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Local Social Meanings and Language Use in a Chicago Bilingual Community

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By

Jennifer Dibbern

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Abstract

This dissertation investigates how the assumptions that bilinguals make about what language(s) an interlocutor will speak are shaped by the linguistic ideologies they hold. Daily life requires communicating with a variety of interlocutors. For bilinguals, each switch in interlocutor entails a decision about what language(s) they expect. Seminal theories of bilingual language control postulate that this decision is influenced by the social context in which the interaction occurs (e.g., Grosjean, 2001; Green and Abutalebi, 2013) but do not determine which aspects of context are relevant. Linguistic ideologies are central to how researchers conceptualize the influence of social information on language (e.g. Kroskrity, 2004; Silverstein, 1979; Woolard, 1998); they are known to shape language use (e.g. Eckert, 2008; Irvine, 2001; Lippi-Green, 2012) and perception (e.g. D'Onofrio, 2019; Kang and Rubin, 2009; Strand, 1999) in monolinguals. To more fully understand how social context influences speech perception and control in bilinguals, therefore, we must consider how linguistic ideologies are incorporated into these processes. While prior work (Li, Yang, Scherf, and Li, 2013) suggests that linguistic ideologies guide speech perception processes in bilinguals, this has not been explicitly studied. In this work, therefore, I take up the question of how ideologies—particularly those related to an interlocutor's perceived social identity—influence language selection and control in bilinguals. I engaged members of Chicago's Mexican American, Spanish-English bilingual community to investigate what linguistic ideologies they held, how those related to patterns of language use at the community and individual levels, and whether they played a role in speech perception. To address these questions, I collected data using: (1) interviews to identify what self-reported linguistic ideologies participants hold about their languages and who speaks them; (2) a questionnaire to gather information about participants' language background, experience, and

patterns of use; and (3) a socially-primed phoneme categorization task testing the influence of local linguistic ideologies on speech perception. Results from all three studies affirm the significance of local social meanings to bilinguals' language use, illustrating how they shape bilinguals' expectations for which language(s) are contextually appropriate (Studies 1 and 2) and their perception of an interlocutor's speech (Study 3). These findings underscore the context-dependent nature of bilingual language use, supporting the need for future research that integrates both qualitative insights and refined quantitative measures to better reflect the diverse realities of bilinguals' language use.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

"Knowing which language to use to whom and when—the famous Fishman question (Fishman, 1965)—is a central part of being bilingual or multilingual," (Wei & Ho, 2018, p. 36).

Social context shapes bilinguals' language use (e.g., Kroll et al., 2023; Titone & Tiv, 2023), influencing their expectations for which language(s) are contextually appropriate (e.g., Kaan et al., 2020; Kapiley & Mishra, 2024). Bilinguals dynamically adapt their language use to accord with these socially-derived expectations (e.g., Blanco-Elorrieta & Pylkkänen, 2017; Kapiley & Mishra, 2018), with different interactional contexts believed to exert different demands on bilinguals' language control mechanisms (e.g., Adler et al., 2019; Beatty-Martínez et al., 2020; Green & Abutalebi, 2013). Seminal theories of bilingual language control postulate that social context modulates the activation levels of a bilingual's languages; they do not, however, determine which aspects of context are relevant to these processes (e.g., Green & Abutalebi, 2013; Grosjean, 2001).

While there is a growing interest in the ways that social information can shape bilingual language processing (e.g., Abutalebi & Clahsen, 2023; Molnar et al., 2015; Salig et al., 2024), prior work has traditionally focused on how aspects of language experience (e.g., age of acquisition) may influence it (e.g., Flege et al., 1995; Gollan et al., 2012; Marian et al., 2007; Surrain & Luk, 2019). Where studies have considered the role of social context, they have often utilized questionnaires to assess a set of predetermined factors (e.g., DeLuca et al., 2019; Luk & Bialystok, 2013; Mann & de Bruin, 2022). The field has not yet reached a consensus, however, on what social factors are most relevant nor how best to characterize them (e.g., Gullifer and Anderson, 2023; Surrain and Luk, 2019).

Recent work has sought to address this issue and facilitate inter-study comparison via the development of novel language use measures (e.g., (J. W. Gullifer et al., 2021; Tiv et al., 2020). These efforts have, however, continued to deploy a researcher-determined approach when selecting which social factors to incorporate; they are not locally situated within the specific cultural, historical, social, and linguistic contexts of their bilingual participants' communities and, therefore, do not capture the ways in which local identities, practices, and norms may impact bilingual language processing and control. Local conceptions of how language is used and by whom as well as how these practices are evaluated matter to language use, however (e.g., Eckert, 2012). To more fully understand how social context shapes bilingual language processing and control, therefore, we must consider what kinds of social information are incorporated into these processes and how. Crucially, we must identify the relevant social factors in an emergent and locally contextualized way.

In this dissertation, I consider what aspects of social context influence language selection and control in bilinguals. I engaged members of the Mexican American, Spanish-English bilingual community in Chicago's Pilsen neighborhood to investigate what social factors they identified as influencing the language(s) they use with an interlocutor, how well those factors were captured by current assessments of bilinguals' language experience, and whether they played a role in speech perception. To address these questions, I collected data using: (1) interviews to identify the social factors that participants describe as central to their choice of which language(s) they engage in a conversation; (2) a questionnaire to gather information about participants' language background, experience, and patterns of use; and (3) a socially-primed phoneme categorization task that uses brief descriptions of interlocutors to test the influence of localized social meanings on bilingual perception. Crucially, I did not predetermine what social

factors would be incorporated into the primes used in the listening task but rather structured the interview and analysis to allow relevant factors to emerge from participants' discourse. Primes significantly influenced responses on the categorization task, with participants exhibiting more Spanish-like perception when first shown a prime that socially indexed Spanish language knowledge. This result suggests that participants drew on local linguistic ideologies linking attributes of the speaker described in the prime to Spanish language knowledge, influencing their expectations for the speakers' language use and their activation of language-specific processing.

Bilingual Language Processing and Control

Speech perception requires listeners to map an "almost bewilderingly complex" (Scott, 2019, p. 58) acoustic input onto linguistic representations in their mental lexicon. Listeners do not rely on a single acoustic cue to understand speech; instead, they leverage the most relevant cues available, a flexibility which is essential for navigating the variety of voices, accents, and complex acoustic environments they encounter (e.g., Shannon et al., 1995). Social cues from within and outside the acoustic signal can also be exploited to parse the speech stream, influencing how speech is processed (e.g., Johnson et al., 1999). As Szakay et al. (2016) succinctly assert, the "processing of spoken language is an exercise in mapping between variable phonetic signals, socio-pragmatic context, and abstracted phonological representations" (p. 92).

The complexities of language processing are heightened for bilinguals who must negotiate the use of two languages that compete and interact (e.g., Schwartz & Kroll, 2006). Grosjean (2001) posits that bilinguals navigate this challenge via the use of language-specific processing, shifting along a continuum of language activation between mono- and bilingual language modes. He defines language mode as the (relative) activation level of a

bilingual's languages and language processing mechanisms and postulates that an array of factors---including discourse content, physical location, and patterns of use--integrate to determine it. Of particular significance to this dissertation is his assertion that those factors include non-linguistic information like an interlocutor's social identity (e.g. their socioeconomic status or relationship with the listener).

Green & Abutalebi (2013) similarly theorize the relevance of social information to the cognitive processes involved in language control, arguing that these processes are sensitive to a variety of cues including face and voice. They distinguish three interactional contexts (single language, dual language, or dense code-switching) by the different demands those contexts are believed to exert on the control processes engaged in bilingual language use. Social information from outside the speech signal, which is positioned as part of the broader environment for these interactional contexts, is argued to influence the activation levels of language-specific task schema or the control processes governing the language(s) needed in an interaction. Crucially, however, while both Grosjean (2001) and Green and Abutalebi (2013) posit an important role for social information in bilingual language control, they leave to future work the elucidation of precisely what social factors act (and interact) to determine the language(s) a bilingual expects to hear and use in a given context.

Subsequent research has taken up this question, investigating how social information from outside the speech signal may influence bilingual language processing (e.g., Molnar et al., 2015). These studies have not, however, directly queried what social factors bilinguals themselves believe shape their language use; neither have they assessed the influence of localized social meanings on speech perception by bilinguals. Social meaning and language use are known to be context dependent, however, shaped by both macro-social and local factors

(e.g., Bucholtz & Hall, 2005; Eckert, 2008, 2012; Irvine, 2002). Recent work has highlighted this lacuna, emphasizing the situated nature of bilingual language use and underscoring the need for theoretical frameworks that account for the neurocognitive implications of its social dimensions (e.g., DeLuca et al., 2019; Titone & Tiv, 2023). Gullifer and Anderson (2023), for example, caution against the use of broad, oversimplified measures, arguing that bilingualism encompasses a diverse spectrum of experience and that "collapsing across all of the complexity that should be accounted for will likely yield nonsense" (p.3, emphasis in original). They advocate for the broader adoption of methods--such as first employing qualitative investigations (e.g., interviews) before developing standardized language experience questionnaires—that allow for the collection and analysis of nuanced/complex datasets. Abutalebi and Clahsen (2023) echo this call to action, asserting that researchers "need to recognize the social implications when characterizing and quantifying bilingual and multilingual experience" (p.245).

Language and Social Meaning

As the field increasingly recognizes the need for a deeper understanding of the social dimensions of bilingual language use, it is important to consider how the relationship between language and social meanings is conceptualized. Two foundational concepts in this area, language attitudes and ideologies, are theorized to "mediate between social and linguistic practices on the one hand, and structures of language and society on the other" (Gal, 2023, p. 3). These concepts shape and reflect how speakers evaluate different language varieties and practices, providing a lens through which researchers can examine/explore how language is perceived and used in social contexts. While closely related, language attitudes and ideologies

are distinct concepts, each with its own focus and scope. The discussion below will consider each concept in greater detail.

Language Attitudes

Attitudes are evaluative tendencies that individuals hold toward particular entities called attitude objects (Eagly and Chaiken, 2007). An attitude object can be anything identifiable or mentally held—whether concrete or abstract, individual or collective—that elicits an evaluative response (ibid.). These responses can vary in intensity and valence; they may be "overt or covert, or cognitive, affective, or behavioral" and need not be consciously experienced by the attitude holder (ibid; p. 582). Attitudes are theorized to reflect an individual's personal experiences as well as broader societal and cultural norms (Edwards, 1999). Language attitudes, in particular, refer to evaluations of different language varieties and practices (Dragojevic, 2017). While researchers differ regarding the number and content of evaluative dimensions in language judgments (Garrett, 2001; Ryan & Giles, 1982; Zahn & Hopper, 1985), they agree that social groups differ in their attitudes toward language (Garrett et al., 1999; Labov, 1972; Trudgill, 1972) and that these attitudes often engage ideas of "correctness" and prestige (Figueroa, 2003; Kasstan et al., 2018; Marlow & Giles, 2008). As Cameron (1995) notes, "very many language users hold passionate views about what is right in language and what is wrong with it" (p. 236).

Attitudes provide a rapid way of organizing individuals' perceptions of and reactions to a complex social environment (Katz, 1960; Pyszczynski et al., 2018). Katz (1960) describes this structuring role of attitudes as their knowledge function, arguing that they provide standards or frames of reference needed to understand "what would otherwise be an unorganized, chaotic world" (p. 175). Attitudes organize perception through the biased assimilation of information, a

process in which "people who hold pre-existing assumptions and expectations erroneously perceive new information as confirming those assumptions and expectations" (Lord & Taylor, 2009, p. 831). In this context, the speech signal is one type of information that listeners may interpret in a biased way based on, among other factors, the attitudes that they hold. Lippmann (1922), in his classic work on stereotypes, highlights both the epistemic and biasing functions of attitudes, stating that "we notice a trait which marks a well-known type, and fill in the rest of the picture by means of the stereotypes we carry about in our heads…and those preconceptions, unless education has made us acutely aware, govern deeply the whole process of perception" (p.60).

The influence of language attitudes on behavior is well-documented (Campbell-Kibler, 2013). They have been implicated as catalysts for language change (Labov, 1963), predictors of second language attainment/acquisition (Masgoret & Gardner, 2003; Schumann, 1975), and factors in heritage language maintenance (e.g., Zhang & Slaughter-Defoe, 2009). Language attitudes also affect evaluations of speakers (Abrams & Hogg, 1987; Giles & Billings, 2004), accommodation (Giles & Ogay, 2007; Sachdev & Giles, 2006), and language perception (Babel & Russell, 2015; Ingvalson et al., 2017) inter alia. Studies of bilinguals have shown that language attitudes can significantly influence, among other things, code-switching behaviors (Guzzardo Tamargo et al., 2019; Toribio, 2002) and language dominance (Birdsong et al., 2012; Olson, 2023). Garrett (2001) argues for the importance of measuring communities' social evaluations of language, stating that, "language attitudes research in sociolinguistic communities can reveal the dynamic identificational and relational forces at work within them. These include prejudices held against (or in [favor] of) regional or social varieties. They also include allegiances and affiliative feelings towards one's own or other groups' speech norms, and they

include stereotypes of speech styles," ultimately concluding that "language attitudes are a key component of sociolinguistic theory-building" (ibid., p.630).

Finally, while an attitude itself may remain constant, its expression can be influenced by contextual factors such as the presence of an audience or other aspects of the setting. Eagly and Chaiken (2007) describe context effects as "pervasive", noting that "evaluative judgments are not pure expressions of attitude but outputs that reflect information in the current situation as well as at least some aspects of the preexisting evaluative tendency" (p.587). Building on this understanding, Shavitt (2018) suggests that attitude structure may differ as a function of an individual's cultural background, contending that "because people may have multiple cultural self-views and identities, their attitudes may depend on which group-linked norms are highlighted in each context" (p. 618). Therefore, grounding speakers' attitudes within their local context is essential for understanding how these attitudes may shape language use, as local social norms and practices provide the framework within which attitudes are formed, expressed, and enacted.

Language Ideologies

Ideologies, according to Eagly and Chaiken (2007), reflect inter-attitudinal structure. They consist of related sets of attitudes and beliefs that, much in the same way as a single attitude itself, are argued to serve as organizing devices that help individuals negotiate the complexities of social life (Pyszczynski et al., 2018). Linguistic ideologies, specifically, connect ways of speaking to aspects of social identity, interactional stances, and frameworks of cultural value; they are essential to how we represent social information's influence on and incorporation into language use (Woolard, 2020). They reflect beliefs about how language is (i.e., patterns of use, indexical links) and judgments of how it should be (i.e., which varieties are viewed as more

prestigious, who is an authorized or expected user of certain features). Consequently, linguistic ideologies can "essentialize and naturalize" social hierarchies by valorizing certain speech varieties and practices over others, contributing to the "stigmatization and marginalization of some speakers and the authorization of others" (Gal, 2023, pp. 2–3).

Linguistic ideologies are argued to exist as both mental representations and embodied practices (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005; Gal, 2023). Gal (1992) emphasizes that ideologies are not only "systematic ideas, cultural constructions, commonsense notions, and representations" but also "the everyday practices in which such notions are enacted; the structured and experienced social relations through which humans act upon the world" (pp. 445-6). Listeners draw upon these ideologies in everyday interactions to interpret variation in others' speech (Gal, 2023), making them integral to social life. Research has shown that linguistic ideologies shape speech perception in monolinguals (D'Onofrio, 2019; Strand, 1999) and matter to bilinguals (T. K. Anderson & Toribio, 2007; Bullock & Toribio, 2014; Woolard, 2004). While studies have examined language ideologies within and about bilingual communities (e.g., (Zentella, 1997); see also Chapter 2 for more discussion), prior work (S. Zhang et al., 2013a) has not directly assessed their influence on bilingual language perception and control.

Finally, linguistic ideologies reflect speakers' experiences and underlie their expectations for how, when, and by whom a language is (or should be) used (Gal, 2023); these associations cannot be assumed from broad macrosocial patterns alone (Kroskrity, 2009). As Johnstone (2010) explains, "the dimensions along which indexical meanings vary (locality, carefulness, class, gender, respect, and so on) depend on *local (not linguists')* ideas about what linguistic variation can mean" (p. 16; emphasis added). Therefore, it is essential to first consider what

locally-situated social meanings surround language use within a bilingual community before

assessing how those meanings shape bilingual language processing and use.

Language in Context

"Expectations are enduring cognitions about the behavior anticipated of others. They are a product of social norms in a given situation and any individuating information that one actor has about the other," Burgoon (2015, p. 3).

Socially constructed expectations about how a speaker should sound based on known or

inferred aspects of their identity have been demonstrated to influence how their speech is

perceived. That is, listeners shift their perception to align what they hear with what they expect

to hear. Strand (1999), for example, showed that listeners' perception of a speaker's gender

influenced how they perceived that speaker's production of two fricative sounds, /s/ and /ʃ/.

When listeners saw a female face, their category boundary between /s/ and /ʃ/ shifted to higher

frequencies. This result was consistent with gender-related variability in how the two fricatives

are produced and indicates that "evaluative judgments, or stereotypes, actually play a role in

shaping the perception of language itself" (ibid., p. 86). Similar perceptual shifts have been

demonstrated for a number of features like ethnic identity (Szakay et al., 2016), race (Rubin,

1992), language background (Blanco-Elorrieta & Pylkkänen, 2017), and persona (D'Onofrio,

2019).

McGowan (2015) built from Strand's (1999) foundational work to further explore how

social information and experience modulate speech perception. Using an inverted matched guise

task, he investigated how listeners' level of experience with a speech variety interacts with their

expectations, cued by auditory and visual stimuli, to influence their perception of

speech. Participants were presented with one of three visual primes depicting a purported talker

that varied in how they were likely to be racialized (East Asian, White, or control (i.e., a

silhouette intended to convey no social information) and asked to complete a transcription in noise task. McGowan found that congruency between the social expectations cued by auditory and visual stimuli influenced how speech was perceived, pairing East Asian-accented speech with a picture of an East Asian face increased intelligibility. This occurred for listeners with both lower and higher levels of experience with East Asian-accented speech suggesting that listeners likely drew on stereotypes about East Asian speakers' English, supporting the significance of social information to language perception.

Kutlu et al. (2022) extended this line of inquiry by investigating how aspects of listeners' local context influence their use of visually presented social information when perceiving and assessing speech. In their study, American and Canadian listeners were presented with speech samples from three different English varieties (American, British, and Indian), paired with images of either a South Asian or White face. Participants were drawn from two locales: Gainesville, Florida, a small U.S. town where multilingualism is generally viewed as a deficit, and Montreal, Quebec, a large metropolitan area in Canada where multilingualism is socioculturally supported. They rated speakers' accentedness and completed an intelligibility task that assessed their recognition accuracy by having them transcribe auditory stimuli. Kutlu et al. found that the perceived race of the speaker influenced listeners' recognition accuracy for British and Indian English, observing poorer accuracy following the South Asian prime than the White one. Notably, this effect was modulated by locale, with Gainesville listeners showing overall lower transcription accuracy than Montreal listeners. Kutlu et al. suggest that Montreal's linguistically diverse environment leads to bilingual interactions that are more frequent and less predictable, contributing to high language entropy. Language entropy, as defined by Gullifer and Titone (2020), quantifies the diversity in a multilingual speakers' daily language use across

different contexts. Montreal listeners' higher language entropy, Kutlu et al. (2022) contend, equips them with greater experience in resolving language-based uncertainties. Moreover, while Gainesville listeners judged both American and British English speech as more accented when paired with South Asian faces, Montreal listeners did not. The authors posit that the social meaning of perceived race differs between the two locales; race is seen as a less reliable cue to an interlocutor's language by those from Montreal than those from Gainesville. These findings support "more context-based social information processing" and highlight the significance of locally-situated social meanings to understanding of language use (ibid., p.16).

The identity-based expectations observed in the aforementioned studies arise from listeners' knowledge of social variation in the ways that different speakers use speech (Eckert, 2012; Labov, 1963). In perceiving speech, listeners draw on these indexical links between linguistic features and social meaning. Indices are, however, inherently culturally-variable, dependent on an individual's social context, history, and point of view for their meaning (Irvine, 2002). Indeed, Eckert (2008) contends that linguistic variables index not one but rather a field of ideologically related meanings, with context shaping which of these potential meanings is activated. Linguistic variables are thus underspecified for social meaning and rely on both macro-social and local context for their interpretation. Local, community-level context is, therefore, essential to understanding how social information influences bilingual language selection and control as the social meaning of any factor is dynamically constructed within the specific sociocultural contexts in which a bilingual uses their languages.

Organization of the Dissertation

In this dissertation, I consider what aspects of local social context influence language selection and control in bilinguals. I engage members of the Mexican American, Spanish-English bilingual community in Chicago's Pilsen neighborhood to investigate what social factors they describe as influencing the language(s) they use with an interlocutor and how those relate to patterns of language use at the community and individual levels (Study 1). In Study 2, I assess how well existing instruments capture the nuances of bilinguals' language experience, with specific attention to the social contexts of their language use. Finally, Study 3 examines whether local social meanings play a role in shaping bilingual speech perception.

In Chapter 2, I provide context for the discussion of social meanings and practices surrounding language use in Pilsen by examining the sociohistorical context for the neighborhood's Mexican-origin community. This chapter includes a thematic analysis of interviews with bilingual, Spanish-English speaking members of Pilsen's Mexican American community, exploring their narratives about Pilsen and the impacts of ongoing gentrification in the neighborhood. Additionally, I address historical and demographic changes as well as (racio)linguistic ideologies within and about Mexican American communities.

In Chapter 3, I present the first study, which uses semi-structured interviews to identify the social factors that participants describe as central to their choice of which language(s) they engage in a conversation. I analyzed eight interviews with Mexican American, Spanish-English bilingual residents of Chicago's Pilsen neighborhood who were recruited for the study via volunteer and snowball sampling (Morse, 1991). Through thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) of the semi-structured interview data, I investigated how participants ideologized their language use and what localized social meanings they believed shaped their expectations for

which language(s) were needed in an interaction. Themes emerged organically from the data,

selected to reflect patterns relevant to the question of bilinguals' language use. Four main

themes were identified: 1) language selection is a fluid and highly contextualized process; 2)

locality conditions language use; 3) Spanish is expected within Pilsen; and 4) Spanish helps to

define and construct community. Theme 1 includes accounts describing the cues to language

choice as heterogeneous and context dependent. Theme 2 captures discourse emphasizing local,

geographic place as an important component of the interactional context that participants

consider when assessing which language(s) to use. Theme 3 reflects commentary positioning

Spanish language use throughout Pilsen's public spaces as unremarkable, safe, and

expected. Theme 4 includes accounts of Spanish as a language of authentication and resistance,

allowing for the affirmation and maintenance of community boundaries in the face of ongoing

gentrification in the neighborhood. Together, these findings underscore the significance of local,

community-level context to bilingual language use and, therefore, support the relevance of local

meanings to bilinguals' language control mechanisms.

In Chapter 4, I consider how effectively existing instruments for assessing bilinguals'

language experience capture the social dimensions of bilinguals' language use that emerged

during the interviews. This second study engages the same participants who completed the

interviews, enabling me to investigate how well a structured, written questionnaire measures the

complexity of their linguistic experiences as assessed through the thematic analysis in Chapter 3.

I drew on social experience questionnaires (e.g., Brigham, 1993; McGowan, 2015) to develop

questions measuring a participants' experience with speakers' of Spanish and English and prior

studies of attitudes (Achugar & Pessoa, 2009) to develop questions probing participants'

language attitudes. Additionally, I incorporated the Bilingual Language Profile (Birdsong et al.,

2012) to assess participants' language experience and dominance. While questionnaires are an efficient way to systematically collect self-reported data on bilinguals' language history and use, I find that they are constrained in the depth of knowledge they can elicit, omitting and/or obscuring important aspects of the social dimensions of bilinguals' language use. I argue that these limitations stem from their predominantly directive mode of questioning and their lack of grounding in community context.

In Chapter 5, I discuss the third study, which investigates how localized social meanings are engaged in the cognitive processes that govern language switching in bilinguals. To explore this, I employed a socially-primed phoneme categorization task to assess the influence of localized social meanings on bilingual perception. Two primes were developed, each intended to cue/activate one of a participants' languages. Crucially, in developing the primes, I did not assume a priori what social factors might influence a bilingual's expectations for what language(s) an interlocutor was likely to speak. Instead, the primes consisted of brief, written descriptions of interlocutors that integrated the linguistic ideologies expressed during the interviews with members of Pilsen's bilingual, Mexican American community (Study 1); these local, community-grounded ideologies connected aspects of an interlocutor's social identity and/or context to their presumed proficiency in Spanish and/or English. This study then engaged Mexican American, Spanish-English bilingual speakers from Chicago (n=40), asking them to first categorize two acoustic continua of bilabial stops in the context of the low, back vowel /a/ and then provide social evaluations of each speaker. I find that when participants were first shown a prime that socially indexed Spanish language knowledge and/or use, they were more likely to respond "pa" to any given continuum step, corresponding to more Spanish-like identification, in both the first and second blocks. The inverse was also true: when first shown a

prime indexing English language knowledge and/or use, participants exhibited overall more English-like categorization of the continua in both blocks.   Additionally, in their social evaluations of the speakers, participants rated the characteristic "Spanish-speaker" as better describing speakers ($t(40)=-2.4$, $p=0.023$) significantly more often when speakers were paired with the prime socially-indexing Spanish language knowledge and/or use than when paired with the prime indexing English. Overall, results demonstrate that social prime significantly affected how the continua were categorized, with participants demonstrating a more Spanish-like identification boundary when presented with a prime indexing Spanish language knowledge and/or use. Local social meanings, therefore, modulated participants' expectations for which language(s) an interlocutor would speak and, consequently, shaped their perception of that interlocutor's speech.

Finally, in Chapter 6, I conclude by discussing key findings from all three studies, exploring their implications and limitations. I argue that locally-situated social meanings are essential to the understanding of bilingual language use, modulating bilinguals' expectations for (Study 1) and perception of (Study 3) others' speech. I advocate for greater incorporation of qualitative methodologies like semi-structured interviews into research on bilingual language use to ground understanding of what aspects of (local) social context are significant to bilinguals in the community of interest, identify what dimensions of social context are salient across bilingual communities, inform the development of measures or instruments assessing these social dimensions of bilinguals' language use (Study 2), and facilitate cross-study comparison.

Chapter 2. Pilsen in Context

Language practices are inherently local, shaped by the specific social, cultural, and historical conditions of the communities where they are used (Pennycook, 2010). Place, therefore, has been central to studies of language and is "one of the most frequently adduced correlates of linguistic variation" (Johnstone, 2010, p. 65). Work has found evidence for its role in shaping linguistic change (Labov, 1963; Llamas, 2007), the meanings of linguistic variables (Eckert, 2008; Silverstein, 2003), the construction of identity and community (Eckert et al., 2009; Trudgill, 1972), interactional styles (Monka et al., 2020), and language practices (Urciuoli, 2013) among other aspects. Other investigations have explored how patterns in visual representations of language on signage construct a linguistic landscape (Coupland, 2012; Landry & Bourhis, 1997) and how language is engaged in making place (Johnstone, 2010; Ryden, 1993), finding that "people actively *create* meaningful places through conversation and interaction with others" (Stokowski, 2002, p. 372), emphasis in the original). These studies underscore that language and place are deeply intertwined. Language does not just mirror our environment, it actively contributes to how we perceive and engage with spaces; similarly, place shapes language practices, use, and ideologies. To understand the social meanings and practices surrounding language use in Pilsen, therefore, it is essential to understand the place itself and situate the community within its sociohistorical and geographic context.

Pilsen is a neighborhood on the Lower West Side of Chicago, just southwest of the city's downtown area. Known for its Mexican-American cultural heritage, public art, and activist community, Pilsen is currently home to a majority bilingual, Spanish-English speaking Latine community. Throughout its history, Pilsen has experienced waves of ethnic succession as an important port of entry to the United States, beginning with Irish and German settlers in the mid

19th century, followed by Czech and other Eastern European immigrants in the late 19th and

early 20th centuries, and, most recently, Mexican immigrants who began settling in the area in

the mid-20th century. While historically a lower to middle-class neighborhood, recent years

have seen rising rents and property values due to ongoing gentrification, leading to significant

socioeconomic changes within the community (J. Betancur & Linares, 2023). To better

understand the local meanings and practices that emerge in interviews with participants (see

Chapter 3), it is necessary to ground them within their social, historical, and cultural context. In

this chapter, I consider the history of Mexican-origin peoples at three levels: first, nationally

within the context of the United States; second, locally within the broader Chicago metropolitan

area; and, finally, at the neighborhood level within Pilsen. In addition to tracing these historical

developments, I will review studies of (racio)linguistic ideologies both within and about

Mexican American communities. I will also discuss recent research on the process and impacts

of gentrification in Pilsen. I conclude by presenting a thematic analysis of participants'

reflections on their community, including the changes and challenges accompanying ongoing

gentrification.

Pilsen Neighborhood: History and Context

History and Racialization of Mexican-origin Communities in the US

   Mexican Americans[1] were first formally woven into US society when The Treaty of

Guadalupe Hidalgo, which ended the US-Mexican War (1846-1848), offered Mexicans in the

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[1] In the ensuing discussion, I follow Gutiérrez (1995) in using the terms "Mexicans" or "Mexican immigrants" to describe persons born in Mexico and "Mexican American" to describe those born in the United States or to refer to locales within the US (e.g., Mexican American communities). I use both "Mexican" and "Mexican American" to describe the peoples of (mixed) Indigenous, Spanish, and African heritage who lived within the Mexican Cession (a region that now comprises the American Southwest) and identify as having Mexican heritage. This choice more accurately reflects the terminology used in nineteenth century historical records, the population's mestizo racial

newly ceded territory citizenship (Moquin, 1971). Citizenship in the US at that time was inextricably enmeshed with Whiteness (Molina, 2010b), as individuals were required to be "free white persons" in order to naturalize (The First Naturalization Act, 1790).[2] Mexicans' eligibility for naturalization under the treaty meant that they were considered legally white even though the treaty did not directly declare them to be so. This *de jure* whiteness was reflected in Mexican Americans' classification as "foreign born whites"[3] on the US census and protected them from legal segregation. As Fox and Bloemraad (2015) note, however, "this claim to legal whiteness…was tenuous since it did not align well with scientific or popular ideas about Mexicans' color status at the time" (p.184). Mexican Americans' *de jure* whiteness was not uniformly recognized by the communities in which they lived and they often faced *de facto* segregation, discriminated against in housing, school, and employment (Molina, 2010a).

Members of the Mexican landed class were also slowly dispossessed, resulting in the extensive transfer of lands from Mexican to European Americans between 1848 and 1880 (Almaguer, 1994; Daniel, 2022, Takaki, 2012). This proletarianization of Mexican Americans living in the Mexican Cession also curtailed their political influence (Acuña, 2022; Almaguer, 1994) and is theorized to constitute an initial stage in the process of their racialization (Rodriguez Domínguez, 2005). Through land expropriation, Mexican Americans were subordinated and rendered "subjects of the racializing forces of United States' social institutions"

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heritage, and that, by this period, very few Mexicans had immediate ancestors (i.e., parents or grandparents) born in Spain (Gómez, 2018). To refer to the combined population, I use 'ethnic Mexican' or 'Mexican-origin'.

[2] Racial exclusions to citizenship weren't fully eliminated until over one hundred and fifty years later with the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952.

[3] This practice continued through 1930 when, due to the rise of nativism during the Great Depression, Mexicans were classified as their own, separate category: "Mexican race." This classification was again changed two more times, alternating between 'white' and 'Mexican,' stabilizing somewhat following a 1970 federal court case in which Mexican Americans were determined to be "an identifiable minority group" (Donato & Hanson, 2012).

(Rodriguez Domínguez, 2005, p. 80). Racist ideologies were constructed to lend legitimacy to their systemic exploitation, shaping popular understanding of Mexican Americans as unambitious, immoral, physically weak, and uncivilized 'others' in need of civilization and Americanization (G. G. Gonzalez, 2000). Gómez (2018) positions these racial projects as part of the "double colonization" of the American Southwest: first by Spain and then, following the Mexican Cession, the United States (p. 11). She emphasizes the significance of this colonial history to understanding of how Mexican Americans have been legally and socially constructed as a racial group, noting that the racial order instantiated by American colonizers evolved in the shadow of the earlier Spanish-Mexican one. From the latter half of the nineteenth century through the first few decades of the twentieth, Mexican Americans are argued to have occupied a "liminal, intermediate" (Rumbaut et al., 2009, p. 19) position within the US racial hierarchy that was below European Americans but above that of black, *mestizo* (those of mixed racial ancestry), Asian, and Pueblo Indian populations (Almaguer, 1994; Gómez, 2018).

Immigration from Mexico was initially low during this period (1850-1880) since there was little driving migration from Mexico. As the US rapidly industrialized in the late nineteenth century, however, demand for labor sharply increased and was further compounded by the passage of restrictionist legislation (e.g., The Chinese Exclusion Act, 1882). This shift coincided with significant social and economic upheaval in Mexico, driving migration from Mexico as many moved to the US in search of work. Consequently, the Mexican-born population within the US saw a nearly tenfold increase around the turn of the century, growing from 68,400 in 1880 to 641,500 in 1920 (Álvarez, 1966; Gratton & Merchant, 2015). Thousands of Mexicans were recruited as temporary workers to fill labor shortages in agriculture, mining, and the railroads. As contract laborers, however, these sojourners were excluded from established

naturalization pathways. Consequently, when the deflationary recession following World War 1 (1920-1921) rendered them superfluous, many contract laborers were dismissed by employers who reneged on obligations to return the workers to Mexico (Aguila, 2007). With employment opportunities scarce, Mexican workers became targets of harassment and violence; they were framed as "foreigners" who were responsible for the nation's economic woes, "a precedent that would recur each time the United States confronted a crisis and needed a scapegoat" (Vargas, 1993, p. 79).

The Great Depression of the 1930s ignited new waves of xenophobia and scapegoating. Mexican Americans had begun moving to urban centers around the turn of the century seeking the higher wages and greater stability offered by factory employment; this migration was accelerated by the first World War and resulted in the establishment of Mexican American communities in cities like Los Angeles, San Antonio, Detroit, and Chicago. By 1930, a majority of Mexican immigrants (54%) lived in urban areas (Gratton & Merchant, 2015). The rapid growth of the Mexican American population in the preceding decades coupled with the economic hardships of the Depression era to heighten racial tensions and foment "anti-Mexican racism, violence, and government hostility, including mass deportation (to Mexico). As many as one million Mexican-origin persons, including many American citizens, were rounded up by police and deported during this period" (Gómez, 2018, p. 160). The intensification of economic competition between European and Mexican Americans during the Great Depression also coincided with the latter's reclassification on the 1930 US Census. Though few had actually been accorded the privileges exclusive to Whites, Mexicans had been previously counted as "White" on the US census; in 1930, however, "Mexican" appeared as a separate racial category

that included "any person of Mexican descent 'who is definitely not White'" (Daniel, 2022, p. 39).

The mobilization of domestic labor in support of wartime production during World War II resulted in a need for agricultural laborers and again prompted a reversal of US policy. Where the 1930s had seen the forced repatriation or expatriation of Mexican-origin workers in the US, the 1940s saw the US again turning to Mexico for workers, negotiating the Emergency Farm Labor Program (popularly known as the Bracero Program) in 1942 to meet the demand. During this period, the US Census Bureau also returned to classifying Mexican Americans as "White" though it continued to pursue alternate ways of enumerating them (Daniel, 2022; Gómez, 2018). By the Bracero program's conclusion in 1964, more than five million Mexicans had arrived in the US as guest workers with several hundred thousand electing to remain and settle in the US. Its rapid expansion of Mexican immigration played a role in transforming settlement patterns, contributing to the dispersal of Mexican American workers across the US. The geographic distribution of Mexican American immigrants in the US had been fairly constant from the late 1920s through the end of the 1940s with Texas and California representing major loci for settlement (Durand et al., 2000). During the 1950s, however, Illinois (Chicago, specifically) emerged as an increasingly popular destination for braceros.

Importantly, the migration of Mexicans to the United States during the Bracero Era echoed patterns of (re)racialization and economic subordination rooted in the colonial history of both nations. Mexican laborers often faced harsh conditions, low wages, and limited rights that mirrored colonial practices of domination and exploitation. Abuses were so widespread and severe that Lee G. Williams, a director of the program under the Department of Labor, described it as "legalized slavery" (Ontiveros, 2006). These inequities were enabled by agricultural and

immigration laws that systematically racialized "ethnic Mexicans as laborers and [positioned] them outside the nation-state regardless of their citizenship or birthplace" in order to legitimize their mistreatment and exclusion from full participation in society (Fernández, 2012, p. 69).

Following the cessation of the Bracero Program in the mid-1960s, US immigration policy became more restrictive but the demand for low-wage labor persisted. This led to a rise in undocumented immigration from Mexico, with many Mexicans continuing to enter the US in search of economic opportunities. In the twenty years following the Bracero Program, approximately 5.7 million Mexican migrants entered the country, 81 percent of whom were undocumented (Massey et al., 2002). In 1980, the U.S. Census Bureau introduced the panethnic label "Hispanic" as a distinct racial category; this shift reflected the efforts of Latine advocacy groups who, cognizant of the complex history of racialization in the US and that being classified as "White" did not protect Latine individuals from discrimination, championed the change in an effort to ensure better recognition, representation, and resource allocation for their community.

Immigration from Mexico slowed in the early 2000s in the wake of greater border security and immigration controls, sharply declining during the Great Recession (2007-2009) as economic conditions in the US decreased while those in Mexico improved. Recent estimates indicate that people of Mexican descent comprise 60% of the US Latine population, the largest proportion of any national original group (Moslimani et al., 2023). The current geographic distribution of Mexican Americans in the US reflects both historical immigration patterns and regions of economic opportunity; the American Southwest is home to the largest Mexican American population with 60% of all Mexican-origin peoples in the US residing in two states: California (34%) and Texas (26%). Illinois has the largest Mexican American community

outside the Southwest and the third largest in the country, representing 5% of the overall

Mexican American population; within Illinois, this population is concentrated in Chicago.

Linguistic ideologies in Mexican American communities

Studies of bilingual Mexican American[4] communities from across the US have

documented a variety of linguistic ideologies involving both Spanish and English; these

ideologies reflect the interaction of identity, socio-historical context, and local social meanings

within these communities. Commonly reported ideologies include: negative evaluations of

Spanish-English mixing as 'bad' or 'foreign' (Elias-Olivares, 1976; Peñalosa, 1980); speaking

contact varieties of Spanish (those whose syntax or lexicon reveal the influence of English) as

reflective of laziness or 'semilingualism' (Leeman, 2012); proficiency in English as a sign of

'Americanness' or recency of immigration to the US (Bedolla, 2003); Spanish language use as

indicative of lower socioeconomic status (O. Garcia & Mason, 2008); and not (proficiently)

speaking Spanish as a denial of heritage and/or Latine identity (Bedolla, 2003). Overall, these

ideologies can be grouped into four general categories, which we will examine in detail below:

(1) code-switching and language mixing, *(2)* heritage language maintenance, *(3)* language and

Latine identity, and *(4)* the use of Spanish in public spaces within these communities.

