There have always been shifts in language use, especially here in the United States, which has been referred to as a “melting pot” of cultures. When people began to arrive in the New World, they brought their native languages with them. Due to the prevalence of English settlers and the fact that the British monarchy owned much of the United States, English slowly became the common language that was spoken.

As more immigrants arrived and had families, a language shift began to emerge. Over the next couple of generations, the immigrant children would lose their capability of speaking their ancestor’s native language as they assimilated into the majority culture. This is true among WELS circles as well. The original immigrants who founded the church spoke German. As the years passed, they saw the numbers of parishioners who were able to communicate effectively in German dwindle. Congregations had to make tough decisions on which language to worship in moving forward. And over the generations, the switch was made permanent to where English is now the dominant language spoken in WELS churches.

The Traditional Model

The scenario described above is an example of the traditional linguistic shift from the native language of an individual to the language of the majority culture. The traditional model for tracking these changes occurs over the span of three generations. The first generation is fluent only in their native tongue. The second generation is vastly bilingual and can function in either language with efficiency. However, by the third generation, the shift has occurred, and they tend

to operate only in the majority culture's language. This model is the traditional model that sociolinguistic scholars have followed in the past few decades.²³

Part of the rationale behind the three-generation model was based on assumptions. One of these assumptions which sociologists like Grosjean took for granted was: children of immigrants would naturally adopt the majority culture's language unless they lived in isolated areas with a high concentration of Spanish speakers.²⁴ This assumption may appear to be a logical deduction based on the necessity of speaking English in the United States. If a person is living in the United States, chances are they are going to need to be able to operate in English to get find success.

However, what researchers in the past failed to take into consideration was the importance of maintaining Spanish within the Latino culture. Parents passed on the maintenance of Spanish-speaking capability to their children. Third and fourth-generation Latinos who make up this group of people who are still able to function to some degree in Spanish have now caused sociolinguists to reevaluate the traditional model and to observe the various factors which play into language shift or maintenance.

One scholar sums up the inadequacies of continuing to use a three-generational model when it comes to understanding language maintenance and shift among Latinos. Eduardo Hernández Chávez writes, "this three-generation shift model is an oversimplified account of the actual state of affairs and in many respects underestimates the rapidity with which linguistic absorption into the dominant society is actually taking place."²⁵ Chávez's concern is that the

23. Daniel J Villa and Susana V. Rivera-Mills, *An Integrated Multi-Generational Model for Language Maintenance and Shift: The Case of Spanish in the Southwest*, (New Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2009), 26-27.

24. Villa and Rivera-Mills, *An Integrated Multi-Generational Model*, 27.

25. Garland Bills, Alan Hudson, and Eduardo Hernández Chávez, "Spanish Home Language use and English Proficiency as Differential Measures of Language Maintenance and Shift," *Southwest Journal of Linguistics*, 19 (2000): 15.

traditional model does not leave room to explain and account for the current state of affairs of Spanish maintenance in the United States. The fact that researchers can find people in fourth and subsequent generations who have Spanish language capability shows the necessity for a new model.

A Proposed New Model

Many sociolinguists today are looking at ways to redefine the traditional model to fit their current contexts. For example, researchers are finding that Spanish is being maintained into the fifth generation, and others are encountering high rates of mother tongue transmission from Spanish-speaking immigrants to their children.²⁶ With all of the new data that is coming forward, there have been new models that have been proposed to explain these cases of language maintenance in subsequent generations of immigrant children.

When researchers began to consider using a new model there were a couple of things which they had to draw their attention to: (1) to look at the process of language maintenance and shift beyond the third generation, and (2) to pay particularly close attention to variables of acculturation and/or reacquisition.²⁷ Therefore, the data which is gathered here in this section focuses primarily on third and subsequent generations. The researchers also bring up an important point which will be elaborated on later in the thesis of Spanish reacquisition. This is an important factor for not only understanding why Spanish-speaking capability is found in later

26. Villa and Rivera-Mills, *An Integrated Multi-Generational Model*, 27.

27. Villa and Rivera-Mills, *An Integrated Multi-Generational Model*, 30.

generations of immigrant children but also will affect the ministry plans of the church. More will be said about the reacquisition of Spanish.

One of the other concepts which went into the proposed new model of language shift and maintenance is what is called “The Catherine Wheel Effect.”²⁸ The basic understanding of this effect is to say that language maintenance and shift might be circular in nature. This concept of a circular process makes sense when it comes to Spanish speakers.²⁹ The main reason why this new model suggests a circular movement is because of the steady flow of immigrants into the United States. While immigration continues to be a major factor in the increase of Hispanics in the United States, there will always be those who fall into the first generation and speak only Spanish. When people, who are around a similar age but fall into the third or fourth generation, come into contact with these recent immigrants the Spanish language may be maintained or reacquired. Even when one generation might have lost their ability to use the language of their ancestors, a subsequent generation may reacquire the language through contact with Spanish speakers in their community.

