Shift Happens: Spanish and English Transmission Between Parents and Their Children

Aída Hurtado*
University of California at Santa Cruz

Luis A. Vega
California State University, Bakersfield

We examined evidence for linguistic bands in Spanish/English language shift. Linguistic bands, defined as the degree of individuals’ exposure to a language they may not speak but nonetheless comprehend, facilitate English/Spanish bilingualism and increase linguistic diversity rather than English monolingualism. Data for this study came from the National Chicano Survey (Arce, 1982), the California Identity Project (Hurtado, Hayes-Bautista, Valdez, & Hernández, 1992), a statewide survey, and a California rural town convenience sample. Our findings strongly suggest that Spanish to English shift does occur from one generation of Latinos to another, but the existence of linguistic bands results, also, in stable English/Spanish bilingualism. Finally, we discuss consequences of advocating “English-Only” policies and their effects on educational equity and social justice.

Brown vs. the Board of Education of Topeka Kansas (1954) was the beginning of dismantling inequalities in education. As progress was made, race was not the only basis for examining educational disparity (Ginorio & Huston, 2001; Valencia, 2002). Other indicators of group membership were examined to uncover their use in justifying blocked educational opportunity. Ethnicity, culture, language, and gender all began to be conceptualized as part of the social constellation used to justify certain groups not having the same educational access as others (Gándara, 1995; Valenzuela, 1999; Weis, 1988). For Latinos, or individuals whose ancestry is

*Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Aída Hurtado, Psychology Department, University of California, Santa Cruz, Social Science II, Santa Cruz, CA 95064 [e-mail: aida@cats.ucsc.edu].

We are grateful to reviewers for their guidance in revising this manuscript.

© 2004 The Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues
connected to Mexico or the rest of Latin America, the use of the Spanish language is a salient marker of their ethnic group membership (Hurtado, García, Vega, & González, 2003). The use of Spanish, especially in an educational system that privileges the use of English over other languages, has been consistently used to justify repressive practices against its use (Hurtado & Rodríguez, 1989), to assign Spanish-speaking children to special education regardless of intellectual abilities (García, 2000), and as an explanation for Latinos’ lack of educational achievement and attainment (García, 2001).

The use of Spanish by Latinos in the United States has been identified as a social problem leading to increase economic and social isolation (Gándara, 2002). Recent social policies, therefore, have focused on condoning the use of Spanish and other non-English languages in such forms as limiting bilingual programs in K–12 (Pease-Alvarez, 2002), efforts to make English the official language of the United States (Padilla et al., 1991; Unz, 1999), and English-only local laws (Maharidge, 1996; Piatt, 1990). Efforts to limit the use of Spanish in public life has impacted public translation services in courts and in voting ballots (Chávez, 1998), further stigmatizing entire communities for the use of their ethnic groups’ language (Pease-Alvarez, 2002). At the same time, multicultural diversity has increased in this country (see Gurin, Nagda, & Lopez, this issue) and economic and social globalization demands an increase in bilingual and multilingual citizens who can lead, work with, and manage a diverse workforce (Moya, 2002).

One of the main concerns of the Brown vs. the Board of Education of Topeka Kansas (1954) was the integration of the educational system to insure the economic and social integration of US society, but in today’s multicultural society, race is no longer the only concern to achieve this goal (Maharidge, 1996). The Latino population is now the largest minority group, surpassing the African American population, and representing about 12 percent of the U.S. population (León, 2003). According to the 2000 U.S. Census there are forty-seven million U.S. residents who speak a language other than English at home most of whom speak Spanish (Crawford, 2002). As these demographic changes take place, Latinos’ educational achievement continues to lag behind all other ethnic and racial groups (Gándara, 2002; Valencia, 2002). In the year 2000, the percent of high school graduates was 94 percent for whites, 87 percent for African Americans, but only 63 percent for Latinos (Martínez & Aguirre, 2003). A similar condition exists at the college level. Among first-time, full-time students in public universities in 1998, only 1.7 percent were Latino, compared to 82.6 percent white, 7.3 percent Asian, 7.2 percent African American, and 1.8 percent American Indian (León, 2003). The use of Spanish and transition into English become an important topic to achieve the goal of educational equity (Gándara, 2002).
Studies on Spanish to English Shift

