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# Intergenerational Spanish transmission in El Paso, Texas

## Parental perceptions of cost/benefit

Isabel Velázquez

### **Abstract**

This study examines the beliefs held by a group of adult Spanish-English bilinguals from El Paso, Texas, regarding the vitality of Spanish in their community and the ways in which their own experience of being bilingual on the US-Mexico border has influenced their perceptions of the benefits and costs of fostering Spanish development in their children. Results show that parents' positive attitudes toward Spanish did not translate into the investment of time and resources to foster Spanish development in their children nor, ultimately, into the use of Spanish by their children. Households where the mother perceived herself as having an active role in her children's linguistic development and where she perceived both Spanish and a bilingual/biethnic identity as desirable for her children's future were also households where children were expected to speak Spanish at home and where more opportunities for linguistic development were present. The author argues that these beliefs must be understood as a consequence of the underlying tensions present in the community, where intense linguistic and interethnic contact takes place every day.

**Keywords:** language attitudes, bilingualism, border dynamics, language loss, language maintenance

## **1. Introduction**

The purpose of this study is to examine the beliefs held by a group of adults from El Paso, Texas, regarding the vitality of Spanish in their community and the ways in which their own experience of being bilingual on the US-Mexico border has influenced their perceptions about the benefits and costs of fostering Spanish development in their children. This research seeks to answer the basic question of why in a community like El Paso, where Spanish shares so much of the public

domain, where a Spanish-language cultural industry is readily available and opportunities for contact with Spanish-speakers abound, some families successfully transmit Spanish to their children while others do not.<sup>1</sup>

The present article is centered on three main arguments: first, that speakers' choices regarding transmission or non transmission of Spanish are motivated by their beliefs about language, and that those beliefs are a reflection of underlying tensions present in a multilingual community (following Martínez 2006). Second, intra-community diversity translates into widely diverging understandings about bilingualism even among speakers belonging to the same social network and sharing similar socioeconomic characteristics. And third, several parents in this group internalized and reproduced a linguistic ideology that serves to marginalize working-class speakers of Spanish.

As several researchers have argued, tensions present in a bilingual community are closely tied to competition for economic and symbolic resources (Giles & Byrne 1982; Husband & Khan 1982; Heller 1999, 2003). Tollefson (1991) proposes a historical-structural approach to the analysis of individual choices and individual assumptions about language in a majority/minority language setting. Under this framework, dominant ideological assumptions about language, and the manifest and covert linguistic policies that derive from them, serve to perpetuate social inequality inasmuch as they prevent linguistic minorities from accessing social and political institutions. This analysis is useful, for example, when attempting to explain why, regardless of their personal view of bilingualism and of the benefits it could afford their families, most speakers interviewed for this study perceived that there was a correct way to speak Spanish, and a correct way to speak English, and these in no instance corresponded to El Paso varieties of either. This disconnect between positive attitudes toward Spanish and bilingualism in general and negative attitudes toward local, everyday El Paso Spanish is consistent with perceptions of Spanish that Beaudrie (2009) found prevalent among university-level heritage speakers of Spanish.

## 2. The community

El Paso is the oldest and largest city on the US-Mexico border, and one of the oldest sites of Spanish/English contact in the United States. The city differs from all other major metropolitan areas with Spanish-English bilingual communities in that it constitutes, together with Ciudad Juarez, its neighbor to the south, a single community that was segmented by a border after the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848. Today, El Paso is part of a bi-national, tri-state metropolis, together with Juarez and Las Cruces, New Mexico to the north. Given the current state of this region, it is clear that El Paso is a site of intense eth-

nic, linguistic, and dialectal contact. This contact has been described by Hidalgo (1995) and Teschner (1995) as a continuum of historical interdependence that ranges from conflict to accommodation. This continuum was characterized by the economic and political control by an Anglo minority and the social and economic segregation of a Mexican-American majority until the last half of the twentieth century (Timmons 1990). Today, the city presents one of the highest indices of ethnolinguistic vitality for Spanish, Mexican-Americans, and Mexicans and, according to Hidalgo (2001), is undergoing a situation of language shift reversal in favor of Spanish.