Daniel Villa and Susana Riviera-Mills explain the importance of reacquisition of heritage language for the group of people who fall into the category of being native-born U.S. Latinos who have experienced some degree of language shift or loss. They propose:

Those bilinguals who have undergone some degree of shift or loss and possess a receptive knowledge of Spanish but do not speak it we place in a separate category commonly referred to as ‘receptive bilinguals.’ Receptive bilinguals may play a role in reversing language shift by relearning their heritage language and thus transitioning to maintenance bilingualism.³⁰

28. María Carreira, “The Media, Marketing and Critical Mass: Portents of Linguistic Maintenance,” *Southwest Journal of Linguistics*, 21 (2000): 37-54.

29. Villa and Rivera-Mills, *An Integrated Multi-Generational Model*, 31.

30. Villa and Rivera-Mills, *An Integrated Multi-Generational Model*, 34.

This new group plays a large role in the reasoning for the new model. There are a growing number of U.S. Latinos who desire to relearn the language of their grandparents or great-grandparents. This growing group also explains the circular understanding of language shift and maintenance. Hispanics who fall into this receptive bilingual group are changing the way researchers observe the shift and maintenance of the language.

The new model which Villa and Riviera-Mills propose in their journal article, *An Integrated Multi-Generational Model for Language Maintenance and Shift*, breaks down the cycle into seven generations rather than only three. The table³¹ shows the reasoning for breaking the groups into seven, each with two subdivisions.³²

The two subdivisions are important factors that are represented in helping to explain the reason for shift or maintenance in the language of the first generation. Those two divisions are endogamy and exogamy. Endogamy refers to the situation where a Hispanic person marries another Hispanic person. Opposite of that is exogamy, which is where a person of Hispanic descent marries a non-Hispanic person. With roughly 25% of Hispanics marrying individuals outside of their ethnic group,³³ this is a crucial factor in understanding language shift.

“Intermarriage has undeniable consequences for mother-tongue maintenance, given that the dominant language spoken in the households established by exogamous couples is generally English.”³⁴ When the two families come together understandably the language spoken in the home will be English due to the one spouse’s English-monolingualism.

31. See Appendix 1.

32. Villa and Rivera-Mills, *An Integrated Multi-Generational Model*, 34-36.

33. Villa and Rivera-Mills, *An Integrated Multi-Generational Model*, 33.

34. Richard Alba, John Logan, Amy Lutz, and Brian Stults, *Only English by the Third Generation? Loss and Preservation of the Mother Tongue*, (Chicago: Population Association of America, 2002), 471.

In Villa and Riviera-Mills' new model they label the first generation as the contact generation, meaning this is the generation that has immigrated to the United States and is monolingual Spanish.³⁵ This distinction is important for the fact that based on this group is how the subsequent groups are categorized. To give a sense of what their data is like, see the graphic below of the possible outcomes of the second and third generations regarding maintenance or loss.³⁶

2nd generation maintenance

Endogamous: Spanish/English bilinguals, both parents from the contact generation; bilinguals who learned both languages before 15, parents are monolingual Spanish or English speakers.

Exogamous: Spanish/English bilinguals, one parent monolingual in English and the other from the contact generation.

2nd generation shift/loss

Endogamous: Receptive Spanish/English bilinguals or English monolinguals, both parents are from the Spanish-speaking contact generation (also called accelerated shift, Mora et al. 2006).

Exogamous: Receptive Spanish/English bilinguals or English monolinguals, one parent monolingual in English and the other from the contact generation.

3rd generation maintenance

Endogamous: Spanish/English bilinguals, all grandparents from the contact generation.

Exogamous: Spanish/English bilinguals, three grandparents from the contact generation.

3rd generation shift/loss

Endogamous: Receptive Spanish/English bilinguals or English monolingual, all grandparents from the contact generation. (The traditional three-generation loss model is based on this type of individuals.)

Exogamous: Receptive Spanish/English bilinguals or English monolinguals, three grandparents from the contact generation.

35. Daniel J Villa and Susana V. Rivera-Mills, *An Integrated Multi-Generational Model*, 34.

36. Daniel J Villa and Susana V. Rivera-Mills, *An Integrated Multi-Generational Model*, 35.

This graphic is continued for the subsequent generations leading up to the seventh generation. In the progression of their data, each subsequent group gets further away from having contact with their ancestral language, but there is hope for the maintenance of the language due to reacquisition.

To see if their newly proposed model would be viable in assessing language shift and maintenance, Villa and Riviera-Mills put the model to the test. They surveyed roughly 500 participants in New Mexico to gauge their language preference and ability. Their findings have thus far backed up their suppositions about the need for a new multi-generational model. Their data found that, of the people they had surveyed, at least one person fit into each of the seven generational categories they proposed. This survey is relatively small when it comes to sociolinguistic data, but the researchers are anxious to continue expanding their survey to see if the results hold among a larger test group.³⁷

The research supporting a change in the three-generational model of language shift and maintenance is compelling. While the old model never took into account the complexities of the Spanish language spoken in the United States, it opened the door for continued research into the linguistic trends among Spanish speakers. Researchers today are actively looking into all of the various factors which explain how the Spanish language has been able to have continued use in a society dominated by English. There are many factors that researchers see as influential in the maintenance of Spanish within the borders of the United States, some of which will be covered in the following section of this paper.