Code-switching refers to the alternation between two or more languages within a single

context and is a common practice within many Latine communities in the US. It enables

speakers "to foreground certain aspects of the context at hand to create a momentary frame for

the construction and interpretation of their identities" (Coryell et al., 2010, p. 455) and requires a

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[4] I use "bilingual Mexican American communities" to refer to communities of Mexican-origin individuals who reside in the US, some of whom speak both Spanish and English. I do not make any assertions regarding members' proficiency levels in each language nor do I assume that all members of these communities identify as bilingual.

deep syntactic knowledge to effectively accomplish (Poplack, 1980, 1981). Evaluations of code-switching are, however, mixed within many Mexican American communities. It is viewed as an authentic expression of Mexican Americans' bicultural identity (Christoffersen, 2019) that "promotes the maintenance of the Spanish language in the context of English" (Toribio, 2002, p. 90) while simultaneously being "assailed as contributing to the demise of the socially subordinate Spanish language" (ibid.) and reflective of linguistic "decay" (Hidalgo, 1986; Mahootian, 2005). Despite these widely varying perceptions, the blending of Spanish and English is a natural language contact phenomena (Tseng, 2021) that is characteristic of US varieties of Spanish (Zentella, 1997) and serves as an act of identity for many bilingual Mexican Americans (Fought, 2010; Velasquez, 2010).

The ideologies surrounding heritage language maintenance within bilingual Mexican American communities are deeply intertwined with cultural pride, sociohistorical context, and linguistic prestige. While Spanish is, in general, positively evaluated in these communities (e.g., Achugar & Pessoa, 2009; Beaudrie & Ducar, 2005; Rivera-Mills, 1998), attitudes toward the language and its use are often complex. Galindo (1991), for example, found that Spanish is perceived "as the language of the less-educated, the poor, the old, and the foreign" (p.112) while also being regarded as an important cultural inheritance that is of pragmatic utility, supporting community and allowing for communication with family. Drawing on this work, Rivera-Mills (1998), in study of a majority Mexican-origin community in northern California, found that language attitudes evolve across generations; second-generation respondents maintained a strong loyalty to Spanish, while third-generation respondents exhibited less preference for speaking their heritage language. That this stratification also appeared along socioeconomic lines, with those from lower socioeconomic groups exhibiting a greater preference for Spanish, suggests

that language use is deeply tied to social and economic contexts. Furthermore, this shift in attitudes toward Spanish across generations mirrors a clear trend towards English dominance. Pearson and McGee (1999), working with a Mexican American community in Florida, found that individuals within the first and second generations maintained Spanish (the heritage language) to a greater extent while those within the third generation showed a decreased preference for and daily usage of Spanish. This intergenerational language shift, sometimes referred to as the three-generation model, has been widely-reported (Hidalgo, 1986; Rivera-Mills, 1998; Veltman, 1983) and is argued to reflect tension between younger generations' desire to assimilate into English-dominant society and the importance of preserving their cultural heritage through language (Galindo, 1991). Leeman (2012), in her discussion of how Mexican American communities negotiate a complex linguistic landscape, emphasizes that Spanish not only symbolizes cultural pride but also faces pressures from dominant English-language norms and institutions that marginalize Spanish speakers and devalue their linguistic practices (see the following section for further discussion). Ultimately, these studies evince the complex, sometimes contradictory, and multifaceted nature of ideologies surrounding heritage language maintenance in Mexican American communities.

The way Mexican Americans perceive and express their identities is deeply influenced by linguistic ideologies surrounding the use of Spanish. Bedolla (2003) emphasizes the vital role that Spanish plays in the negotiation of identity and community solidarity among Mexican Americans. Describing her interviews with Latine-identified individuals (the majority of whom were of Mexican descent) in California, Bedolla indicates that "language was an important part of these Latinos' understanding of their identity" (ibid., p. 268). She, too, finds a generational shift in how participants define membership in their stated (pan)ethnic group (e.g., Mexicane,

Latine) with earlier generations (1st and 2nd) tending to include mention of whether the person

spoke Spanish while later generations (3rd and beyond) were more likely to refer to Latin

American descent, rarely drawing on language ability in their definitions. Galindo (1996)

postulates that this shift away from Spanish may, in part, be motivated by intraethnic tensions

between Mexican immigrants and Mexican Americans. A significant body of work has

considered the factors underlying this historically contentious relationship (Browning et al.,

1986; de la Garza, 1998; Gutiérrez, 1995, 1995; Menchaca, 1989; Ochoa, 2000). Browning et al.

(1986), for example, observe that these tensions often stem from differing experiences and

perceptions related to assimilation and identity, with native-born Mexicans sometimes perceiving

recent immigrants as holding onto cultural practices, including language, that they have partially

or fully abandoned in their pursuit of integration into American society. Ochoa (2000) similarly

finds that, for the vast majority of Mexican American interviewees in her study, "cultural factors

such as the Spanish language [could] either be a source of tension or a source of connection" (p.

90) and that this was influenced by several factors including prevailing norms within the US that

valorize English language use while stigmatizing Spanish, group identity, differences in culture

and expectations of acculturation, and economic competition. Consequently, Bedolla (2003)

notes that Spanish—both its use and the variety spoken—may be employed in identity

construction, as a way of distinguishing to which group one belongs.

    In interethnic settings, however, Spanish language use may serve as a tool for

intracommunity solidarity and resistance. Barrett (2006), for example, discusses how Mexican

Americans use Spanish to create an alternative linguistic market that offers social capital and

prestige outside the mainstream English-dominated market—particularly within contexts where

dominant economic and social systems marginalize them. This alternative market allows for the

construction and assertion of a positive in-group identity, fostering a sense of belonging and solidarity among Spanish speakers. It operates as a counter-hegemonic force, providing a means to resist assimilation pressures and maintain cultural distinctiveness. This use of language as a form of resistance underscores the powerful relationship between language and social identity (Fought, 2006).

As the preceding discussion illustrates, the linguistic ideologies within Mexican American communities are deeply connected to sociohistorical context and the ways in which these communities construct and negotiate identity. Mexican Americans navigate a complex linguistic landscape, balancing heritage language maintenance with the pressures of assimilation, while also drawing on language as a tool for solidarity and resistance in a variety of social contexts. To better understand the context within which Mexican Americans negotiate their linguistic and social identities, it is crucial to consider what (racio)linguistic ideologies surround their communities and language practices.

(Racio)linguistic ideologies about US Latine Spanish-speaking communities

Raciolinguistics[5] conceptualizes processes of racialization and language as dynamically interrelated (Alim et al., 2016); it engages an array of conceptual and methodological frameworks in the investigation of this relationship (Flores & Rosa, 2023). Alim is credited with instantiating the term in 2016 (Smitherman, 2017) but the perspective is in conversation with a significant body of prior inquiry that considers the relationship between race and language (Bailey, 2002; Barrett, 2006). Work in this area has documented clear ideologies around the use

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[5] Flores and Rosa (2023) distinguish this broader term from their narrower conception of a raciolinguistic perspective which seeks to de-conventionalize "Eurocentric ways of being and knowing" in favor "situating local instantiations of the co-naturalization of race and language within broader global geopolitical processes" (p. 425).

of Spanish in the United States, including that it is an unmistakable indicator of Latine identity (Rosa, 2016). The racialization of Spanish language use reflects raciolinguistic enregisterment, an ideological process "whereby signs of race and language are naturalized as discrete, recognizable sets" such that "people come to look like a language and sound like a race" (Rosa & Flores, 2017, p. 632).

Urciuoli's (1996) ethnography of language in a New York Puerto Rican community underscores this racialization of Spanish, reporting that its use is stigmatized in public spaces and associated with lower socioeconomic status. Carter draws on these findings in his assertion that "Spanish is an icon of Latinidad in the US" (2014, p. 211). He highlights the pervasive influence of US discourses on Spanish and how these shape hegemonic perspectives on Latino identity and perpetuate the "foreignization" of Latine communities (Santa Ana, 2002, p. 291). Leeman (2012) emphasizes that, in the US, "all non-English languages are seen as suspect, but distinctions are made among different languages, with Spanish seen as particularly un-American and dangerous" (p.47). Speaking Spanish in public spaces is problematized, positioned as an issue in need of urgent remediation and viewed as unpatriotic when used to convey a positive Latino ethnic identity (O. Garcia, 1993). The construction of Latines as "invaders" and "criminals" through such discourses contributes to the marginalization of Spanish speakers, framing their linguistic practices as a threat to mainstream American culture (Aguirre, 2011). This narrative, termed the Latino threat narrative by Chavez (2008), portrays Latines as unwilling to learn English, further alienating them from English-speaking society, and, ultimately, as "legally and culturally incompatible with conventional understandings of US citizenship" (E. Gonzalez, 2019, p. 46).

Zarate (2018) offers evidence for how these discourses linking Spanish language use with Latine identity and, via indirect indexicality (Ochs, 1990), "otherness," low proficiency in

English, and criminality are engaged in racial profiling. Informed by her lived experience as a Chicana, Zarate analyzes interviews with three high school students who self-identify as Latino and relate having been raciolinguistically profiled at work. She highlights experiences where speakers' preferred language was presumed to be Spanish and/or their English language knowledge was positioned as surprising. One of the students, Adrian, expresses the impacts of this raciolinguistic profiling in light of recent laws in his state, Arizona, that mandate detention or arrest for individuals "reasonably" suspected to be an undocumented immigrant, saying, "If I begin to speak Spanish I could also be targeted to be asked for my identification because of my heritage, my skin, and my language" (ibid., p. 235). Zarate argues that these experiences evince the close connection between racial and linguistic profiling: how students were visually read and racialized influenced others' assumptions of their language knowledge.

Hill (1998) offers further insight into the linguistic racialization of Spanish through the lens of Mock Spanish, a covert racist discourse wherein White speakers incorporate Spanish elements into English "in order to create a jocular or pejorative 'key'" (p.682). This practice is characterized by semantic pejoration, euphemism, and hyperanglicization; it is "a linguistically inaccurate denigration of the Spanish language" (Davis & Moore, 2014, p. 678) that reinforces racist stereotypes of Latines while elevating whiteness (Hill, 2007). It accomplishes the latter by directly indexing a "congenial personality" while indirectly indexing negative, racist stereotypes of historically Spanish-speaking, Latine communities (Hill, 1998, p. 683). Hill argues that Mock Spanish serves to normalize linguistic disorder (e.g., heavy accents in a non-native language, language mixing) among White speakers while scrutinizing and othering historically Spanish-speaking populations, contributing to the creation of "White public space" (Hill, 1998, 2014).

Finally, monolingual language ideologies within the US contribute to the stigmatization of Spanish language use (Sánchez-Muñoz & Amezcua, 2019). Assimilationist (monolingual) discourses have historically dominated the public sphere, including discussions of language and educational policy (e.g., Potowski, 2013). These discourses "stress the importance of having one (official) language to maintain sociopolitical unity and prosperity" within the nation; fluency in this language is a "precondition for effective participation in society" while bilingualism is framed as inefficient (de Jong, 2013, p. 101). Theodore Roosevelt exemplifies this monolingual, assimilationist ideology in a 1919 letter where he asserts that:

> …it is an outrage to discriminate against [any immigrant] because of creed, or birthplace, or origin. But this is predicated upon the person's becoming in every facet an American….We have room for but one language here and that is the English language.

Roosevelt aligns English language proficiency with Americanness, predicating equal treatment and protection from discrimination on immigrants' assimilation to this norm; multilingualism is juxtaposed against it and positioned as un-American, with multilingual speakers derogated as "dwellers in a polyglot boarding house". These ideologies are still present and influential at a national level today, shaping policy (e.g., de Jong, 2013) and political discourse (e.g., E. Gonzalez, 2019; Sánchez-Muñoz & Amezcua, 2019).

In summary, raciolinguistic perspectives illuminate the dynamic relationship between language use and racial identity, illustrating how Spanish has been racially enregistered in the United States. This racialization manifests through various discourses and practices, from the stigmatization and profiling of Spanish speakers to the mocking appropriation of Spanish by non-Latine individuals. The historical and ongoing stigmatization of Spanish underscores the

persistent view of Spanish as a marker of 'otherness' and a challenge to the monolingual,

assimilationist ideals embedded in American identity. This complex interaction of language and

race not only influences personal and collective identities but also broader discourses around

Spanish language use within the US. To understand how these raciolinguistic ideologies may

operate within Chicago's Mexican American communities, however, requires consideration of

the local contexts that shape their interpretation and expression (e.g., Eckert, 2008; Silverstein,

2003). In the following sections, therefore, I examine the history of Chicago's Latine

community more broadly before turning to a detailed consideration of Pilsen's geographic and

sociohistorical context in order to situate these broader raciolinguistic discourses as well as the

social meanings that emerge from interviews with Mexican American residents of Chicago's

Pilsen neighborhood.

Chicago's Latine Community

Chicago's Latine community, the third largest and one of the most diverse in the U.S.,

has a long and vibrant history (Potowski & Matts, 2008). In the years immediately following the

city's incorporation in 1837, however, the majority of its residents were immigrants from

northern and western Europe with fewer than two hundred individuals in Illinois identified as

Mexican in the 1900 census (A. E. Jones, 1928). Chicago's Mexican (American) population was

initially comprised of immigrants from the central and north-central states of Mexico and

migrants from the American Southwest (Arredondo, 2008; A. E. Jones, 1928; Valdés,

2000). Rapid industrialization and urbanization in Chicago at the outset of the twentieth century

led to a high demand for labor (Arredondo, 2008). Combined with the concurrent development

of US agriculture, social upheaval in Mexico, and US policies that actively recruited itinerant

laborers, many Mexican and Mexican American (im)migrants were drawn to the area by the

prospect of economic opportunity throughout the early 1900's (A. E. Jones, 1928; Kerr, 1976). Those who were fortunate to achieve stability made the area their home, settling primarily in three areas within the city: Near West Side, Back of the Yards/PackingTown, and South Chicago (Kerr, 1976).

The Near West Side (NWS), situated to the southwest of Chicago's central business district, housed one of the city's oldest Mexican communities (Figure 1). It was established by Mexican immigrants who were initially recruited to the area to meet the railroads' labor needs and, later, to mitigate war-time labor deficits during the First World War (Arredondo, 2008). Coming from a mix of backgrounds, including "working- and middle-class laborers, merchants, small landowners and farmers" (ibid., p.15), this largely male population (A. E. Jones, 1928) settled in a transient and rooming-house district near Madison and Halsted Streets, an area lying in the northeastern quadrant of the NWS (Ramirez, 2011). Mexican immigrants continued to be recruited to the area through the 1920's as laborers were sought for the city's steel mills and meatpacking plants, particularly during times of labor unrest (Kerr, 1976). Starting in the mid-1920's, however, the majority of Mexican immigrants were not arriving in Chicago due to direct recruitment (which continued in small numbers) but via more indirect routes, following work in agriculture during the warmer months and wintering in Chicago where they found employment in the mills, rail yards, or packing plants (Arredondo, 2008; Kerr, 1976). These employment patterns also influenced where within the city Mexicans chose to settle, with communities developing in South Chicago and Back of the Yards adjacent to the steel mills and meatpacking plants, respectively. By the 1930's, the number of Chicago's Mexican-origin residents had grown to between twenty and twenty-five thousand (Arredondo, 2008).

Figure 1. *Map of Chicago's neighborhoods*

Note. Adapted from " 'Non-White' Gentrification in Chicago's Bronzeville and Pilsen: Racial Economy and the Intraurban Contingency of Urban Redevelopment,*"* by Anderson and Sternberg, 2012, *Urban Affairs Review,* 49(3), p.438.

The establishment and growth of Mexican-origin communities in Chicago complicated racial categories within the city. As Fernández (2012) describes, "despite being identified as 'white' in the government census, Chicagoans had ascribed this group a non-citizen/alien, non-white, and non-American racial location, marking them firmly outside the national body" (p.51). Mexican workers, due to this racial positioning, were denigrated and stigmatized; they were compensated less for equivalent work relative to their counterparts from other ethnic backgrounds and, consequently, tended to settle where housing costs were lowest and where, in a strongly segregated Chicago, Whites allowed them to reside (J. Betancur, 1996; Kerr, 1976; Ramirez, 2011). In Back of the Yards, for example, landlords charged Mexican families more than their European ethnic counterparts for equivalent units and restricted them to living on certain blocks within the neighborhood (Kerr, 1976). Often, the areas to which Mexicans were relegated were the least desirable, being the most rundown and crowded sections within a neighborhood (Ramirez, 2011).

The neighborhoods in which Mexican (im)migrants settled had long served as ports of entry into the city and were home to immigrants from predominantly eastern and southern European backgrounds (Kerr, 1976). The influx of Mexican (im)migrants to these areas during the 1920's coincided with the onset of European ethnic colonies' dispersal throughout the city due, in part, to their economic advancement but also out of their desire to "maintain ethnic traditions" (Kerr, 1976, p. 27). Even as European ethnic groups left the area, however, Mexicans did not form a majority in these neighborhoods (though they were a plurality) until the latter half of the twentieth century (Kerr, 1976; Ramirez, 2011).

Racial tensions between Mexicans and their ethnic European neighbors varied across time and location (Ramirez, 2011). Poles, however, were the most openly and significantly

antagonistic due to demographic changes in the late 1920s and early 1930s which saw the greatest concentration of Mexicans settling in newly Polish-dominated South Chicago; Poles imposed informal curfews on their Mexican neighbors, refused to share public baths, and established certain streets as boundary lines which Mexicans were not to cross (Kerr, 1976; Ramirez, 2011). Mexican communities, whose access to community services was restricted by these tensions, developed their own community resources, forming mutual-aid societies and holding English-language classes and social clubs at local settlement houses (Kerr, 1976; Ramirez, 2011).

The economic pressures of the Great Depression led to anti-immigrant sentiments nationwide and strengthened anti-Mexican sentiments locally, exacerbating the challenges faced by Mexicans in Chicago (Ramirez, 2011). Immigration from Mexico was halted and thousands of Mexican immigrants as well as their US-citizen children were deported, repatriated, or expatriated between 1930 and 1940 (Arredondo, 2008; Kerr, 1976). Chicago's Mexican population fell to sixteen thousand, an approximately twenty percent decrease (Kerr, 1976; Ramirez, 2011). Paradoxically, this period of severe economic hardship curbed "neighborhood disintegration," fostering "limited inter-ethnic cooperation" and a more stable, demographically-balanced Mexican population in Chicago (Kerr, 1976, p. 69). These changes, in turn, supported the development of an ethnic consciousness among Chicago's Mexican residents (Ramírez et al., 1976). By the outset of the 1940's, Mexicans had more fully integrated into and established themselves as permanent residents of Chicago's Near West Side, Back of the Yards, and South Chicago neighborhoods.

A few years later during the Second World War, Chicago, as an industrial and transportation hub, received many new Mexican workers with over fifteen thousand arriving

between 1943 and 1945 under the guest-worker or Bracero Program that had been established a few years prior in 1942 (Ramirez, 2011). These workers were greeted by Chicago's established Mexican American community on their arrival; many local agencies (e.g., Hull House, the Immigrants' Protective League, University of Chicago's Settlement House) coordinated to support them, providing social and recreational services (ibid.).

Another economic recession during the Korean war again sparked increasing anxiety over Spanish speaking (im)migrants within the city and Mexican (Americans) again became targets for suspicion and scorn; public outcry saw large-scale efforts to deport "illegal aliens" from the US in 1954. At the same time, however, industrial flight to regions with even cheaper labor (both in the US and abroad) made economic mobility challenging for Mexican-origin workers. Over the next three decades (1960's - 1980's), many former braceros came to Chicago from around the country, following family and/or returning after securing legal residency. Many Mexican Americans also came from Texas during this period, looking for work in Chicago as competition pressures in the American Southwest pushed them out of the migrant labor stream.

From the 1980's onward, Chicago's Latine community experienced significant growth, approximately doubling over the next four decades (Table 1) due to continuing (im)migration from Latin America and the American Southwest (J. Betancur, 1996; M. D. Wilson, 2021). This growth led to broader demographic shifts in the city, with the Latine community emerging as an increasingly prominent and influential force in Chicago's social and cultural landscape. It also, however, coincided with broader urban changes like gentrification, which began to alter the fabric of Pilsen and other majority Latine neighborhoods within the city like Humboldt Park (J. Betancur, 1996). The influx of new, often wealthier residents to these areas led to rising property values and rent prices, displacing many long-term residents (see sections 'Pilsen Today' and

'Pilsen is gentrifying' for further discussion) and underscoring the ongoing struggle for space and identity within Chicago's evolving urban landscape.

Table 1. *Hispanic or Latine population in Chicago from 1980 to 2020*

Year	Total Population (n)	Hispanic or Latine (n)	Percent of Total
1980	3,005,072	422,063	14.0
1990	2,783,726	545,852	19.6
2000	2,896,016	753,644	26.0
2010	2,695,616	778,862	28.9
2020	2,746,388	819,518	29.8

Note. The data for 1980 are from *General Population Characteristics: Illinois* by the U.S. Census Bureau, (1980). The data for 1990 are from *General Population Characteristics: Illinois* by the U.S. Census Bureau, (1990). The data from 2000 are from *Illinois: 2000 Summary Population and Housing Characteristics* by the U.S. Census Bureau, (2002). The data for 2010 are from *Table P9: Hispanic or Latino, and Not Hispanic or Latino by Race* by the U.S. Census Bureau, (2010). The data for 2020 are from *Table P9: Hispanic or Latino, and Not Hispanic or Latino by Race* by the U.S. Census Bureau, (2020).

As of 2020, approximately 800,000 Latine individuals live in Chicago with the Mexican-origin community representing the city's largest national origin group (Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning, 2024a; U.S. Census Bureau, 2020). In recent decades, there has been a noticeable shift of Chicago's Latine population westward and into suburban areas due to factors like gentrification and housing affordability (Paral et al., 2004; Sugrue et al., 2023). This trend reflects a broader pattern of suburbanization within the city, where suburban areas have seen greater/more rapid population growth (e.g., Scarborough et al., 2022). Within Chicago, the Latine population remains most concentrated in key neighborhoods on the west side (e.g., Pilsen and Little Village), southwest side (e.g., Gage Park), northwest side (e.g., Hermosa), and far southeast side (e.g., East Side), with nearby suburbs like Cicero also housing substantial Latine populations (Figure 2). Recent research on Chicago's Latine community has addressed an array

of topics including Spanish language development in heritage speakers (e.g., Potowski et al., 2009), literacy (e.g., Farr, 2005), the histories (e.g., Kanter, 2012) and interactions of different national origin communities (e.g., Rúa, 2001), and (pan)ethnic identity formation (e.g., De Genova & Ramos-Zayas, 2003; Pérez, 2003). Studies have also explored pressing community issues such as gang violence (e.g., Spergel & Grossman, 1997) and gentrification (e.g., Curran, 2018; Flores-Gonzalez, 2001). Within this literature, Pilsen has emerged as a focal point, often highlighted due to its prominent role within Chicago's Latine community. The neighborhood's active artists community and history of activism have established Pilsen as a cultural hub and center for organizing efforts in the city (e.g., Ramirez, 2011). In the following sections, I consider in greater detail the geography and history of Pilsen. This focused consideration will provide essential context for understanding the social, geographical, and historical factors that have shaped the settings within which the neighborhoods' bilingual residents negotiate their language use. Ultimately, this will allow for a fuller understanding of the social meanings that participants in my studies, who are also bilingual residents of Pilsen, identify as influencing their language practices.

Figure 2. *Percent Hispanic or Latino by Chicago community area*
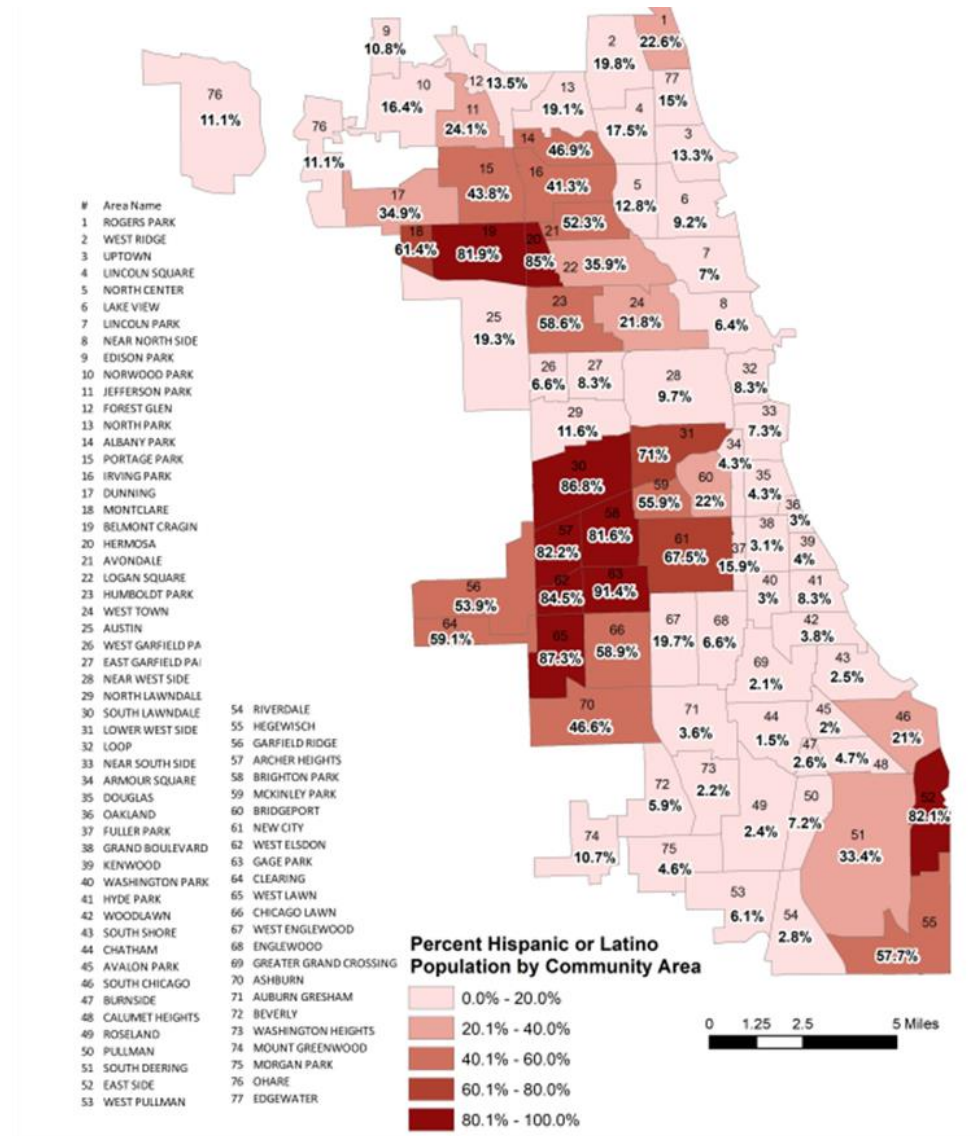
Note: From "Percent of Hispanic or Latino Population by Community Area, 2020" by UIC Great Cities Institute for the Puerto Rican Arts Alliance (p.1), 2021, (https://greatcities.uic.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/HispanicorLatinoPopulationData.pdf).

Pilsen's geographic context

Pilsen is a neighborhood in Chicago's Lower West Side (Figure 1). It lies three miles southwest of the Loop, a community area that is home to Chicago's central business district and which constitutes the principal/core section of its downtown. Covering an expanse of 2.8 square miles, Pilsen's boundaries include Sixteenth Street to the north, the expressway to the south, Western Avenue to the west, and the south branch of the Chicago River to the east (Figure 3). The area is currently home to approximately 33,700 residents, according to recent US Census data, 71% of whom identify as "Hispanic" or "Latino."

Just north of Pilsen in the Near West Side lies the University of Illinois Chicago (UIC), which has an enrollment of approximately 34,000 students (University of Illinois Chicago, 2023), and University Village, a large redevelopment project that provides housing and mixed-use retail for students and faculty at UIC. Little Village, also known as *La Villita* or *La Veintiséis*, lies to the west of Pilsen and shares a similar demographic composition. Pilsen is also situated to the south of several major health facilities that serve the Chicago area including the University of Illinois Hospital and Health Sciences System, Mount Sinai Hospital, Rush University Medical Center, the Jesse Brown Veterans Affairs Medical Center, the John H. Stroger Jr. Hospital of Cook County, and others. With direct access to the Loop via the Chicago Transit Authority Pink Line and proximity to the Eisenhower, Kennedy, Stevenson, and Dan Ryan expressways, Pilsen is well-connected to both downtown Chicago and the wider metropolitan area.

Figure 3. *Map of Lower West Side*
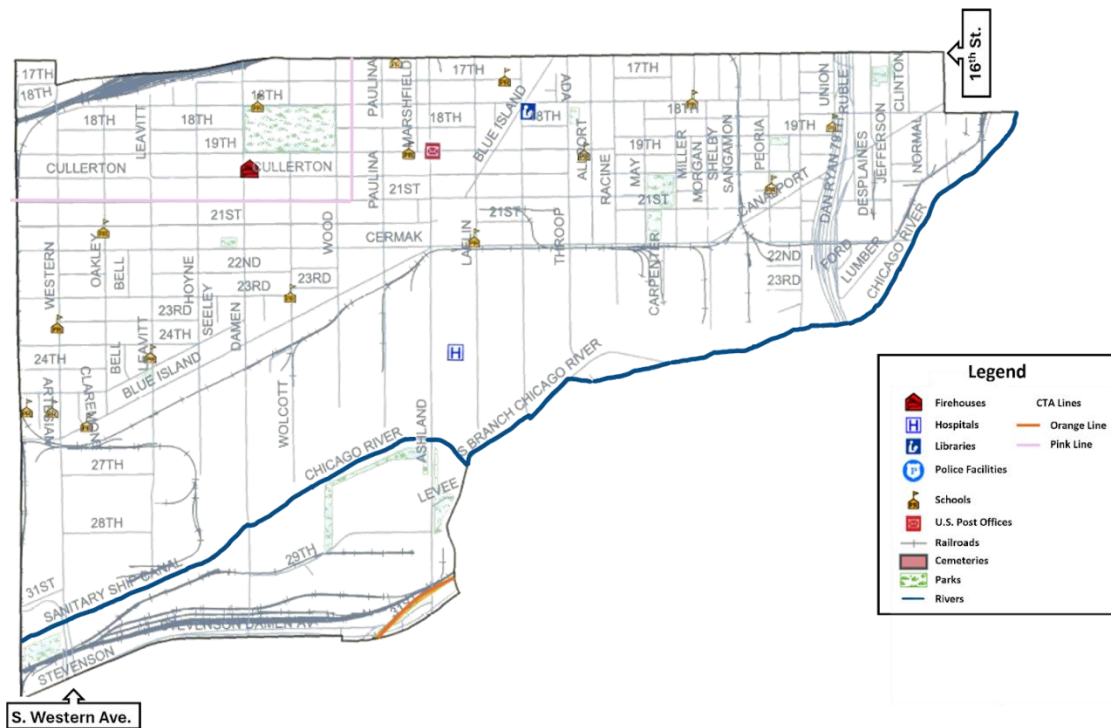
Note. Adapted from "Map Book: Community Areas," by City of Chicago, 2014, (https://www.chicago.gov/content/dam/city/depts/dgs/InformationTechnology/GIS/MapBook_Community_Areas.pdf). Copyright 2015 by the City of Chicago.

Historical Pilsen

Pilsen has a rich history as a port of entry for immigrants to the United States. Founded in 1878 by Czech immigrants, it initially served as a hub for European settlers employed in the city's burgeoning industrial sector. During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the neighborhood saw an influx of German and Czech workers who played pivotal roles in developing Chicago's expanding transportation infrastructure, notably through the construction of canals and railroads (D. Wilson et al., 2004). They were part of a larger wave of European immigrants who moved to the US during this period in the wake of war and agricultural crisis in Europe (M. A. Jones, 1992). Throughout the early 20th century, Pilsen continued to attract a

diverse array of European immigrants, including Poles, Croatians, Lithuanians, and Italians. These new arrivals found employment in the area's manufacturing sectors, working in breweries, tractor factories, packing houses, garment shops, and steel mills (Pero, 2011). By the time of the First World War, Pilsen had firmly established itself as a bustling working-class neighborhood, predominantly inhabited by a blend of White ethnic groups.

The first Mexican residents began arriving in Pilsen during the early 20th century, attracted by labor shortages during World War I that created new employment opportunities in the area's factories and railroads. At the time of the 1910 Census, only 156 individuals[6] of Mexican origin were recorded in Illinois; this number rapidly grew over the following two decades from 1,141 in 1920 to approximately 21,000 by 1930. This initial wave of Mexican immigrants, however, settled predominantly outside of Pilsen in the Near West Side, South Chicago, and Back of the Yards neighborhoods. Indeed, only 114 Mexicans lived in Pilsen at the time of the 1940 Census (Kerr, 1976).

It wasn't until the displacement of Mexican communities from the Near West Side in the 1960s that the Mexican-origin population in Pilsen saw a significant increase. In a bid to revitalize the area, local leaders and residents in the Near West Side applied for federal assistance to improve their community and succeeded in "getting the area near Harrison Streets and Halstead streets, the heart of the Mexican neighborhood, designated by the federal government for 'urban renewal,'" with a plan for new affordable housing on the site (Fernandez, 2005, pp. 169–170). City Hall initially supported this proposal. However, in a surprising move,

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[6] At this time, Mexican-origin individuals were categorized as "White" on the US Census under the terms of the Treaty of Hidalgo. The Census form included, however, questions asking individuals to specify their place of birth and native language(s), allowing the census to collect detailed information on the diverse origins of the U.S. population. Consequently, the numbers reported on the 1910 and 1920 Censuses reflect individuals who listed Mexico as their birth place.

Mayor Richard J. Daley decided to use the federal funds to establish a new University of Illinois

at Chicago (UIC) campus on the site instead. This unilateral decision sparked significant outrage

among the local residents who launched aggressive protests against the new campus (Rosen,

1980). Their efforts delayed the construction but ultimately could not prevent it. Coupled with

the construction of a major expressway interchange, these developments forced thousands of

residents from the Mexican settlement near Taylor Street to relocate.

Pilsen, located just to the south in the Lower West Side, had established infrastructure

and affordable housing; it was also in proximity to the factories where many Mexican families

were employed (D. Wilson et al., 2004). Consequently, the neighborhood became a new home

for many of the displaced Mexican families (M. Garcia, 2013). The forced migration of these

residents into Pilsen marked the beginning of its transformation into a predominantly Mexican

neighborhood. This history of displacement and resettlement is argued to have fostered the

robust culture of advocacy and community organization within Pilsen that remains a defining

characteristic of the neighborhood today (e.g., Fernández, 2005).

The 1970s marked a transformative period for Pilsen as it evolved into the first Latine-

majority neighborhood in Chicago. The influx of families displaced from the Near West Side by

urban renewal coincided with a new wave of Latine migration to the city, initially fueled by

wartime labor demands and later the 1966 Family Reunification Act, to drive rapid growth in the

neighborhood's Latine population (Kerr, 1976). Pilsen's growing Mexican population began to

reshape the neighborhood's social and cultural fabric. Community organizing flourished as

residents sought to slowly make local institutions their own (e.g., Fernández, 2012; Kanter,

2012). Churches began offering masses in Spanish, Mexican community centers and cultural

festivals were established, and neighborhood civic organizations emerged, advocating for

improved facilities and greater access to services for the Mexican community. This era of community development and activism laid the groundwork for Pilsen's identity as a hub of Mexican culture and Latine solidarity within the city.

As the demographic shifts of the 1970s solidified Pilsen's identity as a predominantly Mexican neighborhood, the 1980s and 1990s brought new challenges. A massive wave of deindustrialization hit Chicago during the mid-1970s, leading to the closure of major factories and the loss of over 100,000 manufacturing jobs (D. Wilson et al., 2004). Pilsen suffered significantly from the resulting increases in unemployment, poverty, and substandard housing (ibid.). During this time, the continuation of white flight from urban areas, which had started earlier in the century, left low-income neighborhoods like Pilsen stigmatized by broader society. Pejorated as an "ethnic" neighborhood, Pilsen's residents were marginalized and their neighborhood under-resourced. Once seen as an "orderly and well-maintained working-class white ethnic enclave," the neighborhood's image shifted to one of "social disorder, decay, and rowdiness" in the eyes of outsiders (J. Betancur & Smith, 2016, p. 163). This negative representation was used to justify interventions aimed at combating supposed blight. Local authorities and developers began positioning Pilsen as a prime target for urban renewal, arguing that "Mexican occupation was dysfunctional and that the neighborhood needed to be rescued" from decline (ibid.).

This narrative set the stage for gentrification pressures that began during the mid-1980s and intensified in the following decades. Pilsen's inexpensive land combined with, inter alia, its proximity to downtown Chicago (Figure 2) to make the neighborhood increasingly appealing to developers (e.g., D. Wilson et al., 2004). As development interests grew, alongside a citywide surge in gentrification, so did the threats to Pilsen's cultural and social fabric. The 1990s marked

the beginning of a new chapter in Pilsen's history, characterized by shifts in the neighborhood's demographic composition, social dynamics, and economic conditions (e.g., J. Betancur, 1996; Curran, 2018). Rising property values and the influx of new, wealthier residents began to reshape the community, sparking tensions between longtime residents and developers (e.g., D. Wilson et al., 2004). Despite these challenges, Pilsen's strong sense of identity and history of community activism continued to serve as a bulwark against the forces of gentrification, as residents organized to combat gentrification in an effort to preserve the neighborhood's unique character and cultural heritage (ibid.). Consideration of this recent history is essential to understand the ongoing changes in Pilsen and how they may influence participants' perspectives regarding their language use. In the next section, I will explore how redevelopment is shaping modern Pilsen, highlighting key factors in and impacts of this process.

The Modern Pilsen Community

Pilsen today

The Mexican American community in Pilsen has been a focal point for academic research exploring various dimensions of language (Farr, 2011; Lyons & Rodríguez-Ordóñez, 2017), history (Fernández, 2012; Kerr, 1976), political engagement and activism (Curran & Hague, 2023; Ramirez, 2011), and identity (Hadley, 2015; Rudolph, 2009).   Over the last twenty years, studies have increasingly focused on the dynamics of gentrification and how the neighborhood both experiences and resists these changes. While many facets are considered, two primary themes emerge in this body of work: socioeconomic impacts and cultural identity. With regard to the former, studies have examined how redevelopment affects Pilsen's socioeconomic landscape (J. Betancur & Kim, 2016; Curran, 2018), particularly through the displacement of long-term residents, the engagement of different stakeholders in the

gentrification process, and the evolving dynamics within the neighborhood (e.g., changes in business landscape, increases in property values and rents, shifts in usage of public space and perception of neighborhood). These studies highlight the challenges faced by the community as economic pressures and urban development reshape the local landscape. The latter theme, on the other hand, encompasses how Pilsen navigates the complexities of maintaining and negotiating cultural identity amidst changes to its socioeconomic landscape. Researchers investigate how the community preserves its cultural heritage and resists the erasure of its historical roots in the face of gentrification. The following discussion will examine research on both the socioeconomic and cultural impacts of gentrification to afford a clearer understanding of contemporary life and community in Pilsen.

Gentrification has consistently influenced the settlement patterns and community development of Latine populations in Chicago, shaping where and how these communities establish themselves. Betancur (1996), tracing demographic and cultural shifts in the development of Chicago's Mexican and Puerto Rican-origin communities, underscores how their settlement "experience has been characterized by residential exclusion and speculation rather than by opportunity and mobility" (p.1299). He argues that these patterns of exclusion, segregation, and discrimination have disrupted their ability to settle securely and curtailed future opportunities, often diverting their efforts from community building to defending their neighborhoods from external pressures. Despite these challenges, such exclusionary practices are also argued to have reinforced intracommunity solidarity (J. Betancur, 1996; Padilla, 1987).

