

"American Myths of Linguistic Assimilation: A Sociolinguistic Rebuttal"

This study examines the linguistic behavior of 332 Spanish speakers, 272 immigrants to the United States and 62 native-born individuals, through language usage questionnaires and sociolinguistic interviews. Results show that increased life experience in the U.S. correlates with expanded use of English in both private and public domains of life. The data also show that greater use of English co-occurs with the maintenance of fine-grained patterns of linguistic variation in Spanish, such that U.S. born speakers demonstrate remarkable similarity to the immigrant generation in their usage of three sociolinguistic variables: (i) subject pronoun presence vs. absence, (ii) grammatical subject position, and (iii) syllable-final /s/. The co-occurrence of language shift towards English, on one hand, and intergenerational structural continuity in variable linguistic behavior in Spanish, on the other, challenges two misconceptions about Spanish in the United States: (1) That Spanish-speaking immigrants and their U.S. born children are unwilling, unmotivated, or unable to learn English, and (2) That the regular use of English characteristic of daily life in the U.S. entails attrition and/or failed acquisition of Spanish. Neither of these views finds empirical support in our data.