37. Villa and Rivera-Mills, *An Integrated Multi-Generational Model*, 39-40.

PART 3: FACTORS AFFECTING LANGUAGE SHIFT OR MAINTENANCE

Geography

The U.S.-Mexico Border

While researchers seek to find the answer as to why Spanish is enduring in the United States and not dying off like other languages in the past have, they have found that many factors contribute to this maintenance. One of the key factors in language shift or maintenance among the subsequent generations of Latino immigrants is where they reside. Location plays a huge role in whether or not a person will maintain their ability to speak Spanish or not.

Perhaps the biggest geographical feature which aids in the maintenance of the Spanish language is the proximity of Mexico to the United States. Researchers such as Garland Bills have observed the importance the border plays in linguistic preferences. He writes,

It is eminently reasonable to assume that proximity to Mexico will have a positive effect on the use of Spanish. It might be supposed that the closer one is to the border, the greater the likelihood of interaction with speakers of Spanish. Nearer the border [...] the numbers and concentrations of Spanish speakers are greater than in more distant localities. Also, proximity encourages travel back and forth, by persons on both sides of the border, to visit relatives, for commercial transactions, and for pleasure. And distance from the border will affect the availability of electronic and print media, music, and other cultural resources in the language.³⁸

Being close to the border allows for an immigrant and their future generations to maintain contact with their cultural roots.

38. Garland Bills, Eduardo Hernández Chávez and Alan Hudson, "The Geography of Language Shift: Distance from the Mexican Border and Spanish Language Claiming in the Southwestern United States," *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* 114 (1995): 10.

When living close to the border, in states such as Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and California, the concentration of Spanish speakers is greater than anywhere else in the United States.³⁹ Again, due to the proximity of the border, these states find themselves with the largest numbers of Hispanics, including both immigrants and native-born Latinos. Therefore these areas are safe havens for Spanish speakers. They are not alone in their preference of speaking in Spanish, and therefore there are more opportunities for Spanish to flourish and be maintained.

An important fact to remember when it comes to understanding the concentration of Spanish speakers in the American Southwest is to acknowledge that they lived there before English speakers moved in. The notion that Spanish is an “immigrant language” needs to be revised. Spanish speakers have lived in the Rio Grande Valley since before the first English settlers discovered America. It wasn’t until the Mexican-American War ended in 1848 with the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, that the United States acquired 55% of Mexico’s territory, including its native Spanish speakers.⁴⁰ History is important in helping explain why so many people living in the Southwest speak Spanish. The simple truth of the matter is they were here first. “The Spanish-speaking population in the Southwest is highly heterogenous. The families of some Spanish speakers have been here since before the Pilgrims landed at Plymouth Rock.”⁴¹

39. Devin L. Jenkins, *The Costs of Language Loyalty: Socioeconomic Factors in the Face of Shifting Demographic Trends among Spanish Speakers in the Southwest* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2004), 13.

40. Villa and Rivera-Mills, *An Integrated Multi-Generational Model*, 28.

41. Villa and Rivera-Mills, *An Integrated Multi-Generational Model*, 28.

Rural Communities

Another geographical feature that plays a role in language shift or maintenance is the population density in which a Hispanic person finds themselves. “The highest measures of language loyalty, unlike count, are generally found in rural and less densely populated areas.”⁴² Researchers have not speculated as to why this seems to be the case, but the numbers clearly show that in areas that do not lie along the U.S.-Mexico border, Spanish speakers prefer a rural setting as opposed to an urban one. Perhaps this is simply due to the line of work that many seek out, or perhaps it is easier to maintain their former way of life in a smaller town than in a booming city. Whatever the reasons may be, sociolinguists have noticed that numbers in rural areas continue to rise in Spanish retention.

The rural regions in the Southwest are not the only rural communities that are seeing an uptick in Hispanic peoples and Spanish language use. In 2010, Illinois ranked fourth in the nation in its number of Latinos and first in the Midwest region. In a recent study of two rural communities in Illinois, the growth of the Latino population has been fairly recent. In 1980, the proportion of Latinos in these two towns was almost nonexistent. In 2010, it was 18% and 4% in the two towns.⁴³ Also, between 2000 and 2010, the growth of the Latino population in the Midwest ranged from 33% to 104%.⁴⁴ Latinos are continuing to immigrate to this country, but they are now residing in areas in which they have not previously settled. Again, the preference seems to be in smaller communities. In the two towns which serve as case studies in the

42. Devin L. Jenkins, *The Costs of Language Loyalty*, 14.

43. Julia Albarracin, Guadalupe Cabedo-Timmons, and Gloria Delany-Barmann, *Factors Shaping Second Language Acquisition among Adult Mexican Immigrants in Rural Immigrant Destinations* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2019), 87.