Anderson and Sternberg (2013) investigate the role that stereotypical conceptions of race play in how gentrification progresses in two sites targeted for redevelopment by the city of Chicago: Bronzeville, a predominantly African-American neighborhood, and Pilsen. They argue

that both neighborhoods are experiencing a novel form of gentrification that is characterized by "the displacement of a low-income non-White population by one of non-White affluence" and driven by "racial recodification and sanitization" (ibid., p. 437). Under this process, redevelopment narratives recast Pilsen as an inviting, culturally rich destination for "ethnic consumption" (ibid., p. 454) and position its Latine residents as morally upright and industrious. This discursive positioning seeks to attract investment through the commodification of Pilsen's cultural elements, such as murals and local festivals, and, in so doing, contributes to a form of cultural erasure where authentic community expressions are replaced by commercialized versions designed to appeal to investors. Additionally, by co-opting what had been a key anti-gentrification discourse centered around the ethnic claim to space, it undermines a key strategy of resistance (J. Betancur & Smith, 2016; D. Wilson et al., 2004). Anderson and Sternberg (2013) emphasize these discourses as a strong departure from prior framings which sought to position Pilsen as "a decrepit ghetto in need of refurbishment and colonization by affluent White 'pioneers'" (p.451) and demonize it's residents as unmotivated and encumbered by a supposed "culture of poverty" in order to justify intervention (Lewis, 1966; Rosemblatt, 2009).

Wilson et al. (2004) and Betancur and Smith (2016) consider the narrative strategies that community activists have used to resist redevelopment efforts in Pilsen. These narratives center on preserving Pilsen's cultural heritage and preventing the displacement of long-term residents. Activists frame gentrification as a threat to the neighborhood's historical identity, emphasizing the importance of maintaining Pilsen's rich Mexican-American culture (e.g., D. Wilson et al., 2004). Spatialized discourses, which reinforce the idea that Pilsen's identity is deeply intertwined with its long-standing residents and their traditions, are used to foster "in residents a positive territorial identity, a legacy of activism, and [provide] a clear villain to confront" (ibid.,

p. 1184). These cultural and historical narratives are leveraged to engender a collective sense of belonging and to galvanize resistance against the intrusion of wealthier newcomers and developers via slogans, community art, and public demonstrations. Betancur and Smith (2016) extend this analysis by exploring how economic arguments are woven into these cultural narratives and emphasizing the fluid nature of the struggle over gentrification. They note that activists have criticized gentrification as a form of economic exploitation that disproportionately benefits developers and wealthier new residents while harming and disempowering the existing community. This critique is often articulated through the lens of social justice, framing gentrification as an issue of economic and racial inequality. Betancur and Smith also describe how community groups have mobilized against policies and development projects that accelerate gentrification, advocating instead for affordable housing, equitable urban policies, and inclusive development that benefits all residents, not just the affluent. They argue that these discourses of economic justice, right to self-determination, and cultural preservation are central to the community's resistance efforts.

Significant economic and demographic changes have accompanied the progression of gentrification in Pilsen (e.g., J. Betancur & Linares, 2023). Since 1990, Pilsen has experienced continuing population loss as the arrival of new, non-Latine residents has not compensated for the departure of working-class Mexican families and foreign-born residents displaced by gentrification. A shift in Pilsen's population density, evidenced by a decline in overcrowding within Pilsen's eastern census tracts and a corresponding rise in its western ones, suggests "a westward push of families struggling to stay put" (J. Betancur, 2005, p. 57). This observation aligns with participants' accounts of neighborhood changes, where rising housing costs have gradually driven longtime residents westward within Pilsen or entirely displaced them to more

affordable areas like Little Village, Cicero, and Berwyn (see sections 'Pilsen is gentrifying' in

this chapter and 'Thematic analysis' in Chapter 3; J. Betancur, 1996; Curran & Kern,

2023). However, these areas, historically home to large Latine populations, are also facing

development pressures (e.g., Malagón, 2023). Little Village, a neighboring Latine-majority

community to Pilsen's west, experienced a population loss of 23.5% between 2000 and 2020,

similar to Pilsen's 22.2% decline (Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning, 2024b). In

Pilsen, this decrease reflects the loss of approximately 39% of its Latine residents and 35% of its

foreign-born ones, with the most significant impacts in the Eastern Edge of Pilsen/East Pilsen

and Central Pilsen sub-areas (J. Betancur & Linares, 2023). Educational attainment levels and

median household income have been on the rise, particularly in these same sub-areas. Median

rents have also risen sharply (46%), mirroring the overall trend in rising property values and

often outpacing income growth for many of its working-class residents. The surge in property

values (e.g., Lyons & Rodríguez-Ordóñez, 2017) has attracted more affluent buyers and

investors, which has led to the proliferation of upscale developments and amenities that cater to a

wealthier demographic. As these economic pressures mount, the Pilsen community continues to

change, with gentrification reshaping its demographic composition and social landscape.

Finally, Lyons and Rodríguez-Ordóñez (2017) examine the impacts of gentrification on

language in Pilsen. They analyzed over 400 signs within Pilsen's linguistic landscape to

determine the preferred code (English or Spanish), the context in which the signs were presented

(frame), and location in order to assess language variation across the neighborhood. The study

revealed that signs with a balanced use of Spanish and English are more prevalent in less

gentrified areas. Conversely, there is a significantly lower likelihood of encountering Spanish-

only signs in these areas. While this result may appear counterintuitive, Lyons and Rodríguez-

Ordóñez indicate that this aligns with prior research and reflects a broader linguistic ideology in

the U.S. that privileges English over Spanish in public spaces. They also observed a polarization

in what is constructed as 'authentic.' In the more gentrified eastern parts of Pilsen, authenticity is

often portrayed through a "hipster" aesthetic, while in less gentrified areas, it is represented

through references to a combined American and Mexican or Latin American heritage (ibid., p.

354).   In consideration of these findings, they argue that language plays a significant role in how

identity and belonging are negotiated in gentrifying spaces.

Representation of Pilsen in news

      To further situate Pilsen within its local context, in this section I consider how the

neighborhood has been portrayed in the local media. Understanding these media representations

is essential, as they not only shape and reflect external perceptions of Pilsen but also influence

how residents themselves interpret and navigate their community. By analyzing these narratives,

we gain insight into the complex social and cultural dynamics that intersect Pilsen, providing a

fuller understanding of its place within the city.

      In local news coverage, Pilsen is frequently depicted as a vibrant, culturally rich

neighborhood known for its arts community and Mexican heritage (Chang, 2019; Chicago

Magazine, 2021). Happold (2024), for example, paints an idyllic picture of a neighborhood

imbued with Mexican culture:

> It's mid-afternoon and store doors are open, displaying shelves of fresh *conchas*, antique
>
> trinkets and vintage clothing. Weaving down the street, vendors sell small prints and
>
> handmade jewelry, chatting idly with customers. Bright yellow, pink and blue *papel*
>
> *picado* wave lightly overhead in the autumn air.

Gallardo (2022), writing for the local ABC news channel, echoes this narrative depiction albeit in a much more direct way, stating that "Pilsen is a neighborhood that screams Mexico, loud and proud," citing its street vendors and public murals. In articles about the neighborhood's annual festivals, *Mole de Mayo* is described as emblematic of Pilsen's "prevailing culture" (Savedra, 2024) and *Fiesta Del Sol* is positioned as "the largest Latino festival of its kind in the United States" (e.g., E. McGowan, 2023). In this way, news stories situate Pilsen as a center of Mexican American community within Chicago.

Art and community are intimately linked in depictions of Pilsen. Articles featuring Pilsen's public art have noted that "Pilsen's buildings, alleyways, and even doors are places where artists blend their identities and culture" (Scannell, 2017), describing the neighborhood as "a living art museum" (Tanveer, n.d.). Walking guides have been developed by the National Museum of Mexican Art (National Museum of Mexican Art, n.d.), located in the southwest corner of the neighborhood, and others (Tanveer, n.d.) to help residents and visitors alike appreciate the public art; free and guided versions of these tours are routinely featured on lists of 'Things to do Do" in Chicago (e.g., Schagemann, 2022; Sprewer, 2021). News coverage also highlights the cultural significance of murals to the neighborhood with many depicting influential leaders or activists (e.g., Scannell, 2017), community identity (e.g., Calzada, 2021), political or religious themes (e.g., Chappell, 2020), or Mexican and Aztec cultural symbols (e.g., Ickes, 2021).

Finally, news coverage has also engaged the challenges posed by gentrification in the neighborhood as well as the efforts that residents have made to preserve its cultural heritage amidst rapid demographic shifts. Stories center the activism of local residents like Laura Paz who, protesting displacement due to gentrification-linked property tax increases in the

neighborhood, asserts that "[we] are the main Mexican cultural and intellectual center of Chicago, and we cannot lose that" (Miller, 2023). They also highlight community initiatives that resist gentrification like a unique inclusionary zoning mandate under which developers must allocate twice as many units for affordable housing relative to what is set forth in Chicago's Affordable Housing Ordinance (Pupovac, 2017) and a demolition surcharge that imposes fees on developers who tear down single- and multi-family homes in the area (Parrella-Aureli, 2024). Coverage also captures moments of tension between residents and perceived gentrifiers like the graffitiing of a newly-opened bakery café with messages exhorting the owners to "get out of Pilsen!" and referring to them as "gentrifiers" and "sell outs" (e.g., Hope, 2024; Savedra, 2024; Selvam, 2024). The complexity of residents' perspectives on gentrification is reflected in the comments of Patricia Carlos Dominguez, a lifelong Pilsen resident who expressed her sorrow at the graffiti, explaining that, "[Pilsen] was the port of entry for everyone so that's how we feel—we still feel that it's a port of entry for everybody. We have to give everybody a chance" (Hope, 2024).

Thematic Analysis of participants' narratives on the Pilsen community

Pilsen, as illustrated in the preceding discussion, is a Chicago neighborhood locally celebrated for its Mexican heritage and known for its community-driven efforts to resist redevelopment pressures. It is home to an established Spanish-speaking community, where language plays an important role in how identity and belonging are negotiated. The neighborhood's developmental trajectory and Mexican-origin community have been the subject of a significant body of prior research, with recent investigations focusing on the ongoing tensions between gentrification and neighborhood cultural preservation efforts. Studies have highlighted the significance of Spanish to local discourses reinforcing community ties and

mobilizing resistance to gentrification. This literature provides a valuable contextual frame for interpreting the local practices and meanings surrounding language use within Pilsen, making the neighborhood uniquely well-suited to the study of how local social meanings shape language use in a bilingual Mexican American community.

To gain a more nuanced understanding of Pilsen, however, it is essential to explore how residents themselves perceive and position their community. In this section, I present an analysis of semi-structured interviews with Mexican American, Spanish-English bilingual residents of Pilsen that examines how they construct and articulate their understanding of the neighborhood amidst ongoing changes. By centering the voices of those who call Pilsen home, this analysis provides a richer, community-grounded perspective on the neighborhood's current dynamics. The participants in this study are the same cohort engaged in the studies that I discuss in Chapters 3 and 4 of this dissertation. Their insights into Pilsen's dynamics here provide essential context for interpretation of the local language practices and ideologies that they describe as shaping their language use, as explored in the subsequent chapters.

Thematic analysis of data from semi-structured interviews with Pilsen residents (refer to Chapter 3 'Thematic Analysis' and 'Participants') for detailed accounts of this approach and participants' backgrounds, respectively) was conducted to identify the characteristics that surfaced in their discourse as representative of the community. The analysis revealed that participants conceptualize Pilsen as a dynamic, welcoming, and safe place, with language–Spanish, in particular—integral to how they understand and define their community. Although language is a prominent theme, it is explored in greater detail elsewhere in this dissertation (see Chapter 3). This analysis, therefore, focuses on the other attributes of the Pilsen community, with five key themes emerging in participants' discourse: 1) Pilsen is a Latine community; 2)

Pilsen is vibrant, colorful, and a home to the arts; 3) Pilsen is a friendly, family-oriented, and warm place; 4) Pilsen is a safe place; 5) Pilsen is gentrifying. In the following discussion, I will refer to participants (Table 2) by their pseudonyms; any other personally identifying details have been altered or omitted to protect their privacy.

Pilsen is a Mexican/Latine community

Participants articulate an appreciation for and connection to Pilsen's Mexican heritage. They emphasize how the visible presence of Mexican cultural elements in community spaces fosters an enduring sense of home and belonging. For some, this connection to Latine community is a core reason why they moved to the neighborhood; for others, it is what anchors them to Pilsen despite rising costs and other challenges wrought by gentrification. For all, this characteristic is essential to the neighborhood's identity, shaping both their own view and how outsiders see the area. It is also instrumental in organizing resistance to gentrification, with residents mobilizing to preserve their community's Latine heritage.

When asked to describe Pilsen's characteristic places, all of the locales cited by participants reflect Mexican cultural elements: the National Museum of Mexican Art, Mexican restaurants or *panaderías*, local street vendors selling *tamales o paletas*, and *el muralaje* depicting important community or cultural figures. Hector highlights this abundant Mexican culture as a cherished aspect of the neighborhood, stating, "Something that I love is that you can find—I'm Mexican and you can find a lot of Mexican culture." Ana similarly treasures the thriving Mexican community in the neighborhood, sharing that it makes Pilsen feel like home:

When I think of Pilsen, I guess it's kind of like when I describe it to my husband, because he's a lot more of like—he grew up more in the suburbs or residential areas. So, when we think about where we would like to live, he thinks about, "I'd rather move out to

something like that." I think of, well, no because Pilsen, you know, you can literally go

down the street and there's like a taco stand at night and, you know, you can't beat that

(laughs). Like, if I want a *tamal* in the morning, I can just go down the street and it'll be

there and, you know, I can walk to places and have all these experiences that are so close

to home 'cause, you know, it's like, this Mexican American neighborhood or I grew up

this way. So, having all of those things is kind of like having all of your comforts, all

your comfort foods—all your comforts that make you feel…safe, I guess. So, I think

about it a little bit more as that, as like what someone would think of as, like, a home.

For Ana, who grew up in Pilsen in the 1990s–two decades after the neighborhood had firmly

established itself as a Latine-majority community and center of Mexican culture within Chicago

(e.g., Fernández, 2005)–the omnipresence of Mexican cultural traditions in the neighborhood is

familiar and comforting. These traditions are integral to how she understands her community,

fostering a sense of belonging and safety. Additionally, by contrasting Pilsen with other

residential areas in metropolitan Chicago, Ana positions Pilsen as unique in this regard. Her

perspective resonates with how Pilsen has been represented in local media (e.g., Gallardo, 2022),

which often portrays the neighborhood as a center of Mexican American community within the

city. This view also aligns with local discourses that emphasize preservation of the

neighborhood's cultural heritage in an effort to resist gentrification (e.g., D. Wilson et al.,

2004). Ana has been personally impacted by gentrification, sharing that she has noticed "prices

going up, rent going up a lot" and explaining that those increases are "actually one of the reasons

I feel like I'm moving farther west." Despite these pressures, however, she seeks to remain in the

neighborhood out of deep appreciation for its cultural character. Her experience reflects the

demographic shifts within the neighborhood that have accompanied gentrification (e.g., J.

Betancur, 2005) as well as the strong community-led resistance to gentrification in Pilsen, which is rooted in the neighborhood's cultural identity.

Oscar, who moved into the neighborhood as an adult, shares Ana's appreciation for Pilsen's Mexican heritage and community. Explaining his decision to settle in the neighborhood, he remarks that Pilsen "just felt more like home than anywhere else." Luna, describing how they came to live in the neighborhood, also emphasizes the centrality of Pilsen's identity as a Latine community to this choice:

> I was trying to find a place to stay in Chicago. I didn't know Chicago at all. It was, like, I didn't know the neighborhoods; I didn't know anything, and then my friend, Alex, who was like, "Oh my god, have you been to Pilsen?" And I said, "What's Pilsen?" And he was like, "It's where, like, *all* the, like, Mexicans and Latinos are." And I was like, "Well, I guess I'm gonna start looking for a house in Pilsen!" (laughs) And so I came here and it was awesome, like, there was a *panadería* right around the corner and, like, everything just felt really accessible and, like, everything was just good.

In their remarks, Luna highlights their friend's view of Pilsen as the neighborhood where "all the Mexicans and Latinos are," reflecting a broader awareness within metropolitan Chicago of Pilsen's identity as a Latine-majority area. This perception aligns with how Pilsen is often portrayed in local media (e.g., Chang, 2019) and is consistent with the neighborhood's history as a majority Mexican-origin community since the 1970s (e.g., Kerr, 1976). Luna, who was moving from out of state, was not familiar with Chicago's neighborhoods or how they might differ. However, as their remarks reflect, they immediately felt the presence of and connected with Latine community in Pilsen, sharing their joy at finding "there was a *panadería* right around the corner."

Together, participants' remarks foreground the significance of Pilsen's Mexican heritage and community to their sense of home, safety, and belonging within the neighborhood. The omnipresent Mexican culture—from the street vendors to the colorful murals—is not the backdrop for Pilsen's community but rather lies at the core of it; it is what makes Pilsen feel like home, a familiar and comforting environment. Pilsen's identity as a Mexican community is unequivocal in participants' eyes and, thus, it is simultaneously unremarkable and a point of pride that it is recognized as such by outsiders. The opportunity to live in a neighborhood where Mexican culture is a pervasive and expected part of their daily life is a defining reason why participants choose to reside in Pilsen.

Pilsen as friendly, family-oriented, warm

Pilsen emerges in participants' commentary as a welcoming community where people come together to support one another. Participants relate feeling at home in Pilsen, sharing that the people they encounter on the streets greet them warmly. They also highlight the presence of many families in the neighborhood, emphasizing that Pilsen is a family-oriented community that fosters a strong sense of belonging and mutual support.

Ines, a younger resident who has lived in Pilsen for a few years, reflects on the people in her neighborhood when asked to describe it. She shares that, "most of the people are pretty friendly. Like, you say hi, they say hi back but, you know, it's a city still so people just tend to keep to themselves. But it's a good spot. It's very family—like, I see a lot of kids around." Maribel, a nearly lifelong resident of Pilsen, also emphasizes the warmth of the community in her comments:

Here you tend—people…you know, where I live at, we tend to stick together. We're

close knit. And if you go anywhere in Pilsen and you ask for help, they'll help you. They

help you, you know? "Ah, you know, you need this? You need that?" We all get
together and anything, anything, you know, that happens in a family. A
building…fire? We all get together. And it's like that in Pilsen. The whole thing! And
in Pilsen, it's like that. You know? It's a big family, yeah…. Yeah, and I, you know, I've
seen it through the years, and it's always been like that. When we first got here, you
know, when we first arrived, people came over and I— "Oh, you're new
neighbors. Where do you come from? Do you need anything? Can we give you
anything? Do you need any help with anything?" And yeah! It's always been like
that. So, I tend to.... Yeah, I mean, I haven't lived in another neighborhood, but I don't—
I wouldn't want to live in another neighborhood, really.

Pilsen, as Maribel describes, is a cohesive community where neighbors act with genuine care and
in a spirit of mutual assistance; she expresses a strong sense of camaraderie among its
members. These characteristics are not newly emergent but rather are longstanding features of
the community; Maribel emphasizes that her family first experienced the warmth of neighbors'
concern when they first arrived in Pilsen decades ago. Her family settled in the neighborhood
during the 1950s, at the beginning of a period of ethnic succession (e.g., Kerr, 1976), when, as
she describes, "[the neighborhood] was mostly Czech people…and there was only one Hispanic
store." While many accounts of this period (e.g., Fernández, 2005) remark on the tensions
between Pilsen's Eastern European residents and Mexican in-migrants, Maribel highlights the
kind gestures of her neighbors. As she later summarizes, Pilsen is "a very diverse community
and it's a welcoming community."

Luna's reflections on Pilsen echo these sentiments. Having more recently moved to the
area, they recall being initially unsure as to where within the city they wanted to live. They were

moving from a Latine-majority community in the southwest and, on the advice of a friend from the area, decided to settle in Pilsen. When they arrived, their first impression of the community was that it was, "yeah, I dunno, warm? I felt, when I first got here, it was very—it felt like this was my home away from home." They connect this feeling to Pilsen's identity as the place within Chicago "where all the Latinos live," mirroring local media (e.g., Chang, 2019) and scholarly reports (e.g., Grams, 2010) in describing it as an "epicenter of community." Luna, who was not in a comfortable financial position shortly after settling in the neighborhood, relates experiencing firsthand the generous support and warmth of neighbors:

> I would be walking down the street and someone would be like, "Hey! Did you want this half of a—we're doing this food thing, do you want this food?" And me—I was, like, really broke at the time and I did not—you know, I barely had enough for food but because of the Pilsen community, I survived that summer. Because they gave me, like, you know, chicken and, like, milk and all that stuff so…. And with the food pantry right down—right there! I felt really—I don't have to worry for food, you know? Like I don't have to worry for food, I guess. I only have to worry about shelter. (laughs) But it felt like that. It was that very community feeling, like, hey, we got you.

Neighbors' offers of food, combined with resources from the local food pantry, made Luna feel seen and cared for, as if the community was saying, "Hey, we got you." These actions fostered a strong sense of community, supporting Luna's understanding of Pilsen as a secure and welcoming place to live.

As evinced through Ines, Maribel, and Luna's comments above, participants' narratives depict Pilsen as a nurturing and inclusive community. They underscore a spirit of solidarity and mutual aid within the neighborhood. For Ines, the friendly greetings and family-oriented

environment create a welcoming atmosphere that contrasts with the indifferent anonymity she associates with Chicago more broadly. Maribel draws on her decades-long residence in the neighborhood to emphasize Pilsen's deep-seated tradition of neighborly support, where acts of kindness and collective responses to adversity have long been the norm. Luna's recent arrival and subsequent integration into the community further affirms its generosity, with residents proactively seeking to support those in need. The blend of community context and contemporary experience captured in participants' remarks constructs Pilsen as not just a place to live, but rather a community where individuals feel cared for and connected, regardless of their individual circumstances. Pilsen thus emerges as a resilient, warm, and nurturing neighborhood community.

Pilsen is vibrant and a home to the arts

This theme reflects discourse positioning Pilsen as vibrant, both in the wealth of bright colors that adorn its physical landscape, and the spirit of its community. Participants establish this vibrancy through descriptions of the neighborhood as "bright" and "colorful," emphasizing its "vibrant energy" and plethora of available activities. They also highlight the local artists' community and presence of public art, foregrounding the community's "originality" and "Bohemian" character. Participants interleave these different aspects to narratively construct Pilsen as a locale that is bright, energetic, and rich in culture.

Luna links Pilsen's vibrancy to its Latine community, focusing on the Mexican cultural elements that they encounter in the neighborhood and feel are characteristic of it. When asked to describe the neighborhood, Luna responds:

> The first thing I would say is colorful. Colorful from, you know, the—all of the mural
> stuff. Like, that in itself, is colorful and, like, I feel like people's houses here have a little

bit more room for originality, if that makes sense? Just because it is Latine, you know,

and you can put, you know, your altars out on the streets and no one really, like, fucks

with them because you're in a Latino community and you understand. But I would

definitely say colorful.

The salience of Pilsen's 'colorfulness' to Luna's understanding of the neighborhood is evinced

through its repeated mention, appearing four times in their description. Importantly, for them,

Pilsen's 'originality' and colorfulness arises from its Latine community; "[just] because [the

neighborhood] is Latine," residents are asserted to have greater freedom in their personal

expression of culture and/or style in how they decorate their homes. This sense of freedom,

Luna explains, is supported by an underlying sense that "because you're in a Latino community,"

others will understand.

Oscar's conception of Pilsen also centers its Latine community; he articulates, however,

the belief that Pilsen has a particular character:

I always say it is like a Mexican hipster town. Well, I just think like—I don't mean to be

derogative, anytime, but, like, I think hipsters are very creative people, for the most part,

or they're in the arts, right? So I feel like there's a lot of mixtures between the Mexican-

Latin cultures and, like, the American "hip" kind of movement. So I feel like (laugh) it's

a pretty accurate way of describing it. There's a lot of art….I don't know if it's considered

art but there's a couple of galleries also around—like, the antique houses and all that. I

feel that's part of…a little bit of the hip culture, right? Of kind of reusing and, like,

always bringing back stuff.

Pilsen's established art community is central to Oscar's perception of the neighborhood as a

locale characterized by creativity and renewal. He observes that spaces in Pilsen are transformed

rather than abandoned, a practice he associates with American "hip culture." This continuous

reinvention, coupled with the visible presence of art throughout the neighborhood, supports his

view of Pilsen as a "hipster" neighborhood with a distinctively Mexican character. Oscar's

description positions Pilsen as a vibrant, culturally-rich locale where art is an important part of

the community's identity. This perspective aligns with Grams' (2010) analysis, which

emphasizes how public murals and other forms of creative expression are integral to Pilsen's

identity as the cultural center for metropolitan Chicago's Mexican-origin community. Grams

(2010) argues that Pilsen "functions as the cultural center, not only because [it] was one of the

most culturally active of [Chicago's] Mexican locales, but because it is also home to the largest

ethnic cultural institution in the city…the National Museum of Mexican Art" (p.42). Oscar's

views also echo portrayals of Pilsen in the local news, which frequently highlight the

neighborhood's many murals to establish it as a dynamic, culturally-rich locale (see section

'Representation of Pilsen in the News' earlier in this chapter).

Hector's perspective on the community aligns closely with this understanding; he, too,

emphasizes Pilsen's active community of artists in his description of the neighborhood, sharing

that:

> Well, maybe you can describe it in many ways, one of those that I—the first that I'm
>
> gonna start with is that it's kind of like a Bohemian neighborhood; there are live a lot of
>
> artists and a lot of murals and I think it's like a very—it's a neighborhood with a very rich
>
> history about migration.

For Hector, part of the renewal that Pilsen experiences is due to its enduring legacy as a port of

entry (as described in the section 'Historical Pilsen' above). The historic and continuing flow of

(im)migrants into the neighborhood, though somewhat abated in recent years (J. Betancur &

Linares, 2023), means that Pilsen is "getting richer in cultures because there's arriving more and more people from different cultures." Hector shares that this is "something [he] love[s]" about the community, feeling that it prompts growth, cross-cultural exchange, and a welcoming space in which to share and celebrate Mexican culture. He also reflects on the ways that Pilsen's many active community groups uphold and contribute to these aspects, stating that residents like "cooperating and working and helping each other." Overall, he asserts that "the neighborhood is thriving and in evolution," and describes his community as "hardworking," "inclusive," "welcoming," and "open-minded."

Overall, Pilsen's vibrancy emerges in participants' narratives as deeply rooted in community culture. Participants consistently portray the neighborhood as a place where the bright colors of murals blend with and reflect Mexican traditions to create a lively, dynamic environment. Luna, for example, sees Pilsen's "colorfulness" and "originality" as intrinsically linked to its Latine identity, allowing residents to freely express their cultural heritage. This sentiment is echoed by Oscar, who describes Pilsen as a "Mexican hipster town," where the blend of artistic creativity and cultural renewal fosters a unique and evolving community. Hector further underscores this dynamic by highlighting Pilsen's role as a historic gateway for immigrants, contributing to its cultural richness and continual transformation. He appreciates the neighborhood's ability to embrace new arrivals while maintaining a strong sense of community and mutual support. Collectively, these narratives illustrate how Pilsen's vibrancy is not only a visible characteristic but also a lived experience that shapes and is shaped by the community's enduring commitment to cultural celebration, artistic expression, and collective solidarity. Finally, Ines' reflections on the neighborhood echo and encapsulate many of the sentiments expressed above as she remarks that Pilsen is "very, like, vibrant. Like, that's a very

cliché term and whatnot but it does fit because there's a lot of stuff always going on. There's a lot of color everywhere."

Pilsen as safe

Participants establish Pilsen as a safe place to live through narratives of transformation, juxtaposing past and present circumstances to accentuate how Pilsen has become a safer, more welcoming community. Long-time residents recall when gang-related violence was a significant concern in the neighborhood and express pride in the progress made, attributing the changes to community-grounded activism. Significantly, while participants' accounts often incorporate their reflections on the impacts of gentrification within the neighborhood, gentrification-linked development is described as following—not leading—community-internal efforts to improve the neighborhood.

Maribel, who has lived in Pilsen since the 1950's, reflects on the neighborhood's dynamic changes over the decades. She recalls that when her family first settled there, the community was "real nice," but later became known in the Chicago area for gang activity and developed a "bad name." Noting the positive turnaround that Pilsen has experienced in recent years, Maribel asserts that the neighborhood is "coming back up again." She attributes these positive changes to community action–particularly the enthusiasm and efforts of younger residents whom she perceives as invested in revitalizing the neighborhood:

Some of the people moved out during the time that it was kinda bad. So they moved out but then younger people are coming in and…they're bringing up…the old buildings, they're building them up. Or there's new construction. There's restaurants. So, yeah, that's why it's coming up again….I think it is…there's other ways that it's changing because the younger people are putting more effort into activities in the neighborhood,

you know…in Pilsen. Whereas before, the old people were like, you know, it's—we're just leaving, we're just going to let it...but then these younger people are coming to say, "Yeah, we can do this. Its—it could come up, you know. It can do that." And yeah, you know, they—I think that's fine.

Her description offers a personal perspective on the neighborhood's history, reflecting the period of disinvestment that accompanied the influx of Latine residents into Pilsen during the 1960s as well as the grassroots organizing that emerged in response throughout the 1970s (e.g., J. Betancur, 2005; Kerr, 1976). Maribel's reference to "younger people" is notably ambiguous, potentially encompassing both younger generations of long-standing Pilsen residents and the newer, often younger, arrivals to the community. Her characterization of these "younger people" as "coming in" suggests that she includes recent residents in her assessment, recognizing their role in contributing to the neighborhood's revitalization.

Oscar shares a similar view of Pilsen as a community that has been made safer through the efforts of its members. He explains that Pilsen has "for sure" changed since his arrival, pointing specifically to the "immersion of White families" and "young people" in the area as a notable shift. However, he challenges the perspective that the increased safety within the neighborhood resulted from the influx of these new residents, saying, "I think they moved here because of the cultural 'ambiance' but that happened also because safety was a little better at the time. I think that maybe just expedited the process." This view aligns with findings that redevelopers co-opted Pilsen's strong Mexican identity, which had been central to community efforts to resist gentrification (e.g., D. Wilson et al., 2004), and deployed a "sanitized version of 'Latinoness'...to attract development" (M. B. Anderson & Sternberg, 2013, p. 1716). Despite this rebranding, Oscar notes that Chicagoans' perspective of Pilsen may not yet align with the

community's own understanding, saying that "I think up North, a couple still think that it's not safe. But I think it's more like the lag in stereotype that Pilsen had in the past other than the actual situation of Pilsen."

Altogether, participants frame the environment in Pilsen as markedly improved, highlighting the greater security in recent years while acknowledging that theft and occasional violence still occur. While Oscar describes the neighborhood as "a bit up-and-coming," Luna contends that "Pilsen is hood," reporting that outbreaks of violence may be encountered regardless of whether "you're in the gentrified part or the less gentrified parts." Although this depiction seems in conflict with the perspective that Pilsen is safe, Luna tempers it with the statement that violence is not "something [they] think about everyday when [they're] walking around." Furthermore, Luna's description of Pilsen as "hood" is part of a larger narrative in their comments that considers how the neighborhood might be perceived by outsiders. Specifically, Luna feels that "Pilsen can be scary for some people…really, like, scary or intimidating, especially because it is so cultural." Sharing their reasoning for this belief, Luna draws on amalgam of factors including the "paintings of Aztec gods" present in Pilsen's public spaces, the Catholic church, and depictions of Pilsen in local media as they feel Pilsen is "frequently on the news for, like, you know, shootings and deaths and gun violence."

Pilsen is gentrifying

This theme encompasses participants' reflections on the demographic changes and gentrification in Pilsen. Their diverse positions within the neighborhood have led to different experiences with and perceptions of gentrification. Maribel, a Pilsen resident for over 60 years, draws parallels between the current wave of change and earlier shifts, noting differences in how residents have responded. In contrast, Ines, a more recent arrival, focuses on community

resistance to gentrification and expresses solidarity with long-term residents in their efforts to preserve the neighborhood's cultural identity. Despite these varied viewpoints, participants are united in their belief that gentrification is significantly impacting the community.

At 74 years old, Maribel's nearly lifelong residence in Pilsen affords her a unique perspective on gentrification in the area. She recalls a time when the neighborhood was largely White and Czech; her family arrived just before the 1960s demographic shift that saw an influx of Latine families to the neighborhood and a corresponding exodus of European ethnic groups. She regards the recent surge of White residents into Pilsen as a similar demographic shift but emphasizes that it is marked by a key difference: members of Pilsen's long-standing Latine community are staying in the neighborhood and working alongside new arrivals to improve it:

> When we got here in fifty-six, it was mostly Czech people. And there was, like, only one Hispanic store which is on Eighteenth street. And the others, you had to come to Halsted and Roosevelt. And then more Hispanic people started to come in and, you know, buy businesses and then it started to change. And then most of the Czech people left. Because they didn't want to stay around. And so, yeah, and then now, its more, well, American people coming—White people coming in. And both of them are working just side by side and it's, you know, better.

Maribel juxtaposes the actions of Pilsen's Czech community in the 1950s, who "didn't want to stay around" as the neighborhood began to change and "more Hispanic people started to come in," with those of the current Latine community who are "working just side by side" with new, often young, White residents as the neighborhood undergoes another wave of demographic transformation. Her observations reflect scholarly analyses of how different Pilsen communities

have responded to demographic changes in the neighborhood at different points in its

history. During the 1960s, ethnic succession in Pilsen–characterized by the departure of white

ethnics and the influx of Mexican immigrants–was largely driven by factors like racial tensions,

white flight, and economic disinvestment (e.g., J. Betancur, 2002; Fernández, 2012). In contrast,

the neighborhood's current Latine residents are organizing and fighting to remain in Pilsen,

navigating the complexities/pressures of gentrification and the arrival of newer, more affluent

residents.

In her description of who is entering the neighborhood, Maribel equates "Americanness"

and "whiteness;" this reflects racialized narratives of American identity (e.g., Sorrell et al., 2019)

that position whiteness as synonymous with being American in what Rumbaut (2009) describes

as the nation's "white racial frame" (p. 2). Maribel identifies White Americans as a distinct,

(re)emerging group within the neighborhood and situates them as outsiders to Pilsen's

established Mexican American community by saying that "both" groups are working to improve

the neighborhood. This positioning of new residents as collaborators rather than intruders is

reinforced in Maribel's later comments as she remarks that Chicagoans who live outside Pilsen:

> …have a misconception that it's being gentrified, it's being taken over; like, they say, 'the
>
> white people.' And I don't think so. I don't think so. I think—and then they're saying
>
> that the white people have changed it. No, they—it's a change but I think it's a change for
>
> the better. And I don't think it's, 'They're taking over.' They're not, you know.

Maribel asserts that narratives which cast Pilsen as 'being taken over' by gentrifiers are

'misconceptions' thereby positioning the neighborhood as unconquered and unrelinquished to

'the white people' moving into it. She also refutes assumptions that these newer white residents

acted as catalysts for or had any agency in the beneficial changes that Pilsen has experienced in

recent decades. Combined, these assertions frame the ongoing influx of white residents as a nominally beneficial change that does not impact the neighborhood's identity as a Mexican American enclave.

Oscar shares a similar perspective, asserting that the recent (re)growth of Pilsen's non-Latine, White community is in response to—and not responsible for—positive changes within the neighborhood like improved public safety, community resources and services, and new public works. While he does feel that the "immersion of White families" is the biggest change that the neighborhood is currently experiencing, he believes these families moved to Pilsen "because of the cultural 'ambiance'" but argues "that happened because safety was a little better at the time." This perspective aligns with Anderson and Sternberg's (e.g., M. B. Anderson & Sternberg, 2013) findings that redevelopment agents recodified Pilsen as "an authentic and vibrant Mexican 'ethnoscape' inhabited by a new racialized subject: the hardworking, professional, and civically reliable Mexican citizen," thereby commodifying its Mexican community to "facilitate a form of tourist-oriented redevelopment" (p. 18). Importantly, Oscar's comments also foreground the contributions of Pilsen's Mexican community to improvements within the neighborhood. It is the longstanding residents who have been initiators of change, working to ameliorate safety and support the community's well-being, while the newer white residents "maybe just expedited the process."

Ana, as someone who has "lived in Pilsen [her] whole life," has noticed marked improvements in neighborhood safety since she was a child; she notes, however, that these changes have come at a literal and figurative cost to the neighborhood with rising property costs driving longtime residents westward and out of the neighborhood. Reflecting on these changes, Ana shares:

I think when I was younger, I feel like my parents were very protective and, like,

sheltering me because it seemed to be a lot more, like, dangerous to be out. Definitely

you couldn't be out at, like, night because, you know, like you would hear gunshots or

things like that. And I mean, like, those kind of things still happen but now I feel like we

see a lot more people out and about even, like, when it's really late. And so that's one

thing that I've noticed is there seems to be maybe, like, less danger and definitely a lot

more people coming in from different areas and obviously prices going up, rent going up

a lot. And I think that's actually one of the reasons, like, I feel like I'm moving farther

west. When we were more central, we had a house there and then, you know, my parents

couldn't keep up with the payments anymore—which is kind of what happened to the

whole block. And so, like, all the original people that were there, they ended up, like,

having to sell or just—they just couldn't keep up with the payments so they had to just

move. So I'm seeing, I guess, a lot of also homeowners becoming renters now.

Ana's comments reflect the progression of gentrification into the neighborhood, starting in the

northeastern corner and gradually displacing longtime residents further westward as it continues

(e.g., Betancur, 2005). She shares that displacement has not been confined to a few isolated

cases but rather "happened to the whole block" where her family used to live. Additionally, like

Oscar, Ana links the increased safety within Pilsen to the influx of new residents, implying that

the former was a precondition for the latter. She makes this more explicit in a later comment,

saying that:

I think Pilsen, at first, wasn't seen—when I say at first, I mean kind of like when I was

way younger—seen as like, oh, you know, by outsiders like, "Who would want to live in

Pilsen?" You know? ...And now, you know, it seems like a hot spot for people to want

to move into and, you know, especially with, like, a lot more restaurants and bars and things like that. Like, on the east side of Pilsen.

Overall, Ana states that she views these changes in "a little bit more…neutral way. Like, you know, this is just how the community is developing." She notes that certain changes may be beneficial, like the instantiation of a local food pantry, but balances them against "more negative aspects" including a growing need for such services in the area and that she herself feels likely to be displaced from the neighborhood in the near future by increasing rents. Finally, while Ana never describes Pilsen's newer residents in detail, referring to them as "outsiders" or "the people coming in," she does establish them as relatively wealthier, highlighting their ability to purchase property within the neighborhood, and as English dominant or monolingual speakers.

Ines, despite having settled in Pilsen only a few years prior, feels more aligned with the neighborhood's longtime residents than other recent arrivals, whom she characterizes as White, affluent, and primarily English-speaking. This description of Pilsen's newer residents accords with observed demographic shifts in the neighborhood (Betancur & Linares, 2023). While she describes Pilsen as a "good spot," Ines is also keenly aware of the "issue of gentrification," noting, "I do see it and it's very pressing for sure. But I think that people are starting to—like native residents are starting to fight back against it." Through her comments, she locates herself somewhat outside Pilsen's Mexican American community, distinguishing herself from other "native residents" but also as someone joined with them in their struggle with and resistance to gentrification. She recalls having seen "flyers of different actions going on" and emphasizes that "residents are definitely organizing." Overall, however, she perceives residents' attitudes toward gentrification to be mixed, noting that:

there's always going to be people that are kind of apathetic, you know?…But I also think

that those people are the ones that have the least to lose and the ones that are organizing

are the ones that are like, "Well, my family's going to be kicked out, like, next month,

you know, if we don't do something."