Spanish to English shift refers to the transition from Spanish monolingualism, to English monolingualism, with bilingualism defining this continuum (Veltman, 1983). Several studies suggest that English shift is rapid, predictable, and systematic (Arce, 1982; Grenier, 1984; Portes & Hao, 1998; Veltman, 1983). Veltman (1983, 1988), in his classic studies, provides one of the most detailed examinations of Spanish use by Hispanics (i.e., Latinos) in the United States. Veltman defines as “Hispanics” those individuals “who practice Spanish as a daily language, and [it includes] English bilinguals, Spanish bilinguals, and Spanish monolinguals” (Veltman, 1983, p. 21). Persons of Hispanic ancestry who came from English language homes and did not speak Spanish were excluded in Veltman’s studies. He found that the use of Spanish is significantly reduced in succeeding generations of immigrants. The lower use of Spanish was significantly related to age at the time of immigration and the amount of time lived in the United States. Also, within 15 years of immigration, most Hispanic immigrants speak English, children of first-generation immigrant parents become fluent English speakers, and their children, the third-generation, all have English as their mother tongue. Veltman (1983) adds that if there were no new immigrants, the Spanish language would disappear in the United States (Grenier, 1984; Portes & Hao, 1998).

This last prediction by Veltman (1983), however, was based on population figures and future population projections at the time of his study. Veltman’s (1983) projections predicted 16.6 million Hispanics by the year 2001 in the United States; however, the 2000 U.S. Census shows there are now 35,205,818 Hispanics in the United States, a figure considerably larger than Veltman had anticipated. This unprecedented increase in the Latino population in the United States was mostly the result of high birth rates and high rates of immigration, mostly from Mexico (Chavez, 2001). Latino Immigrants, in comparison to U. S. Latino residents, are more likely to be Spanish dominant, increasing the number of U. S. Spanish speakers and contributing to the vitality of the language (Zentella, 2002).

While some variables identified by Veltman (1983, 1988) such as years lived in the United States, generation, education, and income have noticeable and permanent effects on language shift, several researchers (Carranza, 1982; Hakuta & D’Andrea, 1992; Pease-Alvarez, 2002) posit that situational pressures have the most important influence on the pace at which language shift occurs. For example, in a survey about language use among high school students of Mexican descent, Hakuta and D’Andrea (1992) found an equal level of Spanish proficiency in first generation (immigrant) and second-generation (children born in the United States of Mexican parents) students. These findings are surprising considering that a rapid language shift occurs from Spanish to English in both first and second generations (Portes & Hao, 2002). However, as Pease-Alvarez points out, Spanish
serves an important social function for Spanish speakers—while English facilitates communication in most public settings, Spanish facilitates it in the intimate settings of home and community. Consequently, situational pressures come into play when most Latinos find occasions when Spanish is the preferred language (Pease-Alvarez, 2002).

In agreement, Ramírez (1988) shows that the use of Spanish or English depends on situational pressures or sociolinguistic domains. These he defines as, broad institutional and functional categories that are congruent combinations of a particular kind of speaker, topic(s), and place, each of which calls for a particular type of language use. Thus, “home,” “neighborhood,” “church,” “work,” and “recreation” may be considered domains. English may be the language of school, government, and work, while Spanish may be employed in the home, church, and neighborhood. In some domains, both languages may be used, depending on the participants, topics, and/or speech acts (advice, compliment, warning, greetings; p. 200).

Sociolinguistic domains raise an important issue for language shift: The presence of different sociolinguistic domains necessitates permanent bilingualism. Therefore, how does language shift to English take place, given the presence of many sociolinguistic domains in most Latinos’ lives?

The answer to the above question is not an easy one. However, an analysis of language maintenance provides some answers. While most, if not all, work on language shift concludes that it happens, language maintenance, which is very high, is left unexplained (Hurtado et al., 1992). As shift in language happens from Spanish to English and from one generation to the next, different levels of language use occur within the home domain, allowing exposure of Spanish to children, and exposure of English to parents (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). These different levels or degrees of language use we have labeled “linguistic bands,” defined as different levels of language use and exposure falling under the use of only Spanish, to the use of only English, and the continuum in between (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Zentella, 2002). For a linguistic band to exist, there must be at least two or more people who speak the same language. When these people speak to each other in some variation of the same language, a linguistic band can be said to exist.

It is the presence of linguistic bands that facilitate communication across different sociolinguistic domains (Carranza, 1982; Ramírez, 1988). For example, parents and their spouses, who speak predominantly Spanish represent one linguistic band within the family context, their children who speak mostly English represent another one (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). It is the presence of different linguistic bands in the home environment that allow for learning to take place across bands, resulting in “receptive bilingualism” as well as varying degrees of English/Spanish bilingualism by all members of the household (Hurtado & Rodríguez, 1989). Included in our definition of linguistic bands is the exposure to different language media, be it visual media like television, print media, newspapers, and magazines, and audio media, like radio and recorded music, as well as
the World Wide Web (Tatum, 2001). Receptive bilingualism occurs when predominantly Spanish-speaking parents understand English, and when predominantly English-speaking children understand Spanish (less common is the reverse situation); Veltman, 1983). In turn, receptive learning allows a language (either Spanish or English) to flourish in the future (Hurtado, Gurin, & Peng, 1994; Hurtado, Rodríguez, Gurin, & Beals, 1993), given an appropriate context that is defined more by intergroup than intrapersonal processes (Apfelbaum, 1979; St. Clair, 1980).