44. U.S. Census Bureau, 2011.

Albarracin et al. journal article, newly built factories are the driving force in the surge of Hispanic immigrants.⁴⁵ Economic factors will be discussed later in this paper, but economic opportunities also influence the places where Latinos decide to live.

Cultural Enclaves

Dense pockets of Spanish speakers exist in the United States in which the Hispanic culture can thrive and the use of Spanish is more easily retained. These dense pockets are referred to as an enclave. “An ethnic enclave is a ‘distinctive economic formation, characterized by the spatial concentration of immigrants that has organized a variety of enterprises to serve their own ethnic market and the general population.’”⁴⁶ In other words, these places where the density of the Hispanic population is so great and close-knit that the Latino culture dominates and supersedes the majority culture. One of the most famous of these cultural enclaves is located in Miami, FL.

Miami is a hotspot for Hispanic culture. This is in large part due to its proximity to Cuba. Many of the Latinos that make up the population in Miami are of Cuban ancestry. They arrived in the United States as refugees fleeing from a communist government run by Fidel Castro. They were granted asylum in the Miami area and have continued to live and raise their families there.

In Miami, the Latino population makes up about 69% of the population.⁴⁷ What makes Miami unique is the Latinos make up such a great number of the population that there is little to no pressure to learn English. The Latinos are not only the busboys and car wash employees, they

45. Albarracin, Cabedo-Timmons, and Delany-Barmann, *Factors Shaping Second Language Acquisition among Adult Mexican Immigrants*, 87.

46. Jorge Porcel, *Language Maintenance and Language Shift*, 636.

47. www.census.gov.

are also the patrons and the business elites.⁴⁸ With such a large group of Spanish speakers, people can go their entire lives living in the United States and never have to learn English. When speaking with people who have served in Miami as teachers or pastors, they even note how the public leaders of Miami barely speak English.

This unique cultural setting is so supportive of Spanish it has even protected it in the schools so that the next generation can maintain their Spanish speaking capability. This sentiment of maintaining Spanish in the education system is not shared in other parts of the country. For example, in states such as Arizona, California, and Massachusetts, anti-bilingual policies have been implemented in their schools.⁴⁹ In these states, legislation has been passed which prohibits the use of a bilingual program for those desiring an education in both English and Spanish. Many of the politicians and teachers in Arizona favored the bill and believed that English and little to no Spanish should be used for immigrant children.⁵⁰

In contrast, the educational system in Miami has protected the use of Spanish in their schools and promoted its continued use. Not only is it promoted, but the Florida Department of Education, the University of Miami, and the University of Florida are working to create a multilingual workforce network to help them fulfill positions that demand someone who is Spanish-English bilingual capable of conducting business with Latin America.⁵¹ This push in recent times will only help to ensure that the Spanish language will continue to play a vital role in the Miami enclave.

48. Jorge Porcel, *Language Maintenance and Language Shift*, 636.

49. Jorge Porcel, *Language Maintenance and Language Shift*, 636.

50. James Cohen and Corrine M. Wickens, "Speaking English and the loss of heritage language," *The Electronic Journal for English as a Second Language*, 18, no. 4 (2015): 2.

51. Jorge Porcel, *Language Maintenance and Language Shift*, 636.

Since Spanish is being protected and encouraged in this enclave it is no surprise to find such a large number of late generation immigrant children who have maintained their capability of speaking in Spanish. The institutional infrastructure in this area fosters bilingualism even more so than an ethnic neighborhood, which could be surrounded by the majority culture.⁵² As is no surprise, when there is a safe haven, like an ethnic enclave which supports and fosters the use of their native tongue, language maintenance will be more prevalent than language loss. These ethnic enclaves are not widespread and Miami is a unique example. While there are indeed cities lying on the U.S.-Mexico border, they do not have the same institutional infrastructure as Miami does. The sheer size and strength of the Miami enclave seem to encourage a continued pattern of Spanish transfer to the next generation.

Parental Factor

When it comes to passing on the Spanish language to the next generation, the parents serve as an influencing factor in either the maintenance or loss of the language. There are, however, outside factors that affect the parents in either their ability or desire to hand down their language to their children. In this section, the thesis will explore some of the considerations parents have to make when deciding how much, if any, of the Spanish language is handed down to their children.

Attitudes

One of the important factors which influence the parents' ability to pass down their native tongue or support the shift to English is their attitude towards either language. A researcher, María Isabel Velázquez, found that even in areas where Spanish is abundant and bilingualism would be

52. Richard Alba, John Logan, Amy Lutz, and Brian Stults, *Only English by the Third Generation? Loss and Preservation of the Mother Tongue* (Chicago: Population Association of America, 2002), 472.

supported, parents choose not to pass Spanish down to their children.⁵³ If there is not much enthusiasm for maintaining Spanish in the next generation, parents seem to be content letting their children excel in English while their Spanish skills remain undeveloped.