In the last decade, border relations between Juarez and El Paso have been impacted by two major events that have been documented by journalists, urban geographers, and anthropologists, but that have remained mostly unnoticed by sociolinguists. The first of these was an increase of violence in Ciudad Juarez, which started around 1995 with the murder of working-class women and girls; the current figures now run to some 300 victims (Wright 2001, 2004). At the same time, the city suffered a wave of public shootings, executions, and kidnappings stemming from internal battles within the Juarez drug cartel. The most immediate outcome of this was a decrease in the number of El Pasoans who visited Juarez. Another consequence, of greater impact to El Paso's language dynamics, and most specifically to the local status of Spanish, was the number of middle- and upper middle-class Juarenses who had the economic means, and often, the American citizenship, to avoid the violence by relocating their families to El Paso. The second event to impact border dynamics was the September 11, 2001, terrorist attack, or more specifically, the increased security at border crossings which followed it. For Juarenses and El Pasoans this has often translated into waiting for hours at one of the international bridges in 100-plus degree weather in the summer and freezing temperatures in winter.

The number of middle- and upper middle-class Juarenses who have relocated to El Paso in the past decade is hard to quantify. However, indirect evidence of this is the number of Juarez businesses that have moved across the border during the same period and which are growing because they cater to a distinctively Juarenses taste and aesthetic — as opposed to that of Mexican-Americans or Anglos. These recently-arrived El Pasoans, educated in Mexico and oriented to Mexican middle-class norms, bring with them expectations about the type of Spanish that should be spoken, i.e. non-accented Mexican Spanish, and a keen sense of the importance of unaccented English as the key for economic mobility. The extent to which these expectations and perceptions will coalesce, compete, or collide in the near future with those of a growing Mexican-American middle-class remains to be seen. All parents interviewed for this study are part of El Paso's middle-class. They are both active participants in these changes in their everyday decisions to transmit the language to their children or not and influenced by them. Examina-

tion of their perceptions and attitudes is relevant because it serves as a starting point to access intra-community differences regarding maintenance and shift.

### 3. The study

The framework for this study is based on Fishman's Reversing Language Shift theory (1991, 2000) and his understanding that intergenerational mother tongue transmission in the home is fundamental for minority language maintenance. Spolsky (2004) concurs with Fishman, but adds an additional level of analysis in that he views the home domain as an important site to understand how external pressures impact family language policies (p. 46). For Spolsky, "A host of non-linguistic factors (political, demographic, social, religious, cultural, psychological, bureaucratic and so on) regularly account for any attempt by persons or groups to intervene in the language practices and beliefs of other persons or groups" (2004:6). Following this argument to its next level and borrowing from Spolsky's theory of language planning, we could conceive of the five families in this group as individual communities of speech in which family linguistic policies are formed by language beliefs, language practices, and specific efforts to modify or influence those practices. Because the mothers in this group, to a great extent, acted as managers of family linguistic policies, a core component of this study is the examination of the beliefs held by the mothers regarding the vitality of Spanish, Mexican-Americans, and Mexicans in their community, and the value of transmitting Spanish to their children. Vitality is understood here to mean "perceived ethnolinguistic vitality" (Bourhis, Giles & Rosenthal 1981; Giles & Byrne 1982) or, as Giles and Byrne have described, "an individual's cognitive representations of the socio-structural forces operating in inter-ethnic contexts" (1982:23). For these authors, a perception of high ethnolinguistic vitality – together with a strong identification with an ethnic group that considers language an important dimension of its identity – is one of the factors that make individuals more likely to define themselves in ethnic terms and adopt strategies for positive linguistic differentiation (Giles & Byrne 1982:25).

