

UCI Spanish & Portuguese Department Present

LIDIA AGUILERA

University of Illinois Chicago

Identity and Language Investment: University Heritage Spanish Speakers in Chicago

My research explores the contexts in which heritage speakers (HS) of Spanish create, respond to, and resist opportunities to speak Spanish, and how these contexts shape their language practices. While Spanish is not at risk of disappearing in the U.S, due to the consistent influx of new immigrants, the risk of Spanish disappearance is absolutely the case for the generations of HS growing up bilingual. We must ensure educational models that not only keep the Spanish language alive but also extend its reach and development among Spanish speakers without limiting HS' linguistic practices. My research examines this loss, what can be done to prevent it, and proposes educational models that extend linguistic reach and development among HS. I qualitatively analyze the contribution of speakers' interactions to their language practices using raciolinguistics, investment, and critical language pedagogies as perspectives to explore the concepts of language and identity. To better understand familial, social, and institutional experiences, I collected linguistic autobiographies and conducted individual and small group interviews with ten university HS of Spanish, asking about their personal experiences. Using Grounded Theory for my theoretical framework, I analyze the contribution of speakers' interactions to their communicative practices.

Regarding the findings, one of the most salient themes exposes the connection between experiences in the educational system as bilinguals and language investment. Participants stated the importance of school as equal to the importance of their families in nurturing their ethnic identities and language practices: one participant even referred to this duality as having *dos hogares*, two homes. Participants who felt that their full language repertoire was welcomed at school reported confidence and agency in *bigger settings*, actively deciding on how and when to use their languages and advocating for their linguistic rights. Current research argues that Spanish as a Heritage Language (SHL) instructors that build on SHL students' linguistic confidence and stimulate their agency foster a more profound commitment to maintaining their language. My work adds to existing research on language maintenance and, in particular, explores participants' perspectives on the role SHL curricula plays in promoting HL investment.

Tuesday, January 16, 2024

3:30 PM – 4:30 PM

Humanities Hall 344