Another factor that influences the parents' attitudes towards teaching their children Spanish is their disadvantages in the social, education, and/or occupational realms.⁵⁴ In other words, if parents find themselves at a disadvantage partially due to their lack of English capability then those parents are less likely to want the same future for their children. This has been observed by researchers in the Miami area. They observed that middle-class, Cuban mothers were easily able to raise their children to be bilingual, whereas the working-class mothers blamed their language skills for the lack of their success.⁵⁵ These mothers were more likely to push English-monolingualism on their children so that they wouldn't suffer the same fate. The attitudes of the parents, either positive or negative, influence their decisions when it comes to raising the next generation.

As part of the research for this thesis, I sent out several questionnaires to Latino members currently in WELS congregations. One of the questions dealt with their decision to raise the children speaking in Spanish, English, or both. One of those interviewed said that she raised her kids speaking Spanish and that is all that they speak with her.⁵⁶ She also noted how she has not been in the United States very long and so she is not able to speak English herself, which has led to her not teaching any to her children. Another member from the same church has been in the

53. Daniel J. Villa and Susana Riviera-Mills, *Spanish Maintenance and Loss in the U.S. Southwest* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2009), 3.

54. Jorge Porcel, *Language Maintenance and Language Shift*, 635.

55. Jorge Porcel, *Language Maintenance and Language Shift*, 635.

56. Interviewee #2.

United States for over twenty years. She said that she speaks Spanish in the home and her kids can as well. She made sure to include, however, that her children are indeed bilingual and are proficient in either language.⁵⁷ These two mothers both fall into the category of the first generation, so it is to be expected that their children would maintain much of the Spanish language due to the lack of speaking ability of their parents. The attitudes in these interviews reveal that there can also be a neutral feeling towards language use. These women clearly prefer Spanish and their children communicate with them in their native tongue. They also have welcomed the learning of English and have not hindered that in any way due to their own experiences.

Marriage

Perhaps the most influential parental factor which helps researchers to determine the cause of language maintenance or loss is based on the marriages of their parents. As was previously mentioned, when a Latino marries another Latino this is referred to as endogamy. Exogamy is where a Latino marries someone who is not of their ethnic background. When researchers are looking at the linguistic preference of subsequent generations this factor has to be taken into account. When someone, no matter their minority language, marries a monolingual English speaker in the United States, the odds of them speaking in English rise significantly. "In such an instance, the subsequent biological generation will be farther removed from a Spanish-speaking environment in the home due to one parent's English monolingualism, regardless of ethnic origin."⁵⁸ This trend does not appear to be slowing down; in fact, it appears to be on the rise.

57. Interviewee #1.

58. Villa and Rivera-Mills, *An Integrated Multi-Generational Model*, 33.

According to Pew Research, “Among young adults, more than half (58%) of the third generation or higher Hispanics are married to someone who is not Hispanic, compared with 36% of the second generation and just 5% of immigrants.”⁵⁹ As pastors and congregations plan to reach out to their community, the family dynamic will be an important factor in understanding their linguistic needs.

Socioeconomic and Educational Factors

The final group of factors that researchers have perceived that influence the maintenance or loss of the Spanish language are the economic and educational factors. There is a strong correlation between the two and therefore they will be treated together in this section of the paper. It doesn't take a genius to understand the simple correlation between higher education and a better economic situation. Generally speaking, if one has completed more schooling or has a degree they will make more money than those who drop out of high school. This axiom appears to be the same when it comes to Latinos and whether their children maintain Spanish or not.

“Spanish language use was stronger in those counties with lower overall income and median years of education.”⁶⁰ In those areas where the economy is weaker, the data shows that it is due in part to the educational level of the parents and their ability to help their kids learn English. Since they are not proficient in the language, they are not able to help their children assimilate to the majority culture. Pew Research finds this to be true as well: “English proficiency is greater among Hispanic immigrants with higher levels of education.” Only fifteen percent of immigrants twenty-five years or older who have completed less than a high school

59. Lopez, Krogstad, and Flores, *Key Facts about Young Latinos*, 2018.

60. Devin L. Jenkins, *The Costs of Language Loyalty*, 9.

degree are proficient in English.⁶¹ Those who have less education tend to speak their native language.

While a lack of education may seem like a hindrance to achieving success in their new country, immigrants have used the desire for a better economic situation as motivation to learn the language of the majority culture. The notion that immigrants who come to America don't want to learn the language is generally a false statement. They would love to learn the language because there are many benefits to doing so, especially economically.

In a study conducted in rural Illinois, researchers found that one of the motivating factors behind immigrants learning English was the desired success economically. Interviewees said, “[learning the language] is very important for one’s success in the United States.”⁶² Hispanics recognize the need for learning the language to find economic success and happiness in their lives.