So far our discussion of linguistic bands has been theoretical and abstract, as implied by the literature. Consequently, the purpose of this study is to investigate the evidence for the existence of linguistic bands, to understand how they work, and to examine how linguistic bands interact with sociolinguistic domains. We investigate four questions:

1. What are the levels of language shift within the home environment for people of Mexican descent?
2. What are the levels of language shift within different generations of people of Mexican descent?
3. How is language shift manifested across different sociolinguistic domains?
4. What is the evidence for linguistic bands?

Unlike previous research, which has been limited to studies on archival data, small-scale studies, or theory based studies, we use data from three surveys. One is a national survey, another is a state survey, and the last one is from a small rural area. The advantage of using these surveys is that it allows for replication of the findings, as well as for a more thorough analysis of language shift.

**Method**

The three samples of data for the study were as follows:

**Surveys**

*Sample one.* The data used in this sample came from the 1979 National Chicano Survey (NCS) conducted by the Institute for Social Research at the University of Michigan. Face-to-face interviews were conducted on 991 respondents in five states, among them California, Arizona, New Mexico, Colorado, Texas, and Illinois. The probability sample covered approximately 90 percent of the adults of Mexican descent in the United States, as identified by the 1970 U.S. Census. Sampling and design issues of this survey are presented in Arce and Santos (1981).

Characteristics of this sample were as follows: Forty percent of the respondents were males, 52 percent of the respondents chose to take the interview in Spanish,
62 percent of the respondents were U.S. born, and the respondents’ median age was 20 years, with a range in age from 17 to 98 (\(M = 40.00, SD = 15.04\)). Of these respondents, the first generation immigrant was the largest (36.50%), followed by second (34.10%) and third (29.40%) generations.

**Sample two.** The second set of data came from the California Identity Project (CIP) conducted in 1989 by the UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center (Hurtado et al., 1992). Face-to-face interviews were conducted on 1,375 respondents of Latino descent, of which only respondents of Mexican descent (unweighted sample) were selected (\(n = 1,200\)) to allow comparisons with the national sample—all of whom were of Mexican descent as well. The sample design was a single-stage stratified random sample, drawn from the 1980 U.S. Census from California’s metropolitan and non-metropolitan areas that had tracts with a least 3 percent Spanish-origin population. More details on the specifics of the survey are presented in Hurtado et al. (1992).

Characteristics of the Mexican American sample were as follows: Women were 54.5 percent of the sample, the range in age was from 16 through 84 (\(M = 37.80, SD = 13.50\)), with first generation immigrants being the largest (64.25%), followed by second (21.08%) and third (10.67%) generations.

**Sample three.** The respondents for this convenience sample were seventh grade students and their parents in Watsonville, California. Watsonville is located in a predominantly agricultural community, half of its population is of Mexican descent, and most have settled in the area in the last two decades (Donato, 1988). Both parents and students were interviewed between April and September 1989. Bilingual/bicultural interviewers conducted the face-to-face interviews, and each interview took on the average of 45 minutes. There were a total of 62-parent and 62-student completed interviews, and the interviews were conducted according to the respondents’ language preference. In the interview, parents and students were asked sociodemographic, language use, and social identity questions.

Characteristics of this sample were as follows: Although the majority of the parents were born in Mexico (\(N = 54\) or 87%), most had lived in the United States many years (an average of 16.78 years; \(SD = 6.17\) years). Twenty-three fathers (37%) and thirty-nine mothers (63%) comprised the parent sample; their average level of education was elementary school (\(M = 5.27\) years, \(SD = 3.69\)), their families were large (\(M = 6.76, SD = 2.41\)), and most (56) were married (90%). Their average family income was between 12,000 and 15,000 dollars. Even though most parents took the interview in Spanish (92%), on a rating scale ranging from 1 (not at all) to 5 (very well), they report having some proficiency in English (\(M = 1.94, SD = 1.03\)).