Ines supports community efforts to resist gentrification and, while acknowledging the role that

"systemic issue[s]" might play in its trajectory, assigns some responsibility to those moving into

the neighborhood. She distinguishes between those who relocate to the neighborhood for

practical reasons (e.g., students who need to be closer to campus) and those who elect to for

financial reasons (e.g., investment, property acquisition). Of the latter, Ines remarks that "people

with real jobs, like, adult jobs, like…everyone's trying to find affordable housing but…you

know, there's gotta be a way that you can not kick people out of their homes and you can find a

way to live."

Overall, participants' comments underscore the importance of understanding

gentrification not as a uniform process but as one shaped by local histories, identities, and

community dynamics. They also offer insight into the trajectory of gentrification within Pilsen,

(and who is involved). Long-standing community members are described as Hispanic, Latino, or

Latine; they are Spanish speakers (who may also speak English), and are characterized as

families and/or more advanced in age. Newer community members, those associated with the

ongoing gentrification, are English dominant (or monolingual) speakers who are described as

"younger", "white" (or 'international', multicultural)*,* "hipsters." We see this in the comments of

Luis who refers to the newer residents as "young(er) people " and "kids". Sometimes, as both

Maribel and Luis do here, the younger people are framed as instilling energy into the community

to tackle the challenges that have faced it in recent memory (such as gang violence, vacant storefronts, and declining property values).

Conclusions

The current chapter employed thematic analysis of semi-structured interviews to examine how bilingual Mexican American residents of Pilsen perceive and discursively construct their neighborhood. I found that participants' narratives about Pilsen frame the neighborhood as an inclusive, vibrant community where residents feel connected and supported. While participants acknowledge the challenges that Pilsen has faced and currently confronts, they characterize the neighborhood as safe, thriving, and resilient. Central to this perception are community efforts to proactively organize on behalf of local needs, including measures to preserve Pilsen's Mexican heritage amidst increasing gentrification pressures. Participants emphasize this cultural heritage as vital to their sense of belonging in Pilsen and having played a key role in why they originally settled in the neighborhood or chose to remain despite rising housing costs. They highlight Pilsen's colorful murals, many of which depict culturally significant community leaders or symbols (e.g., *Chappell, 2020*), as a testament to the neighborhood's ongoing commitment to collective solidarity and celebration of its Mexican heritage. Together, these accounts reflect the pride that participants have in their community as well as their determination to maintain its cultural identity. Pilsen's enduring connection to Mexican culture remains a defining feature in how participants understand the neighborhood, even as it continues to evolve.

Participants' commentary aligns with representations of Pilsen in local media (see section 'Representations of Pilsen in the news') and echoes findings from the literature–particularly regarding the significance of the neighborhood's Mexican heritage, history of grassroots activism, and legacy as a port of entry to community identity. Numerous studies have

emphasized the centrality of Mexican heritage to Pilsen's identity (e.g., Curran, 2018), a perspective that is evident in how participants narratively construct the neighborhood. The importance that participants attribute to public murals and the local arts community resonates with research highlighting public art as a powerful form of cultural expression and resistance in Pilsen (e.g., Hadley, 2015). The neighborhood's history of activism (e.g., Fernández, 2012; Ramirez, 2011), advocating on behalf of its most vulnerable members and in preservation of its cultural identity, is evident in participants' accounts of how residents organized to address safety concerns, will readily come together to support those in need, and are mobilizing to resist gentrification. Participants also draw on Pilsen's history as a port of entry (e.g., Kerr, 1976) to establish the neighborhood as a vibrant and welcoming community. These connections between participants' narratives, scholarly work, and local discourses, as reflected in media coverage, underscore the significance of Pilsen's sociohistorical context to understanding of the social meanings that emerge in interviews with its residents.

The preceding description of Pilsen's sociohistorical context, representation in local discourses, and narrative positioning by residents provides essential context for the core studies of this dissertation. These studies investigate the local social meanings surrounding language use in Pilsen's bilingual Mexican American community and test how they influence bilinguals' language perception; they aim to elucidate how local social meanings shape bilingual language processing and control. Situating participants' commentary within their community's distinct sociocultural context allows for fuller understanding of the language practices and ideologies that emerge during the interviews. This approach allows for the examination of whether and how local social meanings modulate bilingual perception, thereby extending existing frameworks on bilingual language processing and control.

Chapter 3. Language and Social Meaning in Pilsen: Thematic Analysis of Interviews

Local conceptions matter to language use (e.g., Eckert, 2008); the social, cultural, and historical contexts of a community shape its members' language practices (Pennycook, 2010). However, the social factors tested in previous work in bilingualism have not been locally situated and, therefore, do not capture the ways in which local categories, practices, norms, and ideologies may impact bilingual language processing and control (e.g., J. A. E. Anderson et al., 2018; Marian et al., 2007). Pilsen, a neighborhood on Chicago's lower west side, is home to a longstanding Spanish-English bilingual language community that is composed of individuals primarily of Mexican origin. It is well-contextualized within the national and local sociohistoric landscape by prior research. Despite the breadth of work undertaken, however, how local social meanings and language practices shape the language use of its Spanish-English bilingual members is not well known. This knowledge, however, would advance theory on bilingual language processing and control by more fully accounting for the local social context of bilingual language use. In this chapter, I present the thematic analysis of semi-structured interviews that investigate what localized social meanings Mexican American, Spanish English bilinguals in Chicago's Pilsen neighborhood believe shape their expectations for what language(s) are needed in an interaction. The influence of these local social meanings on bilingual perception was examined using a socially-primed phoneme categorization task (Chapter 5), which utilized brief descriptions of interlocutors (i.e., personae) that incorporated the social factors that emerged from participants' metalinguistic discourses during the interviews.

Thematic analysis (TA) is a widely-used method for identifying recurrent themes or patterns of interest within a corpus (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In contrast to deductive methods that apply predetermined or theory-driven codes (e.g., framework analysis), inductive TA

employs a coding process called the constant comparative method (CCM) that allows themes to emerge organically from the data without relying on prior assumptions or expectations (e.g., Gale et al., 2013; Pope et al., 2000). Under CCM, segments of data are iteratively compared to identify similarities that facilitate the development of categories (initial codes), the refinement of category boundaries (focused coding), the assignment of segments to categories, and the discernment of conceptual patterns that can be summarized as themes (e.g., Boeije, 2002; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Tesch, 1990). TA's use of constant comparison facilitates the dynamic reconfiguration of themes throughout the analysis. This flexibility allows researchers to remain open to unexpected patterns or insights, making TA a powerful tool for qualitative/exploratory analysis. It supports the development of a nuanced, richly-contextualized understanding that is closely aligned with participants' perspectives and experiences.

Within linguistics, TA has been employed to explore how language is used and perceived within specific contexts. For instance, Schumann (1978) applied TA to written diaries to analyze how personal factors shaped the process of second language acquisition. Relatedly, Bewley (2018) utilized TA to interrogate the linguistic and cultural ideologies within Chinese foreign language textbooks. In this dissertation, I draw on a line of work that has employed TA to investigate bilinguals' language attitudes, perceptions, and ideologies through coding of themes within interview data (e.g., Banes et al., 2016; Fitzsimmons-Doolan et al., 2017; Trenchs-Parera & Newman, 2009). Peace-Hughes et al. (2021), for example, employed TA to identify the attitudes Gaelic-English bilingual children in Scotland expressed about their languages, while Zhang and Slaughter-Defoe (2009) utilized it to understand attitudes toward heritage language maintenance among Chinese immigrant families in the US. These studies illustrate TA's ability

to elucidate the diverse ways in which bilinguals engage and perceive their languages across contexts.

This approach aligns with the growing recognition of the crucial role that social context plays in shaping bilingual language use and cognition. Titone and Tiv (2023), for instance, advocate for greater consideration of how social interactions and environmental factors shape the language practices of bilinguals, highlighting findings that attest language's role in accomplishing social goals as well as the role of social dynamics in shaping cognition (including language). This perspective resonates with work from several linguistic subdomains (e.g., sociolinguistics, pragmatics, second language acquisition) and is reflected in seminal theories of bilingual language control which establish social context as an important factor (e.g., Green & Abutalebi, 2013; Grosjean, 2001). Titone and Tiv, alongside Kroll et al. (2023) and Abutalebi and Clahsen (2023), call for a renewed focus on how social factors shape bilingualism, arguing that understanding bilingualism requires a deeper exploration of the social contexts in which bilinguals operate that moves beyond assessing language proficiency or frequency of use.

Kroll et al. (2023) similarly advocate for a broader approach to the study of bilingualism that incorporates the social and cognitive dimensions of language use. They note that traditional cognitive models often overlook how bilinguals' language use is embedded within and informed by the rich social contexts they navigate in daily life. Describing insights from work in sociolinguistics on how aspects of identity (e.g., Auer, 2013) or local environment (Nagy et al., 2014) shape bilinguals' language use, Kroll et al. highlight how this body of work has seldom been integrated into analyses or models of bilingualism and argue for greater dialogue between sociolinguistic and cognitive perspectives. They argue that "real progress on understanding the seeming noisiness of bilingual language and brain data requires a better understanding of the

speakers involved and the pressures that shape their identities. In other words, a synthesis of the type called for by Titone and Tiv will require making use of deep ethnography and qualitative analysis of both speaker identity and interactional context" (ibid., p.18). Abutalebi and Clahsen (2023) further emphasize the necessity of considering social factors in bilingualism research, noting that bilinguals' language use is not static but rather dynamically influenced by their social environments, and advocate for research that moves beyond isolated language tasks to better include the rich tapestry of bilinguals' daily social interactions.

In this chapter, therefore, I consider what aspects of the local social context influence language selection and control in bilinguals, according to speakers themselves. To that end, I present an analysis of data from semi-structured interviews (Adams, 2015) with eight Spanish-English bilingual speakers who self-identified as Mexican American and lived in Chicago's Pilsen neighborhood. Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was used to ascertain the factors that participants described as related to their language use. Specifically, I consider how bilinguals within this community ideologize their language use and what localized social meanings they believe shape their expectations for which language(s) are needed in an interaction.

Methods

Participants

Mexican American, Spanish-English bilingual residents of Chicago's Pilsen neighborhood were sought for this study. The inclusion criteria were that participants: have significant lived experience within Pilsen, Chicago; have spoken both Spanish and English since early childhood; self-report fluency in and use of both languages; and identify as Mexican, Mexican American, Chicane, or of Mexican descent. Recruitment flyers, emails, and web forum

posts directed interested individuals to a brief intake questionnaire, accessible online via Qualtrics, that provided a summary of the study and detailed enrollment criteria. Respondents who reviewed this information and affirmed that they met study criteria were contacted to schedule an interview/their participation.

Due to the gentrification-driven demographic shifts in Pilsen, I did not establish a minimum length of residence in the neighborhood as a requirement for study participation. The longest length of residence was sixty-six years while the shortest was one year (Table 2). It is possible that relatively newer residents may have differing language practices and ideologies that are shaped by their experiences in other communities. I welcome these diverse perspectives, however, as they more fully reflect the current community and the neighborhood change processes Pilsen is experiencing.

Potential participants were recruited through volunteer and snowball sampling (Morse, 1991) by: (1) sharing information about the study in web-based forums (e.g., Facebook groups) for neighborhood organizations; (2) emailing leaders of neighborhood organizations to share and request they pass information about the study onto their members; (3) posting informational flyers in community spaces like coffee shops and libraries; (4) snowball recruitment. Though the response rate was highest to social media posts, most of those who expressed interest did not meet study criteria; often they did not live in Pilsen or self-report proficiency in Spanish and English. The majority of participants (n = 6), therefore, came from responses to informational flyers posted in local spaces.

A total of ten interviews were conducted; two participants were excluded for not meeting study criteria. In the following discussion, therefore, interview data from eight participants will be presented and analyzed. Participants were early Spanish-English bilinguals who reported a

high proficiency in both languages. All participants had acquired Spanish since birth (0 years); their average age of acquisition for English was 4 years (range: 0 - 7). They self-identified as Mexican American and/or self-reported familial ties (themselves, their parents, or grandparents) to Mexico. They ranged in age from nineteen to seventy-two years with most participants (n = 5) in their late twenties. Participants' pseudonyms and self-reported demographic information are summarized in Table 2 below.

Table 2. *Self-reported Demographics of Interview Participants.*

Participant	Pronouns	Age	Gender	Years in Pilsen	AOA Span	AOA Eng
Ana	She/Her	29	Female	29	0	7
Fernando	He/Him	19	Male	1	4	0
Hector	He/Him	38	Man	6	0	6
Ines	She/Her	24	Female	2.5	0	0
Isabella	She/Her	20	Female	1	0	5
Luna	They/Them	31	Trans non-binary (no binarix)	4	0	5
Maribel	She/Her	72	Female	66	0	5
Oscar	He/Him	28	Male	10	0	6

Note. All names are pseudonyms.

Measures

Interview Guide

An interview guide (Appendix A) was developed to help structure the discussion with participants. The guide consisted of fourteen open-ended main questions and nine open-ended sub-questions; sub-questions were asked only if participants' initial response did not encompass certain topics of interest. Questions were designed to elicit participants' views regarding (1) the characteristics of prototypical speakers of each language; (2) how they decide which language to use in a conversation (both when meeting someone new and someone known); (3) their attitudes

toward use of both languages in public and private spaces; and (4) their perspectives on others'

attitudes toward Spanish and English in their community and Chicago more broadly.

The guide was organized into four domains of inquiry as distinguished by topic: community

context; language experiences; code switching and language use; language attitudes. Question

order was designed to support a gradual transition from discussion of more neutral topics focused

on concrete experiences to those which were more specific, theory-driven, and potentially

controversial or awkward (Adams, 2015; Galletta & Cross, 2013; S. Mann, 2016; Yeong et al.,

2018). This structure allows the interviewer to build rapport with the interviewee before

broaching more challenging topics, helping to establish a comfortable space for them to share

attitudes and personal experiences (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006).

The interview guide was piloted with three bilingual individuals living in Chicago to assess

question clarity, flow, and interview duration (Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik, 2021); these

individuals did not live in Pilsen and were not part of the participant population for this

study. While this pilot study helped to finalize a draft of the guide prior to data collection, it

should not be understood as fixing the set of questions included in interviews with

participants. Rather, the guide is best understood as a living document that is intended to be

refined throughout data collection in response to insights from conversations with participants

(Galletta, 2013). Planned re-assessments of the guide with the research team followed the first,

third, and sixth interviews; the content of the guide was revisited by the lead investigator after

every interview to ensure that it remained responsive to the topics and lines of inquiry that

emerged.

Finally, and importantly, the guide does not fully encompass the questions asked during an

interview but rather provides direction and structure to it. While interviews all incorporated

questions from the domains delineated above, they were also partly unscripted, guided by participants' interests, responses, and background. Unplanned prompts were used to clarify or explore ideas arising in participants' responses (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006).

Interview Transcriptions

Transcription has been a topic of ongoing scholarly deliberation, with researchers calling for greater critical engagement with transcription practices and their implications for research outcomes (e.g., Bucholtz, 2000; Davidson, 2009; Ochs, 1979). Ochs (1979), critically reflecting on the transcription process and how it may impact linguistic analysis, argues that transcription is not a neutral act: a transcript is the outcome of a researcher's choices regarding how and what to record and, therefore, is reflective of their theoretical goals. Bucholtz (2000) builds on this assertion to highlight how transcription choices can reflect and perpetuate power dynamics—particularly concerning race, gender, and social class—and emphasizes the importance of transparency in transcription methodologies. I follow Bucholtz (2007) in understanding transcription as a "socioculturally embedded linguistic and metalinguistic practice" of representing discourse (p. 785) whereby variation in transcription methods can be understood as reflecting researchers' different analytical or political goals. Accordingly, in deciding the transcription method that I would employ, I chose practices that aligned with the objectives of this study. Central to this work is the understanding and faithful representation of participants' attitudes and experiences; this requires a full transcription that preserves context and detail. I retained nonverbal actions, nonlinguistic sounds (e.g., laughter, sighs), and idiosyncratic elements of speech like fillers (e.g., like, um, uh), false starts and hesitations, and pauses. I also incorporated some written features of discourse like commas and quotation marks to help clarify intended meaning. I employed orthographic translation, preserving a set of non-standard forms

(e.g., wanna, gonna), slang, and grammatical errors or misuses of words. I recorded all code switches. To systematically record these different aspects of speech, I drew from Jefferson (2004) and McLellan, MacQueen, and Niedig (2003) in establishing a notational system. Finally, to protect participants' privacy, I substituted pseudonyms for their names and for anyone else they mentioned by name. I also altered or eliminated any identifying references (e.g., their street address or the school they attend). Transcripts were reviewed for accuracy and revised as necessary.

Procedure

Interviews were conducted either remotely (online via Zoom video conferencing software) or in person at a location convenient to the participant (e.g., a local library branch or coffee shop). This flexibility in interview modality was incorporated into the research design due to the health risks posed by Covid-19 at the time of data collection. Interviews were scheduled for a time, modality, and location with which participants were most comfortable.

The majority of interviews (n = 6) were conducted in person with participants electing to meet at a variety of locations within Pilsen. For those interviews conducted online (n = 4), participants were provided a link to a Zoom meeting room; they were asked to set-up for the meeting in a quiet location and, if available to them, use a headset with an in-line microphone.

All interviews were audio-recorded. In-person interviews were digitally recorded using a Zoom H4n recorder and Audio Technica ATPro70 lavalier microphone at a 44.1 kHz sampling frequency and 16-bit rate. Online interviews were digitally recorded direct-to-disk via Zoom's native audio recording capabilities. Participants were made aware before recording began and when it ended; notes were taken on conversation that occurred outside of the recording.

Interviews were conducted primarily in English and all written materials (e.g., intake and scheduling communications, consent documents, questionnaire) were provided in English. The decision to provide materials in only one language (English) allows for consistency with other components of the study and accounts for evidence that bilinguals can respond differently depending on the language in which a questionnaire is presented (Richard & Toffoli, 2009). In their responses, however, participants were free to use whichever language(s) they felt were most apropos. Approximately half of all participants (n = 4) code-switched during the interview, with frequency of code-switches varying by participant. Across all participants, code switches were predominantly intra-sentential incorporations of single words or phrases with English as the matrix language.

I opened interviews with a brief statement thanking participants for their involvement in the study, summarizing the study's purpose and eligibility requirements, and introducing myself (Adams, 2015; Galletta & Cross, 2013). Participants were then provided with an overview of the interview and consent process. After giving consent, participants completed a written questionnaire that queried their language background, experience, attitudes and demographic information (see Chapter 4 'Measures' for detailed discussion). I briefly reviewed participants' responses on the questionnaire and asked for any needed clarifications before beginning the interview. Interviews followed the prepared guide while remaining responsive to novel ideas raised during the discussion and the topics most interesting to the participant. Following the interview, participants were given the opportunity to reflect on the discussion and, if desired, review the recording; they were then asked whether they would like to adjust their consent and/or request that specific responses be changed or removed from the data. They received a $20 digital gift card in exchange for their participation.

Analysis

Thematic Analysis

I applied TA to identify the factors, like attitudes or local practices, that participants described as related to their language use. Interview transcripts were first reviewed to develop an initial set of codes that reflect interesting features within the data. Codes are typically more granular than the themes which ultimately emerge, as they correspond to the most basic elements of the data that can be meaningfully assessed regarding the question of interest (Boyatzis, 1998). Each paragraph within an interview transcript was reviewed and coded in order to collect data excerpts relevant to each code; more than one code could be attached to a single paragraph. Codes were then collated into potential themes such that similar beliefs or experiences were grouped together under one theme. Themes were not predetermined but rather chosen to reflect patterns within the data and their centrality to the question of bilinguals' language use. Themes were reviewed and refined as necessary to ensure that they were coherent, distinct, and sufficiently supported by the data.

Researcher Positionality

Ricoeur, in his work and teaching, invited others to consider from where they spoke (du Toit, 2019). This question arguably encapsulates a core premise of reflexive research, a perspective that encourages researchers to consider how their "praxis and their role and social position [relate] to the product and process of their work" (May & Perry, 2014, p. 110). I identify as a white, cis-woman and, while conducting this research, I was a member of Northwestern University's academic community. My theoretical perspective as a researcher is informed by my study of linguistics (multilingualism, second language acquisition, and

sociolinguistics) and social scientific theory and methodology. These viewpoints have shaped the methodologies engaged in this work and my interpretation of the data.

Through this dissertation, I sought to better understand and share the perspectives that members of a Mexican American bilingual community in Chicago held regarding their language use. I was a visitor to that community, having no lived familiarity with it, and differ in background from community members. While participants in this study were early Spanish-English bilinguals, I am a trilingual speaker of English, Spanish, and Korean; the latter two are later acquired languages. Though not a native speaker of Spanish, I have studied and taught it at the university level. All participants self-identified as being of Mexican descent whereas I do not. When greeting participants before each interview, I introduced myself, sharing information about the communities of which I was a part and the languages I spoke. Specifically, I shared that I was a graduate student at Northwestern who was not originally from Chicago, lived outside Pilsen, and spoke Spanish as a later acquired language. My position as a community 'outsider' may have influenced the questions I asked (or left unasked), my interactions with participants in the field— including what they felt comfortable sharing in the interviews, the language(s) they used, and how I understood their answers (Holmes, 2020; Smith, 2006). I discuss in greater detail how my positionality as a researcher may have influenced my findings in addressing the limitations of this study (see Chapter Six). I am committed to engaging deeply with community members, seeking their perspectives, and incorporating their voices into the analysis to ensure that my work accurately reflects their lived experiences.

Results

Thematic Analysis

Four main themes were distinguished through thematic analysis according to both their

prevalence (how often they appeared across the dataset) and their centrality to the question of

bilinguals' language use. They are as follows: 1) language selection is a fluid and highly

contextualized process; 2) locality conditions language use; 3) Spanish is expected within Pilsen;

and 4) Spanish helps to define and construct community. These themes reflect participants'

perspectives on the presence and place that each of their languages holds in their lives as well as

how they navigate the use of them. I will begin by defining each theme and explaining its

significance, along with the specific aspects of participants' experiences it encapsulates. I will

illustrate each theme with quotes from the interviews, showing how it emerged in the

data. Finally, I will discuss the broader implications of each theme and its connections to

existing research findings. Throughout the discussion, I will refer to participants by their

pseudonyms. All participants were given the option to either select their own pseudonym or

have me assign them one. Any other personally identifying details have been altered or omitted

to protect participants' privacy.

Language selection is a fluid and highly contextualized process that centers interlocutor

comfort.

This theme comprises discourse that frames the language selection process as dynamic and

context sensitive. Participants describe attending to multiple factors when deciding which

language(s) to use such as interlocutor identity, locale, the topic and purpose of a conversation,

and mood. They convey that these factors are often jointly determinative, integrating to establish

the social context for an interaction. According to participants, the impact of each factor is not

fixed but rather exerts a contextually dependent influence on their language use. Also encompassed by this theme is discourse highlighting interlocutor comfort as a primary interactional goal. Participants relate using a variety of cues to gauge an interlocutor's comfort with the language of an interaction; of the many cues discussed, three emerge as particularly salient: perceived race, age, and accentedness. While these cues are consistently raised by participants, often among the first factors they identify when discussing their language use, they are not equally weighted: perceived race is positioned as salient but unreliable; age is described as a good proxy for generation within the US and, therefore, comfort with English; and perceived accentedness is noted as a strong cue to an interlocutor's comfort with English.

Ana's experiences illustrate how participants narratively position their perception of various facets of an interlocutor's identity as integrating to establish an expectation for the contextually appropriate language(s). Ana initially asserts that, when she meets someone new, her choice of language is primarily guided by the interaction of two factors—her interlocutor's perceived age and ethnicity. Describing how she might approach this choice, Ana explains that her choice of language is:

> …based on two things: one is do they look like they're Hispanic or Latino and, if they do, it depends on do they look older or do they look younger? If they look older, I will most likely start in Spanish. And if they look younger, I'll speak in English. And I guess that's me assuming that most likely they know English because they're younger. That's kind of, like, generally how it happens.

Ana's belief that younger, Latine speakers know English primes her to expect that they will be likely to use and/or be more comfortable in it; this expectation then influences the language in which she initiates the conversation, making her more likely to use English. Significantly, Ana's

expectation of her interlocutor's English language knowledge is informed by a combination of their perceived age and race, with older Latine speakers seen as less likely to be proficient or comfortable in English. In later comments, Ana reveals that she centers the comfort of her interlocutor, attending to whether they seem to be experiencing any difficulty or unease with the language being spoken. She shares of her experiences that, "sometimes they'll start speaking in English, but they are kind of having a hard time speaking in English. So, then I'll try to speak to them in Spanish to see if that's more comfortable for them."

As we continued to talk, Ana's description of the factors she attends to when deciding which language to use became more complex, incorporating whether the person was alone and, if not, by whom they were accompanied (e.g., children, older adults). If they have a family or children with them, Ana relates that she is more likely to believe they speak Spanish and to, accordingly, speak Spanish with them. Conversely, she explains that "if it's new people, I think it's—do they look like they're, like, young and they're just by themselves? I likely will speak to them in English. And then, if I see they're kind of like a family unit...I'll speak to them in Spanish." She also highlights locales within the community like her favorite *panadería,* Nuevo Leon, where she expects Spanish to be spoken and, therefore, to use Spanish while there.

Ines' comments further exemplify how participants' reflections on language choice cast it as a highly-contextualized process that is guided by the integration of multiple factors—both within and outside the speech signal. She initially shares that, "I guess it depends—it really does depend a lot on everything…feelings. It depends if you wanna be emotional at the time…if I wanna be speaking fast…the time of day…what we're talking about…. English to me is, like, my academic language as well…. I also talk to my roommate's cat in Spanish." She later

describes attending to her interlocutor's speech, listening for specific features that she believes index Latine identity:

> I think every, like, Latino in the United States and in Chicago, too, speaks a little differently and there's an accent or something. I don't know if it's an accent because you can just hear it. (laughs) On both [languages], I think. Mostly in English, though. There's-- I don't know, it's more clipped, the sound, I think. I don't know. There's a difference, though.

In her comments, Ines conveys a concept of Latine identity that is strongly linked to Spanish language use. She is listening for an accent that, to her, will mean her interlocutor speaks Spanish and is found in the speech of "every Latino in the United States." Ultimately, over the course of her interview, Ines distinguishes nine factors that influence her language use.

Of the many social factors that participants report considering in assessing which language(s) to speak, perceived race was among the most frequent; often, however, participants' comments weigh the unreliability of this cue against its salience, describing situations in which they had incorrectly assessed an interlocutor's language background based on how they had racialized them. Maribel, for example, highlights perceived race as a possible cue but then immediately casts it as unreliable, sharing that when meeting someone for the first time she considers, "…how they look, how they seem, yeah…we've had experiences that we see…a Mexican person—blonde, blue-eyed. So…right away we say, 'Well, does she speak Spanish?' We speak English. And she'll say, 'Uh, sorry, I don't speak…English.'" Luna echoes this experience, saying that, "Latinos…will approach other Latinos speaking Spanish, just assuming that it's just gonna be a thing and, for some people, it's not." They contextualize this experience

within the history and language attitudes of the broader Mexican American community,

conveying that:

> Generationally, there's like a gap almost of, you know, Spanish speaking people who
>
> were shamed for speaking Spanish. And, if we even harken back to, like, the indigenous
>
> folks, right? The indigenous folks of Mexico being told to speak Spanish or, like, perish,
>
> right? So, then they were told to speak Spanish and then—so, that was like indigenous in
>
> Mexico speaking Spanish and then the speaking Spanish spreading to the United States,
>
> and it's become a lot more like a targeting, in a sense. And, like, even within that, there's
>
> like, you know, these people that didn't want to teach their kids Spanish and so their kids
>
> now feel like they're lacking out of their culture.… And, like, I just—I hold space for
>
> that and—'cause I understand that all comes out of, like, trauma and they didn't want to
>
> teach their kids Spanish because they were made fun of all the time for using it.

Luna's remarks offer insight into how, from their perspective, US-based (racio)linguistic

ideologies and traumatic experiences of discrimination have negatively impacted families'

decisions to maintain Spanish as a heritage language and, consequently, why perception of an

interlocutor's ethnic background is not a faithful predictor of whether they speak Spanish.

Hector, who moved to the US from Mexico as an adult, offers a different perspective on

the considerations shaping heritage language maintenance within the community and,

accordingly, the fidelity of perceived ethnicity as a cue to language background. He recounts

experiences where he met someone who preferred to speak English and that he knew or

perceived to be Latine, saying:

> Yeah, and also when you arrive here for the first time, you say, "Oh, you know, there
>
> are"—you have like that…*prejuicio*. *Prejuicio*. Prejudge? Prejudice. That's the

prejudice that, "Oh, you know, that some people got to the US then they forget about their roots and they—they don't wanna be Mexican" and just—and you start judging the people. But when you move here, and you keep knowing more people—you know about the stories, the immigration here, maybe what happened to those people, maybe they're…. Well, I don't have any relative here. Just my wife. The biggest part of my wife's family lives in Chicago…and maybe some of them would prefer—rather English than Spanish.   And then you say, "Oh, but why?" And, no, maybe they…you'll think [at] the beginning, "Oh, they're rejecting the story, their heritage," no? It's very different, very different. And as I mentioned also there's people who don't know about their culture, their heritage. They know about all of the richness that they have that maybe their parents— as maybe in one case…they couldn't teach them or show them all of their culture because they didn't have time. Because people—or, well, once I heard that a guy said, "Oh, my father's had the life of an immigrant. He just worked to survive. Yes, and well, this guy was my hero." He's, like, forty years old so…and then you understand and realize and you get more [empathetic] with the people.

For Hector, Spanish is a key aspect of Mexican identity and culture; it is "roots" and "heritage." For Mexican Americans to not speak (or prefer not to speak) Spanish was, therefore, something he initially felt to be a rejection of this heritage. He frames this past conception as a "prejudice," a belief he no longer holds having learned more about the experiences that members of the Mexican American community had to face when immigrating to or living in the US. The factors that both he and Luna highlight echo Zentella's (1997) assertion that, in minority language communities, "many factors that determine opportunities for linguistic…development are beyond the immediate control of children and their parents" and may include language

policies, access to economic opportunity, and the structure of the community within which they live (p.125). Speaking of how he now approaches selecting which language to use in conversation, Hector emphasizes his consideration for the comfort of his interlocutor and notes that establishing the language for an interaction is a two-way street; just as he is assessing the social context, so too are his interlocutors. He remarks, "It's up to them. Or maybe some people, I look at them and they say, 'No, this [guy'll] talk Spanish.' And I talk Spanish and English and they answer maybe at first in Spanish but, all the other things, they talk…in English." He also further underscores how his views have evolved away from perceived race or ethnicity as a good proxy for what language someone may speak, sharing that, "you can find some people that you look, 'Oh, this guy may be Mexican, may be Guatemalan' and, no, they are Filipino or they're from Afghanistan as well and…say, "No, no español." And you may say, 'No, he doesn't want to speak Sp —' 'No, I'm from Afghanistan.' 'What?!' You really can't tell."

While most participants portray perceived race as an unreliable predictor of Spanish language knowledge or use, some report considering it as an element of a persona that they associate with Mexican American identity and, specifically, a preference for Spanish language use. For example, when asked what information informs his language choice, Fernando relates:

Definitely skin color. Yeah. It's as simple as that. Even though we come in, like, all shapes, colors, and sizes…if you're in between black and white, that little color, ah, spectrum, I guess, then that's—probably gonna talk to you in Spanish…. If they're, like, older lookin', I pretty much assume, like, they're—I say assume because my dad came over from Mexico—both my parents. And while I'm a first generation American, so I grew up among a lot of first generation Americans and a lot of their parents still, to this day, don't speak English. No matter how long they've, like, lived here. Ah, so yeah,

definitely age does play a factor. And, well, yeah, that's why I would talk to 'em in

Spanish…. Mm, are you familiar with the term, 'Edgar'? Ah, so I'm just gonna paint it—

this description for you. Mm—like brownish skin; cropped hair at the front; kinda like,

ah, shaved sideburns; maybe like a small fade and then like a big poofy back. That's the

hairstyle. Ah, black hoodie. And usually like jeans and some Jordans. There's so many

of those peop—kinds of people. You could see 'em, like, down in the car wash... Those

are usually what we call *takauches*. And they're like, I'd say, a subsection of the *cholos*,

like, from Los Angeles. And they're pretty much, I would say, like, the wanna-be gang

bangers and that kinda lifestyle. They listen to *narcocorridos*, if you're familiar with

that. And instead of like '*ese'* and the typical *cholo* ending of their sentence, they say

'cuh'….I've come across like a whole lot of those. And even in high school, they seemed

to not be as fluent in English. So I would speak to them in Spanish.

Fernando's comments convey his experience that members of the Mexican American community

"come in all shapes, colors, and sizes," which would support perceived race as a less reliable

indicator of someone's language background. His association of whiteness with English

language use is consistent with other participants' views and may reflect both local social context

(i.e., cognizance of gentrification and the perceived identity of the gentrifiers) as well as broader

US-based raciolinguistic ideologies. He is distinguished from other participants in linking

blackness to a non-Latine and non-Spanish speaking identity. Significantly, however, Fernando

offers a detailed portrayal of a persona that he associates with Mexican American identity and

Spanish language use: *takuaches* or 'Edgars'. Alongside a specific hairstyle and interests, a key

element of this persona is "brownish skin". 'Edgar' is a relatively well-known persona that is

not local to either Pilsen or Chicago; it has been a topic of discourse on social media across the

US and a subject of articles in major newspapers (Gurba, 2023). Fernando notes that there is

some controversy surrounding the term, saying that "people are starting to get offended by [it]"

but feels like "the majority of us kinda see it as a joke." He recalls encountering many

individuals who he feels align with this persona and, perceiving them as less fluent in English, he

"would speak to them in Spanish."

Oscar, like Fernando, describes elements of a Mexican American persona that he

associates with a preference for Spanish language use. He expresses that, when deciding what

language to speak with a new acquaintance, he considers, "Well, stereotypes, I guess. And if

there is an accent then I can identify it into some Spanish speaking accent then I'll try to speak a

little bit of Spanish…also if they're older I would also use Spanish probably." Though he

initially and directly asserts that he uses "stereotypes," he quickly hedges, indicating that he

primarily listens to his conversation partner to see whether he can detect an accent that would

reflect Spanish language use. When asked for more information about the stereotypes to which

he had been referring, Oscar briefly mentions "skin color" before describing someone he would

be more likely to assume spoke Spanish as older, wearing a hat, soccer jerseys, and/or rancher

belts. Of the last, Oscar specifies, "You've seen the rancher belts? Like the Texan belts? I don't

think many Texans would use them here in Chicago so (laughs) I assume they're mostly

Mexicans or Latinos." Finally, Oscar shares he is more inclined to use Spanish with older

members of the community, explaining that, "if they're older, I would also use Spanish probably

first…just because I think most of the elderly people here, from the Hispanic community, don't

speak great English or don't like to speak English." Significantly, it is not only his perception

that older community members may be less proficient in English but also that, independent of

their English proficiency, they may not prefer English that motivates Oscar's use of Spanish indicating that he is selecting a language in consideration of his interlocutor's comfort.

As the preceding discussion illustrates, the contextual cues that speakers report considering when negotiating use of their language(s) are heterogeneous, emphasizing the dynamic and context-sensitive nature of language selection. Participants report considering a variety of factors, such as interlocutor identity and locale, which integrate to establish the social context for an interaction and influence language choice. Participants note the salience of cues like perceived race, age, and accentedness in assessing the language(s) appropriate for a given context. These cues, however, are emphasized as differing in their reliability; perceived race, though salient, is positioned as unreliable, while age and accentedness are seen as better indicators of an interlocutors' knowledge of and comfort with a language. Participants' narratives highlight the complex interplay of factors influencing language use, emphasizing the nuanced and contextually driven nature of their decisions. Ultimately, the preceding discussion underscores how local social meanings and individual experiences shape language use within Pilsen's Mexican American community.

Locality Conditions Language Use

The second theme, "Locality conditions language use," comprises discourse that highlights the importance of local, geographic place to language choice and indicates that place may condition which cues are relevant to language selection. Participants' descriptions of local place are organized across three levels: (1) Within Pilsen; (2) Other Latine majority neighborhoods in Chicago like Little Village; and (3) Other areas of metropolitan Chicago. These locations modulated participants' stated expectations for the languages they might encounter and also carried different levels of reported comfort using each language. The latter was shaped by the

(racio)linguistic ideologies of participants and their interlocutors as well as participants' personal experiences.

Locales within Pilsen

Local place was not only distinguished as a Pilsen versus outside of Pilsen contrast. Even within Pilsen, participants describe graded levels of expectation of Spanish based on location within the neighborhood. These sometimes corresponded to the perceived extent of gentrification in that area of the neighborhood but were also related to the different community spaces. For example, when describing their typical day, Luna shares the following:

Get to coffee which is usually–I usually go here or Jumping Bean. So, I'm like okay, you know—when I go to Jumping Bean, I'm like, "oh, for sure" and I switch just back and forth. Versus here, at Sleepwalk, like, sometimes I'll use [Spanish], like, usually with some people at the back…but when I get more to like 18th or stuff, English becomes more prevalent.

The locations that Luna mentions are noted on the map of the neighborhood below (Figure 4); the transition to blue shades in the right half of the neighborhood (or west of Loomis St) marks increasing property values due to ongoing gentrification.   Participants' discourse, as reflected in Luna's comment, consistently positions white residents of Pilsen as English-speaking gentrifiers and white non-residents as English-speaking cultural tourists who are visiting the neighborhood from other areas of the city. Correspondingly, participants describe a greater expectation of English in the northeastern (or more gentrified) areas of the neighborhood. Eighteenth Street runs along the northern border of the neighborhood and, as Luna does here, is frequently described as an area where participants hold a greater expectation of English language use. Cafe Jumping Bean has two locations: one firmly in the southwestern area of the neighborhood and the other, close to Loomis Street. The latter is near the border between gentrifying areas of the

neighborhood and those which remain, as yet, relatively less affected by gentrification. Cafe

Jumping Bean is a longstanding fixture in the neighborhood, having been in operation for over

thirty years. Comparatively, Sleepwalk Cafe lies further west and only recently opened its doors

in November of 2021. It is reflective of the ongoing reinvestment in that area of the

neighborhood. Luna's perspective on Sleepwalk's usual clientèle is consistent with its location

in an area of the neighborhood where the state of gentrification is relatively more advanced; they

share that, "Sleepwalk. It's good. And it brings people in. But, like, one of the things that, like,

my roommate noticed, she was, like, I feel like it was like a lot of, like, white hipsters that, like,

came into town." Luna's expectation of encountering white hipsters in Sleepwalk Cafe aligns

with the language they describe using in this locale: English.

Figure 4. *Map of Pilsen neighborhood with locations noted in Luna's comments*
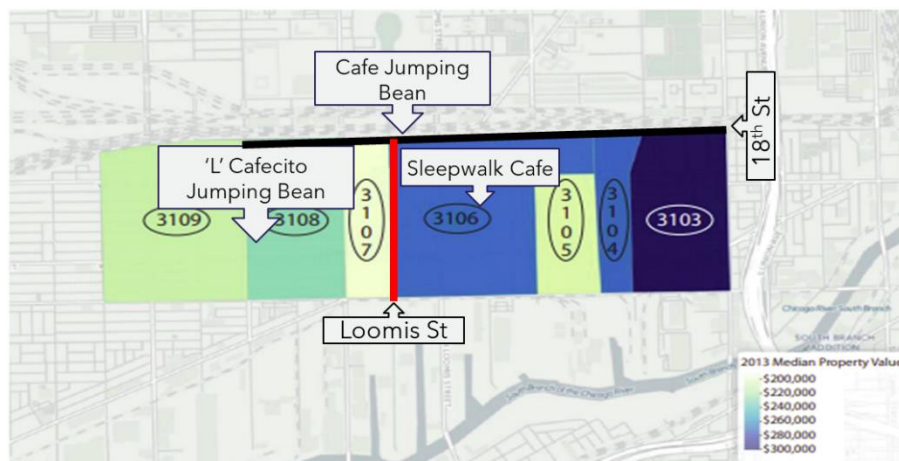
Note. Adapted from "Quantifying the Linguistic Landscape: A study of Spanish-English variation in Pilsen, Chicago" by K. Lyons and I. Rodríguez-Ordóñez, 2017, *Spanish in Context*, 14(3), p.333.