Some researchers are opposed to the idea that economic success leads to language loss. For example, “Ofelia García studied the issue and concluded that although the rate of LS⁶³ among Mexicans and Puerto Ricans was higher than among Cubans, the latter had higher incomes.”⁶⁴ Also, researchers Fradd and Boswell conducted a study of ten cities in the United States highly impacted by immigration and they found that in seven of the cities English-monolingual Hispanics earned more, and in three of the cities Hispanic bilinguals had higher

61. Krogstad, Stepler, and Lopez, *English Proficiency on the Rise*, 2015.

62. Albarracin, Cabedo-Timmons, and Delany-Barmann, *Factors Shaping Second Language Acquisition among Adult Mexican Immigrants*, 94.

63. Language Shift.

64. Jorge Porcel, *Language Maintenance and Shift*, 634.

incomes.⁶⁵ These researchers demonstrate that the shift from Spanish to English monolingual is not necessary to find success. A Hispanic who is proficient in both Spanish and English is more likely to find success in most communities.

When it came to the questionnaires I conducted with some Hispanic WELS members I found that they had mixed responses. One lady whom I interviewed said that she used Spanish in her job and found that she didn't need to learn English to find success in that job. She even said it was a great way to meet other people in her community who had similar backgrounds because she used Spanish at her job.⁶⁶ Another member responded that she doesn't use English in her job but wishes she had time to learn it so that she would have more options when it came to employment.⁶⁷ Spanish use in the workplace is growing as is the need for bilingual individuals. In the case of these two women, one desired to learn English so that she might have more opportunities for advancement, while the other woman was content where she was. Each person is different and researchers are on both sides of the matter.

What can be said is data shows in some contexts that those who have less education and a lower income tend to speak their native tongue. At an evangelism day presentation about immigrants in college, I heard it explained to me that to expect someone who works sixty to seventy hours a week in order to put food on the table and then learn a difficult language like English is unfair. Many Latinos desire to learn the language most commonly used in America, but they simply don't have the time or the resources available to them. This is perhaps an area in which the church can provide something to help these immigrants settle into the United States.

65. Jorge Porcel, *Language Maintenance and Shift*, 634,635.

66. Interviewee #1.

67. Interviewee #2.

As we help Hispanics learn English, it is also wise to encourage them to maintain their Spanish-speaking abilities. Bilingual speakers are a needed commodity in most cities, and their heritage is important to maintain.

PART 4: PRACTICAL APPLICATION FOR TODAY

Noticing the Trends

Part of the research for this thesis included several interviews conducted with pastors who are currently serving in a congregation which provides some sort of service in Spanish to its community. In these interviews, there are trends that pastors in WELS are noticing in their own congregations which line up with the data presented in this paper. Some of these trends are positive and a change in ministry philosophy is not a major concern. However, some trends will undoubtedly complicate the way the church reaches out into its communities to share the gospel of Jesus Christ with them.

In this section, I would like to layout just some of the different ways in which men in our circles and those outside of our circles are handling the linguistic trends which are occurring in America. The goal of this section is to provide a variety of examples to help someone formulate their own conclusions about what will work best in the context in which they are serving it. This section will not promote a specific ministry plan that will solve the problem of how to reach out to a complex and changing group of people.

Case Studies

When it comes to serving the Hispanic community there are many factors that a congregation has to take into account. This is seen in just how complex linguistic preferences are among Latinos and how it affects their identity as a whole. Due to the complexities of Hispanic ministry, everyone is looking for what will work best, and some claim to have the solution to the dilemma.

No matter the scale of the ministry, the concern of how to reach the younger Hispanic population who do not speak Spanish like their ancestors are on the minds of leadership.

For example, Iglesia Alpha & Omega, a mega non-denominational church in Miami, had to shift their ministries to fit the growing need of reaching the younger population. The founding pastor, Alberto Delgado, started the Spanish-only congregation in 1984 with just twenty people. Today membership is roughly 6000 people and they claim the reason for that growth is due to their ability to pivot their ministry mindset and fulfill the needs of the people around them. Pastor Delgado recognized the need to offer something in English because his grandchildren had lost their ability to communicate proficiently in Spanish. He frankly told church leadership, “If we do not adjust [our approach] we run the risk of losing our children and grandchildren to the world.”⁶⁸ He also goes on to say that the message is more important than the language or music and communicating that message in the heart language of those sitting in the congregation should be the main focus of their ministry plan.

What can be learned from this megachurch is the correct attitude which a congregation needs to have in order to succeed in any kind of ministry, especially ministry among Hispanics. The ability to see a need for change and then make the necessary steps to change can be hard for some pastors, especially if what isn’t working was their idea. What should be the driving force behind the ministry decisions is the gospel and not pride in one’s ideas. As is usually the case, change can be met with fierce opposition. It is therefore the pastor’s job to teach his people the reasons for the change, to help show them the need to change, and to be patient while change is being implemented.