For the student sample, 40 percent were female (\(N = 37\)), 68 percent were born in the United States (\(N = 42\)), their average age was 12.9 years (\(SD = .79\) years),
and most were in the seventh grade ($M = 7.07, SD = .31$). Although 40 percent of the students ($N = 25$) opted for taking the interview in Spanish, all of them reported on a rating scale ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*very well*) as knowing English ($M = 3.8, SD = 1.1$).

**Measures**

*Generation*. Across the national and California samples, the first generation of Mexican descendants was defined as those who were not born in the United States. The second generation was defined as those Mexican descendants who were born in the United States. The third generation was defined as those Mexican descendants who were born in the United States, for whom at least one parent was also born in the United States. There were no questions asked that might help assess fourth or later generations of Mexican descendants in either survey; therefore, the analysis presented here is limited to three generations.

*Language use*. Questions to measure language use were asked using a five-point scale, ranging from 1 (*speak only Spanish*) to 5 (*speak only English*). One set of questions asked what language the respondents used to speak to their family members (e.g., father, mother, spouse, siblings, and children); another set asked what language their family members used to speak to the respondents. In addition, questions on Spanish and English ability were included. These questions asked how well the respondents read, wrote, understood, and spoke Spanish and English. These questions were used to create English and Spanish ability scales, both of which have been used before and shown to have high reliabilities ($\alpha$’s > .80; Arce, 1982; Hurtado et al., 1992). These questions used a five-point scale, ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*very well*).

**Results**

1. **What are the Levels of Language Shift within the Home Environment for People of Mexican Descent?**

Table 1 shows the results of the respondents’ averaged self-reported ratings of what members of their family speak to them and what the respondents speak to their family, representing language use in the home environment for both the national and California samples and separated by generation. Each rating was done on a scale that ranged from 1 (*only Spanish*) to 5 (*mostly English*). Across all generations, averaged ratings of what “others” (family members) spoke to the respondents in the national sample ranged from 1.77 to 2.99 (combined $M = 2.30, SD = 1.19$), and what “others” spoke to respondents averaged ratings ranged from 1.89 to 2.72 (combined $M = 2.27, SD = 1.26$). These ratings suggest some
Table 1. Respondent’s (R) Mean Self-Reported Ratings of What “Others” Speak* to R and What R Speaks to “Others” by United States (US) and California (CA) Samples by Generation (G)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>US</th>
<th>US</th>
<th>US</th>
<th>US</th>
<th>CA</th>
<th>CA</th>
<th>CA</th>
<th>CA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>all G</td>
<td>1st G</td>
<td>2nd G</td>
<td>3rd G</td>
<td>all G</td>
<td>1st G</td>
<td>2nd G</td>
<td>3rd G</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>What “Others” Speak to R</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children to R</td>
<td>2.99</td>
<td>1.84</td>
<td>3.52</td>
<td>3.79</td>
<td>**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Siblings to R</td>
<td>2.39</td>
<td>1.20</td>
<td>2.78</td>
<td>3.35</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spouse to R</td>
<td>2.52</td>
<td>1.47</td>
<td>2.92</td>
<td>3.33</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother to R</td>
<td>1.77</td>
<td>1.05</td>
<td>1.74</td>
<td>2.60</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father to R</td>
<td>1.85</td>
<td>1.06</td>
<td>1.80</td>
<td>2.73</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean Ratings</td>
<td>2.30</td>
<td>1.32</td>
<td>2.58</td>
<td>3.16</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>What R Speaks To “Others”</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R to Children</td>
<td>2.72</td>
<td>1.53</td>
<td>3.19</td>
<td>3.57</td>
<td>2.55</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>3.42</td>
<td>4.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R to Siblings</td>
<td>2.36</td>
<td>1.18</td>
<td>2.72</td>
<td>3.33</td>
<td>2.15</td>
<td>1.51</td>
<td>3.29</td>
<td>4.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R to Spouse</td>
<td>2.49</td>
<td>1.42</td>
<td>2.90</td>
<td>3.29</td>
<td>2.21</td>
<td>1.67</td>
<td>3.15</td>
<td>3.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R to Mother</td>
<td>1.89</td>
<td>1.06</td>
<td>1.87</td>
<td>2.85</td>
<td>1.67</td>
<td>1.19</td>
<td>2.24</td>
<td>3.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R to Father</td>
<td>1.93</td>
<td>1.07</td>
<td>1.90</td>
<td>2.86</td>
<td>1.70</td>
<td>1.21</td>
<td>2.30</td>
<td>3.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean Ratings</td>
<td>2.27</td>
<td>1.26a</td>
<td>2.54b</td>
<td>3.18c</td>
<td>2.06</td>
<td>1.52b</td>
<td>2.93b</td>
<td>3.82c</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Subscripts with different letters are significantly different from each other, *p < .05.