In order to operationalize speakers' beliefs about the status of Spanish in their community and their perceptions about the cost/benefit equation in linguistic transmission, Karan's Perceived Benefit Model (1996, 2000) was used. In addition, in order to investigate if the families in the sample were doing anything regarding their children's development of Spanish, a measure of the factors identified by Tse (2001) in successful cases of heritage language resiliency were incorporated. This brings us to the question of what successful linguistic transmission is. Possible answers to this question might be: development of receptive competency; oral competency; sociopragmatic competence; biliteracy; or biculturality

(encompassing both sociopragmatic competence and biliteracy). Speakers in the present study were allowed to formulate their own understanding of linguistic transmission rather than being provided with a definition. Their answers hold important implications for heritage speaker pedagogy and language policy, because, among other things, they shed light on parental expectations about their children's development of bilingual competence and about the role that schools should play in it.

### *3.1 Methodology and sample*

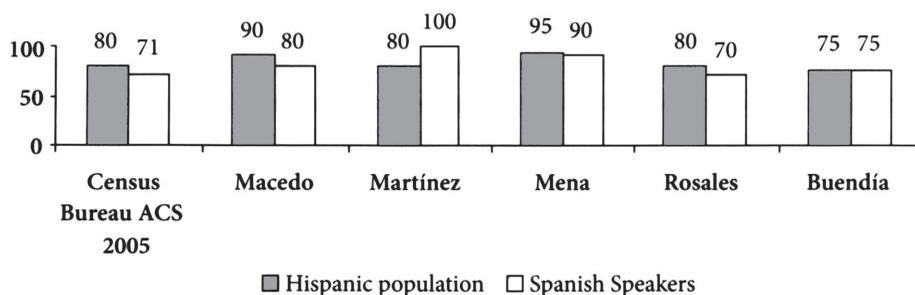
Data for this study were collected during two hour-long home interviews, and one month of participant observation. Four instruments were used to collect speakers' perceptions of vitality for Spanish in their community and their attitudes and motivations toward Spanish use and transmission.<sup>2</sup> An analysis of the mothers' primary network of interaction was performed at a later date.<sup>3</sup> The sample for El Paso was comprised of five two-parent, two-children, middle-class households belonging to the same social network. In all cases the main informant was the mother, with participation of the father when possible. Families were invited to participate in this study using what Oppenheim calls a "snowballing technique," where "a few appropriate individuals are located and then asked for the names and addresses of others who might also fit the sampling requirements" (1992:43).<sup>4</sup> As Oppenheim points out, the main drawback of this method of sampling is that it does not yield a representative sample that would allow for analysis with inferential statistics. This method has been employed in several sociolinguistic studies because it reduces the effect of the outsider, as the researcher identifies herself/ himself to potential participants as "a friend of a friend" (Milroy 1987; Yagmur, de Bot & Korzilius 1999). This type of approach is particularly relevant in researching attitudes toward language that might not be expressed in the presence of someone perceived as an outsider. In the end, these five families were chosen because they share several demographic, economic, and linguistic characteristics, and also because they belong to the same social network.

Three of the families in this group lived on El Paso's eastside, an area of rapid growth, preferred by Mexican and Mexican-American middle-class families with young children. One of the families lived in the area adjacent to Cielo Vista Mall and the I-10 freeway, in a neighborhood with a greater ethnic mix. The last family in the sample lived in an older, working-class Mexican-American neighborhood adjacent to Franklin Mountain, with a higher median age and longer history of settlement. All of the families in this group owned their home. Four of the families lived in neighborhoods that in 2000 had a higher percentage of Hispanic population than the city's average of 77%. Four of the families lived in neighborhoods

that in 2000 had a higher rate of Spanish use at home than El Paso's average of 69%.<sup>5</sup> Age-wise, only two of the ten parents in the sample were younger than El Paso's median age of 31.5.<sup>6</sup> Three were older by more than ten years. Economically, four of the families lived in a neighborhood where the median household income in 2000 was less than \$5,000 above El Paso's median household income. One of the families lived in a neighborhood where the median household income in 2000 was less than \$10,000 below El Paso's median household income. All parents in the sample were Spanish-English or English-Spanish bilinguals with varying degrees of competence in each language, and all were native speakers of either Chicano or Mexican Spanish. All self-identified as *Hispana/Hispano* – as opposed to Mexican-American, Mexican, American, Chicano, or Latino. Two of the mothers were second-generation El Pasoans, one was born in the state of Chihuahua, but studied in El Paso since high school, and the remaining two lived between Juarez and El Paso for most of their lives, but settled in El Paso around the age of thirty. All knew each other and were bound by ties of friendship, family, or neighborhood. All names used in this article are pseudonyms.