68. Daniel Rodriguez, *A Future for the Latino Church*, Kindle location 629.

Besides attitudes, are there certain programs or events which churches could be doing to reach more people in the Hispanic community, keeping in mind the complexities surrounding the language preferences of their community? Pastor Ryan Kolander, who is currently serving at Palabra de Vida in Detroit, says not to be too specific in making evangelism plans. The way he approaches ministry is to meet people on an individual level and where they are.⁶⁹ Therefore, the events that his church plans are ones that do not put up a linguistic barrier, but provide an opportunity to bring the community together and serve them. For Pastor Kolander, those outreach events are things such as food or clothing drives. Low-income families are not just of one ethnic background but make up a vast amount of the population in his community. These events are tailored for people to get acquainted with his church, and to avoid excluding someone based on the language they speak. If a need to serve an individual in Spanish arises, the church can funnel that person to the Spanish resources which they offer. The important thing he insisted on remembering was, “Meet people where they are at!”⁷⁰

As was previously stated in this paper, a vast majority of the Latino community believes that passing the Spanish language down to the next generation is important. Knowing this fact helps enable churches to reach out into their communities with something that is perceived to be a need. One possible program a church could implement in their outreach efforts might be to offer classes that teach Spanish to the Hispanic youth in their community. Being able to operate in a language efficiently is more than an oral familiarity with that language; therefore, churches may be able to help teach Spanish grammar and syntax to aid in their ability to learn and utilize the language of their ancestors.

69. Interview with Pastor Ryan Kolander, October 6th, 2020.

70. Interview with Pastor Ryan Kolander, October 6th, 2020.

In a completely different setting Pastor Chris Ewings, serving in Anchorage, found that people often come to Alaska to run from their problems. What they fail to realize is those problems continue to follow them, or they develop new ones. Pastor Ewings said one of the outreach strategies he has found success with is small group Bible studies. In these smaller and more intimate settings, people seem to be more comfortable. This is especially the case for the Latinos in his community. By creating a connection with a family in their home, the pastor can take away some of the intimidation of communicating with someone not of the same linguistic background. He said these smaller settings help them to feel more comfortable and open up to hearing what he has to say concerning what the congregation can offer them.⁷¹

An important thing to remember which Pastor Ewings brought up in his interview is that the Hispanic culture is looking for intimacy; in other words, they are looking for people whom they can trust. One of the ways the church can build that trust is to show genuine concern for their struggles they are currently in. For many immigrant children, the crisis of identity weighs heavily on their hearts. Being able to talk to them in whatever language they prefer, or helping them get in touch with their ancestral roots, are simple ways of showing the church cares about them. Building up this trust takes time and especially patience when it comes to overcoming linguistic barriers.

Once a Hispanic person feels comfortable with a pastor or congregation, they begin to embrace church life and look for the church to “provide such comfortable safe havens and serve as cultural ‘cocoon’ for wearied people trying to make a living and raise families in the midst of a caustic environment.”⁷² According to this church leader, he feels the church should be the

71. Interview with Pastor Chris Ewings, October 13th, 2020.

72. Albert R. Rodríguez, *Transcultural Latino Evangelism: An Emerging New Paradigm*, (American Theological Library Association, 2016), 675.

place to preserve cultural events and to provide help with the transition to America. This is fairly exclusive to immigrants, but those who make up the second and third generations also want to rediscover their ancestral heritage and see this as a deciding factor when looking for a church.

In an interview with Pastor Paul Bidenbender, currently serving in Denver, CO, he expressed the importance of cultural events and traditional Spanish services for his community, including the maintenance of the Spanish language in their services. He noted that one of the trends he has witnessed in his area is the desire to continue to have cultural events for the people. He noted there always seems to be a party to go to on Saturday night.⁷³ The Latino culture is full of *fiestas* and is a way for them to maintain their heritage. Being invited to a family gathering is a big sign that one is in the process of being accepted by this family or the community as someone who can be trusted. Again, this is a process that takes time and is crucial to opening the door to sharing the gospel. Knowing this, churches can serve as places for this community to gather, to foster a safe environment where people can speak their native or ancestral language and celebrate the way their heart desires.

By serving as a place that can help the transition into American culture while maintaining Latino traditions, many churches offer ESL classes for those living in their communities. This might seem like a logical place to begin, especially keeping in mind that Latinos value the ability to speak the language of the culture they are living in. It is a service that can be provided for the community and shows the church cares about more than just spiritual matters. However, it is important to keep in mind the specific setting of the congregation's ministry. Understanding

73. Interview with Pastor Bidenbender, October 27th, 2020.

which generations the Latinos in a particular community fall into and understanding the geographical setting will help a pastor determine if an ESL program is a viable outreach option.

For example, Pastor Nathan Zastrow, currently serving in Yakima, WA, said in an interview that they tried to start an ESL program but no one showed up. Part of his suspicion for that is because of the linguistic makeup of Yakima. He noted how the city is truly a bilingual city which reminds him of the cultural dynamics of Miami. So many can operate in either language and therefore, English classes do not appear to be a need in his community.