*1 (Only Spanish) 2 (Mostly Spanish) 3 (Both Equally) 4 (Mostly English) 5 (Only English).
**Questions on what “Others” spoke to Respondent were not asked in the California sample.

bilingual language use (i.e., 2 [mostly Spanish]). Although no questions were asked in the California sample on what family members spoke to the respondents, averaged ratings of what the respondents spoke to their family members (“others;” range: 1.67–2.55; combined $M = 2.06, SD = 1.16$) corroborated the national data. However, the averaged ratings described so far collapsed respondents across all generations, and the extent of bilingualism cannot be known until we answer question two.

2. What are the Levels of Language Shift within Different Generations of People of Mexican Descent?

Table 1 shows, also, the results of language use in the home environment, for the national and California samples, broken down by generation. One-way analyses of variance using the Tukey procedure for multiple comparisons were run to assess significant differences in language shift across the generations of respondents in these samples. The results of these runs were as follows: In the national data, the averaged ratings for what “others” spoke to the respondents was lowest for the first generation ($M = 1.32$), higher for the second generation ($M = 2.58$), and highest for the third generation ($M = 3.16$), $F(2, 967) = 339.49, p < .000$. Similarly for what the respondents spoke to “others” (family members combined), the lowest averaged ratings were for the first generation ($M = 1.26$), higher for the second generation ($M = 2.54$), and highest for the third generation ($M = 3.18$), $F(2, 964) = 322.17, p < .000$. This again was corroborated by the California
sample, where averaged ratings of what the respondents spoke to “others” was lowest for the first generation \((M = 1.52)\), higher for the second generation \((M = 2.93)\), and highest for the third generation \((M = 3.82)\), \(F(2, 1197) = 622.88, p < .000\). All pairwise comparisons for the three generations on these three \(F\) tests were significant \((ps < .01)\), suggesting significant differences across generations. These results showed that the first generation is mostly monolingual, for they speak to others in either only Spanish, or mostly Spanish \((\text{range } M = 1.05 \text{ to } M = 1.84)\). Bilingualism does not appear until the second and third generations \((\text{using both Spanish and English equally, a rating of 3})\), but even then, English monolingualism is not widespread \((Ms < 3.79)\) for the national sample.

Table 1 further shows the results of language use by generation for the California data. The results replicate those for the national data, but only that slightly more Spanish to English shift occurs. First generation respondents manifest some shift when they speak to their children in mostly Spanish \((M = 2.00)\), but by the third generation the shift to English monolingualism is marked, when respondents speak mostly English to their children \((M = 4.20)\). However, it must be noted that even within each generation, there is some variation on what the respondents speak to others, and on what others speak to the respondents—not withstanding the limitations to California’s sample where only what others speak to respondent data were collected. This is true of the national, as well as the California data, and to account for this variation we must answer question three.

3. How is Language Shift Manifested across Different Sociolinguistic domains?

Table 2 displays standardized regression weights of sociolinguistic domains, defined as participants’ English-, Spanish-ability, age, education, family income,

| Table 2. Standardized Regression Weights of Participants’ English-, Spanish-Ability, Age, Education, Family Income, Gender, and Generation on What “Others” Speak\(^a\) to Respondent’s (R) and What R Speaks to “Others” by National (N = 991) and California (N = 1,200) Samples |
|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| United States Sample | California Sample\(^a\) |
|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| **English Ability** | .44***           | .45***           | .30***           |
| **Spanish Ability** | -.32***          | -.35***          | -.15***          |
| **Age** | -.01             | -.01             | .04              |
| **Education** | .24***           | .25***           | .15***           |
| **Family Income** | .08***           | .06**            | .06**            |
| **Gender** | .05**            | .06**            | .04              |
| **Generation** | .09**            | .06*             | .41***           |
| **Adj. \(R^2\)** | .67***           | .66***           | .64***           |

Note. *\(p < .05\), **\(p < .01\), ***\(p < .001\); “Questions on what “Others” spoke to Respondent were not asked in the California sample; \(^a\)1 (Only Spanish) 2 (Mostly Spanish) 3 (Both Equally) 4 (Mostly English) 5 (Only English).
gender, and generation, regressed on (a) what “others” (family members’ overall averaged rating score) spoke to respondents and what respondents spoke to family members (also an overall averaged rating score). Ratings on these two dependent measures ranged from 1 (only Spanish) to 5 (only English), in both the national and California samples; again, the latter sample has no data on what others spoke to respondents, as previously described. Also, sociolinguistic domains are further qualified by their influence on differing Spanish to English shift levels.