#### 4. Results

Figure 1 presents speakers' perception of the demographic strength of Mexican-Americans in particular, and Spanish speakers in general, as compared with 2005 Census Bureau data for the city of El Paso. These data were gathered with a 14-item Likert-type scale, and also via (open-ended) questions asked during two interviews.



**Figure 1.** Mothers' perception of demographic strength of Mexican-Americans/Hispanic population and of Spanish speakers in El Paso.

The first thing to note is that in all cases but one, speakers' perception of the percentage of El Paso's Mexican-American population was at or above actual Census data. All speakers attributed a very high vitality to Spanish in their community, estimating that three quarters or more of El Paso's population spoke Spanish. Two

answers to this item are particularly illustrative of these speakers' sense of the prevalence of Spanish in their community. Asked during an interview why she believes that 80 percent of El Pasos population is Mexican-American or Hispanic, but that 100 percent of El Pasoans speak Spanish, Rosy Martínez explained that in El Paso everyone knows some Spanish, even if it is just enough to understand a conversation. Ana Buendía, on the other hand, associated linguistic competence with ethnicity, asserting that all Mexican-Americans/Hispanics in El Paso speak Spanish, a perception not supported by objective data. In these exchanges, this perception often co-appeared with the notion of *looking Mexican/Hispanic* or *looking like you speak Spanish*.

In order to examine speakers' perceptions of the acceptability of Spanish in media, in education, in business, and when trying to access government services, a four-point Likert scale was employed. Results show that all speakers found that Spanish is very important in these public domains. On the issue of acceptability however, a difference was found in the domain of education, where Lala Macedo and Carmen Mena agreed that Spanish in El Paso schools was very important, but disagreed with that state of affairs and expressed the belief that instruction in El Paso schools should take place exclusively in English. When asked to expound, both speakers expressed the belief that bilingual education of all types hindered the full acquisition of English in children and thus, made them susceptible to future discrimination. As can be seen in the following excerpt, for Lala Macedo (LM), Spanish must be sacrificed to ensure her children's acquisition of English:

I: ¿Y qué tan importante ... es el español en las escuelas del Paso?

LM: Yo pienso que'l español en las escuelas nomás debería ser utilizado para integrar a los niños al inglés ...

I: ¿Por qué? A ver, explícame más ...

LM: Pienso que la educación debe ser en inglés. [...] Yo pienso que como vivimos en Estados Unidos los niños tienen que aprender bien el inglés, si no yo pienso que si no aprenden el inglés correcto, bien, después son discriminados para trabajos de ... de otro ... de niveles más altos ... eso es lo que pienso yo.

I: ¿Entonces piensas que alguien que habla inglés con acento tiene más posibilidades de que lo discriminen?

LM: ¡Claro, mil veces! Sí, no sí ... y más por ejemplo ... si te quieres quedar aquí toda tu vida pu's a la mejor no, pero si te quieres por ejemplo ir a otros lugares, y ganar más dinero en el norte, por supuesto que te van a ver con ojos de pu's qué onda, quién eres tú ¿veda? Yo pienso que a los niños se les debe enseñar inglés sin acento.

I: ¿Y ... se les debe enseñar español sin acento?