Another determining factor to consider when planning to offer an ESL program or not is the setting one finds themselves in. As was noted earlier, people living in a rural setting are more apt to retain their capability of using Spanish and are slower to learn English. This fact has a profound effect on the planning process. A church located in a rural setting may have more of a need to offer English classes because the people living there are more comfortable in using Spanish and have fewer opportunities to interact in English. The opposite may be true for a congregation in a city setting. Since the odds of needing English are greater in a city the need for an ESL program may be less, or there are already several organizations that are offering ESL classes and the church will not stand out with their program. Understanding these factors will help spare a pastor and his congregation from potentially putting effort into a program that may not be as fruitful as they desire it to be.

One of the constant struggles a pastor will face when determining the language to use in the worship life of his congregation is what language to use with the youth. This thesis has been focused on those generations of children who have been born in the United States and are more proficient in English than they are in Spanish. There are many different ideas as to how to conduct youth ministry because many of them will not have as strong of a grasp of Spanish as

they do of English. Some pastors have the children leave during the service to have a lesson taught to them in English. Others do not want to divide families and so they opt for a children's message in the service taught in English. Whatever a pastor decides to do, it is crucial for them to work through the various challenges of each approach and to find a way to give the children in his congregation God's Word in the language that best suits them.

CONCLUSION

At the onset of this paper, the image of a pastor who was eagerly planning different ways in which he could reach out to his Latino community with the gospel was described. Some of those plans failed because of a lack of understanding of the community he was serving. For plans to be successful, many factors have to be taken into consideration. Besides the assumed help of the Holy Spirit, data needs to be gathered and analyzed before a pastor can determine a plan for reaching out to the community.

One of the factors which need to be considered is the linguistic background of the people for whom the plans are being developed. This may sound like an obvious step. However, as has been presented in this paper, the choices immigrant children have to make in determining which language they will use are complex. And the decisions they make affect the way others perceive them and how they even perceive themselves. Planning for these complex identity issues will take in-depth research and time to fully understand their community.

When something as important as language is a battle for an individual living in the hyphen, they struggle to find their true identity. We have a message which can bring people peace, especially those who are in the midst of an identity crisis—those who are struggling to find their place in society. What a great motivation this is for pastors and congregations who are seeking to reach out to their communities with the gospel. With such an important task at hand, it is imperative to do our due diligence in understanding the community we are called to serve. That means knowing their linguistic preferences and the baggage that comes with them. It means getting to know the people and their customs and how they fit into the community. It means

being able to recognize past failures and strive to adapt to the needs of the community. The message we have to share is important; do not let a poor understanding of language be a barrier to the spread of the gospel. Instead, research, analyze, and synthesize the data which has been collected, and with the help of the Holy Spirit, churches can go out and make disciples of all nations.

APPENDIX 1

Table 1. Integrated Multi-Generational Model for Language Maintenance and Shift, Linguistic Endogamous and Exogamous Patterns

	Endogamous Pattern ~ Maintenance~	Endogamous Pattern ~ Loss ~	Exogamous Pattern ~ Maintenance ~	Exogamous Pattern ~ Loss ~	Language Shift/ Loss Reversed
Contact Generation	Spanish monolingual, contact with English after age 15 OR English monolingual, contact with Spanish after age 15				
2nd generation	Both parents contact generation OR Parents monolingual in Spanish or English, speaker learned both languages before age 15	Both parents contact generation (accelerated loss)	One parent contact generation and the other monolingual in English (accelerated loss)	One parent contact generation and the other monolingual in English (accelerated loss)	Reacquisition Generation
3rd generation	Maintenance; all grandparents contact generation	Shift/Loss; all grandparents contact generation (traditional model)	Maintenance; three grandparents contact generation	Shift/Loss; three grandparents contact generation	Reacquisition Generation
4th generation	Maintenance; all great-grandparents contact generation	Shift/Loss; all great-grandparents contact generation	Maintenance; one or two grandparents contact generation	Shift/Loss; one or two grandparents contact generation	Reacquisition Generation
5th generation	Maintenance; all great-great-grandparents contact generation	Shift/Loss; all great-great-grandparents contact generation	Maintenance; five or more great-great-grandparents contact generation	Shift/Loss; five or more great-great-grandparents contact generation	Reacquisition Generation
6th generation	Maintenance; all great-great-great-grandparents contact generation	Shift/Loss; all great-great-great-grandparents contact generation	Maintenance; four or less great-great-grandparents contact generation	Shift/Loss; four or less great-great-grandparents contact generation	Reacquisition Generation
7th + generation	Maintenance; ancestral bilingualism, distant relationship w/ contact generation	Shift/Loss; ancestral bilingualism, distant relationship w/ contact generation	Maintenance; ancestral bilingualism, some ancestor contact generation	Shift/Loss; ancestral bilingualism, some ancestor contact generation	Reacquisition Generation

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