Test for assumptions of normality, linearity, and homogeneity of variance revealed no problems with the data (Cohen & Cohen, 1993) in the three simultaneous multiple regressions runs done for this analysis. Tolerance levels for all predictors met inclusion criteria, and while education and English ability had a high correlation, \( r(964) = .73 \), we judged the two variables to merit inclusion given the low educational attainment of Latinos in the United States (Hurtado et al., 1992) as well as the high level of exposure of English for Spanish speakers (López, 1978).

Table 2 shows that, uniformly across the two samples, what respondents speak to others and what others speak to them is largely determined by respondents sociolinguistic domains, as evidenced by the high proportions of variance accounted for in the analyses (Adj. \( R^2 \)s < .60). Significantly their English and Spanish ability play the biggest determinants—malleable domains. While age did not play a role in what respondents speak to others and what others speak to respondents, education played a pivotal role across all the samples. Income had a small but significant role in what the respondents speak to their families and what their families speak to them, but gender played a role only in the national sample and not in the California sample.

Several possible explanations exist on the gender difference found above, including the slightly higher shift from Spanish to English in California (as seen in Table 1), and the fact that Latinos living in California are more urbanized than those in the national sample (Arce, 1982), allowing for more English exposure for both men and women. This finding is further corroborated by the fact that generation, while significant across the samples, played its major role in the California sample, where succeeding generations are more likely to manifest a shift to English (\( \beta = .41, p < .000; \) Table 2). These, however, are all tentative explanations in need of empirical support. One thing that is clear from Table 2 is that context of sociolinguistic domains play a role in language use, some more than others, but collectively a major one.

The results in Table 2 do not answer questions on language reciprocity (what the respondents speak to others and what others speak to them), however, another factor plays a large role on the language people use to communicate with others. The influence of reciprocity in language shift to English among Mexican descendants can be found in the answer to question four.
4. What is the evidence for linguistic bands?

Linguistic bands can be defined as different levels of language use and exposure falling under the use of only Spanish, to using only English, and the continuum in between (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Zentella, 2002). A linguistic band is present when there are two or more people who are exposed to the same language and when these people speak to each other in some variation of the same language. These linguistic bands can be assessed through language reciprocity between speakers, in terms of what they speak to each other—actual or perceived, and measured by strength of association.

Figure 1 shows language reciprocity results for the parents and their children in the Watsonville sample. These reciprocity results are Pearson correlations of (a) what the parents report they speak to their children and what their children speak back to them (left side of Figure 1—Band 1), and (b) what the children report they speak to their parents and what their parents speak back to them (right side of Figure 1—Band 3). Bands 1 and 3 show high reciprocity levels, indicated by the high correlations of intra-individual reports of what the respondents speak to others and what others speak to them ($r_s \geq .69$). Band 2, however, shows low reciprocity levels, indicated by the low correlations of inter-individual reports of what the parents and their children speak to each other (middle of Figure 1—Band 2). Specifically, the $-.16$ ($ns$) correlation represents a measure of association for what the students say they speak to their fathers, and what the fathers report their children speak to them. The $-.02$ ($ns$; for both fathers and mothers) is the correlation for what parents report they speak to their children, and what the children report they speak

|================================| |================================|
|High Reciprocity | Low Reciprocity | High Reciprocity |
|Band 1 | Band 2 | Band 3 |

Note. Numbers represent Pearson correlations; *$p < .01$

Fig. 1. Pearson correlations as measures of language reciprocity between parents ($N = 62$) and their children ($N = 62$) and what they report speaking to each other.
to their parents. The $-0.14$ ($ns$) is the correlation for what the students say they speak to their mothers, and what the mothers report their children speak to them. In general, when the respondents (both parents and their children) are asked what they speak to others and what others speak to them, one finds high reciprocity (Bands 1 and 3), but when one correlates what the parents and what the children say they speak to each other (Band 2), there is no congruence on their reports (low correlations and not significant).

The reciprocity results presented above raise an interesting issue on how these parents and their children communicate. Individual reports of who speaks what to whom evince high reciprocity, but when these reports are separately examined and correlated, it appears as if communication breaks down, yet such is not the case. Earlier we stated that in order for a linguistic band to exist, there had to be two speakers of the same language, which could allow for language reciprocity. Having two speakers of the same language exposes others to that language, and in turn creating receptive and different degrees of bilingualism—all made possible by sociolinguistic domains (see Table 2). It is this hybridity of bilingualism that allows the parents and their children to communicate, given the low reciprocity in the language that they speak to each other. That is, while the children may be speaking mostly in English, and the parents mostly in Spanish, they still can understand each other, and even have the notion that they do so in the same language (as evinced by the high reciprocity reported intra-individually).