LM: Si quieres, en tu casa sí, o sea, yo pienso que el español es opcion[al].<sup>7</sup>

Results of the subjective ethnolinguistic vitality index (see endnote 2) regarding the status of Mexican-Americans, Mexicans, and Spanish in El Paso demonstrate a contrast between speakers' perception of the role/importance of the Spanish language on one hand and its Mexican and Mexican-American speakers on the other. While all of the mothers in the group assigned very high vitality to Spanish in their community, three assigned low vitality scores in the categories of Mexican-American's access to political power and community pride in Mexican-American and Mexican culture. Asked specifically about the importance of Mexicans to El Paso businesses, all mothers assigned very high vitality to Mexicans in this category. Their uniform answer here is no surprise if one takes into account that Mexican buying power is, together with Fort Bliss, one of the motors of El Paso's economy. The divide between perceived status of Spanish as a language and perceived status of Mexican-Americans as a group is particularly telling, because Mexicans and Mexican-Americans have been a numerical majority in the region for more than 300 years and in 2005 constituted 93% percent of El Paso's Hispanic or Latino population, a fact which per force makes them the largest group of Spanish speakers in the city.

#### *4.1 Parental perceptions of their role in their children's Spanish development*

Before examining participants' perception about their own role in their children's development of Spanish, it should be noted that all families in the sample have Spanish-dominant extended family members with whom their children interact regularly. It should also be noted that except in the case of the De la Cruz and Buendía families, whose parents are second-generation El Pasoans, most adult interactions within these households are conducted in Spanish. All mothers in the sample agreed that knowing how to speak Spanish in El Paso was beneficial, and all expressed their desire that their children would speak Spanish in the future. All mothers, except Lala Macedo, strongly disagreed with the item: "I don't need to teach Spanish to my children because we live in the United States". By the same token, all mothers except Lala Macedo responded in full agreement to the items: "Hispanic/Mexican parents have an obligation to teach Spanish to their children" and "Not teaching Spanish to children denies them of their culture". Important differences between the families appear when one examines in greater detail the role that the mothers envision for Spanish in their children's future, and consequently, the amount of time, effort and resources that they are willing to invest in helping them maintain the language.

While Lala Macedo and Carmen Mena, for example, believe that fostering the kind of Spanish spoken in El Paso holds no academic or economic benefits for their children, Rosy Martínez and Tere Rosales believe it is a way to help their

children achieve greater academic success and take advantage of future opportunities for economic advancement. Further, while Rosy Martínez and Tere Rosales see Spanish as an integral part of their children's identity, Lala Macedo believes that Spanish should be a second language that her children can learn in school at a later date if they wish to do so. At the same time, although she believes that she hurts her children when she speaks to them in Spanish because, as she explained, she slows down their acquisition of English, she dislikes the idea of them being unable to communicate with their family in the future.

Three of the mothers in this group ascribed to the notion that there is a "correct" or "pure" Spanish, which in no instance corresponded to El Paso Spanish, and also, a *correct* way to teach it. The inference can be made here then, that from these speakers' perception it is possible to hinder children's full acquisition of English, while at the same time teaching them the *wrong* kind of Spanish. This notion had different implications for family linguistic policies according to the mother's own linguistic identity. Carmen Mena, who had a successful professional career in Juarez before moving to El Paso and at the time of our interviews had just received a bachelors degree from a local university, perceived herself as a speaker of both the correct kind of Spanish and the correct kind of English. She manifested a strong dislike for codeswitching and described people who mix languages as lacking education. Because of this, she explained, when her family moved to El Paso she instituted a family policy of not switching between languages in the same utterance. The result of this policy, which she herself did not adhere to during the interviews, was not two children monolingual in both Spanish and English, but two children who, as they were growing up and were faced with lexical gaps related to domains outside the home, switched to English altogether and who today function mainly as English monolinguals both inside and outside the home.

Ana Buendía, on the other hand, spoke Spanish at home in early childhood but lost the language in elementary school. As an adult, she reacquired functional use of Spanish when she married a man with a large Spanish-dominant family. Today, Buendía is an English teacher in a two-teacher team in charge of a bilingual classroom at a local school. As she explained, she conducts part of her workday in Spanish, communicating with her partner, with parents who prefer Spanish or cannot speak English and with Spanish-dominant students (about half of her class). At home, Buendía listens to radio in Spanish, sporadically watches television in Spanish and, on social occasions, interacts in Spanish with extended family members and acquaintances, but does not speak Spanish to her husband or either of her children except when there is a Spanish speaker present and the social situation demands it. At the time of our interviews, although we had previously spoken in Spanish on a number of informal occasions and despite her husband speaking mostly Spanish to me in one of our sessions, she explained she felt

more comfortable if I presented the questions both in Spanish and English. With few exceptions, she answered my questions in English.