Figure 5. *Map of Pilsen neighborhood with locations noted in Ana, Ines, and Isabella's comments*
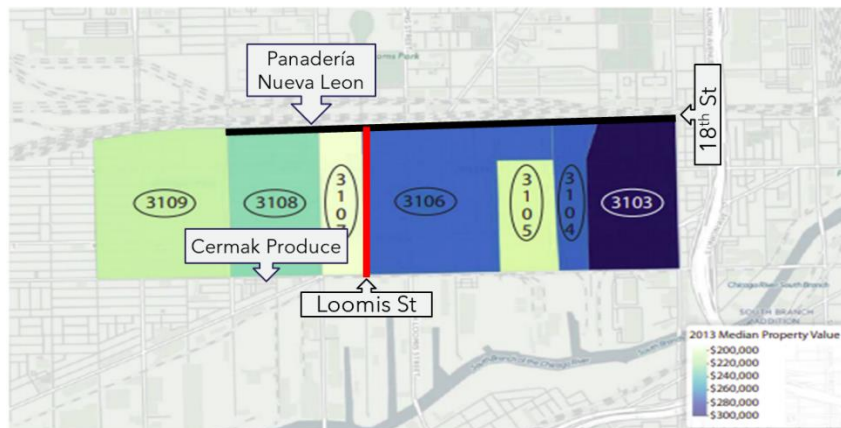
Note. Adapted from "Quantifying the Linguistic Landscape: A study of Spanish-English variation in Pilsen, Chicago" by K. Lyons and I. Rodríguez-Ordóñez, 2017, *Spanish in Context*, 14(3), p.333.

Ana also describes differential expectations based on locale within Pilsen, saying "I would for sure in Nuevo Leon speak in Spanish and…in the newer places, I would probably speak in English." In this statement, she draws a contrast between a local *panaderia*, Nuevo Leon, which has been operating in the neighborhood since 1973, and "newer places." Nuevo Leon sits west of Loomis Street in an area relatively less affected by gentrification (Figure 5). At the time of recording, the majority of new business openings were east of Loomis Street due to reinvestment in gentrifying areas. Ana's assertion that she would likely use English in the "newer places" is consistent with the progression of gentrification into the neighborhood as well as how the gentrifying residents are described.

Finally, Ines highlights a local grocery store, Cermak Produce, as a place where she anticipates hearing and speaking Spanish, saying of her language use there, "it's Spanish most of the time." Cermak Grocery lies along the southern border of the neighborhood, west of Loomis Street in the least gentrified areas (Figure 5). Isabella also raises Cermak Grocery as a locale

where she expects Spanish. Indeed, in her experience, it is the primary language of interaction

there. Cermak Grocery, she explains, falls within a region of the neighborhood where she has an

overall greater expectation of Spanish language use:

> There's certain restaurants, certain areas, like, Cermak—the Cermak produce or, like,
>
> the—that restaurant on Cermak that I mentioned, the taco place, those are places where I
>
> know I can either call or go there, and I know they're going to speak to me automatically,
>
> like, by default, in Spanish. Whereas, I could probably go somewhere on Eighteenth
>
> Street, and they may—maybe more likely to speak to me in English first. It just really
>
> depends on the area, yeah…. It's probably also because [Eighteenth Street's] closer to,
>
> like, the city so people that are not from Pilsen are less likely to, like, go into further-
>
> down Pilsen as opposed to, if you're from Pilsen, you know the area a little bit better so
>
> you go other places that are not as quote unquote touristy, I guess…. 'Cause people
>
> probably—if they don't live here, you probably are not buying groceries around here, so
>
> you're probably just coming here to go to Eighteenth Street and like maybe a couple of
>
> things somewhere else.

Ines' description of what language(s) she expects in different areas of the neighborhood is

grounded in a contrast between "touristy" areas to the north along Eighteenth Street and lived

spaces along Cermak Street to the south that are frequented by Pilsen residents in the course of

their daily lives (e.g., grocery stores). This accords with her earlier description of how

gentrification was progressing into the neighborhood "more East to West" and also "north going

south."

Other Latine majority neighborhoods in Chicago

While not as extensively discussed, participants raised other Latine-majority neighborhoods in Chicago like Little Village (or *La Villita)* as places where they might have a greater expectation of Spanish language use. Little Village lies immediately to the west of Pilsen in the South Lawndale neighborhood (Figure 1). Its residents are predominantly Latine-identified, making up 80.8% of the population. In addition, 12.5% are non-Hispanic Black individuals, while non-Hispanic White individuals account for 5.8% (Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning, 2024b). The vast majority of residents report speaking Spanish (74.4%) with 24.9% of residents indicating they speak English only (ibid.). Fernando first refers to Little Village in establishing a foil for Pilsen. He characterizes Pilsen as the "new Wicker Park," an appellation he immediately connects to gentrification, saying that redevelopment is "the first thing people bring up with Pilsen." Wicker Park is a neighborhood north of Pilsen in the West Town community of Chicago; it was gentrified in the mid-1970's by white artists and has since emerged as a "Neo-Bohemia" known for its art galleries and live music venues (Parker, 2018). By referring to Pilsen as the "new Wicker Park," Fernando invokes both Pilsen's status as a destination for live music and art as well as who is perceived to be gentrifying the neighborhood. Participants describe the recent influx of residents into Pilsen as predominantly young and white, referring to them as "hipsters" and remarking on their connection to art. Luna, for example, shares that:

When I first moved out here, I remember, like, seeing a lot of community artists. And so, they would have, like, showings at this place on the corner and then this other place would also have another thing. And...so that was cool but one thing that…I noticed is, like, one of

the first things I went to, it was, like, very clearly **not** people from Pilsen [who were] coming

to Pilsen to do art. And that, to me, was upsetting.

While Luna frames gentrification in the neighborhood more negatively, Fernando believes it is

"a good thing," saying that Chicago is "already segregated as-is." His relatively positive stance

may be attributable to his perception that gentrification is desegregating the neighborhood; he

views putting "mixed races or races with their people" as "a double-edged sword, something

beautiful and something a little wicked." In strong contrast to gentrifying Pilsen where cultures

are mixing and English's presence is increasing, Fernando asserts that he could, "bring [his]

grandma from Mexico, or anyone from Mexico, over to Little Village, and she'd feel right at

home." However, when asked whether he felt Pilsen was similar to Little Village in that regard,

Fernando initially replies in the affirmative then tempers his answer, saying, "Mm…more or

less. I mean, the fact that I could come here, specifically here, this restaurant, ah, coffee

house...and order in Spanish—woah, that's...somethin'—something great, I feel like. And that's

definitely, like, going away in Pilsen". Fernando's comments illustrate an expectation that he

would be able to use Spanish in the public spaces of both Pilsen and Little Village—a fact that he

deeply values. However, they also convey his sense that gentrification may be beginning to

erode this expectation of Spanish in Pilsen. This understanding is supported by the languages

Fernando expects to encounter in each neighborhood. In Pilsen, Fernando expects, "I mean,

definitely English and Spanish," while in Little Village he expects, "pretty much all

Spanish." Significantly, despite his general expectation of Spanish within Little Village, there

are locales within that neighborhood where this expectation shifts, favoring English. For

example, when he's "going to Pizza Nova…or the grocery store," he'll "talk to 'em in English."

Hector, like Fernando, identifies Little Village as another Latine community in Chicago and positions Pilsen as having relatively more "mixing" of cultures within the community than occurs in Little Village. Hector's expectations for language in Little Village are, however, unclear. He positions the two neighborhoods as being very similar but also in contention, asserting that Pilsen is "like in an 'air quotes' competition with…other Mexican neighborhoods such as *La Villita*, that is the closest. And, well… it's different." When conveying how the two communities differ, Hector states that Pilsen "is…thriving and in evolution and maybe in some other neighborhoods…it's not, you don't see like that evolution, that-- like that mixing like when, you know, people from other communities…*conviven.*" He also shares that "some people" have told him that Pilsen is "like a place for the rich people, like the nice Mexican neighborhood" and that they "feel like [they're] rejected" by the community. Hector's portrayal of Pilsen as an evolving, mix of peoples with relatively greater socioeconomic standing indirectly references the impacts of gentrification in the neighborhood. Hence, by implied contrast, Little Village is cast as a more stagnant and less advantaged community—or the "not-nice Mexican neighborhood." It is unclear how these perceived differences condition Hector's language use. However, Hector does code switch to use the Spanish, *La Villita*, in referring to the neighborhood instead of the English, Little Village. Throughout the interview, Hector often uses Spanish terms of reference or pronunciations when describing Mexican cultural elements (e.g., *las posadas, una vecindad, anglicismos*).

Finally, Ana is neutral and direct in her mention of Little Village. In answering a question regarding her feelings of safety or comfort using Spanish outside of Pilsen, Ana responds:

> …in other areas, it's...well, for one, most people won't speak Spanish—or not most
>
> people, maybe like if you—it's more, like, okay, it's expected that you'll know English
>
> kind of. So. So Spanish doesn't quite come up…unless I happen to be in another
>
> predominantly, like, Spanish speaking community like Little Village or something like
>
> that.

Ana's comments express her sense that, outside of Pilsen, there are two clear expectations: others presume that she will know English, and she believes that others will not speak Spanish. Accordingly, Spanish language use in these spaces is marked and "doesn't quite come up." She highlights Little Village as an exception within the landscape of Chicago communities; as it is a "predominantly Spanish speaking community," it is also a place where Spanish may "come up" and she will use it.

Other areas in metropolitan Chicago

Participants articulate a strong conviction that, outside of Pilsen, they will be expected to know and use English in Chicago's public spaces. They also report holding the expectation that most people they encounter in those spaces will not know or speak Spanish. Combined, these expectations create a sense that English is the default and Spanish language use is marked or, in certain cases, wholly unwelcomed. Even under these broader expectations, there are still contexts that shift the language(s) participants expect and/or use. For example, when asked what language(s) she expects to use and encounter in Chicago, Isabella explains:

> I think it depends on the area of Chicago as well 'cause I don't really speak Spanish
>
> anywhere else. Like, I don't go to a restaurant, say like, up north in Lakeview or something,
>
> even, I don't really go up there that much but even if I did, I don't really—I don't expect to
>
> speak Spanish to anyone 'cause I know most of the population there doesn't really speak

Spanish. But, with, like, my friends for example, I have a lot of Latin American friends and sometimes we'll speak Spanish to each other; and we mostly speak Spanish to each other in a way to, like, kind of like, hide what we're saying from non-Spanish speakers. We don't necessarily talk Spanish to each other, like, constantly or, like, if we travel together somewhere that does speak Spanish, we are more likely to speak Spanish to each other. Whereas, here in Pilsen, I kind of—my switch always to just be in constant Spanish. Because I feel like the—I'm more likely to find people that speak Spanish and are more comfortable with speaking Spanish than I am to be—encounter people that are comfortable only speaking English. Or English first and then Spanish. So. Yeah, I guess it depends on the area of Chicago. But I would say most of the time, I don't really speak Spanish unless it's Pilsen. Or, like, by default, I don't speak Spanish unless it's Pilsen.

Through these comments, Isabella illustrates how her expectations shift as she moves from Pilsen to other areas of Chicago; in Pilsen, her 'default' is Spanish whereas outside of Pilsen she doesn't "expect to speak Spanish to anyone." Lakeview, the neighborhood that Isabella picks out in her comments, is a community bordering Lake Michigan on Chicago's North Side (Figure 1). Its residents are predominantly white (75.6%) with Latine identified individuals comprising 9.1% of the population; the vast majority of residents report speaking only English (83.9%) with 5.8% of residents indicating they speak Spanish (Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning, 2020). Isabella also explains that there are factors, like location and with whom she is speaking, that can influence her to use Spanish, the less-expected language, outside of Pilsen. These factors may be less impactful on her language choice within Pilsen, however, where she switches "to just be in constant Spanish."

Fernando strongly asserts that, outside of Pilsen or Little Village, he does not expect to encounter others who speak Spanish. This belief shapes his language use, with English emerging as a default in these areas such that Spanish, when he encounters it, is surprising. In narrating an example of this surprisal at being spoken to in Spanish, Fernando also illustrates how his assumptions of which language(s) a customer would speak were based on the integration of locale with other contextual cues:

> I worked at this coffee shop up in River North. Well, not River North, in North Loop. I did not—there was only let's [say], like, three customers out of the nine months that I was able to speak Spanish to. And, one of them came up talking Spanish to me and—which completely threw me off because I think he was—he was definitely, like, fair-skinned so maybe, like, Argentina or from Spain. So, it really threw me off. He was asking me about, like, a flat white in Spanish and I was just like, 'Wh—what?" (laughs)

Fernando recounts being disappointed that he missed this initial bid for Spanish language use by the customer, saying, "I stumbled and I was like, aw, man…because, like, I was like deprived from speaking Spanish. And I wanted to speak Spanish with him." In Fernando's experience, the opportunities to speak Spanish in this area were so infrequent that he expresses feeling "deprived" of Spanish.

Luna shares that their experiences speaking Spanish outside Pilsen are polarized: positive when connecting with Spanish speakers and negative when refracted through the lens of others' raciolinguistic ideologies about Spanish. This distinction is evident in how they describe two different encounters. In the first, Luna narrates their experience working at a store in The Loop, a neighborhood in downtown Chicago:

When I was working at Nordstrom, [Spanish was] almost like an annoyance. Like, there's an annoyance. People are like "Oh, great, there's Spanish speakers." Or like "Ugh, oh, we need someone who speaks Spanish." And I'm like, "Oh (laughs) okaay." And it's almost like people feel inconvenienced as soon as they hear anything other than English. But again, that was Nordstrom in downtown. Yeah, very colonized, very big space, and capitalism galore. But it's, you know, and it's an annoyance versus, like, it should be a call to understanding and a call to, like, finding some common ground. But there isn't. And, of course, people have, like, their own thoughts about Spanish, too. So, like, when, for example, someone will come and be like, "Oh! They speak French!" Versus, "Oooh. We have a Spanish speaker. Who do we need? We need the cleaning lady to come help us, like, translate. So, it's like—I think it's all tied into that, right? We can't really talk about language without talking about, like, racism, and the culture, and capitalism and what that means.

Conversely, at other times, they articulate that Spanish "almost feels like a secret code in other places" referring to their connection with other Spanish speakers in Chicago's public spaces. Fernando describes a similar sense of connection when using Spanish in these areas, relating that:

I feel like it's invited. Because if I'm able to strike up a conversation in Spanish and I, you know, just like, again with the assumptions, assuming they speak Spanish, I'm gonna take all the risk a hundred percent of the time…you get that connection. Like, no one knows what we're talking about right now. Like, "hey, you're just like me."

Luna was also not alone, however, in their experience of linguistic discrimination toward the use of Spanish in public spaces outside of Pilsen. Maribel, for example, expresses comfort using

Spanish within Pilsen, saying that she hears Spanish when walking around the neighborhood and expects that she'll be able to use it "freely," without remark from others. When asked if she feels the same sense of ease when using Spanish in other areas of Chicago, however, Maribel shared the following anecdote:

> I've had an experience that, you know, we've been speaking Spanish with friends of ours who were waiting to go into some restaurant or something and they kinda, like, "Dontcha speak English?" And we said, "Yes, we do but, you know, we choose to speak Spanish because we're amongst our friends right now."

While Maribel does not directly state any discomfort, she recounts an experience where her Spanish language use was treated as inappropriate for Chicago's public spaces. Other participants describe similar experiences feeling monitored, othered, and harassed when using Spanish outside Pilsen, in other Chicago neighborhoods. Ana recalls an experience from her childhood where she initially did not question her use of Spanish in a Chicago public park:

> I was with my family, my immediate family, but we also brought along, like, some of my cousins and my aunts. So, it felt even more of, like, a safe place to like, "Okay, we can speak Spanish." I mean, they speak Spanish so, like, of course we're going to speak Spanish.

However, she then noticed a nearby family that "didn't speak Spanish but they definitely noticed us speaking Spanish." When some napkins fell from that family's stroller, Ana's sister picked them up to return them and was met with anger, accusations of stealing, and yelling. She recalls being "confused and scared" by this response, emphasizing that she and her sister were young children at the time, and that she "had never really experienced…some sort of, like, racism because I lived in Pilsen my whole life." Through this story, Ana highlights the disparity

between her childhood in Pilsen, where Spanish language use was unquestioned and safe, and an experience in broader Chicago where it was not.

Even within broader Chicago, however, there are still specific locales where participants describe a greater expectation of Spanish. Fernando, for example, relates an encounter where, based on other contextual cues, he expected to speak Spanish at a restaurant in the Loop and was mildly surprised to be addressed in English:

> Well, it's a Cuban style coffee place. So, of course, you'd expect to see, like, Spanish speaking workers. And then when I go there it's, like, white people. Workin'. As, like, servers and baristas. So I—no, judgment on that, of course. But, it has to do with the environment…. When someone comes into, like, a restaurant like this or like a coffee house like this—a restaurant owned by, like, Latinos, I'd say, or even, like, specifically, like, a restaurant with, like, a Spanish name. You expect to speak Spanish with, like, all the workers here. And I don't know, I feel like it's something I've only ever seen with Latinos. Also I mean, I don't—I've never been to, like, [an] Italian restaurant, like Maggianos, and seen someone order in Italian. So, I don't know, I feel like it's somethin' just with us.

For Fernando, even in an area of Chicago where he describes holding a general expectation of English, the name and type of café—specifically, that had a Spanish name and served Cuban-style coffee—engendered the expectation that he would hear and use Spanish. Additionally, by juxtaposing his expectation of seeing "Spanish speaking workers" in the restaurant with his surprise at encountering "white people," Fernando also implicitly positions white-perceived individuals as non-Spanish speakers.

Overall, while participants still describe using Spanish in Chicago's public spaces, it is with neither the same comfort nor ease as in Pilsen. They unanimously articulate a general expectation of English outside Pilsen and note that Spanish language use is marked in these spaces. There are specific contexts, however, that may prompt their use of Spanish in areas outside Pilsen. When interacting with someone they don't know, for example, participants may engage or switch to Spanish if they perceive the other person to have an accent or difficulty communicating in English. When speaking with those they do know, participants describe using Spanish to signal group membership as a form of covert prestige, to have privacy in a discussion, or to accommodate their interlocutor(s) (e.g., family members with whom they would normally speak or know to be more comfortable in Spanish).

Spanish is expected within Pilsen

Participants unanimously describe a strong expectation that Spanish will be present in Pilsen's public spaces like grocery stores, coffee shops, nail salons, and public libraries. This expectation is sometimes established via contrast with other areas of Chicago where English language use is perceived as the norm and Spanish is marked. Spanish's use throughout Pilsen, however, is consistently positioned as unremarkable and safe.

Ana, considering the relationship between language and Pilsen, asserts that "Pilsen is a place where it is safe to speak your own language"—clarifying immediately, and with a laugh, that she means Spanish. She draws a contrast between the sense of safety she feels in Pilsen with other areas of Chicago:

I think in Pilsen…where, you know, even for me...like, I feel more comfortable talking in Spanish. Um...not, I wouldn't say in general but, you know, like, I can sense more confidence in me when I'm speaking Spanish rather than when I'm speaking in English….But

for everyone in Pilsen, I think—I feel like I'm thinking about my mom and, like, her coworkers and things like that and I feel like they also feel kind of like this safety with like, "Oh, I know I can speak Spanish here and it'll be fine because people understand me." And I sense that shift when, let's say, we're like downtown or something…my mom's a little bit more reserved and, you know, like more quiet or she has more—she's a little more self-conscious about, like, trying to ask something in English or anything like that.

Ana describes feeling more comfortable and confident when speaking Spanish in Pilsen. Relatedly, she perceives her mother and her mother's coworkers to be more "reserved" and "self-conscious" when articulating their needs in public settings outside Pilsen; she refers specifically to the downtown area of Chicago (i.e., the Loop) as a place where this may occur. Ana's comments suggest that her mother's discomfort might relate, in part, to her self-perceived proficiency in English: her mother expects that she will be required to use English outside of Pilsen and worries that she may not be understood. The expectation of English in public spaces outside Pilsen may also carry the weight of negative experiences speaking Spanish with family and friends in these spaces where others in the vicinity reacted with derisive, racist, and/or condescending commentary. Within Pilsen, however, the expectation that they can use Spanish, the language in which they feel more comfortable communicating, engenders "this safety" in knowing that they will be understood.

Isabella expresses a strong connection between Spanish and the Pilsen community in a direct way. She asserts that Pilsen is "unlike many neighborhoods in Chicago; we're all somehow Latin American in one way shape or form. And we express that a lot through our food or through the decorations you see in the house or the way that people talk….I love being able to, like, speak to the cashiers in Spanish. Like, I think that's really cool. You don't do that anywhere

else in Chicago." Her comments position Pilsen in relation to other Chicago neighborhoods, differentiating it as a community that is co-created through shared food, ways of engaging the physical space, and "the way that people talk". Describing her joy in being able to expect and speak Spanish in community spaces like the local groceries or restaurants, Isabella emphasizes that this every day, public presence of Spanish is a unique feature of Pilsen that, in her perspective, distinguishes the neighborhood from "anywhere else in Chicago".

Luna expresses a similar sense of the significance of Spanish to the Pilsen community, describing both an expectation of hearing Spanish in Pilsen's public spaces and that this expectation distinguishes Pilsen from other Chicago neighborhoods:

> I spent some time in Andersonville .... (laughs) it was, like, bland. Uh, I dunno it was…boring but it was, I guess, safe? …Yeah I-- but I also would hear some Spanish out there in Andersonville but whether that's just because I like to talk to, like, line cooks or not is like…but here I feel like it's everywhere, right? You hear like *vecinos* shouting to each other or you hear, like, the *chisme* of some lady walking by, like.

Andersonville is a community within the Edgewater neighborhood on Chicago's North Side that is majority White (54.3%) with Hispanic or Latine identified residents comprising sixteen percent of the population (Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning, 2024c). The majority of residents report speaking English only (65.4%); just 12.6 percent of residents report speaking Spanish. Luna's comments underscore their sense that, not only is Spanish not visibly present in or significant to the Andersonville community but, rather, it is only found in—or perhaps relegated to—certain spaces within the community that may be less privileged (e.g., line cooks). In contrast, Luna highlights Pilsen as a place where they expect Spanish to be openly present on the streets. There is a warmth to how they position Spanish language use in Pilsen,

describing it as the language between neighbors (*vecinos*) shouting to one another or the gossip (*chisme*) overheard from a passerby. In Pilsen, Spanish is a language of connection and community that is integral to Luna's conception of everyday life and interactions in the neighborhood.

Ines expresses a similar perception that Spanish and community are interwoven in Pilsen, creating an expectation of Spanish in many aspects of daily life. She indicates that she "for sure" expects Spanish within Pilsen and offers as an example her experience greeting passersby in the neighborhood, "Like, I will be walking by and it's probably this person speaks Spanish. Unless they kind of look like they don't. But most of the time, yeah, I'll probably be like, '*Buenos dias, buenas tardes,*' you know, like, just as a greeting." She further conveys that she feels comfortable speaking Spanish in Pilsen, and that "when I am with my family, like, we're just walking around speaking Spanish." She articulates that this expectation of Spanish extends throughout different aspects of daily life in Pilsen. When needing help in a store, for example, she will make the request in Spanish as she believes that "this person probably speaks Spanish."

Importantly, while participants concur on Spanish's significance to and presence in the Pilsen community, their discourse also reflects a sense that gentrification is impacting language use in the neighborhood. Ines, a younger Pilsen resident, speaks to this shift, saying:

I remember when I was a child…I would hear a lot more Spanish. Or maybe I just wasn't aware of the English. But I remember it being as a lot more Spanish, a lot more signs in Spanish. Um, like almost everything was in Spanish. And so...that was good. But now I don't see it as frequently. Like, it's still there of course but...there's English coming up with it.

 She also expresses concern for how this change may impact older residents in the neighborhood, who she views as Spanish dominant speakers, as gentrification progresses:

> I know, like, especially, like, the older residents, like, not all of them speak English and so, like, Spanish is the primary, like, way they communicate, read and whatnot. And so, if everything is starting to change into English, um, how are they gonna be speaking, you know? How are they gonna be communicating? Like, if the person that now works at the store speaks English, like, how are they gonna be like, "Oh, can I have this? Do you have this?" if they can't even understand each other?

By framing everything as "starting to change into English," Ines establishes that English is not and has not been the dominant language in the community. She positions Spanish as in-community, an expectation that older residents have when negotiating everyday life within Pilsen, and worries about the possible encroachment of English into key community spaces like local grocery stores. To Ines, the impacts of gentrification are not only felt through increasing property values or the emergence of new businesses but rather, and significantly, a change in the linguistic environment. A lifelong resident of Pilsen, Ana shares the sense that gentrification has been impacting language use within the neighborhood and recounts her childhood experience to highlight how language in Pilsen is changing, saying, "I used to hear Spanish a lot more…and now it's a mix of Spanish and English. And, I mean, I honestly…it might be because of, you know, I was obviously younger, but I don't really remember a lot of people speaking English."

Despite this sense that English language use has increased in the neighborhood, however, participants still assert an overarching expectation of Spanish in the community. Isabella, for example, explains that "there's not really an area where I'll be like, 'Oh, they're definitely gonna speak Spanish here' because, I think, I kinda feel that way everywhere I go in Pilsen. I just kinda

err on the side of Spanish." Ines positions Pilsen as a place where Spanish is her default language; she establishes this via contrast to her behavior outside of Pilsen, saying of those experiences, "I wouldn't say that I'm uncomfortable speaking Spanish. It's just not the first--like, my first sentence to the person will not be in Spanish….I would usually start with, like, 'Do you have this? instead of, like, *'¿Tiene esto?'*'" Indeed, while Oscar does note a shift in language within the neighborhood, saying "it's been drastically changing in the last couple years," he does not feel it is one that has seen a diminished presence of Spanish. Rather, he says that it is, "in terms of the pride of speaking Spanish" that he thinks has changed, with residents being less "skeptical" about using Spanish and speaking it with greater pride than before.

As the preceding comments illustrate, participants articulate a clear expectation that Spanish suffuses Pilsen's public spaces such as grocery stores, sidewalks, and coffee shops. This expectation fosters a sense of safety and belonging, as articulated by Ana, who contrasts her mother's comfort speaking Spanish in Pilsen with her reserved demeanor in English-dominant areas like downtown Chicago. Participants' narratives additionally highlight how deeply enmeshed Spanish is with the fabric of everyday life in Pilsen, underscoring its role in shaping community interactions from *chismeando* with friends to casual conversations with cashiers. Although participants share the perception that the presence of English has grown in conjunction with the progression of gentrification in the neighborhood, they maintain that Spanish still predominates and is expected in Pilsen.

Spanish helps define and construct community

Spanish language use is central to how participants describe viewing and negotiating their community in Pilsen; it is presented as a language of authentication and resistance, allowing for the affirmation and maintenance of community boundaries in the face of ongoing

gentrification. Participants' anecdotes also reflect awareness of how Pilsen, as a community, is understood by those from outside of it; of particular relevance is the perspective that Spanish is integral to the community's identity.

Participants unanimously agree that language is important to the Pilsen community and that, of the languages spoken in the neighborhood, Spanish is uniquely salient. They offer a variety of evidence in support of this view from the visibility of Spanish in Pilsen's community spaces to its instrumentality in forging deeper connections with neighbors. Luna, a younger resident of Pilsen who has lived in the area for ten years, exemplifies the former in their response; they feel that, "[l]anguage is huge to Pilsen, especially because…when you do see, right, murals, *el muralaje*, like, you see graffiti and murals in Spanish". To Luna, "language in Pilsen" is synonymous with Spanish. They emphasize that, within Chicago, this significant and visible presence of Spanish in the physical environment is particular to Pilsen, saying, "I don't see that anywhere".

Isabella, who recently moved into the neighborhood upon beginning study at a local university, concurs on Spanish's importance to the community but offers different support for this assertion, saying that she's "found that it's so much easier to communicate with people sometimes when they find out that you speak Spanish." Elaborating on this perspective, she shares:

> I feel like it is more comfortable to speak Spanish in Pilsen. I just feel like it automatically helps people understand that you're, like, a part of their community as opposed to just someone that's—that's just like here to—to look at Pilsen like it's like a tourist area or, like, just, like, take advantage of, like, the services or whatever that Pilsen provides. So I do think it's like I feel more comfortable speaking in Spanish 'cause it kinda shows that I'm here

because I wanna be here and, like, I wanna support the area. As opposed to just kind of being

here only for fun. Or whatever.

For Isabella, Spanish language use signals her membership in and support for the Pilsen

community. In so doing, it opens and eases communication with her neighbors; she reports that

"when I start speaking to them in Spanish, it's so much better. Like, they start communicating so

much better. They start being more enthusiastic. They're suddenly, like, super interested in, like,

getting to know me."

Hector, a resident in his thirties who moved into Pilsen for work, foregrounds a similar

connection between Spanish and community in his comments, articulating that, "someone that

just speaks English, it's okay. But I think…if you share— if you talk **Spanish** [emphasis in

original] as well as you talk English, I think you can…more deeply get...not engaged but maybe,

like, make more connections with the people." Like Isabella, Hector feels that, while speaking

English is accepted, Spanish facilitates connection and relationship building within the

neighborhood.

While many participants focused on how Spanish establishes community in modern

Pilsen, some referred to the neighborhood's history in articulating the importance of language to

the community. For example, Oscar, in the excerpt below, considers the experiences of the first

Latine families to arrive in the area:

…from the mass migrations, like, the first people that were born here were kinda maybe

pushed to not speak the language, Spanish. And I think that that -- their kids or maybe

their grandkids have now been pushed to speak the language with a little bit more pride

than before. I think it was a very specific time in history but I think that has changed and

I think people are speaking Spanish more openly and more proudly now than they used to

before.

In sharing this vignette of historic Pilsen, a community in which Spanish was not welcomed,

Oscar emphasizes how much he believes has changed within the neighborhood. He distances the

present community from historic Pilsen, referring to it as a "very specific time in history," and

repeatedly asserts that Spanish is now spoken proudly within the neighborhood. Additionally,

Oscar's use of the word "pushed" suggests that community members actively encourage

speaking and taking pride in Spanish rather than passively appreciating it.

Maribel, who has lived in the neighborhood for over sixty years, draws a similar contrast

between past and present Pilsen to illustrate language's relationship to the

community. Reflecting on her childhood memories of the neighborhood, she shares that, "in our

block, it was like a lot of older people and we spoke mostly English and then a lot of Hispanics

started to move in and…on our block…we were the only Hispanic family to move in

first." Maribel moved into Pilsen with her family in the mid 1950's when the neighborhood was

still a predominantly Slavic community. She recalls a "negativity about accepting Hispanic

people" in Chicago at that time that sometimes manifested in linguistic discrimination:

When we first arrived here, I remember, yeah, there was negativity about accepting

Hispanic people. They—we were like…I remember [because]…my father did speak

English but not that well. He had an accent. And they would tell him, "Well, you know,

you're here now, you have to speak English. We don't accept…you speaking Spanish."

This experience contrasts sharply with her description of present-day Pilsen where "you know

you're going to be able to speak Spanish freely and they won't condemn you or make fun of you

or -- or say, oh, you know, you don't speak Spanish there." By drawing on the disparity between

her present and past experiences, Maribel establishes Pilsen as a *community* wherein Spanish language use is welcomed and safe. It is not simply that Spanish is now spoken in the neighborhood but, rather, that the neighborhood itself has changed in a way that allowed for this linguistic shift. Her comments reflect the ethnic succession, which occurred in Pilsen during the middle of the 20th century, that saw the neighborhood transition from majority Slavic to majority Latine by the 1970 census (Fernández, 2005).

The Pilsen community, as Maribel's comments evince, has undergone linguistic and cultural shifts within recent history to become a predominantly Mexican American community. Participants' discourse conveys their concern, however, that the community is again changing as a consequence of gentrification. The impacts of gentrification are felt in many ways including rising property costs, an influx of new businesses and residents, and an increasing presence of English. Isabella, confronted with these changes, advances Spanish language use as a way to resist the encroachment of gentrification and re-affirm community in Pilsen by "maintaining the culture":

> I feel like it's important following—in maintaining the culture. I think a lot of people are also really angry and, and I totally understand that and I agree—they're really angry with, like, the gentrification of the area where, like, all these people are like buying up, like, the areas and houses and plots that have belonged to families for generations. And they're just buying them and then—getting rid of what used to be part of the history and making it into something that is maybe not even, like, as pretty but it's so much more expensive and the original families that are there, they cannot afford it anymore. Or they can but it—it's like it's no longer their home or anything. And so, like, I think preserving the language is one way to hold onto your culture where those people that don't speak the

language, cannot, like, really…they can't, like, assimilate into our culture as well because it's never gonna be—like I've noticed a difference between knowing how to speak Spanish and being around people that are Latin American or Spanish speakers, and being around people that are…understanding of the culture but they don't speak it. They don't speak the Spanish. It's just a little bit different. So, I think the language is really important to preserve the culture in, like, more than just one way. But, language is definitely important…. Most Americans don't really, like, speak Spanish unless they are from, like, a Spanish background or, like, a Latin American background. And so, I think that's a really good way to, like, resist it and be like, "You know what? You can take almost anything but you can't really take my actual culture, and my Spanish, and my background."

For Isabella, gentrification has further heightened the salience of Spanish to community in Pilsen. She frames Spanish language use as resistance, a way to stand against the loss and changes that gentrification has wrought. To use Spanish is to claim her culture, an intangible and essential aspect of identity that others cannot take or assimilate. She explains that, as "most Americans don't really speak [it]," Spanish provides a way to affirm and define community in Pilsen.

Finally, participants' discourse also reflects an awareness of how 'outsiders,' those who live in other Chicago neighborhoods, perceive Pilsen. Three characteristics emerge as central to how participants believe that Pilsen is conceptualized by outsiders; namely, that it is: a Mexican American community, a place where Spanish is spoken, and a culturally rich neighborhood filled with art and music. Ana's comments illustrate that Pilsen residents are aware of outsiders' gaze

and, moreover, that they believe Spanish is an important aspect of the community's outward-facing identity:

> I guess, younger generations who are Mexican American might still be I guess, trying to, like, make a business here or anything like that are using their, like, Mexican American roots to kind of, you know—like, for example, I would say a lot of the newer places that are businesses that people are opening, it might be like a nail shop or anything like that but it's like they'll name it something in Spanish. So, it's still kind of like they're still trying to keep that. I think also, you know, like the younger people who were from the community, I feel like when we were all younger speaking Spanish wasn't something that was…cool, I guess. It was kind of like—it just is. And now that a lot of people are coming in or taking interest, it's like, "Oh, it's cool to speak Spanish." Yeah. So, you know, they're also kind of taking that advantage or that opportunity to be like, "Okay, let's bring people in using what we know, since we know it," you know? (laughs)

Ana speaks to her perception that gentrification is making it 'cool' to speak Spanish as reinvestment draws new residents and visitors to the neighborhood by capitalizing on the neighborhood's strong Mexican identity. Curran (2018), in a study of gentrification in Pilsen, speaks to this experience, saying "The ethnic claim to space that was previously a strategy of resistance to gentrification…has been adapted by pro-gentrification forces who now incorporate a celebration of Mexican culture into the selling of both individual developments and the neighborhood at large" (p. 1716). In her comments, Ana indicates residents' awareness that Spanish has become a commodity, it is what visitors expect and want to experience when visiting Pilsen. Residents capitalize on this expectation via their intentional deployment of Spanish when opening or operating businesses in the neighborhood.

Discussion

The diverse factors that participants describe attending to when negotiating the use of their languages suggests that language activation is guided by the complex integration of social cues, both from within the acoustic signal and outside of it, and local social meanings. Specifically, participants perceive social information to shape their expectations regarding the language(s) an interlocutor will know and/or be comfortable speaking. No single factor is portrayed as uniquely determinative of language choice nor is the selection of a language necessarily fixed across the duration of an interaction. Rather, language choice is characterized as an ongoing process that integrates a variety of socio-contextual factors with speaker internal motivations like mood or stance to determine the best language(s) for a situation.

These findings support understanding of bilingual language use as inherently fluid in nature, responsive to the social and communicative demands of different interactional contexts (e.g., De Bruin, 2019; J. W. Gullifer & Titone, 2020; Gumperz, 1982; Myers-Scotton, 1993). Contemporary models of bilingual language control, for example, postulate that bilinguals integrate cues from interlocutors and the environment to dynamically modulate the activation of their languages, adjusting their language processing to optimize communication in response to sociocontextual demands (e.g., Green & Abutalebi, 2013; Grosjean, 2001). These models theorized but did not determine the relevance of a variety of social factors including location and aspects of the interlocutor's identity, attitudes, or patterns of language use (e.g., Grosjean, 2001). My findings provide evidence for the influence of these factors and, additionally, emphasize the significance of localized social meanings to bilinguals' language use.

In participants' assessments of the contextually appropriate language(s) to use, macrosocial aspects of an interlocutor's identity were weighed alongside and situated within local categories, practices, norms, and ideologies. For example, the influence of perceived age as a cue is contextualized within ideologies about who are legitimate members of Pilsen's Spanish-speaking community. In Pilsen, Latine families are being displaced by younger, English-speaking professionals in a process of gentrification (e.g., J. Betancur & Linares, 2023). In a reflection of this dynamic, participants' discourse often organizes younger individuals in the neighborhood into two locally defined categories: a young member of a Latine family from Pilsen or a young gentrifier. Perception of an interlocutor as belonging to the latter category reinforces their expectation of English language use while a belief that an interlocutor belongs to the former can shift their expectation toward Spanish. Local place is also important to how participants conceptualize their language use, with different locales at different geographical scopes carrying different expectations for the language(s) they will encounter. These place-dependent expectations arise from patterns of language use (i.e., what language(s) participants encountered there), local conceptions regarding the identity of the neighborhood itself as well as the identities of its residents, and participants' attitudes toward their language(s). Finally, acoustic cues are reported to shape participant's language use with perceived accentedness attributed the greatest impact. Overall, locally situated social meanings are presented as central to participants' language use, influencing how they perceive an interlocutors' language knowledge and the suitability of a language to the context.

Participants' discourse also reflects awareness of not just what contextual information is available but consideration of its perceived reliability and, therefore, informativity as a cue. In particular, participants portray perceived race as a factor that, within their community, is a less

reliable index of the language(s) their conversation partner might speak. In contrast, locale is

described as a reliably informative cue to the language(s) that other speakers may know and use.

Acoustic cues, such as perceived accentedness, are also positioned as salient, highly reliable

indicators of an interlocutor's proficiency and/or comfort in a language. Importantly, a cue's

reliability was not always directly related to its salience. Perceived race, for example, is a

prominent topic in participants' discourse about their language use; it is described as something

they notice and consider when assessing the language(s) a new acquaintance speaks. However,

their mentions of perceived race are often tempered by their stance that it is not a faithful

indicator of an interlocutor's language knowledge with participants relating experiences where

language knowledge was incorrectly assumed.