Figures 2 and 3 present graphically what the parents and student’s report they speak to others, and vice versa, what others speak to them, after controlling for parents’ gender, family size, income, education, length of U.S. residence, and English ($\alpha = .87$) and Spanish ($\alpha = .96$) ability, with averaged ratings of what they speak to others and what others speak to them rated on a scale that ranged from 1 (mostly Spanish) to 5 (mostly English).

Note. Controlling for parents’ gender, family size, income, education, length of U.S. residence, and English ($\alpha = .87$) and Spanish ($\alpha = .96$) ability, with averaged ratings of what they speak to others and what others speak to them rated on a scale that ranged from 1 (mostly Spanish) to 5 (mostly English).
Controlling for students’ gender, family size, income, education, length of U.S. residence, and English ($\alpha = .93$) and Spanish ($\alpha = .89$) ability, with averaged ratings of what they speak to others and what others speak to them rated on a scale that ranged from 1 (mostly Spanish) to 5 (mostly English).

**Fig. 3.** Adjusted means of students’ ($N = 62$) reports of what they speak to others and what others speak to them.

The arrows in Figures 2 and 3 denote what the respondents speak to others or speak in different situations (adjusted means) and do not imply causation in any form or shape. The rating scale of what the respondents reported speaking to each other ranged from 1 (mostly Spanish) to 5 (mostly English). For the parents, it can be seen that they report speaking mostly Spanish to their children, and in turn the parents report the children do the same (Figure 2). Yet, when the students report what they speak to their parents (Figure 3), the numbers do not coincide. The parents claim their children speak to them only in Spanish (adjusted means of 1.11 and 1.05—Figure 2), but the students report they speak to their parents mostly in Spanish (adjusted means of 2.08 and 2.21—Figure 3). It is this gap in language reciprocity that linguistic bands, as posited here, can explain—that is, explained through the use of different degrees of bilingualism, including its receptive use where an individual may be able to understand Spanish (or English) well but be
hesitant to speak it, which is a skill associated with a higher level of performance anxiety (Hurtado & Rodríguez, 1989).

Finally, Figure 2 further supports our findings from the national and California samples that the first generation is mostly Spanish monolingual ($M_s < 1.86$)—these parents were mostly first generation (87%). Similarly, Figure 3 shows how these students who are mostly second generation (68%) are mostly bilingual ($M_s < 3.32$)—similar results to the national and California samples. Overall, the data from these samples show consistency and uniformity in the Spanish to English shift among Mexican American respondents.

**Discussion**

Shift happens, shift is inevitable. This study shows that language transition from Spanish to English among Mexican descendants is most pronounced inter-generationally. That is, succeeding generations of Mexicans continue the shift to English monolingualism, and while it might be expected that Spanish language loss is the price to pay, such is not the case, for the knowledge of the Spanish language remains viable through different degrees of bilingualism. This is made possible through linguistic bands, which allow for exposure of Spanish or English to speakers of only one language, either Spanish or English. Also, the variables most important on how fast the shift to English occurs are high English ability, low Spanish ability, and education, with these three variables increasing the use of the English language among Mexican descendants, regardless of generation. Yet the use of Spanish or English in no time becomes mutually exclusive, given the pattern of our results. This raises several interesting implications.

First, theoretical and empirical conclusions from previous studies can be clarified with our results. By knowing the influence of sociolinguistic domains, linguistic bands, receptive bilingualism, as well as long term and short term forces (e.g., generation and situational influences), language shift becomes a comprehensible phenomenon. Also, contrary to Veltman’s (1983, 1988) findings that the Spanish language is destined to disappear in the United States in the future, our findings suggest that Spanish will not disappear but instead, it will lay dormant through different degrees of bilingualism, including receptive. Hence, given the appropriate contexts, Spanish will flourish and remain a viable language, in sharp contrast to the languages spoken by earlier immigrants (López, 1978; Srivastava, 1989).

Second, the use of the two large scale surveys allowed us to triangulate the evidence on language shift; the findings from these two surveys were congruent, except for a slightly higher shift to the English language for California. The slightly higher shift to English in the California sample, compared to the national sample, can be explained in two ways. One, the 10 year expand between the national sample (conducted in 1979) and the California sample (conducted in 1989) may
Shift Happens 151

seem to suggest that more Mexican descendants have since then learned English, and therefore have shifted to using more English. However, this explanation is tenuous, given the continued influx of Mexican immigrants (Gándara, 2002). The other possible explanation is that in 1979, when the national survey was conducted, more Mexican descendants lived in rural areas as compared to today, where the need for English, it may be argued, is not as pressing (Ramírez, 1988). Indeed, our third survey corroborated this explanation, for the respondents in this survey were from a rural town, and most were Spanish monolingual, with little language shift evinced by these parents (see Figure 3).