During interviews with three speakers in this group, and during informal conversations with other El Paso speakers, I encountered the following examples of folk linguistics: that speaking two languages confuses children and that it is detrimental to children if their parents force them to use Spanish. When present in a household, these ideas, of course, impact parental choices regarding Spanish use with their children. Examining these perceptions about language can be a valuable tool in uncovering the power differential of both languages in the community. The inverse perception, that it would be detrimental to children if their parents force them to speak English, was not considered a possibility for these speakers.

#### *4.2 Parental perceptions of bilingualism*

We return now to two questions we left unanswered at the beginning of this article: “What do these speakers understand as linguistic transmission?” and “What are their attitudes towards their children’s Spanish development?” While all parents agreed that English was crucial for their children’s academic success, and all agreed with the notion that speaking Spanish in El Paso was advantageous, differences were found in their understanding of successful linguistic transmission and about the value of bilingualism in their children’s lives. For some, their children needed only enough Spanish to converse in social situations; for others, just enough to communicate with monolingual relatives. Still for others, Spanish was needed to access opportunities later in life and to construct an important part of their identity. For Rosy Martínez, whose children had been enrolled in a trilingual program and were learners of Russian, multilingualism was a way to better understand the world. Comparing parents comments about the value of their children’s development of more than one language, five views of bilingualism were found: *Bilingualism as inevitable* – that is, even if parents do not use the language with their children, they will learn and use Spanish just by the fact that they live in El Paso; *Subtractive bilingualism* – one must chose English over Spanish to be successful; *Double monolingualism* – true bilinguals are able to keep both languages separated and can function as monolinguals of either language in any context; *Bilingualism as capital* – bilingualism will give children an edge in a very competitive world and will afford them future opportunities, and; *Multilingualism as a goal* – multilingualism is a way to help children understand the world better.

### *4.3 Parental expectations of their children's language use*

This section presents the results of an analysis of practices that might help to support or hinder Spanish development within each household. The instrument employed to gather these data incorporates the factors identified by Tse (2001) in successful cases of heritage language resiliency and is adapted to El Paso conditions. An important characteristic of this instrument is that it distinguishes between parents' Spanish use and their expectations of their childrens Spanish use, and also between practices which require little effort, a given for most of the neighborhoods where these families live (e.g. "My children hear me speaking Spanish with people in the community" or "We receive/visit relatives who speak Spanish") and practices which require a greater expenditure of time and family resources (e.g. "I read in Spanish to my children" or "My children are enrolled in a bilingual program"). Six items were added to this linguistic practices questionnaire to ascertain the extent to which parents fostered in their children a sense of ethnic pride, as well as a bilingual identity. Among these items, for example, participants were asked if their children had heard them say that being bilingual is important; if they had ever told their children stories about Latinos, Mexican-Americans, or Mexicans who had done something exemplary; and if they had ever participated with their children in any type of cultural or community event related to Latinos, Mexican-Americans, or Mexicans. For each practice presented, informants reported the frequency with which they engaged in it and the researcher assigned their response a value from 0 to 4 (4 = always/very frequently, 3 = once in a while, 2 = I don't know/don't remember, 1 = almost never, 0 = never).

When comparing results across families, three overall trends were found. The first evidences El Paso's situation of stable bilingualism: all but one of the families reported providing ample opportunities for their children to interact in Spanish in the community and with extended family, and all but one of the families reported high to very high scores in practices related to Spanish use in the home. The second finding was a strong relationship between ethnic pride/bilingual identity and overall family linguistic practices. Which is to say that, in this group, families that reported the highest frequencies for parents' communication of the value of bilinguality/biculturality to their children and for childrens exposure to Mexican/ Mexican-American culture and role models, also reported the highest frequencies of engaging in practices which foster the development of Spanish.