These findings align with insights from Alim et al. (2016) and Rosa and Flores (2017)

who argue that racialized assumptions about language often do not reflect actual linguistic

capabilities. Indeed, Rosa (2019) asserts that "perceptions of bodies and communicative

practices are colonially-conditioned constructions of reality rather than unmediated reflections of

preexisting differences or similarities" (p.3). Moreover, participants' emphasis on locale as a

more reliable indicator of language knowledge resonates with Bailey's (2002) findings that social

and geographic contexts often provide more accurate cues for language use than perceived race;

in his ethnography of a Spanish-English bilingual, Dominican American community in Rhode

Island, Spanish language use emerges as a significant resource for speakers in countering

assumptions of their racial identity as either "Black" or "White" (which entail assumptions of

their use of English or an African American English) and asserting a Spanish-speaking, bilingual

Dominican/Hispanic ethnolinguistic identity. He emphasizes that social and linguistic categories

like "White" or "Spanish" imply "uniformity, masking internal variation and the diachronic

change that is characteristic of both available social categories…and language" (ibid., p. 193). Implicit in the aforementioned works is that broader raciolinguistic ideologies within the US often position perceived race as a reliable indicator of language background and use. Indeed, findings from Kang and Rubin (2009) illustrate how these ideologies–specifically those linking speakers of East Asian descent to non-native speaker status–can generate racialized expectations that modulate perception of an interlocutor's speech. Participants' discourse in my study, however, challenges the understanding of these ideologies as influential within every context and underscores the importance of understanding local, community-based social conceptions to language use.

Overall, the findings of this study underscore the importance of examining how bilinguals make sense of their language use in an emergent, locally contextualized way. The data highlight how bilinguals actively negotiate their language choices by integrating a wide array of socio-contextual factors alongside internal motivations, emphasizing the fluid and dynamic nature of bilingualism. Participants' discourse reflects a nuanced understanding that no single factor, whether social or personal, decisively determines language choice. Instead, bilinguals continually adjust their language use based on the evolving context, including the perceived identity and attitudes of their interlocutors, the geographical and social settings, and their own affective states.

Conclusions

In this study, I sought to elucidate the local social meanings that Spanish-English bilingual residents of Pilsen understand to shape their language use. Four main themes were identified in participants' discourse: 1) language selection is a fluid and highly contextualized process; 2) locality conditions language use; 3) Spanish is expected within Pilsen; and 4) Spanish

helps to define and construct community. Theme 1 includes accounts that describe the cues to language choice as heterogeneous and context dependent. Theme 2 captures discourse emphasizing local, geographic place as an important component of the interactional context that participants consider when assessing which language(s) to use. Theme 3 reflects commentary positioning Spanish language use throughout Pilsen's public spaces as unremarkable, safe, and expected. Theme 4 includes accounts of Spanish as a language of authentication and resistance, allowing for the affirmation and maintenance of community boundaries in the face of ongoing gentrification in the neighborhood. These results underscore the significance of local, community-level context to bilingual language use as, in Pilsen, ongoing gentrification has resulted in changes to the neighborhood community that participants indicate influence which languages they expect to encounter and, ultimately, use in different areas of the neighborhood. Spanish language use is simultaneously unmarked and particularly salient within Pilsen, with community members drawing on it to signal and construct an in-group identity as a Pilsen resident.

Additionally, participants' discourse highlights the ways in which categories like "at work" or "with friends," conventionally used in bilingual language experience assessments (e.g., Birdsong et al., 2012; Anderson et al., 2018, Li et al., 2020), fail to capture the complexity of bilingual language use. For example, even within Pilsen, participants describe different coffee shops and neighbors as carrying different expectations for what languages they would use, or feel would be appropriate. Which friend(s) they are talking with and specifically where they are when having the conversation interact to influence the language(s) they use. Therefore, although a category like "with friends" encompasses both where and with whom a bilingual is speaking, it erases the intersectionality, fluidity, and locality of their language use. As Titone and Tiv (2023)

emphasize, this omission "sends an implicit but clear message that social factors are irrelevant to how mind and brain represents and processes language, yet our lived experiences and common sense tell us that nothing could be further from the truth" (p. 11).

In conclusion, this study highlights the intricate ways in which local social meanings and contexts shape bilingual language use among Spanish-English bilingual residents of Pilsen. The findings underscore the importance of considering the dynamic and context-dependent nature of language selection, influenced by factors such as geographic location, community identity, and sociopolitical changes like gentrification. The themes identified—fluidity of language selection, locality, expectations of Spanish use, and the role of Spanish in community construction—emphasize the necessity of nuanced frameworks that capture the intersectionality and complexity of bilingual language practices. By integrating these insights, future research can better understand the relationship between social context and language processing, ultimately enriching our understanding of bilingualism in diverse communities.

Chapter 4: Assessment of Bilingual Language Experience

Bilingual language experience is heterogeneous and multifaceted, reflecting the myriad ways in which individuals acquire and engage their languages. Bilinguals may, inter alia, have different ages of acquisition (AOA) or degrees of proficiency in their languages; they may also vary in how frequently they use each language as well as the social and/or situational contexts in which they tend to employ them (e.g., Genesee, 2016). Significantly, individual differences in language experience are argued to modulate language-related processing and domain-general executive functioning (e.g., Bialystok et al., 2004; Costa et al., 2009; Grundy, 2020; Prior & MacWhinney, 2010). Bilinguals who acquire their second language (L2) later in life, for example, often exhibit distinct patterns in language processing (e.g., Silverberg & Samuel, 2004), cognitive control (e.g., Luk et al., 2011), and cerebral lateralization (Hull & Vaid, 2007) compared to those who acquired both their languages in early childhood. Such findings emphasize the significance of language experience to understanding of bilinguals' linguistic behavior and, therefore, the elaboration of comprehensive models of bilingualism.

A range of self-report questionnaires have been developed to assess bilinguals' language experience and aid researchers in quantifying its impact on different facets of language behavior (J. A. E. Anderson et al., 2018; Gertken et al., 2014; Li et al., 2020; Marian et al., 2007). Traditionally, these instruments have focused on measuring language use, proficiency, and age(s) of acquisition–factors widely believed to impact how bilinguals access and control their languages (De Bruin, 2019; Luk & Esposito, 2020). Recently, there has been a push to expand the scope of these assessments to incorporate dimensions such as the frequency with which a bilingual code-switches (e.g., Prior & Gollan, 2011; Solís-Barroso & Stefanich, 2019). However, formulating instruments that more fully capture the spectrum of bilingual

language experience poses a significant methodological challenge due to the "sheer number of variables characterizing individual differences" (J. W. Gullifer & Titone, 2020) and the need for greater attention to the diverse contexts in which bilinguals use their languages (Titone & Tiv, 2023). A burgeoning line of work has sought to address these complexities via the development of novel language use measures. Marian and Hayakawa (2021), for example, articulate their vision for a "single, generalizable index of bilingualism" called the Bilingualism Quotient; this index would integrate key aspects of bilingual experience with flexible methods of administration and scoring to support consistency in the characterization of bilingualism across different populations and research domains (p.537). Marian and Hayakawa (2021) do not specify the components of this index, but advocate for leveraging statistical analyses on large and diverse datasets to identify the most relevant attributes to include. Similarly, Gullifer et al. (2021) attempt to better capture how differences in language experience and communicative context combine to modulate language use by incorporating these aspects into the calculation of a single, continuously-variable measure called language entropy. Though innovative, these measures continue to rely on top-down approaches that may not encompass the complexity of bilingual language use as they select a priori (and with a focus on the macrosocial) which factors to incorporate.

The lack of consensus in how bilingual language experience is measured has itself been raised as an important methodological concern, with researchers emphasizing it as a challenge in cross-study comparison and the report of mixed results (Calvo et al., 2016; Dass et al., 2024; Marian & Hayakawa, 2021). Review of the questionnaires developed to assess bilingual language experience (e.g., Birdsong et al., 2012; Li et al., 2020; Luk & Bialystok, 2013; Marian et al., 2007; Sabourin et al., 2016) finds that they measure different aspects of it, with little

overlap between the instruments (Calvo et al., 2016; Dass et al., 2024; Marian & Hayakawa, 2021). Due, in part, to this diversity, there is not broad agreement as to how these measures should be deployed or compared across studies. Anderson et al. (2018) encapsulate these difficulties in their assertion that, "[with] few studies that objectively examine how different aspects of language experience jointly constitute bilingualism, a consensus on which questions are most informative is difficult to establish. Given the ambiguity surrounding the classifications of this crucial independent variable, it is not surprising that different research groups report different results" (ibid., p. 252).

In response to these challenges, and in recognition of a growing body of work in sociolinguistics that has "focused on a range of phenomena that characterize bilingual experience," (Kroll et al., 2023, p. 17) there has been a call for greater attention to the social contexts of language use. Scholars have emphasized the importance of understanding how social interactions and environments influence language use and cognitive processes in bilinguals (Abutalebi & Clahsen, 2023). Kroll et al. (Kroll et al., 2023) underscore that bilingualism is not merely a cognitive phenomenon but also a socially embedded practice that is influenced by interactional contexts and cultural experiences. Similarly, Titone and Tiv (2020) argue that bilinguals' language processing is profoundly affected by the diversity of their linguistic and social interactions. They propose that future research must adopt more nuanced models that capture the variability in bilinguals' experiences, emphasizing the role of social diversity and context in shaping bilingual language use. Models like those proposed by Gullifer and Titone (J. W. Gullifer et al., 2021) reflect this shift, suggesting that social context is a crucial factor in understanding how bilinguals navigate their languages and should be a central consideration in future research. By incorporating dimensions of social context, researchers can develop more

holistic measures that better capture the diversity and complexity of bilingual language experience as well as its effects on cognition and language processing. As the field is just beginning to look at what constitutes social context, however, it has not yet reached a consensus on what social factors are most relevant nor how best to characterize them. Where studies have considered the role of social context on bilinguals' language control mechanisms, they have often utilized questionnaires to assess sets of predetermined factors like where or how often bilinguals use their languages (e.g., A. Mann & de Bruin, 2022)

In this chapter, I describe a study assessing how well existing instruments capture the nuances of bilinguals' language experience and social contexts of language use. The same participants (n = 8) who took part in the interview (see Chapter 3) completed a questionnaire gathering information about their language background, experience, and self-reported patterns of use. Their participation in both tasks allows for the contextualization of their responses on the questionnaire within the interview data, enabling analysis of how effectively the written instrument was able to capture their language history, proficiency, use, and attitudes. Of particular interest was the degree to which questionnaire responses reflected the social meanings, local contexts, and facets of experience that participants described as most influential upon their language use during the interviews. I align the structured questionnaire data with the nuanced perspectives from the interviews to evaluate the comprehensiveness of the questionnaire in reflecting the complexity of their linguistic experiences, identifying where the written instruments perform best and where gaps may lie.

Methods

Participants

This task was conducted with the same cohort of participants (n =10) who completed the interview (Chapter 3). As delineated above (see the section 'Participants' in Chapter 3), two participants were excluded for failing to meet study criteria; moving forward, all participant counts reflect only those included in the study (n = 8). All participants self-identified as Mexican American, Spanish-English speaking bilingual residents of Chicago's Pilsen neighborhood. Detailed demographic and inclusion criteria for this group are provided in Chapter 3 'Participants'. Additionally, as outlined in Chapter 3 'Methods', participants completed the questionnaires immediately before the semi-structured interviews, all within the same session.

Measures

A questionnaire was designed to quantify participants' language experience and attitudes as well as identify patterns of self-reported language use. In consideration of the between-instrument content differences (Dass et al., 2024), I identified four widely-used instruments for assessing bilingual language experience in adults: the Bilingual Language Profile (BLP, Birdsong et al., 2012; Gertken et al., 2014); the Language Experience and Proficiency Questionnaire (LEAP-Q; Marian et al., 2007)), the Language History Questionnaire (LHQ3; Li et al., 2020), and the Language and Social Background Questionnaire (LSBQ; J. A. E. Anderson et al., 2018; Luk & Bialystok, 2013). However, as Dass et al. (2024) note, "the investigation of context is often a secondary consideration" on these instruments. For that reason, I also incorporated questions directly assessing participants' attitudes toward the use of their languages

in different contexts. Ultimately, the final questionnaire (Appendix B) measured language experience in five key areas: language history, use, proficiency, attitudes, and community.

All written materials and instructions, including the questionnaire, were provided in English. While some questionnaires, such as the BLP and LEAP-Q, can be administered in either of a bilingual's languages, others, like the LSBQ, cannot. Additionally, previous research has shown that the language of the questionnaire can influence bilinguals' responses (e.g., Bond & Yang, 1982; Harzing, 2006; Richard & Toffoli, 2009). Therefore, to enable comparison with a broad range of extant measures and maintain internal consistency with other components of the study, written materials were provided only in English. In their responses, however, participants were free to use whichever language(s) they felt were most apropos.

To preclude potential issues during field research, the questionnaire was piloted twice with a total of six participants; these participants were a convenience sample and were not from Pilsen nor did any identify as Mexican-origin individuals. These pilot sessions highlighted areas of ambiguity, leading to several questions being revised and reworded for greater clarity.

Language Dominance and Proficiency

The Bilingual Language Profile (BLP), a well-established instrument for assessing language experience and dominance, was used to evaluate language history, self-rated proficiency, and use (Birdsong et al., 2012). A bilingual's language dominance can be understood to reflect their relative proficiency in their languages as well as their language use (Treffers-Daller, 2019). It is a broader measure than proficiency alone and, while proficiency is best understood in absolute terms, dominance is a relative measure, capturing "observed asymmetries of skill in, or use of, one language over the other" (Birdsong, 2014, p. 374). Perfectly balanced bilinguals are uncommon (e.g., Wei, 2000) as speakers tend to be more

skillful or experienced in one language than the other. Importantly, a bilingual's language dominance may change over time as their language use, proficiency, or attitudes shift. Dominance has been argued to influence bilinguals' perception (e.g., Amengual & Chamorro, 2016)and production (e.g., Antoniou et al., 2011) as well as code-switching (e.g., Olson, 2016). In this study, I draw on language dominance to evaluate participants' similarity along this dimension and assess whether differences in this measure correspond to differences in how they evaluate questionnaire items and/or describe navigating language use during the interview.

The assessment of language dominance is complex and has been operationalized in a variety of ways (e.g., Solís-Barroso & Stefanich, 2019). The field has not yet reached consensus on how best to measure it. The Bilingual Language Profile (BLP), however, is one of the most widely-used tools in this domain (Birdsong et al., 2012); it weighs factors across four modules (i.e., language history, use, self-evaluated proficiency, and attitudes) and positions speakers along a continuum of language dominance with possible scores range from -218 (strongly Spanish dominant) to +218 (strongly English dominant). A recent study employed a large sample of Spanish-English bilinguals to evaluate the test-retest reliability of the BLP in determining overall language dominance scores and found it to have excellent reliability (Olson, 2023). Given its reliability, broad adoption within the field, and relatively parsimonious design (Dass et al., 2024), the BLP was incorporated as an assessment of participants' language dominance.

Language Attitudes

The BLP, as a practical measure of language dominance, does not prioritize/center assessment of participants' language attitudes or ideologies. While it includes four items that

query participants' attitudes, these questions focus solely on participants' self-perceptions (e.g., "It is important to me to use (or eventually use) Spanish like a native speaker") and do not assess their attitudes toward other speakers or language practices. Additionally, the BLP quantitatively measures participants' language use but not their experiences using each language. Given my aim to design a comprehensive instrument that reflects the broadest range of coverage found in existing language experience questionnaires, I developed questions to address these gaps in the BLP's measurements. This approach ensures a thorough assessment of how well current instruments capture bilinguals' language experiences and the social contexts of their language use. I drew on social experience questionnaires by McGowan (2015) and Brigham (1993) to develop questions measuring a participant's experience with speakers of both Spanish and English. Questions probing participants' language attitudes were developed in consideration of prior theoretical and empirical studies of attitudes (e.g., Achugar & Pessoa, 2009; Rezaei et al., 2017; Soukup, 2013; Xie & Cavallaro, 2016). Following Schwarz (2015), I use attitude to refer to a participant's predisposition to (un)favorably evaluate an attitude object (e.g. person, idea). Included attitude measures used 7-point Likert scales to assess how participants perceive different types of speakers and linguistic practices (e.g., "Latine children living in the US should learn Spanish"); their own languages (e.g., "In my perception, I have an accent when I speak Spanish"); and their use of those languages in public and private spaces (e.g., "I am comfortable speaking Spanish in public").

Procedure

Questionnaires were administered after obtaining consent from participants and prior to the interview. Participants received verbal and written instructions in English on how to complete the questionnaire, including that they were free to ask any questions that arose as they

moved through it. The questionnaire could be accessed online, via either the experimenter's laptop or a participant's own personal computing device. Those who elected to complete the interview in person (n = 6) used the experimenter's laptop while those who completed the study online (n = 2) used their own. Participants who used their own laptop accessed the questionnaire via a link shared in the Zoom chat. One participant, due to physical limitations that made use of a computer difficult, requested assistance inputting responses. They dictated answers, while reading and reviewing what was being input, as I entered them into the computer; each answer was verbally confirmed as correct before moving onto the next question. After each participant completed the questionnaire, their responses were reviewed for clarity; any ambiguities were addressed with them and recorded separately, in that sessions' written interview notes (see Chapter 3 'Methods'), prior to beginning the interview. Participants took, on average, 20 minutes to complete the questionnaire.

Results

Questionnaire data consists of responses to Likert scale, multiple choice, and open-ended questions. As the smaller sample size precludes regression analyses, descriptive statistics were used to assess overall responses to Likert (e.g., mean attitude toward their languages), nominal (e.g., mode of responses to highest level of education) and ratio (e.g., mean participant age or time spent speaking Spanish each week) scale questions. These responses were then considered together with findings from the thematic analysis of participants' interview data (see Chapter 3 'Results') to understand the degree to which current formulations of written language experience questionnaires are able to capture the local, social factors that bilinguals report as influential upon their language use.

Language Dominance and Proficiency

The language dominance of participants interviewed in Chapter 3 was evaluated using the BLP (Table 3). Their dominance scores ranged from -116.3 (moderately Spanish dominant) to 66.9 (somewhat English dominant). Most scores (N = 6) fell between -33 to +27 indicating that the majority of participants were relatively balanced bilinguals. Overall, there were equal numbers of Spanish dominant (N = 4) and English dominant (N = 4) bilinguals. As a component of the BLP, participants self-reported their proficiency in each language; the maximum possible score for each language is 24, reflecting the sum of the numerical value given in the response to six, 7-point Likert scale items. According to this metric, the majority of participants (N = 5) perceive themselves to be equally proficient in both languages. Of the remaining three participants, two report being slightly more proficient in English than Spanish.

Table 3. *Participants' unscaled self-rated proficiency and language dominance scores*

Participant	Self-Rated Proficiency		Dominance
	English	Spanish	--
Oscar	24.0	24.0	-32.9
Maribel	24.0	24.0	13.3
Luna	24.0	24.0	17.6
Ana	23.0	21.0	24.3
Isabella	24.0	24.0	-25.0
Ines	24.0	24.0	-2.9
Hector	16.0	18.0	-116.3
Fernando	24.0	14.0	66.9
Mean	22.9	21.6	-6.9

Note. Negative language dominance scores reflect greater dominance in Spanish while positive scores reflect great dominance in English; scores closer to zero reflect more balanced bilingualism.

Language History

Participants' language history was quantitatively evaluated through their responses on the 'History' module of the BLP, which queried factors like the ages at which they began acquiring and felt comfortable using their languages. Responses were scored according to the procedure outlined for the BLP with overall scores for each language reported in Table 4 below. Higher scores on this section reflect more experience with a language (i.e., earlier age of acquisition, greater number of years of classes in that language or time spent in a region where the language is spoken) with a maximum possible score of 120 for each language. Overall, participants were relatively balanced in their experience with Spanish (M = 78.25, SD = 17.11) and English (M = 72.88, SD = 19.02), having significant history with both. This finding is consistent with the fact that all participants were early bilinguals who had acquired both languages before the age of seven and spent significant time in regions where English and Spanish were spoken.

Hector is the most Spanish dominant speaker among the participants and also exhibits the largest disparity between his scores in language history, indicating more extensive experience with Spanish than with English. These findings are consistent with Hector's language background measures on the BLP; he reported the longest period of residency in a country where Spanish is a majority language, and also indicated spending the most time in school and work environments where Spanish was spoken. Notably, Oscar, who was similar to Hector on many of the language history metrics, had a very different language dominance score (-32.9 to Hector's -116.3).

Table 4. *Unscaled participant scores on the BLP 'History' module.*

Participant	Language History	
	English	Spanish
Oscar	66.00	94.00
Maribel	80.00	70.00
Luna	95.00	72.00
Ana	84.00	68.00
Isabella	74.00	75.00
Ines	72.00	70.00
Hector	31.00	114.00
Fernando	81.00	63.00
Mean	72.88	78.25

Language Use

Most participants (n=5), when averaging across contexts, report using more English than Spanish in their daily lives (Table 5). As almost all participants (n=7) report using Spanish at least 50% of the time with family, this result appears to be driven by participants' language usage at work or school and with friends where English predominates. In contrast, three participants report using more Spanish than English when averaging across contexts. This same group also reports having spent significant time in a country or region where Spanish is the majority language. Finally, among participants, Hector is notable for consistently and primarily employing Spanish, with it comprising 70% or more of his language use across all contexts.

Table 5. *Participants' self-reported language use across contexts.*

Participant	Language Use (% of time)	
	English	Spanish
Oscar	36	48
Maribel	58	42
Luna	80	46
Ana	80	20
Isabella	37	63
Ines	64	46
Hector	6	92
Fernando	80	18
Mean	55	46

Note. Values reflect the average percentage use that participants reported for each language across five contexts: with friends, with family, when at school and/or work, when talking to themselves, when counting. Scores do not necessarily sum to 100 as participants accounted for their own and others' language mixing.

Participants were also asked to evaluate how often different circumstances arose in their daily language use (Table 6). They report infrequently experiencing others commenting on their language use (either English or Spanish) and that they feel comfortable conversing with native speakers in each of their languages. Their most frequent motivations for switching languages are interlocutor centered; they report switching languages to help the person they are talking to feel more comfortable (M=6.75, 0.46291) or to show caring, affection, or concern (M=6.63, SD=0.52). Their next most common reasons for switching languages are because they cannot recall a word (M=5.38, SD=2.07) or, relatedly, they find it easier to express themselves in the other language (M=5.25, SD=2.12). They switch languages some of the time, but not often, to add emphasis (M=4.88, SD=2.23), gain privacy (M=4.50, SD=2.56), or avoid misunderstandings (M=4.00, SD=1.85).

Table 6. *Ratings of mean event frequency on a seven-point Likert scale.*

Language experiences and choice (0 = almost never, 7 - constantly)	Mean	SD
I feel comfortable conversing with native Spanish speakers in Spanish	6.88	0.35
I switch languages to help the person I am talking to feel more comfortable.	6.75	0.46
I switch languages to show affection, caring, or concern.	6.63	0.52
I feel comfortable conversing with native English speakers in English	6.50	0.93
I switch languages because I can't remember or don't know a word.	5.38	2.07
I switch languages because it is easier to speak or express myself in the other language.	5.25	2.12
I switch languages in a conversation to add emphasis.	4.88	2.23
I switch languages so that others won't understand (privacy).	4.50	2.56
I switch languages in a conversation to avoid misunderstandings.	4.00	1.85
People have commented on my accent in English	2.13	2.47
People have commented on my accent in Spanish	1.50	2.07
People tease me about the way I speak in Spanish	1.25	1.75
People tease me about the way I speak in English	0.75	1.16

Finally, participants were also asked to consider the importance of several factors to their choice of language (Table 7). These ratings reveal that with whom they are speaking (M=5.50, SD=2.51) and where they are when having the conversation (M=4.63, SD=2.67) are both moderately significant factors influencing how participants conceptualize negotiating this choice. Significance, in this context, reflects participants' assessments of how important the listed factor is to their choice of language, with higher ratings reflecting greater importance. The topic (M=4.00, SD=2.98) and purpose of a conversation (M=4.40, SD=3.20) emerged as somewhat significant while participants were neutral on the importance of mood or energy level (M=3.75, SD=2.71) to their choice of language. Participants rated others' perceptions (M=2.25, SD=2.60) as not important to language selection.

Table 7. *Mean ratings of factors' importance to language choice on a seven-point Likert scale*

Importance of factors to language choice

(0 = not very important at all, 7 = very important)

	Mean	SD
With whom I am speaking	5.50	2.51
Where I am having a conversation	4.63	2.67
My mood or energy level	3.75	2.71
The purpose of the conversation	4.38	3.20
The topic of the conversation	4.00	2.98
Others' perceptions	2.25	2.60

Language Attitudes

Questions in the BLP 'Attitudes' module queried how much participants self-identified with their languages and how they wanted others to perceive their relationship to their languages (Table 8). Overall, participants' attitudes toward Spanish (M=23.38, SD=1.06) were more favorable than those toward English (M=18.38, SD=3.58). This trend was most noticeably observed for Hector who strongly agreed with all Spanish items but only one English item ('I feel like myself when I speak English').

Table 8. *Mean ratings of BLP 'Attitudes' module items on a six-point Likert scale.*

Prompt (0 = disagree, 6 = agree)	Mean	SD
I feel like myself when I speak - English	5.13	0.99
I feel like myself when I speak - Spanish	5.75	0.46
I identify with - an English-speaking culture	4.00	2.00
I identify with - a Spanish-speaking culture	5.75	0.71
It is important to me to use (or eventually use) - English like a native speaker	5.38	0.92
It is important to me to use (or eventually use) - Spanish like a native speaker	5.88	0.35
I want others to think I am a native speaker of - English	4.38	2.45
I want others to think I am a native speaker of - Spanish	6.00	0.00
Mean rating across all English items	4.72	0.64
Mean rating across all Spanish items	5.84	0.12

Participants' attitudes toward their languages were generally consistent with measures of their proficiency and use: stronger overall alignment with Spanish on the language attitudes measures aligned with higher self-rated proficiency and greater Spanish language use. There were, however, a few exceptions. Luna and Ines, for example, aligned more strongly with Spanish on the attitudes measures but favored English on measures of language use. Similarly, Ana favored English in both her self-evaluation of proficiency and in her language use but strongly aligned with Spanish in her attitudes. Only one participant, Fernando, showed overall greater alignment with English on the language attitudes measures. While the difference was small, the directionality was consistent with his overall dominance score, 66.93, which reflects English dominance.

In addition to the BLP 'Attitudes' module, participants were asked to respond to several prompts querying their agreement with a set of language attitudes (Table 9). Notably, participants, on average, reported a high degree of comfort speaking Spanish in public (M=6.63, SD=0.52) while also reporting moderate disagreement with the statement that "people are treated with respect when they speak Spanish in public" (M=3.63, SD=2.39). By contrast, participants strongly agree that English is respected in public (M=6.75, SD=0.46).

Table 9. *Ratings of items examining participants' language attitudes on a seven-point Likert scale.*

Language attitude (0 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree)	Mean	StDev
In my perception, I have an accent when I speak Spanish.	2.75	2.92
In my perception, I have an accent when I speak English.	3.50	3.02
I have close friends who speak English as a first language.	6.00	1.91
I have close friends who speak Spanish as a first language.	6.75	0.71
Latine/Hispanic children living in the US should learn Spanish.	6.63	0.74
I am comfortable speaking Spanish in public.	6.63	0.52
People are treated with respect when they speak Spanish in public.	3.63	2.39
People are treated with respect when they speak English in public.	6.75	0.46
Spanish is an important part of my daily life.	7.00	0.00
English is an important part of my daily life.	7.00	0.00
It is important to speak Spanish correctly.	6.13	1.36
To speak Spanish well, it is important to not use slang.	2.88	2.30
To speak Spanish well, it is important to only use Spanish in conversation	2.88	3.04
Some dialects of Spanish are easier for me to understand than others.	5.38	2.07
Some dialects of Spanish are more correct than others.	1.88	2.53
People in my community speak Spanish well.	6.00	0.93
People in my community speak English well.	5.63	1.41
Mixing two languages in the same sentence shows that someone can speak well or is comfortable in both languages.	5.63	1.41
Mixing two languages is as normal and as acceptable as speaking using the same language when talking to a person.	5.25	1.91

Participants moderately agreed that people in their community spoke Spanish (M=6.00, SD=0.93) and English (M=5.63, SD=1.41) well. To better understand what participants believe speaking a language "well" entails, I considered how participants evaluated four statements that reflected prescriptivist ideologies like "some dialects of Spanish are more correct than others" (see Table 9). Participants varied significantly in how they rated these items with some in strong agreement and others strongly opposed. They were in generally strong agreement that "it is important to speak Spanish correctly" (M=6.13, SD= 1.36) but moderately disagreed with the assertions that mixing languages (M=2.88, SD=3.04) or using slang (M=2.88, SD=2.30) were

antithetical to "speaking Spanish well". Indeed, participants, on average, were mildly aligned with the idea of code switching or mixing as a skill (M=4.88, SD=1.88).

Finally, participants unanimously and strongly agreed that both Spanish (M = 7, SD = 0) and English (M = 7, SD = 0) are an important part of their daily lives. This measure appears to capture a different facet of participants' attitudes toward their languages than what was encompassed by the BLP 'Attitudes' module as, on that module, participants overwhelmingly (n=7) favored Spanish.

Summary of Results

Overall, results indicate that participants are early bilinguals, most of whom are fairly balanced in their language proficiency and use (n=6). This aligns with participants' self-perceptions of their proficiency in both languages as majority of participants (5 out of 8) considered themselves equally proficient in both languages. Among the remaining three, two perceived themselves to be slightly more proficient in English. Echoing these findings, most participants tend to use more English in their daily lives (n=5), especially in professional or social contexts, but Spanish remains integral, particularly in family interactions. Language switching, according to participants' ratings of several possible motivations, is done primarily to accommodate others or ease communication. Participants generally held more favorable attitudes towards Spanish compared to English, reflecting stronger cultural or personal identification with the language, though daily language use often favors English. Participants regard both languages as essential to their daily lives.

Discussion

During their interviews, participants' narratives about their language use (see Chapter 3 'Results') position language choice as (highly) dynamic and context dependent. Participants

situate their language use within a complex local ecology shaped by Pilsen's socio-political context within Chicago; local practices, spaces, attitudes, and identities; and discourses about (Spanish) language use and identity. They rarely invoke general contexts (e.g., 'with friends' vs. 'at home') and, where they do, are not categorical in how they describe their language use in these settings. Despite this diversity of influences and experiences, bilingual speakers are often grouped by researchers into broader categories (e.g., early vs. late bilingualism; Spanish vs. English dominant); where social context is considered, bilinguals are frequently asked to evaluate their language use according to broader distinctions (e.g., 'home' vs. 'work') (e.g., Li et al., 2020; Luk & Bialystok, 2013; Marian et al., 2007). Researchers have recently called for increased consideration of the diversity of bilingual experience and the importance of understanding the social contexts of their language use (e.g., Kroll et al., 2023). However, assessment of language experience has relied on questionnaires that query factors which are largely determined a priori, without reference to local context, and which traditionally center facets of language background like age of acquisition (AOA). In the ensuing discussion, I consider the correspondence between participants' conceptions of their language use, as emerged through thematic analysis (Chapter 3), and the quantitative measure of language experience captured on the questionnaire above.

The majority of participants, according to their scores on the Bilingual Language Profile (BLP), are fairly balanced bilinguals (Table 3). The similar proficiency and comfort with both languages that this assessment would denote is reflected in how participants describe their language use. Oscar, for example, emphasizes his flexibility to negotiate a conversation in the language(s) his interlocutor prefers, explaining, "I'm pretty comfortable speaking those languages. So, like, for me, it really doesn't make a difference." Ana, relating how she negotiates

language selection with someone she knows, echoes this sentiment, saying, "I think I tend to think first on what they're most comfortable with because I feel like I'm pretty comfortable in both." Correspondingly, Oscar and Ana's dominance scores (-32.9 and 24.3, respectively) are both indicative of more balanced bilingualism (Table 3). In this regard, therefore, the BLP's measure of language dominance is a good, practical gauge for how participants view their own facility with each language.

Language dominance, however, is also argued to encompass aspects of language use with measures of use incorporated into its assessment (e.g., Gertken et al., 2014). Indeed, on the measures of language use incorporated into the BLP, the language in which participants were more dominant, even if only slightly, is also the language they report using most across contexts (Table 4). What these language use measures obscure, however, is how participants' describe positioning their facility in each language as enabling them to center their conversation partner's comfort (among other factors) in determining which language to use. In other words, mastery of a language is a foundational but not fully determinative condition for which language(s) bilinguals engage in different contexts and, by extension, neither is dominance uniquely predictive of their overall language use.

Furthermore, querying participants' language use as it stands in existing questionnaires (e.g., Dass et al., 2024) is assessing the combined effect of an ensemble of influences: proficiency; local contexts and conceptions; speaker's stances, attitudes, and motivations. Asking participants to evaluate how often they use each of their languages 'with friends' or 'shopping' is asking them to aggregate across the diverse communicative contexts within each of those categories. While it would be impracticable—if not impossible—to assess every context, a greater understanding of the facets that are most determinative of bilinguals'

language use will help to disentangle the many influences on bilinguals' language activation and control.

Questionnaires, as currently formulated, are limited in their informativity regarding the social factors influencing bilinguals' language use, particularly as related to local context. For example, in this study, participants' ratings on measures of their language attitudes indicate their moderate agreement with the assertions that "people in my community speak Spanish and English well." While these ratings do not conflict with participants' interview comments regarding the use of these languages in their community, they also do not capture the variation that participants associated with this factor as a function of perceived age and local group membership. This erasure in turn obscures facets of community context (e.g., gentrification and the correlated influx of English-dominant residents) that participants described as significant to language use and attitudes in Pilsen. For example, ongoing gentrification in the neighborhood has resulted in an influx of English-dominant residents and businesses catering to this growing demographic. During the interviews, participants often narratively constructed these new residents as young, white professionals with whom they expected to use English. By contrast, they related the strongest expectation of Spanish language use with older, Latine, longtime residents of the neighborhood. In the Pilsen community, therefore, participants navigate divergent language expectations depending on the perceived group membership of their interlocutors. They expect to use Spanish with longtime neighborhood residents who embody the traditional Latine identity of the area, while anticipating the need for English when interacting with newer residents who are part of the neighborhood's gentrifying demographic. This dual expectation highlights how social dynamics within Pilsen influence language choice, a factor obscured by the broader framing of local context on the questionnaire. It is additionally unclear

how participants have interpreted 'community' within the statement: "people in my community speak Spanish and English well"; specifically, it is unclear whether their definition of community circumscribes everyone living in Pilsen or a narrower subset of the population. Regardless, such distinctions and ambiguities in the term 'community' highlight the need for more nuanced and context-sensitive approaches to understanding language use in bilingual settings.

Similar to the preceding discussion, participants, on average, report a high degree of comfort speaking Spanish in public while also disagreeing that "people are treated with respect when they speak Spanish in public." Their conceptions of the word 'public' are, however, unclear from questionnaire data alone. In interviews, participants describe being uncomfortable using Spanish in public spaces *outside* Pilsen while being very comfortable *within* Pilsen. These findings echo broader (racio)linguistic discourses in the US that stigmatize Spanish language use, constructing and positioning it as deviant and inappropriate for public use (e.g., Hill, 2007, 2014; Zentella, 1997), as part of racist projects seeking to uphold whiteness. These discourses can make speaking Spanish in public uncomfortable and possibly unsafe for speakers who may face racist backlash (e.g., Martinez et al., 2019). In evaluating Spanish as not being respected in public, therefore, participants' discourse in interviews suggests that they may be conceiving of 'public' as referring to spaces outside Pilsen. Thus, on rating items, the meaning of key terms (like 'public') may be underspecified, such that we, as researchers, risk overgeneralizing participants' attitudes toward the use of their languages in different spaces and, consequently, misinterpreting how these different contexts shape language use. Significantly, absent the context of participants' discourse, it would not be evident that the ratings on these items may correspond to two different conceptions of 'public,' nor why language use within Pilsen may differ from that outside of it.

Finally, participants' evaluation of the importance of six contextual factors to their choice of language reveals that with whom they are speaking and the location of an interaction are the most significant to how they conceptualize this choice. Discourse (e.g., purpose or topic of the conversation) and speaker internal factors (e.g., mood or energy level) are also rated as somewhat significant. This ordering of factors aligns with how participants described making choices about their language use in their interviews. The relatively lower ratings for aspects like mood echo their later, briefer, and (relatively) deemphasized appearance in participants' discourse. The alignment between how these factors were positioned in participants ratings and commentary supports the relevance of social context to the understanding of language use and their utility in assessing it. However, further research is needed to clarify the contribution of each factor to participants' determination of the language(s) they engage. These factors are often portrayed by interview participants as working together to inform their language choice and may not be the separable predictors that their itemization in questionnaire format would suggest. Furthermore, these measures do not reflect key aspects of the local social context. They fail to capture how participants leverage their knowledge of the local community—including its places, people, and practices—to determine which language(s) are appropriate.

Additionally, these results reflect the perspective and context of one community of bilinguals and may not be generalizable; different communities may differently weigh these aspects and/or draw on a different set of factors. De García (2008), for example, highlights how Laredo, Texas' location on the US-Mexico border fosters a cultural and linguistic blend that is central to the community's identity, shaping the language practices of its bilingual members. Hidalgo (1993) similarly argues for the "uniqueness of the border" as a setting where residents' daily lives reflect a dynamic blend of both English and Spanish, with neither

dominating; she observes a "strong correlation between language attitudes and use and the independence of language behavior of demographic factors" in studies of bilingual Latine speakers from one such area, Chula Vista, California (p. 50). Urciuoli (1996), in her work with a New York Puerto Rican community, emphasizes how the local sociopolitical environment shapes the way that members of this community use language as well as how they are perceived based on those linguistic choices. Together, these findings illustrate how bilingual language practices are highly context dependent. While some broader patterns may emerge, the language practices within each bilingual community are shaped by a distinct set of factors, highlighting the need for research that acknowledges these complexities and develops more comprehensive measures to capture the diverse linguistic realities of bilinguals across different locales.

Overall, the findings of this study underscore the importance of examining how bilinguals make sense of their language use in an emergent, locally contextualized way. Questionnaires are an efficient way to systematically collect quantitative, self-reported data regarding bilinguals' language history and use. However, as the preceding discussion suggests, they may be constrained in the depth of knowledge they elicit, omitting important nuances and relationships relevant to bilinguals' language use. This limitation stems from their predominantly directive mode of questioning wherein brief, specific answers (e.g., Likert ratings) are elicited by close-ended questions and may be exacerbated by a composition that is not grounded in community context. Additionally, by adopting a design that partitions social context into discrete categories, questionnaires implicitly frame bilingual language use along these lines; this structure belies the situated nature of language choice that participants describe wherein multiple socio-contextual factors intersect to shape the language(s) they use.

Conclusions

This study underscores the dynamic and context-dependent nature of bilingual language use in Pilsen. Participants navigate a complex local ecology that influences their language choices beyond the broad contextual categories traditionally used in language experience questionnaires. Despite a general proficiency in both languages, factors like interlocutor comfort and specific situational contexts play significant roles in which language(s) they engage. These findings highlight the ways in which conventionally used categories like "work" or "social setting" fail to capture the complexity of bilingual language use. For example, even within Pilsen, participants describe different coffee shops and neighbors as carrying different expectations for what languages they would use or feel were appropriate. Which friend(s) they are talking with and specifically where they are when having the conversation interact to influence the language(s) they use. Therefore, although a category like "social setting" encompasses both where and with whom a bilingual is speaking, it erases the intersectionality, fluidity, and locality of their language use. This highlights a gap in current language experience assessments, which often fail to capture these nuanced influences. Future research must integrate both qualitative insights and refined quantitative measures to better reflect the diverse and intricate realities of bilinguals' language experiences.