Our results support and extend previous work, which has shown language shift to be a systematic, predictable, and a comprehensible phenomenon (Arce, 1982; Grenier, 1984; Pease-Alvarez, 2002; Portes & Hao, 1998; Veltman, 1983, 1988). Our study shows that it is possible to empirically tease apart distinct components of the language shift process, and, hence, render a more systematic explanation of the specific dynamics involved. Also, we hope our work will stimulate renewed interest into this fascinating topic. For example, we are now looking at the connection between language shift and acculturation. Practically all acculturation scales on Latinos are based on language shift (Chun, Balls Organista, & Marín, 2003; Marín & VanOss Marín, 1991; Walllen, Feldman, & Anliker, 2002), and while theoretically it may make sense to use language shift as a gauge for acculturation, empirically it may not. Mexican descendants can be English monolinguals while maintaining their ethnic identity (Hurtado & Gurin, 1987), and this is an aspect that goes unmeasured by acculturation scales today (Chun, Balls Organista, & Marín, 2003; Marín & VanOss Marín, 1991). We exert other researchers to explore this issue. Also, our work was confined to three generations of Mexican descendants because of limitations to our data; we need to sample fourth and later generations for, if our findings hold true, we could expect even more shift to the English language among those generations, and perhaps different levels of bilingualism. Answers to these questions, however, must await further research.

**Policy Recommendations**

Cultural and linguistic assimilation consistently has been recommended by many policymakers and opinion makers as the solution to Latinos’ lack of full educational and economic integration (Chavez, 1991; 2002; Rodriguez, 1983). However, recent demographic changes and the globalization of the U.S. economy requires that all citizens become adept at functioning in multiple cultural settings (Arnett, 2002; also see Gurin et al., this issue). Our results indicate that many Latinos begin life with an invaluable language resource that could be cultivated, rather than repressed or neglected, and that could blossom into full-scale bilingualism. In fact, Feliciano (2001), using the 1990 US Census, finds that Vietnamese, Korean, Chinese, Filipino, Japanese, Mexican, Puerto Rican, and Cuban youth who
are bilingual are less likely to drop out of school than those in English-dominant or English-limited households. Furthermore, students in immigrant households are less likely to drop out than those in nonimmigrant households. Feliciano concludes that for the youth in these groups, it is not the most acculturated but rather those who have not abandoned their ethnic cultures that experience the greatest educational success. It is bicultural youths who can draw on resources from both the immigrant community and mainstream society who are best situated to enjoy educational success. Similarly, Portes and Hao (2002) find that second generation students who became fluent bilinguals reported better relations with their families, greater self-esteem, and higher educational aspirations than those who became English monolinguals. Portes and Hao conclude that

While popular with the public at large, educational policies that promote complete linguistic assimilation contain hidden costs for these children, depriving them of a key social resource at a critical juncture in their lives. Family relations and personality development suffer accordingly. . . . Cut these moorings and children are cast adrift in a uniform monolingual world. They, their families, and eventually the communities where they settle will have to pay the price. (p. 22–23)

As the advantages of being bilingual and bicultural are documented (Mouw & Xie, 1999), many states have dismantled long-term bilingual education and have opted for transitioning Limited Proficiency Students (LEP) as quickly as possible into English by disregarding the cultivation of their ethnic language (Gándara, 2002; Hurtado, Haney & García, 1999). A more sensible strategy would be to recognize all the linguistic bands existent in immigrant households and to cultivate the children’s skills by including non-English-speaking parents in the educational process (Calderón, 1998; Hurtado, 1997; Nieto, 2000). There is beginning to be evidence that this approach may facilitate the initial goals set forth by Brown vs. the Board of Education of Topeka Kansas (1954), insuring the full educational and economic integration of all children regardless of race, ethnicity, language, and gender.

References


AÍDA HURTADO is Professor of Psychology at the University of California, Santa Cruz. She is author of *Voicing Chicana Feminisms: Young Women Speak out on Identity and Sexuality*, New York University Press, 2003.

LUIS A. VEGA is Associate Professor of Psychology, California State University, Bakersfield, where he teaches social psychology and is a mentor to students who are first generation in college.