Perhaps the most problematic finding for a model that views biliteracy as part of successful linguistic transmission was that in three of the families in the sample very low scores were reported for Spanish literacy. When we delve deeper into this, we find important differences between families which again correspond to results for ethnic pride/bilingual identity. The two families with the highest

scores for ethnic pride/bilingual identity in this group showed scores of 83% and 91% in the category of opportunities for Spanish literacy development. This means that they reported children in this household reading or being read to in Spanish always or very frequently, one or both parents in the household reading in Spanish in front of their children always or very frequently, and both children in the household being enrolled in or having completed elementary education in a bilingual program. In contrast, the three families with the lowest scores for ethnic pride/bilingual identity had scores of 58%, 0%, and 0% with respect to opportunities for Spanish literacy development. In fact, only one of the six children in these three families was enrolled in a bilingual program and read/was read to in Spanish by his parents. Another child in this group had just completed monolingual first grade and was beginning to read in English. The other four children in the group (ages 11 to 16) could read and write at grade level in English, but not in Spanish. This is particularly striking, since, according to their mothers' reports and my previous observations, three of them could read and write in Spanish four years prior to the time of our interviews. Two of these children were born in Juarez and entered El Paso schools after the age of five as monolingual speakers of Spanish. Three had been enrolled in a bilingual program for a period of one to two years and were subsequently switched to a monolingual English track.

With different levels of proficiency, all parents in this group (ten total) were able to read and write in Spanish. Four parents in the group reported a preference for reading the local Spanish-language newspapers (*Diario de Juarez* or its El Paso edition) over the English language *El Paso Times*. Specifically, four of the mothers in the group reported having to read or write in Spanish at work sometimes. At home, three of these four mothers did not read in Spanish in front of their children. One of them, once an avid reader of novels in Spanish, reported that she engages in specific practices to counteract what she perceives to be the detrimental influence of Spanish in her children's life. The second of these three mothers reported owning a large collection of books in Spanish for children and adults, but stored in her garage and not used in years. Ana Buendía who was, as mentioned above, a teacher in a bilingual program in one of El Pasos three school districts, did not own any books in Spanish and did not read in Spanish at home.

## 5. Conclusion

This article has presented initial results of a qualitative examination of speakers' beliefs about the vitality of Spanish in their community and about the benefits and costs of helping their children develop their Spanish competence. It has been suggested here that these beliefs must be understood as a consequence of the underlying tensions present in a community such as El Paso, where intense linguis-

tic and interethnic contact takes place every day. Most parents in the group possessed an idea of standard Spanish and English that did not correspond with El Paso varieties of either language.

For some mothers in the group, Spanish competence was viewed as an obstacle for acquisition of unaccented English, and acquisition of unaccented English was viewed as key to avoid discrimination and to access middle-class and upper middle-class employment. Here, it is important to discuss, albeit briefly, the perception that the mothers in this group held about the quality of bilingual education offered in El Paso schools and about the teachers' ability to teach Spanish to their children. All but one of the mothers related anecdotes of miscommunication with teachers, misspellings in notes sent home and teacher's use of non-standard lexical choices both in the classroom and when communicating with them. Again, when examined in detail, we find differences in mothers' reaction to this situation. Some of the mothers' dissatisfaction with the teaching can be most clearly illustrated in Lala Macedos rejection of the dialect spoken by her children's teachers and her refusal to speak Spanish to them during parent/teacher meetings:

LM: La mayoría de las maestras de mis hijos ... las bilingües ... [...] No les entiendo su español, hablan un español inventado, no sé de dónde lo sacaron [...] Aunque según ellas es español, pero no, es que ... [...] Como les dije, no entiendo el español que hablan, prefiero inglés.<sup>8</sup>

Perhaps the most relevant finding for those interested in Spanish maintenance in the United States is the fact that in all households in the El Paso sample parents underestimated the efforts and resources necessary for their children to attain their own idea of bilingualism. For example, in households where parents believed their children needed only oral competency to interact in social situations, they also believed that they would attain it by hearing their parents speak Spanish at home. Parents who believed their children should grow up to be bilingual professionals also believed that completing elementary level bilingual education would ensure their attainment of competency in formal and academic contexts. This points to the urgent need to acknowledge in both academic and community settings that the achievement of full bilingual competence in formal and informal domains requires time, effort, and the deliberate investment of family, community, and institutional resources. Bilingualism is a complex, life-long process, more akin to the cycle described by Silva Corvalan (1994), than to a characteristic one possesses because one lives in a bilingual environment.