Chapter 5: Social information and speech perception

Early work on bilingual speech perception postulated that bilinguals would shift between language-specific perceptual routines according to the language they were cued to expect (Caramazza et al., 1973). Studies testing this hypothesis found that, on a perceptual categorization task, bilinguals classified the same speech stimulus differently depending on the language they believed they were hearing. This perceptual shift, argued to be evidence of language-specific processing, has been demonstrated for a variety of language pairings (e.g., Casillas & Simonet, 2018; Elman et al., 1977; Flege & Eefting, 1987; Gonzales & Lotto, 2013; Hazan & Boulakia, 1993) --including Spanish and English (e.g., Bohn & Flege, 1993; Garcia-Sierra et al., 2009; Gonzales et al., 2019)(e.g., Bohn & Flege, 1993; García-Sierra, Diehl & Champlin, 2009; Gonzales, Byers-Heinlein, and Lotto, 2019).

Recent work has tested the ability of (socio)contextual cues outside the speech signal to influence speech perception in bilinguals. Gonzales et al. (2019), for example, asked whether a conceptual cue to language spoken could shift how bilinguals perceived incoming speech. Participants in the study were French-English and Spanish-English early bilinguals. They were asked to complete a phoneme discrimination task for a single continuum ranging from /b/ to /p/. Half of the participants in each language group were told they would hear English while the remaining half were told they would hear their other language (either Spanish or French). Aside from this brief instruction, no indications (acoustic or otherwise) were given as to which language participants heard during the discrimination task. Finding that how bilinguals perceived an acoustic continuum of speech sounds aligned with the language they were told they would hear, Gonzales et al. argued this to be evidence that conceptual information

triggered the use of a language-specific perceptual routine and, consequently, shaped speech perception in bilinguals.

An earlier study by Molnar, Ibáñez-Molina, and Carreiras (2015) reported a similar effect for interlocutor. They found that congruence between the language an interlocutor spoke during familiarization and at test facilitated early Basque-Spanish bilinguals' processing times on a lexical decision task. This result suggests that bilinguals draw on non-linguistic, contextual cues like an interlocutor's identity in predicting what language will be spoken. Indeed, beyond aspects of an interlocutor's social identity, other studies in this area found evidence that a variety of contextual information—from emotion (Wu & Thierry, 2012) to culturally-biased cues (S. Zhang et al., 2013b)—influences speech perception in bilinguals.

Despite these insights, however, none of these studies have directly assessed the influence of bilinguals' own language ideologies on speech perception. Linguistic ideologies are essential to how language is perceived in a social context (Woolard, 2020) and are known to govern language perception in monolinguals (e.g., Rubin, 1992; Strand, 1999). Therefore, to fully elucidate how social information from outside the speech signal influences bilingual language control processes and the activation of language-specific task schema during perception, therefore, research in this area must acknowledge and consider the role of linguistic ideologies.

In this chapter, I investigate how local social meanings are engaged in the cognitive processes that govern language switching in bilinguals. Listeners may hold linguistic ideologies that link aspects of social identity or context to certain ways of speaking—in this case, an interlocutor's perceived ability to speak Spanish or English. As delineated above, language control processes are theorized to be sensitive to social information (e.g., Grosjean, 2001) but

prior work has not determined precisely what social information may influence

them. Through thematic analysis of semi-structured interviews (see Chapter 3 'Results'), I

identified local linguistic ideologies reported by participants that connect various aspects of an

interlocutor's social identity and/or context with their presumed ability to speak Spanish and

English; these ideologies are specific to local community context, engaging locales and identities

that are not fully predicted by broader discourses surrounding language use in Mexican

American communities (e.g., those discussed in Chapter 2 '(Racio)linguistic Ideologies about US

Latine, Spanish-speaking Communities'). The listening task in this chapter will investigate

whether the community-grounded social factors that participants associate with their language

use also shape their expectations for what language(s) an interlocutor is likely to speak, thereby

influencing their activation of language-specific processing. To test the impact of localized

social meanings on bilingual perception, I employed a socially-primed phoneme categorization

task. The social primes in this task were brief descriptions of interlocutors that reflected the

social factors (e.g., local practices and ideologies) identified in participants' metalinguistic

discourses. Following the categorization task, participants also completed a questionnaire

gathering their social evaluations of the speakers and assessing their language background,

experience, and attitudes. That this study uses linguistic ideologies elicited from participants to

design the social primes distinguishes it from prior work that, in testing the influence of social

information on bilingual language processing, drew on aspects of the interactional context which

were assumed to be most relevant to a bilingual. This study, by assessing and testing the

influence of the social meanings that participants themselves endorse, centers their voices and

experiences, hearing and learning from their perspective on how the ideologies they hold and the

social contexts in which they interact shape their language use.

Methods

Power Analysis

An a priori power analysis was performed to estimate the necessary sample size using results reported in Gonzales and Lotto (2013). They investigated the ability of phonetic cues embedded within the second syllable of pseudowords (i.e., *bafri*) to cue language context and, consequently, shift how bilingual participants (n=32) responded on a phoneme categorization task. The measure of interest was where the phonemic category boundary fell under English and Spanish phonetic contexts. Comparing the two conditions (English vs. Spanish), they reported a significant difference t(30)=3.44, p<0.001. According to Cohen's (1988) criteria, this would be considered a very large (d = 1.26) effect size. Therefore, given this effect size and with alpha = .05 and power = 0.80, the projected sample size needed for this within group comparison is approximately n=8. Ultimately, a total of 40 participants were sought for this task. This sample size provided sufficient power to test the core hypotheses of this study while also allowing for consideration of mediating factors and effects of subgroups.

Participants

Participants (n=48) were simultaneous or early Spanish-English bilinguals who self-reported residence in Chicago and fluency in both languages; they identified as Mexican, Mexican American, Chicane, or of Mexican descent. Data from a total of 40 participants was analyzed for the main task of the study; responses from eight participants were excluded for not (correctly) completing the task. There was no overlap in participants between those who completed the interviews (Chapter 3) and those who completed this task. All participants were compensated for their participation.

Potential participants were recruited through volunteer and snowball sampling (Morse, 1991) by: (1) sharing information about the study in web-based forums (e.g., Facebook groups) for neighborhood organizations; (2) emailing leaders of neighborhood organizations to share and request they pass information about the study onto their members; (3) posting informational flyers in community spaces like coffee shops and libraries; (4) snowball recruitment. Flyers, emails, and web forum posts directed interested individuals to a brief intake questionnaire which provided a summary of the study and detailed its enrollment criteria. Respondents were asked to affirm their interest in the study and that they met study criteria. Due to the auditory nature of the phoneme categorization task, participants with a self-reported personal or family history of developmental speech, hearing, language, or reading disorders were excluded from the study.

Participants' demographic information and language experience, summarized in Table 10, were gathered via a questionnaire completed after the listening task. The mean age of participants was 31.3 years, with participants' ages ranging between 21 and 47 years. Approximately 45% of participants identified as female while 55% identified as male. On average, participants reported acquiring Spanish from birth (0 years) and English from 2 years of age. Participants were relatively balanced bilinguals, as indicated by their mean score of 18.90 (range: -22.8 to 77.4) on the Bilingual Language Profile (Birdsong et al., 2012), where possible scores range between -218 and +218 on this measure, with more negative scores reflecting greater Spanish dominance and more positive ones indicating greater English dominance. Over half of the participants (N = 26) reported current or past residency in Pilsen.

Finally, as DeLuca et al. (2019) emphasize, bilingualism encompasses a spectrum of experiences that reflect the diverse ways in which individuals acquire and use their languages. Identifying participants with matching demographic and experiential attributes has

long been a challenge in bilingualism research–particularly given that language experience itself is correlated with other factors such as the local social contexts in which bilinguals use their languages. In Chapter 4, I discussed in greater depth some of the current difficulties confronting researchers in assessing bilingual language experience. This dissertation, by integrating qualitative and quantitative methodologies, aims to shed light on potential gaps in current language experience instruments and elucidate what aspects of language experience and local social context shape bilingual language use. The demographic and experiential attributes measured in this study (Table 10), including ages of acquisition and language proficiency, are well-established and widely used in studies of bilingual language perception, having been shown to significantly influence how bilinguals process and perceive language (e.g., De Bruin, 2019). Additionally, given that social experience crucially affects how language is associated with social information, this study focused on one community, Mexican American residents of Chicago, to mitigate community-level variation in language practices and ideologies. However, it is important to acknowledge that variation along other dimensions not directly measured in this study, such as the size of participants' social networks (e.g., Lev-Ari, 2018), and/or within Chicago's bilingual, Mexican American community may have contributed to differences in task outcomes. I address the potential impact of variation in language experiences and contexts of use when discussing the study's limitations in Chapter 6.

Table 10. *Demographic information for participants in the main study (n=40).*

Age in years Mean (SD)	31.3 (6.67)	
Age of Acquisition in years Mean (SD)	Spanish	0 (.78)
	English	2.00 (1.92)
Self-evaluated proficiency (0 = not well at all, 6 = very well) Mean (SD)	Spanish	5.08 (.64)
	English	5.38 (.62)
Language Dominance Score (-218 = strongly Spanish dominant, +218 = strongly English dominant) Mean (SD)	18.90 (21.27)	
Gender (*N*)	Female	18
	Male	22
Ethnicity (*N*)	Latine/Hispanic	13
	Mexican/Mexican American/Chicane	24
	White	3
Parents' nationality at birth (*N*) Note: Participants could list multiple nationalities	Mexico	28
	USA	9
	Latin America (not Mexico)	2
	Other	3
Neighborhood within Chicago (*N)* Note: Participants could report living/having lived in multiple neighborhoods; Chicago has 77 total official neighborhood areas.	Pilsen	26
	Uptown	9
	Little Village	4
	Other	23

Socially-primed phoneme categorization

Phoneme categorization is a well-established experimental paradigm in research on bilingual language control (e.g., Gonzales & Lotto, 2013) as well as sociophonetics (e.g. Strand, 1999). Under this paradigm, which is often structured as a two-alternative forced-choice task, participants are asked to categorize continua of speech sounds to understand how different social and/or acoustic cues influence language processing. In this study, I utilize it to test whether participants' linguistic ideologies influenced their expectations for what language(s) an interlocutor will speak and, consequently, their activation of language-specific processing. Participants were randomly assigned to one of four conditions that were determined by a cross of two voices with two written social primes, and two possible orders of presentation. The social primes were brief, written bios that presented information about the social identities (e.g., age, location encountered, aspects of local identities) of two different individuals, explained in more detail below. One bio presented characteristics intended to cue an expectation of Spanish language use by the speaker, while the other was designed to cue an expectation of English. All participants saw both primes and heard both voices. The content of the social primes was determined by participant responses during the interview and on the questionnaires, selected to reflect the most commonly held linguistic ideologies regarding the characteristics of speakers of either language. In each of the four conditions, the only explicit information participants received about an interlocutor (the person whose voice they heard) was the written social prime.

Social Primes

Social primes were used to modulate participants' expectations regarding the language spoken by each interlocutor during the phoneme categorization task. For this reason, two

primes--one to cue each of a participant's languages--were developed. Importantly, in developing the primes, I did not assume a priori what social meanings would be relevant to bilingual listeners in determining what language(s) an interlocutor would be likely to speak. Rather, primes were written descriptions of the interlocutor that incorporated the linguistic ideologies that emerged during interviews with bilingual, Mexican American residents of Pilsen (see Chapter 3 'Results'). In this way, the social primes used in this experiment test the influence of local social meanings on participants' expectations for and perceptions of an interlocutor's speech. While prior studies have tested the influence of picture (e.g., Y. Li et al., 2013), video (e.g., Molnar et al., 2015), and written (e.g., Gonzales et al., 2019) cues to language spoken, the use of a brief written description of an interlocutor that incorporates local social meanings has been less commonly tested.

Three social factors that interview participants described as indexical of Spanish language use were incorporated into the social primes: speakers' perceived age, locale, and community membership. Crucially, the social primes did not explicitly state what language(s) an interlocutor spoke. The inclusion of perceived age reflected commentary positioning older speakers as more likely to be longtime community members who valued, preferred, and maintained high proficiency in Spanish while being less proficient/comfortable in English. Conversely, younger speakers were positioned as more likely to be outsiders (e.g., gentrifiers) and/or having greater proficiency in English. Participants were divided, however, on whether younger speakers were less likely to have maintained proficiency in Spanish or were equally comfortable in both languages. The second factor, locale, reflected commentary that highlighted specific locations (e.g., local grocery stores in Pilsen) as places where participants believed they would have a greater likelihoods of using and/or hearing one of their

languages. Lastly, community membership encompassed two related identities that participants

associated with a greater likelihood of Spanish language use: Pilsen resident and Mexican

American. As the presence of family, particularly older adults and children, was strongly linked

to membership in the Pilsen community, this variable was modulated by noting whether the

interlocutor was accompanied by family members. The two written bios used as social primes

can be found in Table 11 below.

Table 11. *Social primes used during the phoneme categorization task.*

Spanish-indexing Bio	English-indexing Bio
You run into this person at a local grocery store in Pilsen. They look like they are in their late thirties. You've seen them there several times before shopping with an older woman. Today, as you're both waiting in the line to check out, you hear this person speak.	You run into this person at a Starbucks in the Loop. They look like they are in their late teens or early twenties and are by themselves. You haven't seen them before. You are waiting behind them in line when you hear them speak.

Pilot Study of Social Primes

Social primes were piloted with thirty Mexican American, Spanish-English speaking

bilinguals from Illinois to ensure that they (1) cued significantly different expectations for the

language(s) known and/or spoken by the described speakers and (2) were similarly socially-

evaluated along other dimensions. They ranged in age from 19 to 56 years (mean: 30). The vast

majority (24 out of 30) reported living in Chicago, with many (18 out of 24) having lived in the

city their entire lives. Accordingly, pilot participants had, on average, high familiarity with the

Chicago locales mentioned in the social primes. Asked to rate how familiar they were with each

place on a scale of 1 (not at all familiar) to 4 (extremely familiar), participants were very familiar

with both neighborhoods (Pilsen mean: 3.1; Loop mean: 3.5) as well as the specific locales

within them (local grocery in Pilsen mean: 2.8; Starbucks in the Loop mean: 3.9). Participants in

the pilot study were recruited using the online crowd-sourcing platform, Prolific. All

participants self-identified as bilingual speakers whose first language was Spanish. They listed

their fluent languages as English and Spanish, their nationality as the United States, and their

current state of residence as Illinois.

Participants in the pilot study were shown both of the speaker bios (i.e., the social

primes). While viewing the written prime, participants provided their general impressions of the

individual described. They were first asked to share their open-ended impression of the speaker

by typing their opinions into response boxes. They were then asked to evaluate the speaker on a

series of 7-point Likert scales from Not X to X, where X is a characteristic of the speaker such as

"Spanish-speaker," or "friendly". The characteristics on which the speakers were evaluated were

drawn from previous social evaluation experiments (D'Onofrio, 2019) and are included in

Appendix C. At the conclusion of the pilot task, participants completed language background

and demographic questionnaires, indicating previous language experience and self-reported

information about geographic origin, age, ethnicity and gender. On average, the pilot study took

participants approximately 20 minutes to complete. Participants were compensated for

completion of the study.

Paired, two-tailed t-tests were used to assess whether there were significant differences in

how the bios were socially evaluated (see Appendix D for full results). While the bios were

rated similarly across most attributes, they elicited significantly different evaluations of the

speakers' language knowledge. Specifically, participants perceived "Spanish-speaker" as a

better descriptor for the individual in the Spanish-indexing bio compared to the one in the

English bio ($t(29) = -4.23$, $p = 2.12e\text{-}4$). In contrast, there were no significant differences in

participants' evaluations of how well the attribute 'English-speaker' characterized the individuals described in both bios, with it rated as a good fit for both. Notably, participants rated the individual described in the Spanish-indexing bio as a strong fit for both the 'English-speaker' and 'Spanish-speaker' attributes, suggesting that the individual was perceived to be bilingual. Additionally, participants found the attribute 'Accented' ($t(29)=-2.68$, $p=0.012$) to be a significantly better fit for the speaker described in the Spanish-indexing bio, while 'American' ($t(29)=2.30$, $p=0.029$) was deemed a significantly better descriptor for the speaker in the English-indexing bio. These findings indicate that the bios effectively cued the intended language—Spanish for the Spanish-indexing bio and English for the English-indexing bio—while remaining comparable across most other attributes. It is important to note that the norming study population differed slightly from that of the main task. While all participants in the main study were current Chicago residents, the norming study included both current and former Chicago residents (n=24), as well as individuals living elsewhere in Illinois outside the Chicago metropolitan area (n=6).

Auditory stimuli

To construct the auditory stimuli for the main task, three female Mexican Spanish-American English speaking bilinguals were recorded. In the languages they spoke, speakers read aloud a set of monosyllables that contained word-initial bilabial stops, /b/ and /p/, in the context of the low, back vowel /a/. Prior to beginning a recording, speakers were spoken to and had casual conversation with the experimenter in the language in which they'd be recording. Bilingual speakers were given a break between recording in Spanish and English.

These recordings were used to create, for each voice, a fourteen-step voice-onset time (VOT) continuum that ranged from Spanish pre-voiced /ba/ to English aspirated /pa/. Using a Spanish

/pa/ token from each speaker, I removed any interval between the stop release and onset of voicing to create a base token for the stop continuum that had 0 ms VOT. To create the continua, I varied the VOT of this base token in 5 ms increments to create seven pre-voiced and six voicing lag tokens. Together with the base token at 0 ms VOT, these tokens formed the fourteen steps of the continua (Table 12). Following Gonzales et al. (2019), the pre-voiced tokens were created by successively splicing voicing lead from a Spanish token of /ba/ from the same speaker onto the base token until tokens ranging from -35 ms to -5 ms VOT were created. Similarly, voicing lag tokens were created by successively splicing aspiration from an English token of /pa/ (produced by the same speaker), onto the base tokens for each bilingual speaker until tokens ranging from 5 ms to 30 ms VOT were constructed. The stimuli were normalized for peak intensity and care was taken to avoid adding any acoustic artifacts (such as clicks) into the stimulus during manipulation.

Table 12. *VOT in milliseconds at each of the fourteen steps in the continua*

Step Number	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
VOT (ms)	-35	-30	-25	-20	-15	-10	-5	0	5	10	15	20	25	30

Norming Study for Auditory Stimuli

As I am interested in how social information outside the acoustic signal (i.e., locale, visually perceived aspects of an interlocutor's social identity like race or gender) may influence a bilingual's expectations of what language(s) an interlocutor will speak, it was important that the two voices selected for use in the experiment be similarly socially-evaluated. To that end, a preliminary norming study collected social evaluations of the voices using a series of 7-point

Likert scales. A total of 20 Mexican American, Spanish-English bilinguals were recruited

through Prolific for a norming study. All participants self-identified as bilingual speakers whose

first language was Spanish. They listed their fluent languages as English and Spanish, their

nationality as the United States, and their current state of residence as Illinois. They ranged in

age from 21 to 65 years (mean: 31). Nearly all (18 out of 20) reported having lived in Chicago,

many (7 out of 20) for their entire lives.

Each participant was exposed to all three voices articulating a voice onset time (VOT)

continuum ranging from /ba/ to /pa/. Voices were presented one at a time and in a random

order. Participants were asked to share their open-ended impression of the speaker by typing

their opinions into response boxes. They were then asked to evaluate the speaker on a series of 7-

point Likert scales from Not X to X, where X is a characteristic of the speaker such as "Spanish-

speaker," or "friendly". The norming study took participants, on average, 15 minutes to

complete. All participants were compensated for completing the study. The two voices that

were selected for use in the main task were not rated significantly differently on any dimension

(see Appendix E).

Questionnaire

The questionnaire was structured to comprehensively assess participants' demographic

and language background as well as their perceptions of the speakers encountered during the

listening task. To measure participants' social evaluations of the speakers from the phoneme

categorization task, the questionnaire incorporated a series of open-ended and semantic

differential scale questions. The latter ranged from Not X to X, where X is a characteristic of the

speaker such as "Spanish-speaker," or "friendly". The characteristics on which the speakers

were to be evaluated were drawn from previous social evaluation experiments (D'Onofrio, 2019) and are included in Appendix C.

In addition to providing ratings of each speaker on seven-point scales along dimensions such as "friendliness" or "intelligence," participants were asked to describe the speaker and respond to questions asking for their perception of the speaker's age, national origin, and race or ethnicity with short answers. Participants were then asked what language they believed each speaker was using (Spanish or English) and what information they used to make that decision.

Finally, participants answered questions regarding their own demographic background as well as their language experience, attitudes, and patterns of use through a combination of Likert scale, multiple choice, and open-ended questions. The questions in these sections were consistent with those used in the questionnaire following the interview (see Chapter 4 'Measures'). By incorporating questions about participants' experiences, practices, and attitudes, this design allowed for the analysis of how language-related experiential and/or attitudinal factors shaped participants' evaluations of the speakers and continua. To maintain consistency with the first two studies in this dissertation, all written materials and instructions, including the questionnaire, were provided in English.

Experiment Design

Participants completed two experimental blocks that were determined by a cross of two social primes (English-indexing and Spanish-indexing) with two voices. Each block consisted of one prime-voice pairing; all participants heard both voices and saw both social primes. To control for potential order effects, the order of prime-voice pairings was counterbalanced across participants.

Within each block, participants were presented with a brief, written bio describing the speaker and asked to categorize a 14-step acoustic continuum of bilabial stops in the context of the low, back vowel /a/ (Casillas & Simonet, 2018; Gonzales et al., 2019; Gonzales & Lotto, 2013). Auditory stimuli were presented over participants' headphones or their device's internal speakers at a comfortable volume. On each trial, the written description of the speaker (serving as the social prime) remained visible as the auditory token was played. Participants indicated whether they heard /ba/ or /pa/ by selecting the corresponding on-screen button, concluding/ending that trial. The continuum steps were presented in random order, with each continuum labeled twice by participants, resulting in 28 trials per block and 56 trials total. Participants were offered a short break between blocks.

After completing the categorization of the auditory stimuli in both blocks, participants provided social evaluations of the speaker by responding to a series of open-ended and Likert-scale questions. The social prime for each speaker remained on the screen while participants completed evaluation of that speaker.

Procedure

Participants accessed the experiment online via an emailed link to the study website. All participants completed the study in one session. The average time to completion was 30 minutes. After consenting to participate, participants were presented with a written description of the procedure and instructions on how to get situated for the listening task (e.g., checking that they could clearly hear the audio output). Both the consent document and all written instructions to the experiment were provided in English. By keeping the language environment consistent, we hoped to establish English as participants' base language (Grosjean, 2001) such that only the written bio presented to them during testing could serve to activate a Spanish perceptual mode.

This method follows prior work testing the influence of information from outside the acoustic signal on bilingual speech perception (e.g. Gonzales et al., 2019). This study had three components that all participants completed in the following order: (1) a socially-primed phoneme categorization task and (2) a questionnaire regarding their impressions of the speakers they encountered during the experiment, and (3) a questionnaire about their language background and demographic information. They received a $20 digital gift card in exchange for their participation.

Analysis

Categorization responses

Through this statistical analysis, I assess whether brief, written bios–designed to incorporate local social factors that emerged through thematic analysis of interviews with Spanish-English bilingual members of Chicago's Mexican American community (see Chapter 3 'Results') as indexical of a speakers' language knowledge and significant to their choice of language–influence how participants, who were also members of that community categorized a bilabial stop continuum. Participants' phoneme categorization responses are binary in nature, reflecting the outcome of a two-alternative forced choice task. Accordingly, a mixed-effects logistic regression model of the data was run using R (R Core Team, 2023), examining participant response (/ba/ versus /pa/) as a function of continuum step number (a linear predictor), bio (English-indexing vs. Spanish-indexing), voice (Speaker A vs. B), and block (Block 1 vs. Block 2). Both voice and bio were categorical fixed effects while block (categorical) and continuum step number (linear) were included as control predictors. All categorical factors were sum-coded and continuum step number was centered. Likelihood ratio tests were employed in model comparisons to prevent overfitting and ensure model parsimony;

additional fixed effects of listening conditions (participant-reported noise level) were tested but did not significantly improve model fit. The maximum random effects structure supported by the study design was incorporated into all models to prevent overfitting (Bates et al., 2015). The final model predicted participant response based on bio, voice, centered continuum step number, and block, including a random intercept and slope for bio by participant.

A strong order effect was identified in the statistical model fit to the overall dataset, indicating that participants' responses in the second block were influenced by the social prime presented in the first block. To isolate the impact of social information on categorization, the data were divided by block, and a mixed-effects logistic regression was fitted to each subset separately. Participants' categorization response was the dependent variable, with centered continuum step number, bio (within each block, English-indexing vs. Spanish-indexing), and voice included as categorical fixed effects, and a random intercept for participants.

Social evaluations

To contextualize participants' evaluations of the continua, it is essential to understand how they socially evaluated each of the speakers. To identify the attributes along which social evaluations of the speakers significantly differed, I first conducted paired, two-tailed t-tests comparing participants' ratings of the speakers on each attribute tested in the semantic differential scales. This preliminary step ensured that subsequent linear models would only be tested on attributes where significant differences in speaker evaluations were observed, avoiding unnecessary modeling on attributes without meaningful variation. Among these attributes, participants' evaluations of the speakers' language background–specifically, their ratings of the 'Spanish speaker' attribute–were of particular interest. The two bios were designed to evoke significantly different expectations of the speakers' language knowledge, an effect that was

observed in the pilot study of the social primes (see the section 'Social Primes' above). After identifying which attributes significantly differed, a linear model of the data was run to examine the relationship between participant responses (e.g., ratings of speaker attributes) and factors such as bio (English vs. Spanish), voice (Speaker A vs. Speaker B), block (Block 1 vs. Block 2), and listener characteristics (e.g., ages of acquisition for English and Spanish, language dominance score, and familiarity with the locations mentioned in the bios). All categorical factors were sum-coded. Likelihood ratio tests were employed in model comparisons to prevent overfitting the data. Voice, block, and the tested listener characteristics did not emerge as significant in the models nor did they significantly improve model fit; consequently, they were removed from the models. The final models predicted participant response based on bio alone. Participants also provided open-ended impressions of the speakers, which were reviewed and assessed for patterns.

Predictions

Prior work with Spanish-English bilinguals has demonstrated that if they expect to hear Spanish, their probability of categorizing a given step on the /b-p/ continuum as phonemically voiceless (/p/) is higher than if they are expecting to hear English (e.g., Casillas & Simonet, 2018; Garcia-Sierra et al., 2009; Gonzales et al., 2019). This corresponds to cross-linguistic differences in how the bilabial stops (/b/ and /p/) are produced. These studies illustrate that listeners' categorization of speech tokens is influenced by their expectations about the language being spoken; although the acoustic-phonetic signal remains unchanged, their interpretation of this information is shaped by socially-cued expectations. I predict, therefore, that if participants draw on social information in formulating expectations of what language(s) an interlocutor will speak, the locally-informed social primes will significantly affect how participants characterize

the stop continua. Specifically, I predict that if a participant is presented with a prime that reflects social factors they ideologically associate with Spanish language use, they will demonstrate more Spanish-like perception of the continuum, with their identification curve exhibiting a category boundary at lower VOT values than those typical for English. I thus expect a significant effect of social prime in the overall model predicting the probability of a 'pa' response at each step in the continua. Additionally, given a large body of work demonstrating that language background, experience, and patterns of use influence bilingual language processing and perception (e.g., De Bruin, 2019), I expect that these factors will also shape how participants categorize steps on the continua. Finally, given that no significant differences were found in how the voices were socially evaluated during norming (see the section 'Norming Study for Auditory Stimuli' above), I do not predict a significant effect of voice in the overall model.

Results

Socially-primed phoneme categorization

The overall model showed a main effect of block but no significant main effects of bio, voice, or centered continuum step number alone (Table 13). Notably, the interaction between block and bio was significant, while the interaction between bio and voice was not. The interaction between bio and block indicates that the effect of a bio on participants' phoneme categorization was modulated by the block in which they encountered it. Specifically, when participants saw an English-indexing bio in the initial block, they were overall more likely to categorize a continuum step as "ba" in both blocks, reflecting more English-like identification of the continua. Conversely, if the first bio participants encountered was Spanish-indexing, they exhibited a greater likelihood of categorizing a given continuum step as "pa," reflecting more Spanish-like perception throughout the task. These findings support my prediction that the

Spanish and English-indexing bios would cue different listener expectations and, consequently, modulate categorization of the continua. They are also consistent with prior work that has demonstrated the influence of social information on speech perception (e.g., D'Onofrio, 2019; McGowan, 2015; Niedzielski, 1999).

Notably, however, the final model reveals a significant effect for the interaction of bio and block but not for bio alone. This result suggests that the expectations established by the first bio had a persistent influence on participants' categorization throughout the task even after they encountered new, potentially conflicting social information in the second block (i.e., the second bio). This persistent influence of initial social information diverges from my original hypothesis that participants would demonstrate more Spanish-like perception when they were presented with the Spanish-indexing bio, regardless of the block in which this prime was encountered. I hypothesized the converse would entail for those exposed to the English-indexing bio, again regardless of block. It aligns, however, with findings in studies of speech perception which demonstrate that initial contextual cues can establish a perceptual frame or baseline expectation that influences responses in subsequent trials (e.g., Kraljic et al., 2008; Magnuson & Nusbaum, 2007; McGowan and Babel, 2020).

In addition to the significance of the interaction between bio and block, there was also a main effect of block. Independent of bio, participants were overall more likely to characterize a step on the continuum as "pa" in the second block than the first. The interaction between block and bio presentation order (i.e., first bio) was not significant and did not significantly improve model fit. These findings suggest that, while the initial social context set by the first bio had a lasting effect on participants' categorization patterns, other factors, such as adaptation or

increased familiarity with the task, may have biased participants toward more "pa" responses as the task progressed.

A visual examination of Figure 6 illustrates the influence of bio and block on participants' categorization responses. In the first block (B1), those exposed to the Spanish-indexing bio showed more Spanish-like perception, as indicated by the curve's positioning at higher mean probabilities of "Pa" responses. Conversely, participants who encountered the English-indexing bio in the first block exhibited more English-like perception, with the curve positioned at significantly lower mean probabilities of "Pa" responses. These findings are reflected in the statistical model for this subset of the data, where bio appears as the only significant predictor of categorization (Table 14). The directionality of this effect suggests that exposure to a Spanish-indexing bio in this block results in more Spanish-like categorization of the continua.

In the second block (B2), the initial perceptual frame established by the first bio continued to shape participants' responses, resulting in an apparent reversal of the effect observed in the first block. Participants initially exposed to the Spanish-linked bio continued to exhibit more Spanish-like perception in the second block, even when presented with the English-indexing bio; the converse was true for those who saw the English-indexing bio first. Furthermore, in the second block, participants were generally more likely to categorize a continuum step as "Pa" regardless of the bio presented. This main effect of block is evident in the shift of both identification curves toward higher probabilities of "Pa" (Figure 6) and the statistical model for this subset of the data (Table 15). The enduring influence of the first bio participants encountered means that responses to the Spanish-indexing bio in Block 2 appear more English-like (i.e., lower "pa" probabilities) as compared to the English-indexing bio within

the same block. Yet, when compared to their within-condition counterpart (i.e., the English-linked bio from the first block), the identification curve can be seen to reflect a shift toward a greater likelihood of "pa" responses, illustrating the effect of block. These findings suggest that the initial social context had a lasting effect on perception, while additional factors in the task may have progressively biased participants toward more "pa" categorizations over time.

Table 13. *Model for the analysis of probability of a participant responding that they heard "pa" on a given step in the continua. Formula: Response ~ CenteredStepNum + Bio x Block + Bio x Voice + (Bio/Participant Id).*

Fixed Effects	Estimate	Std. Error	z value	p-value
(Intercept)	-0.99	0.18	-5.45	5.03e-08***
CenteredStepNum	-0.008	0.013	-0.62	0.54
Bio [Span]	0.078	0.15	0.53	0.60
Block [B2]	-0.43	0.15	-2.90	3.72e-03**
Voice [Speaker B]	0.098	0.15	0.67	0.50
Bio [Span]:Block [B2]	-0.79	0.18	-4.30	1.77e-05***
Bio [Span]:Voice [Speaker B]	0.21	0.18	1.16	0.25

***p < 0.001

Table 14. *Model for the analysis of probability of a participant responding that they heard "pa" on a given step in the continua in Block 1. Formula: Response ~Bio + (1|Participant Id).*

| Fixed Effects	Estimate	Std. Error	z value	p-value
Intercept	-1.94	0.32	-6.14	8.32e-10***
Bio [Span]	1.19	0.40	2.98	2.91e-3***

***p < 0.001

Table 15. *Model for the analysis of probability of a participant responding that they heard "pa" on a given step in the continua in Block 2. Formula: Response ~Bio + (1|Participant Id).*

Fixed Effects	Estimate	Std. Error	z value	p-value
Intercept	0.22	0.33	0.67	0.50
Bio [Span]	-1.68	0.51	-3.32	9.11e-4***

***p < 0.001

Interestingly, neither step number nor voice significantly predicted participants' categorization responses. Based on previous findings (e.g., Gonzales et al., 2019), I expected participants to be more likely to respond "ba" at lower or more negative VOTs (i.e., pre-voiced tokens) and "pa" at higher or more positive VOTs (i.e., voicing lag tokens), regardless of the social prime presented. Near the phoneme category boundary, where perceptual discriminability is argued to be heightened (e.g., Pisoni, 1997; Holt et al., 2004), I anticipated a nonlinear perceptual pattern (e.g., Hay, 2005; McGowan and Babel, 2020) reflective of a gradient shift in categorization (e.g., McMurray, 2022). This nonlinearity would represent the transition from predominantly "ba" to predominantly "pa" responses, consistent with the sigmoidal response curves found in similar categorization tasks (e.g., Dibbern and D'Onofrio, 2023; Gonzales et al., 2019). However, the observed probability function remained relatively flat across the continua, lacking the expected nonlinearity (Figure 6). This pattern is more consistent with within-category perception, suggesting that the acoustic differences between tokens did not significantly influence participants' categorization. Additionally, voice did not emerge as a significant factor in these analyses, indicating that speaker characteristics read from the voice did not have a significant impact on categorization.

Figure 6: *Probability of a 'Pa' response, considered by Block (Block 1 or 2) and the written prime (bio likely to cue expectation of Spanish or English)*

Probability of Pa Response
Considered by block and bio shown (English or Spanish-indexing)
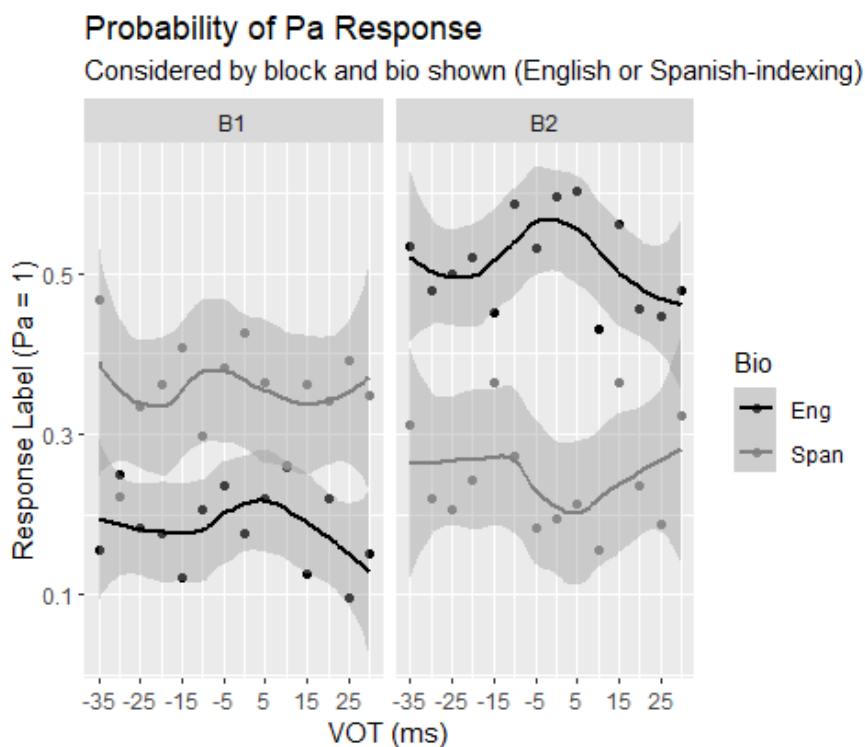
Note. The lines are loess regression fits with standard errors shown in shadings.

Social evaluations

Following the categorization task, participants were asked to rate how well certain characteristics described each speaker on a series of 7-point semantic differential scales. Significant differences were observed for three characteristics: Spanish-speaker, affluence, and coolness (Table 16). Participants rated the characteristic "Spanish-speaker" as better describing the speaker (t(40) = -2.4, p-value = 0.023) significantly more often when they were paired with the bio socially indexing Spanish language knowledge and/or use than when they *were* paired with the bio indexing English. On average, speakers paired with the English bio were rated approximately 0.90 points lower on this characteristic than those paired with the

Spanish-indexing bio. Similarly, when paired with the English-indexing bio, speakers were rated

significantly more affluent (t(40) = 2.9, p = 0.0063) and cool (t(40) = 2.7, p = 0.0093) than when

they were paired with the Spanish-indexing bio. Neither voice nor presentation order (i.e.,

block) emerged as significant factors in participants' ratings of these characteristics; measures of

participants' language experience (i.e., ages of acquisition, language dominance score) were also

not predictive. The only fixed effect that emerged as significant was bio, explaining 7.78% of the

variance in participants' ratings of this factor (Table 17).

Table 16. *Ratings on seven-point semantic differential scales for the speakers presented in the phoneme categorization task.*

Seven-point Likert scale (1 = left term, 7 = right term)	Bio indexing English language knowledge	Bio indexing Spanish language knowledge
*(p < .05), **(p<0.01)	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)
Not attractive – Attractive	5.22 (1.28)	5.00 (1.39)
Not friendly – Friendly	5.27 (1.25)	5.32 (1.36)
Casual – Formal	4.90 (1.60)	5.05 (1.67)
Not confident – Confident	5.15 (1.17)	5.20 (1.39)
Not affluent – Affluent**	5.29 (1.26)	4.59 (1.33)
Not warm – Warm	5.02 (1.23)	4.98 (1.39)
Not intelligent – Intelligent	5.07 (1.26)	5.17 (1.25)
Not feminine – Feminine	5.07 (1.66)	4.95 (1.57)
Not Spanish-speaker – Spanish-speaker*	4.78 (1.27)	5.68 (1.82)
Not enthusiastic – Enthusiastic	4.90 (1.61)	4.73 (1.59)
Not cool – Cool**	5.29 (1.17)	4.68 (1.29)
Not American – American	5.59 (1.52)	5.05 (1.41)
Not educated – Educated	5.02 (1.15)	4.85 (1.31)
Nativelike – Not Nativelike (Accented)	4.95 (1.23)	5.20 (1.87)

Table 17. *Model for the analysis of participants' ratings of the factor "Spanish-speaker." Formula: SpanSpeakerRating ~Bio*

Fixed Effects	Estimate	Std. Error	z value	p-value
Intercept	4.78	0.25	19.46	<2e-16***
Bio [Span]	0.90	0.35	2.60	0.011*

***p < 0.001

Participants also provided open-ended impressions of the speakers. Responses echoed how they evaluated speakers on the semantic differential scales. Their responses indicate that they perceived the individual described in the Spanish bio as a Latine, Spanish-English bilingual with ties to Pilsen's Mexican American community; this assumption was often grounded in the speakers' presence within Pilsen. For example, when asked to describe what else someone might assume about the speaker given what they knew from the bio, participants emphasized that they were likely a local resident or regular visitor with ties to the Pilsen community (14 out of 40). Describing these expectations, one participant shared that:

> Dado que lo has visto varias veces en la misma tienda de comestibles, siempre acompañado de una mujer mayor, es posible que la gente asuma que este hombre es local de la zona y probablemente tenga fuertes lazos comunitarios en Pilsen. Su presencia regular en la tienda sugiere que es un residente activo y conocido en la comunidad. [Given that you have seen him several times in the same grocery store, always accompanied by an older woman, people may assume that this man is local to the area and probably has strong community ties to Pilsen. His regular presence in the store suggests that he's an active and well-known resident in the community.]