As was illustrated by the data from households presented here, community vitality, opportunities for interaction and parents' own linguistic competence and participation in Spanish language social networks were not predictors of family

policies favoring the use of Spanish by their children. Further, in all but two of these families, parents' positive attitudes toward Spanish in the community did not translate into the investment of time and resources to foster Spanish development in their children nor, ultimately, into the use of Spanish by those children. By contrast, those households where the mother perceived herself as having an active role in her children's linguistic development and also perceived both Spanish and a bilingual/biethnic identity as desirable for her children's future were also households where children were expected to speak Spanish at home and where more opportunities for linguistic development were present.

## Notes

1. The data used for this article are part of a broader study about intergenerational transmission of Spanish in two groups of families in El Paso and in the neighborhood of La Villita, in Chicago, two Mexican-American communities on different ends of the bilingualism spectrum (Velázquez 2008).
2. Speaker's perceptions of vitality were collected through the use of a 28-item subjective ethnolinguistic vitality index, constructed following Bourhis, Giles, and Rosenthal (1981) and Yagmur, de Bot, and Korzilius (1999). The first part of this instrument measures the vitality of Mexican-Americans and Mexicans as compared to the rest of the community, with possible rating of 1 through 7, one being "extremely low vitality," and seven being "extremely high vitality." The second part of this instrument addresses normative beliefs. Items 17, 18, 19, and 20 were designed to measure speakers' perceptions of appropriateness of Spanish in public domains. Responses to this section were coded using a five-point Likert scale ranging from "strong agreement" to "strong disagreement." The third and last part of this instrument is an 8-item attitudinal scale. This scale was constructed following Allard and Landry (1994) and Miller (2000). It measures four types of attitudes or beliefs about language: general beliefs (facts which are perceived to exist between language communities); normative beliefs (what ought to be regarding the relative position between languages, according to the speaker); personal beliefs (the speakers sense of belonging to a group, his/her perceived efficacy in regard to language); and goal beliefs (the speakers desires and aspirations regarding his/her languages).
3. For a detailed description of each mother's linguistic background see Velazquez 2008.
4. The same technique was used by Tse (2001) in her study of successful Chinese, Spanish and Japanese biliterates.
5. The highest percentage of Spanish use at home for those over the age of five was 72%, the lowest was 61%.
6. They were younger by an average of 1.5 years.
7. I: How important ... is Spanish in El Paso schools?  
LM: I think Spanish should only be used in school to integrate children to English  
...  
I: Why? Let's see, tell me more ...

- LM: Because education should be in English. [...] I think that children have to learn English well because we live in the United States, if not, I think that if they don't learn correct English, [learn it] well, they are later discriminated against for jobs of ... of another, ... of a higher level ... that's what I think.
- I: So you think that someone who speaks English with an accent has a greater possibility of being discriminated against?
- LM: Of course, a thousand times [more]! Yes, no, yes ... and even more for example ... if you want to stay here all your life well, maybe not, but if you want to go for example to other places, and earn more money up north, of course they're going to see you with eyes that [say] well, what's going on, who are you, right? I think children should be taught English without an accent.
- I: And ... should they be taught Spanish without an accent?
- LM: If you want to, in your home yes, I mean, I think that Spanish is option[al].
8. LM: Most of my children's teachers ... the bilinguals ... [...] I don't understand their Spanish, they speak an invented Spanish, I don't know where they got it from [...] According to them it's Spanish, but no, I mean [...] As I told them, I don't understand the Spanish you speak, I prefer English.

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