Comments in this vein reflect participants' awareness of Pilsen as a Latine-majority community within Chicago. For example, another participant remarked that "[being]at a local grocery store in Pilsen, a neighborhood in Chicago known for its vibrant Latino community, people might assume that the man has ties to the community. This could suggest that he either lives in the neighborhood or has cultural connections to the area." Yet another stated that they might assume "[where the speaker is] from since Pilsen is a predominantly Hispanic community," linking the neighborhood's identity as a Mexican-origin community to the speakers' presumed Mexican heritage. Similarly, a participant commented that "one might assume that this person is likely bilingual in English and Spanish, culturally connected to the Mexican or Mexican American community due to shopping in Pilsen." This last comment is also reflective of how participants' responses to this question tended to incorporate mention of the speakers' language background (6 out of 40). Similar to their inference of the speakers' Latine identity, participants often grounded assumptions of speakers' language knowledge in their presence within Pilsen, sometimes highlighting that they were within a local grocery store.

Participants' perception of the speaker described in the Spanish-indexing bio as someone with Spanish language knowledge is supported by their comments when asked what language(s) they believed this individual had been speaking during the phoneme categorization task. Over two-thirds of participants (27 out of 40) indicated that the individual described in the Spanish-linked bio had been speaking Spanish. This group was nearly evenly split between those who encountered the bio in Block 1 (12 out of 27) and those who saw it in Block 2 (15 out of 27). Nearly all (24 out of 27) believed the speaker was exclusively using Spanish, while the remaining 3 participants thought the speaker might be mixing English and Spanish. In sharing what gave them the impression that the speaker spoke Spanish, the most frequently cited reasons

were: (1) Spanish phonetic features (22 out of 27); (2) the older woman with whom they were shopping (10 out of 27); and (3) the locale and/or the individuals' perceived membership in the Pilsen community (8 out of 27). Some responses cited all or a combination of these factors. As one participant explained, "The person's pronunciation and intonation sounded like Spanish, and they were shopping with the older lady, probably to help her translate or buy items. In addition, I also noticed that they had seen this store before, so they might be local residents." Consonant with these remarks, in the first block, participants presented with the Spanish-linked bio were more likely to respond "pa" to any given continuum step, indicating more Spanish-like perception than those presented with the English-linked bio.

Importantly, while many participants reported perceiving Spanish or Spanish-accented speech, voice (Speaker A or Speaker B) was not significantly predictive of how they characterized the continua nor how they socially-evaluated the speakers. The same voice was perceived to reflect Spanish phonetic features when paired with the Spanish-indexing bio and English ones when paired with the English-indexing bio. Exemplifying these diverging perceptions, when paired with the English bio, Speaker B was described as "a student or young professional, possibly attending a nearby university or working in the area" who was speaking English based on the belief that "Starbucks is a globally recognized coffee chain, but in an English-speaking country like the United States, it's primarily associated with English-speaking customers." When paired with the Spanish-indexing bio, however, Speaker B was assumed to be speaking Spanish because "his accent and intonation sounded like Spanish, and I heard him talking to the lady in Spanish. Also, they were shopping at a local grocery store, and Spanish is a common local language in Pilsen." Similarly, when paired with the English-indexing bio, Speaker A was perceived as an English-speaking "American" because they are "young, in

Starbucks and downtown." When paired with the Spanish-indexing bio, however, they were perceived as a Spanish-speaking "Mexican" because "their pronunciation and intonation sound like Spanish." Overall, participants were 62% more likely to perceive a speaker paired with the English-indexing bio as having spoken English (21 out of 40) compared to one paired with the Spanish-indexing bio (13 out of 40) regardless of voice.

This contrast aligned with participants' descriptions of what, given the information in the English-indexing bio, someone might assume about the speaker. Their responses indicate that they perceived the individual described in the English-indexing bio as a young professional or college student of relatively high socioeconomic status; these perceptions were often grounded in the speakers' locale. As one participant shared, "Being at Starbucks in the Loop, a busy area often associated with professionals and tourists, people might assume that this person is relatively well-off or at least can afford Starbucks, which is considered a bit upscale compared to some other coffee shops." Interestingly, participants made more frequent reference to the speakers' assumed occupation and/or socioeconomic status (10 out of 40) when evaluating the English-indexing bio than the Spanish-indexing bio (2 out of 40). They were also more likely to describe personality traits of the speaker when evaluating the English-indexing bio (13 out of 40) than when evaluating the Spanish-indexing one (6 out of 40). The adjectives used also differed. When paired with the English-indexing bio, the speakers were described as: "refined", "a talkative person who likes to communicate", "experienced and mature", "patient", "sociable", and "confident." By contrast, when paired with the Spanish-indexing bio, the speakers were described as: "[having] a strong sense of familial responsibility", "polite", "respectful", "caring", and "stable."

As noted above, a majority of participants believed that speakers paired with the English-indexing bio had spoken English during the categorization task. Explaining this perception, participants drew on the locale mentioned in the English-indexing bio, saying, "The interaction takes place in the Loop, which is a predominantly English-speaking area, especially in the context of a Starbucks, where English is the primary language of communication." Echoing this sentiment, another participant shared that "Starbucks is a globally recognized coffee chain, but in an English-speaking country like the United States, it's primarily associated with English-speaking customers." Overall, approximately 53% of participants (21 out of 40) indicated that the speaker had been speaking English. Of these, nearly all (18 out of 21) believed the speaker was exclusively using English, while the remaining 3 participants thought the speaker might be mixing English and Spanish. In sharing what motivated their impression that the speaker was using English, the most frequently cited reasons were: (1) English phonetic features (10 out of 21); (2) the locale (7 out of 27); and (3) the speakers' reported age (3 out of 27). Consistent with these social evaluations, in the first block, participants were more likely to respond "ba" to any given continuum step when presented with the English-indexing bio, indicating a more English-like boundary than when presented with the Spanish-indexing bio.

Interestingly, when evaluating the speaker paired with the English-indexing bio, many participants still reported the perception that the speaker was Latine and/or of Mexican origin (25 out of 40) though fewer did so than when the speaker was paired with the Spanish-linked bio (30 out of 40). Correspondingly, the speaker was reported to be White (12 out of 40) or another ethnicity (3 out of 40) more often when paired with the English-indexing bio than the Spanish-indexing one (10 out of 40). Fisher's Exact test was used to compare the distributions of this categorical variable (perceived race) and found a significant difference in how the speaker was

racialized based on the bio shown (p = 0.022). While some participants believed the speaker

paired with the English-indexing bio to be Latine, this did not necessarily entail the perception of

Spanish language use by that speaker. Indeed, approximately 30% of participants (7 out of 25)

who characterized the speaker as Latine also indicated that they believed the speaker to be using

English. One participant reporting this expectation asserted that the speaker was "probably some

no sabo Edgar." They characterized the speakers' language as "English trying to inject a Spanish

accent from [their] household," drawing on a "stereotype of Gen Z kids that barely speak

Spanish nowadays" to motivate this description. The association of the "Edgar" persona with

low or no proficiency in Spanish contrasts with Fernando's description of an "Edgar" as

someone with whom he would expect to use Spanish due to their limited proficiency in English,

emphasizing the multifaceted and situated nature of linguistic ideologies.

Summary of Results

In summary, I observed that the English and Spanish-indexing bios shaped participants'

characterization of the continua, supporting the influence of local social meanings on bilingual

speech perception in alignment with my hypotheses. Importantly, in the overall model,

participants' categorization responses in both blocks were significantly modulated by the first bio

they encountered during the task. This finding, while diverging from my initial predictions,

accords with observations that initial contextual cues can have an enduring effect on perception

(e.g., Kraljic et al., 2008). Block also emerged as a significant main effect in the overall model,

with participants more likely to characterize a step on the continuum as "pa" in the second block

than the first. In the model of data from just the first block, which offers insight into the effect of

bio on perception absent the order effects observed in the overall model, participants' responses

were significantly predicted by bio (within block) in the expected direction. Specifically,

encountering a Spanish-indexing bio predicted more Spanish-like categorization of the continua and vice versa for the English-indexing bio. This finding accords with my hypothesis and supports theoretical frameworks positing a role for social information in bilingual language control (e.g., Green and Abutalebi, 2013; Grosjean, 2001).

In their social evaluations of the two speakers, participants rated the characteristic "Spanish-speaker" as better describing the speaker significantly more often when they were paired with the bio socially indexing Spanish language knowledge and/or use than when they were paired with the bio indexing English; their narrative responses also showed similar patterns. The block in which participants encountered a bio did not significantly predict their explicit social evaluations of it. Notably, however, those who saw the Spanish-indexing bio first also exhibited more Spanish-like perception in the second block despite being presented with the English-indexing bio in that block. This finding indicates that, in the second block, participants' explicit social evaluations of the speakers (i.e., their narratives and ratings on the semantic differential scales) may have diverged from their implicit ones (i.e., their responses on the categorization task), lending support for theoretical frameworks positing different levels of awareness in the perception of language/sociolinguistic perception (e.g., D'Onofrio, 2018; McGowan and Babel, 2020).

Discussion

This study used brief written bios to test whether local social meanings would prompt language-specific perceptual processing strategies in bilingual listeners. Results demonstrate that the bios significantly affected how continua were categorized, supporting the significance of the local social meanings they reflected to bilingual speech perception (e.g., Niedzielski, 1999). Overall, participants' categorization of the continua in both blocks was shaped by

whichever bio they encountered first. In the first block, therefore, participants demonstrated a more Spanish-like identification boundary when presented with a bio indexing Spanish language knowledge and/or use; the converse was true for the English bio. These expectations persisted in the second block, resulting in an apparent reversal of the directionality of the effect of bio observed in the first block and suggesting the lasting impact of initial social information on perception (e.g., McGowan and Babel, 2020). In the following discussion, I consider the implications of these two findings in greater detail.

Local social meanings modulated participants' expectations for which language(s) an interlocutor would speak, shaping their perception of that interlocutor's speech. This finding, evinced most clearly in participants' categorization of the continua in the first block, aligns with Titone and Tiv's (2022) Systems Framework of Bilingualism which emphasizes the importance of social context to understanding of bilingual language use. They propose that "interdependent layers of sociolinguistic context iteratively and reciprocally impact" bilinguals' language use, development, and cognition (ibid., p.5). With the bilingual individual at their core, these layers radiate outwards, building from sociolinguistic experiences at the interpersonal level (Interpersonal Language Dynamics) through broader ecological and societal contexts (Ecological and Societal Language Dynamics) to, at the largest scale, developmental and historical ones (Temporal Language Dynamics). Crucially, the interdependence of these layers suggests a permeability that allows for dynamic interactions across different scales. This permeability becomes evident in how the local social meanings within the written bios in this study were both shaped by and interpretable within broader US discourses on Spanish language use. Broader societal ideologies—shaped by factors like immigration policy, media representations, and long-standing tensions surrounding bilingualism in the U.S.—permeate both community-level

practices and interpersonal interactions. Thus, these layers of sociolinguistic context are not easily separable or isolated. Rather, they dynamically interact, with societal-level ideologies filtering down to influence local language ideologies and practices while community and individual behaviors simultaneously contribute to broader linguistic patterns and discourses. The finding that local social meanings impacted bilingual language processing in this study therefore highlights the need for further research into how each of these different layers of sociolinguistic context act and interact to shape bilingual language processing.

Notably, significant order effects were also observed such that how participants categorized the continua across both blocks (where each block had a unique pairing of voice and bio) was shaped by the first bio they saw. These results suggest that the first bio participants encountered established a perceptual frame or low-level phonetic expectation that continued to influence their categorization across both blocks (e.g., McGowan and Babel, 2020). McGowan and Babel (2020) report similar findings on a matched guise vowel discrimination task where guise was manipulated within-subject. Bolivian Spanish listeners' discrimination accuracy was measured using an AXB perception task in which they categorized front ([i]-[e]) and back ([u]-[o]) vowel continua. The primary manipulation was guise, with listeners told the person they heard was either a native Spanish or Quechua speaker. Importantly, participants were exposed to both guises in this within-subjects experimental design, completing both Spanish and Quechua speaker guise blocks. McGowan and Babel observed that, while participants' explicit social evaluations of the voice shifted upon presentation of the second guise, their implicit evaluations did not appear to change. Participants qualitatively stated that they heard a difference between the first and second speakers but, in their responses on the discrimination task, continued to respond as they had in the first guise. McGowan and Babel attribute this divergence between

participants' implicit and explicit evaluations of the second guise to "different 'levels' or qualities of awareness" (ibid., p. 21), suggesting that participants' responses on the discrimination task reflect more implicit or automatic reactions.

In the present study, while voice was manipulated between blocks, results from the norming study indicate that, without the influence of bio, there were no significant differences in how the voices were socially evaluated. Additionally, participants' explicit evaluations of the speakers, as reflected in their narrative responses and ratings on the semantic differential scales, were not significantly predicted by block. In other words, participants were consistently more likely to explicitly evaluate the individual described in the Spanish-indexing bio as a Spanish-speaker, regardless of whether they encountered this bio in the first or second block. While participants' stated expectations and categorization responses aligned in the first block, they diverged in the second, a pattern that echoes McGowan and Babel's findings (2020). This suggests that listeners perceived the two voices as highly similar. Thus, even when presented with new information (i.e., the second bio), the initial social cues (i.e., the first bio) continued to shape perception throughout the task. These observations are consistent with theoretical frameworks that posit different levels of awareness in the perception of social information (e.g., D'Onofrio, 2018; McGowan and Babel, 2020). One possible interpretation of the findings, therefore, is that participants' written social evaluations correspond to the explicit expectations prompted by the bio they most recently encountered during the experiment. The implicit expectations they formed upon encountering the first bio, however, were persistent, shaping their categorization of the continua in both blocks.

The finding that, within the first block, the written bios significantly modulated how participants characterized the continua also aligns with prior research demonstrating that socially

derived expectations can significantly shape speech perception (e.g., Molnar et al., 2015).

McGowan (2015), for example, found that congruence between the acoustic signal and listeners'

socially cued expectations for a talkers' speech improved transcription accuracy of Chinese-

accented speech in noise. Similarly, Strand (1999) showed that visual cues to a speaker's gender

affected how listeners categorized a continuum of speech sounds, shifting their category

boundary between /s/ and /ʃ/ to accord with a speakers' perceived gender. In this study, the

written bio engendered expectations for speakers' language background and/or use, leading

participants to perceive the speech signal in alignment with those expectations.

Interestingly, not all participants ascribed their expectations for a speaker's language

knowledge and/or use to the same source. Many participants explained that their conclusions

about what language(s) the speaker was using were based on what they heard in the speakers'

productions. Voice, however, does not significantly predict how participants characterize the

continua (Tables 13-15) nor how they socially evaluate the speakers (Table 17). It is, rather,

written bio that significantly predicts participants responses during the phoneme categorization

task and on the semantic differential scales. These findings suggest that participants' perception

that the speaker from the Spanish bio pronounced "Pa and Ba [in a way that] sounds more

Spanish" derive from a socially cued expectation of Spanish language knowledge and/or use. In

other words, primed by the written bio, participants expected to hear Spanish and, consequently,

perceived the speech signal to reflect the acoustic-phonetic characteristics they associate with

Spanish language use, even though Spanish was not explicitly mentioned anywhere in the

bio. The written bio, therefore, may have primed participants' attention to Spanish phonetic

features, effectively heightening the salience of these cues. Alternatively, consistent with the

predictions of exemplar models (e.g., Johnson, 2006), the social information within the bio may

have increased the activation of Spanish episodic memory traces and biased their perception of incoming speech.

As noted above, however, not all participants described relying on the speech signal (a bottom-up approach) to assess what language(s) a speaker would use. Some attributed their expectations to information in the written prime, reflecting a more top-down integration of social information into speech perception. Comments suggestive of this top-down approach frequently highlighted specific aspects of the bio and/or additional inferences based thereupon as the source(s) of their expectations for a speaker's language use. Explaining why they believed the speaker (paired with the Spanish-indexing bio) to be speaking Spanish, one participant said, "they are in a grocery store in Pilsen where most cashiers speak Spanish," while another explained that their decision was motivated by "the neighborhood and older individual they're with." Both comments center social information from outside the speech signal, indicating that local language ideologies and practices informed participants' expectations for the language(s) the speaker would use. That top-down sources of information can shape speech perception in bilinguals aligns with prior work showing that conceptual cues to language spoken influenced how bilingual listeners categorized stop continua (Gonzales et al., 2019).

The observed variation in participants' stated reason(s) for their beliefs about a speakers' language knowledge and/or use during the listening task reflects studies of cue weighting in bilingual perception (e.g., Abutalebi and Clahsen, 2023) which highlight how bilinguals prioritize different types of information when making language decisions. Variation in what participants described attending to during the listening task also echoes variation in how participants in the interviews (see Chapter 3 'Discussion') described deciding what language(s) to use. While all interview participants positioned the language selection process as dynamic

and context-sensitive, with many factors integrating to determine their expectations for an interlocutors' language knowledge and their own language use, some participants emphasized their attention to acoustic-phonetic cues. Oscar, for example, shared that, in an effort to center interlocutor comfort, he tries "to pay attention" and "perceive if there's an accent," particularly one that he "can identify into some Spanish speaking accent." Others, like Fernando, described attending to visually read aspects like an interlocutor's style of dress.

Conclusion

Prior work has demonstrated that explicit, conceptual cues to the language being spoken can prompt perceptual shifts in bilinguals, aligning perception with their expectations of the language spoken (e.g., Gonzales et al., 2019), and theorized the relevance of social information to bilinguals' language control processes (e.g., Grosjean, 2001; Green and Abutalebi, 2013). Recent work has emphasized the need for greater understanding of how bilinguals' local social contexts impact bilinguals' language use and processing. Specifically, Kroll et al. (2022) call for "the use of qualitative methods (e.g., collecting conversational and interview data) to measure sociolinguistic variables in a more nuanced manner: in particular, variables that are sensitive to the contextual factors (e.g., ethnic identity, interactional context)" (p. 18). The current study investigated whether community-grounded social meanings would shape participants' expectations for what language(s) an interlocutor will speak and, consequently, their activation of language-specific processing. While prior studies have tested the influence of picture (e.g. Li et al., 2013), video (e.g. Molnar et al., 2015), and written (e.g. Gonzales et al., 2019) cues to language spoken, the use of a brief written description of an interlocutor that incorporates local social meanings informed by an understanding of community-based linguistic ideologies is unique to this work. In this way, the social primes used in this experiment test the

influence of localized social meanings on participants' expectations for and perceptions of an interlocutor's speech.

Results demonstrate that bio significantly affected how the continua were categorized, with participants exhibiting more Spanish-like identification when first presented with a bio indexing Spanish language knowledge and/or use. Local social meanings, therefore, modulated participants' expectations for which language(s) an interlocutor would speak and, consequently, shaped their perception of interlocutors' speech. These findings have significant implications for our understanding of bilingual language processing and use. By demonstrating that local social meanings can shape perceptual processing strategies, this study highlights the importance of considering sociolinguistic context in bilingualism research. It suggests that bilinguals do not only rely on acoustic-phonetic cues but also draw on social information to navigate their language use. This aligns with the Systems Framework of Bilingualism, which emphasizes the dynamic interaction between various layers of sociolinguistic context. Moreover, that the first bio influenced participants' categorization of speech sounds across the entire experiment–despite new social information being provided in the second block–suggests that the initial social information listeners receive about a speaker may be particularly impactful in shaping their expectations and subsequent language perception (e.g., Kraljic et al., 2008). Finally, that participants' characterization responses in the second block reflect divergent expectations from those they asserted in their qualitative evaluations of the speaker (e.g., narrative responses and ratings on the semantic differential scales) supports assertions of different levels of awareness in the perception of sociolinguistic information (e.g., D'Onofrio, 2018; McGowan and Babel, 2020). Overall, these results contribute to a more nuanced understanding of bilingual language processing, emphasizing the intersectionality, fluidity, and locality of bilinguals' language use.

They also highlight the importance of considering locally-grounded social and contextual factors in investigations of bilinguals' language processing and use, moving beyond traditional categories for bilingual language experience to acknowledge the situatedness and complexity of bilinguals' language use.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

This dissertation examined how local social meanings shape language selection and control in bilinguals. The investigation was organized into three, interrelated studies. In the first study, semi-structured interviews with Mexican American, Spanish-English bilinguals from Chicago's Pilsen neighborhood were used to identify, in an emergent and locally grounded way, the social meanings that bilinguals believe guide their expectations for which language(s) are needed in an interaction (Study 1). Drawing on insights from these interviews, the second study evaluated the effectiveness of structured, written questionnaires in measuring bilinguals' language experience, with a particular focus on how well these instruments captured the social contexts of bilinguals' language use (Study 2). Finally, the third study employed a socially primed phoneme categorization task to test the influence of local, community-grounded social factors on bilinguals' speech perception (Study 3). This final study sought to elucidate how localized social meanings are engaged in the cognitive processes that govern language switching in bilinguals. Findings from all three studies support the significance of localized social meanings to bilingual language processing and use, suggesting that these meanings modulate bilinguals' expectations for what language(s) an interlocutor will speak and, consequently, their activation of language-specific task schema (e.g., Green and Abutalebi, 2013).

In the interviews (Study 1), participants described language choice as a dynamic process that is influenced by a variety of socio-contextual factors. Localized social meanings shaped how participants perceived interlocutors' language knowledge and, relatedly, the appropriateness of a language to the context. Four key themes emerged from participants' accounts: 1) language selection is a fluid and highly contextualized process; 2) locality conditions language use; 3) Spanish is expected within Pilsen; and 4) Spanish helps to define and construct community. The

first theme reflects accounts describing language choice as context dependent, guided by diverse cues. The second theme emphasizes that place—in a physical and social sense—is an important factor in language selection. The third theme captures participants' reflections on Spanish language use in Pilsen's public spaces, portraying it as both an unremarkable and integral aspect of everyday life within the community. Finally, the fourth theme comprises accounts of Spanish as a language of authentication and resistance that allows for the affirmation and maintenance of community boundaries in the face of ongoing gentrification in the neighborhood. Together, these findings demonstrate the importance of local, community-level context to bilingual language use and highlight the dynamic and context-dependent nature of language selection.

The second study revealed that, while questionnaires are an efficient way to systematically collect self-reported data on bilinguals' language history and use, they are constrained in the depth of knowledge they can elicit and may omit or obscure important aspects of the social dimensions of bilinguals' language use. For example, categories like "work" or "social setting" oversimplify the contexts in which bilinguals navigate the use of their languages, failing to account for how local factors such as community identities, practices, and shifting demographics may affect language use. Thus, while language experience questionnaires are useful, I argue that future research must leverage insights from qualitative, locally-grounded studies of bilingual communities to refine these quantitative measures so that they better capture the complexity of bilinguals' experiences.

The third study, which employed a socially primed phoneme categorization task, demonstrated how local social meanings influence speech perception. Social primes were brief speaker bios that incorporated attributes, as determined by Study 1, that were locally indexical of either English or Spanish language use. Primes were found to significantly modulate how

participants responded during the phoneme categorization task. In the first block, a Spanish-indexing bio led to more Spanish-like categorization of the continua, while an English-indexing bio predicted English-like categorization. This finding supports the influence of local social meanings on bilingual language processing, consistent with both theoretical frameworks for bilingual language control (e.g., Grosjean, 2001) and empirical studies that demonstrate how social cues shape speech perception (e.g., D'Onofrio, 2018; McGowan & Babel, 2020). A main effect of block was also observed in the overall model, with participants more likely to categorize a stimulus as "pa" in the second block than the first, suggesting that factors like perceptual adaptation or increased familiarity with the task may have biased participants more toward "pa" responses as the task progressed. Interestingly, participants' explicit social evaluations of the speakers (i.e., written comments and speaker ratings) were not significantly modulated by block, aligning with the bio they saw regardless of when they encountered it. The same was not true for participants' categorization of the continua, however. Notably, participants who saw the Spanish-indexing bio first exhibited more Spanish-like perception throughout the study, despite the presentation of an English-indexing bio in the second block. The converse was true for those who saw the English-indexing bio first. The divergence between participants' explicit social evaluations and implicit perceptual responses in the second block aligns with frameworks that theorize different levels of awareness in sociolinguistic perception (Campbell-Kibler, 2016; D'Onofrio, 2019; K. B. McGowan & Babel, 2020).

In this chapter, I consider the implications of these findings for the understanding of bilingual language control and the assessment of bilingual language experience. I also address the limitations of this work, particularly regarding my positionality as a researcher, and highlight opportunities for future research.

Implications and Future Work

The findings from these studies support the significance of local social meanings to bilinguals' language use, suggesting that local social context is not merely peripheral variation but, rather, an important dimension of bilingual experience that can impact bilingual language processing and control. Seminal theories of bilingual language control (e.g., Grosjean, 2001; Green and Abutalebi, 2013) postulate that social information integrates with factors like language proficiency to modulate the activation levels of bilinguals' languages; they do not, however, determine precisely what facets of bilinguals' social experience are relevant to these processes. The present findings begin to address this gap by offering evidence that locally-situated social meanings—such as associations between language use and certain locales or identities—influence bilinguals' language processing (Study 3) and use (Study 1).

As this dissertation focuses on just one bilingual community, however, many dimensions of bilinguals' social experiences have yet to be explored. These unexamined facets hold the potential to deepen our understanding of how social information influences bilingual language processing and control. Future research that adopts a comparative approach—replicating this work in other bilingual communities—would enable researchers to identify not only the unique language ideologies, practices, and patterns of use within each community, but also the shared elements that may be consistent across bilingual contexts. Studies of Mexican American communities throughout the U.S. (e.g., Galindo, 1996), for instance, reveal regional variation in linguistic ideologies. Investigating whether these ideological differences also correspond to differences in how bilinguals process, control, and negotiate the use of their languages would offer valuable insights. By identifying the facets of social experience—such as cultural norms, local practices or identities—that consistently shape bilinguals' language use, researchers can

gain a clearer picture of how social information is integrated into the cognitive mechanisms underlying bilingual language control.

This knowledge would also inform the development of more comprehensive assessments of bilingual experience. As discussed in Chapter 4, the field has not yet reached a consensus on how best to measure bilingual language experience or language dominance. While there is growing recognition of the role that social context plays in shaping bilingual processing, many widely used instruments (e.g., Marian et al., 2007) fall short in evaluating the social dimensions of bilinguals' language use (e.g., Dass et al., 2024). Thus, a promising direction for future research is to design survey instruments that reflect and capture the complexities of bilinguals' social environments, incorporating questions that are informed by qualitative studies of language use in bilingual communities. Such tools will allow researchers to more holistically assess how social context interacts with cognitive processing and to evaluate whether different bilingual communities can be meaningfully compared across studies.

Finally, this dissertation contributes to growing bodies of work in sociolinguistics (e.g., Strand, 1999) and bilingualism (e.g., Gonzales and Lotto, 2013) that examine the influence of social information from both within and outside the speech signal on perception using acoustic continua of speech sounds. Gonzales and Lotto (2013) and Casillas and Simonet (2018), for example, both test how acoustic cues to language spoken shape participants' categorization of bilabial stop continua that range from Spanish, pre-voiced /b/ to English, aspirated /p/. These two studies, however, like others employing this methodology (e.g., Caramazza et al., 1973), differ in how continua are designed (e.g., VOT range, step size) and constructed. These methodological differences may have downstream effects on participants' responses. Future research could investigate how subtle methodological choices in the design of acoustic continua

influence how participants' respond on bilingual perception tasks and, consequently, whether these differences impact the generalizability of findings. By refining experimental designs and comparing across studies, future work can ensure that findings related to bilingual language processing are robust and replicable across different contexts.

Limitations

Positionality and Knowledge Construction

A limitation of this work lies in my positionality as a researcher. As someone "socialized within a community different from the one in which he or she is doing research," under Banks' (1998) typology of positionalities, I am an "external outsider" to Pilsen's bilingual, Mexican American community (p.8). My location as an 'external outsider' may have influenced multiple facets of the research process, from the questions I asked to what participants felt comfortable sharing. As qualitative research is inherently shaped by the relationships between researcher and participants, it is crucial to acknowledge how my identity, background, and assumptions could have influenced the data collection process.

The significance of a researcher's epistemological position—particularly regarding whether they come from the communities they study—has been the subject of extensive debate (Merton, 1972; Kerstetter, 2012). Some scholars argue that researchers occupying an outsider position benefit from what is sometimes referred to as "epistemological privilege", claiming that distance from the community allows for greater objectivity and critical detachment during fieldwork (Simmel, 1950). This perspective suggests that outsiders are less likely to be biased by personal involvement and are better positioned to view the community's practices with fresh, analytical eyes.

Conversely, others assert that insiders hold distinct advantages, particularly in building rapport and trust with participants, which can facilitate deeper and more meaningful data collection (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). Insiders are often seen as legitimate members of the community, which can encourage participants to be more open and forthcoming, especially when discussing sensitive cultural issues. Moreover, insiders may have a shared cultural understanding that enables them to interpret the nuances of the data with greater accuracy and insight (Kerstetter, 2012), as they can tap into shared experiences and contexts.

In his seminal work, Merton (1972) acknowledged the validity of both perspectives while critiquing the limitations inherent in each. He argued that the insider/outsider dichotomy is overly simplistic and that researchers should instead focus on the fluidity of positionality, understanding how their identity—whether insider, outsider, or somewhere in between— shapes their interactions with participants and the data they gather. This approach emphasizes the need for researchers to remain critically aware of how their positionality may influence not only access and trust but also their interpretations and conclusions.

Of particular significance, insider/outsider dynamics often create asymmetrical power relations in fieldwork, with researchers from outside of a community being perceived as lacking shared experience or understanding (Merriam et al., 2001, Dwyer and Buckle, 2009). Additionally, as Kerstetter (2012) describes, many of the ways that researchers may differ from the communities with which they work, "such as level of formal education and access to resources – also connote a more privileged and powerful status in the larger society…such that community-based researchers approach communities not simply as outsiders but as privileged ones" (p.99). This dynamic can lead participants to modify their responses, shaping them in ways they believe align with the researcher's expectations or withholding perspectives they

perceive the researcher may not understand (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). My position as an outsider, therefore, may have made participants more cautious or less open in discussing sensitive topics related to identity, language, or cultural practices.

These power dynamics may have been heightened by the fact that I share identities with individuals described by participants as gentrifiers. Gentrification in Pilsen, as participants' commentary demonstrates, is a charged issue, with long-time residents often perceiving newcomers as outsiders who are taking advantage of the community, driving displacement through rising property values and disrupting the neighborhood's cultural fabric (e.g., Betancur, 2011/5). By consequence of the identities I share with perceived gentrifiers, participants may have associated me with those forces of gentrification and the structural changes that many perceived to be threatening Pilsen's community identity and/or cohesion. This association may have shaped how participants framed their narratives as well as inhibited their comfort and/or willingness to openly share their perspective on topics like displacement or neighborhood transformation.

My role as an outsider may additionally have created an "observer's paradox" (Labov, 1981), where the presence of the researcher influences participants' natural behavior. Participants may have style-shifted, code-switching more or less than they would in everyday interactions. They may also have chosen certain linguistic forms based on assumptions about what would be perceived as "appropriate" for an outsider audience (Milroy, 1987).

Finally, as Merriam et al. (2001) assert, "[w]hat an insider 'sees' and 'understands' will be different, but as valid as what an outsider understands" (p. 415). My status as an outsider may, at times, have been a challenge to the research process while, at others, it may have been allowed me to ask questions about or receive explanations for things that an insider might have

been assumed to already know (e.g., Merriam et al., 2001). Fernando, for example, when describing a persona that he associates with Spanish language use, opens the discussion by asking, "Are you familiar with the term, 'Edgar'? This question suggests Fernando's perception of me as an outsider who may lack familiarity with cultural concepts that an insider would be presumed to possess. Similarly, that assumed difference in common knowledge due to my position outside the community allowed me to ask questions about the personae and identities he raised. More generally, my position as an outsider allowed me to felicitously ask questions about characteristic places in Pilsen or how the neighborhood has changed as well as those at the very core of this study regarding how participants negotiated the use of their languages.

Ultimately, the aforementioned factors underscore the importance of reflexivity, critically examining how my identities and perspectives may have shaped the research process. Particularly for community-based research, reflexivity is necessary to enable a more transparent understanding of how the research relationship, shaped by power dynamics, may affect the data that is collected and the interpretations that are made (Rose, 1997). While reflexivity can help to mitigate these effects, it cannot completely erase the potential influence of these issues of power and positionality.

Unmeasured Variation in Participants' Language Backgrounds

In this study, another limitation stems from the potential impact of unmeasured variation in participants' language and social experience. All participants completed a language experience questionnaire that measured demographic and linguistic variables. Although well-established factors such as age of acquisition and self-rated language proficiency—widely recognized for their significant influence on bilingual language processing (e.g., De Bruin, 2019)—were measured, other dimensions, such as social network diversity and interactional patterns, were not

directly assessed. Individual differences in the size and diversity of participants' social

networks, however, could influence language exposure and use, thereby affecting task

performance (Lev-Ari, 2018). Additionally, although focusing on a single bilingual community

aimed to mitigate variation in language practices, it is possible that within-community

differences—such as variations in social interaction patterns or localized ideologies—could still

have contributed to variation in results. Future research could address these limitations by

incorporating measures of social network size, interactional diversity, and other social

dimensions to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the factors that shape bilingual

language processing.

Conclusions

This dissertation brought theories of bilingual language control into dialogue with

sociolinguistic frameworks to examine how social information is integrated into bilingual

language processing. The research drew on both quantitative and qualitative methodologies,

grounding perceptual studies in an analysis of local social context to explore what social

meanings surround language use in a Chicago bilingual community and how they impact

language processing. Results from all three studies affirm the significance of local social

meanings to bilinguals' language use, illustrating how they shape bilinguals' expectations for

which language(s) are contextually appropriate and their perception of an interlocutor's speech.

In the first study, semi-structured interviews with bilingual members of Pilsen's

Mexican-origin community emphasized the importance of local, community-level context to

how bilinguals' use and switch between their languages. Participants described local social (e.g.,

local identities) and geographic factors (e.g., specific locales) as modulating their expectations

for which language(s) were contextually appropriate, indicating that language choice is sensitive to local social meanings.

The second study examined how well a written questionnaire, that was based on widely-used assessments of bilinguals' language experience (e.g., Birdsong et al., 2012), would capture the social dimensions of bilinguals' language use. Findings show that the questionnaire was constrained in the depth of knowledge it could elicit, erasing important aspects of the social dimensions of bilinguals' language use. These limitations were argued to stem from questionnaires' predominantly directive mode of questioning as well as their lack of grounding in community context.

The third study found that local social meanings significantly influenced bilinguals' speech perception. Specifically, written speaker bios that incorporated attributes indexing English or Spanish language use shaped how Mexican American, Spanish-English bilingual participants from Chicago categorized bilabial stop continua. Notably, the features embedded in these bios were selected based on local linguistic ideologies identified in the first study, ensuring that the social primes reflected community-grounded perceptions of language use. These findings suggest that socially-mediated expectations, driven by local social meanings, play an important role in bilingual language processing and perception.

Collectively, these findings underscore the important role that local social context plays in shaping bilingual language use. They provide valuable insight into what local social meanings bilinguals themselves believe to guide their language use, how those meanings are integrated into bilingual language processing and control, and how well current assessments of bilingual experience account for the social contexts of bilinguals' language uses.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Interview Guide

I. Background and Community Context
1. How long have you lived in Pilsen?
    a. How has Pilsen changed in the time you've lived here?
2. How might you describe the Pilsen community to someone who doesn't live here?
    a. I wonder if there are places (e.g. restaurants, meeting spaces) that you feel are characteristic of Pilsen?
    b. What are your favorite places or places you often like to visit in Pilsen?
    c. What do you think outsiders (others from Chicago who live outside Pilsen) think about Pilsen? What is the difference between the real Pilsen, as you know it, and what they think?
3. Could you help me draw a map, of sorts, of the social landscape of Pilsen? I've drawn a large circle to represent the community and smaller ones inside to represent groups that were a part of the community. Could you use these smaller circles to show the groups that make up Pilsen? [[Note: if remote, this map can be done via annotating a blank slide in Zoom or Google slides]]
    a. Can you position these groups in relation to one another? For example, groups that interact a lot might be closer together or have a line drawn between them.
        i. Are there particular activities that bring these groups together?
        ii. What sets these groups apart?
        iii. Are there groups which you think are more influential on everyday life here in Pilsen?
        iv. Are there groups which you think have a larger influence on local policy or government?
    b. Where might you place yourself on this map? With whom/what groups do you most often interact?
    c. What language(s) do these groups speak?
4. What languages do you often hear walking around in Pilsen?
5. Is there anything else you would like to share about Pilsen/at this time?

II. Language experiences
6. Do you think language is important to the Pilsen community? In what ways?
7. Can you tell me about your experience speaking Spanish/English in Pilsen?
    a. Is your experience different in different parts of Chicago?
8. Do you think people are comfortable speaking Spanish while out in Pilsen (e.g. in coffee shops, restaurants, grocery stores)?
9. Have you had any positive or negative experiences speaking Spanish? English?
    a. Have you ever felt you were treated differently or unfairly because of the language(s) you used in a conversation?
10. Do you think people are judged for speaking Spanish?
11. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experience speaking Spanish or English at this time?

III. Code switching and language use
    12. Can you describe what a typical day is like for you?
        a. What language(s) do you often speak at home? At work? Running errands?
           With friends?
    13. When meeting someone new, how do you decide which language(s) to use in
        conversation with them?
        a. What about when meeting someone with whom you're already familiar (e.g. a
           friend, co-worker, teacher, barista)?
    14. Please imagine someone that, when you met them, you might assume they spoke Spanish
        (English). How would you describe that person?
    15. Is there anything else you would like to share?

IV. Language attitudes
    16. In the last census, most of the people in Pilsen (~70%) reported speaking Spanish. Do
        you prefer to live in a majority Spanish-speaking neighborhood?
    17. Do you think Latinx children who grow up in the US should learn Spanish?
    18. What does it mean to speak Spanish correctly?
        a. Is it okay to mix/use both Spanish and English in a conversation?
    19. Do you feel it is important to speak Spanish without an accent? How about English?
    20. Do you feel that speaking Spanish is valued in Chicago? In the US?
    21. Is there anything else you would like to share?

V. Conclusion

Follow-up on participants' earlier statements, anecdotes, or stories to seek clarification or additional insight as necessary. Thank them for their participation.

Appendix B: Language Experience Questionnaire

Block A: Participants' demographic information and language community
1. What is your age?
2. What is your ethnicity?
3. With what gender do you identify?
4. What is/are your native language(s)?
5. Do you currently work, attend school, both, or neither?
6. How far were you able to go in school (if currently enrolled, please specify the highest degree you've received)?
7. Please list the places in which you have lived for more than six months along with the ages during which you lived there. If the city is located outside the US, please also specify the country.

For example: Minneapolis, MN (0-18 years); Philadelphia, PA (18-22 years); Lima, Peru (22-24 years); London, England (24-26 years); Chicago, IL (26-29 years)
8. Have you ever lived in Chicago, Illinois?
9. What neighborhoods in Chicago have you lived in and for how long did you live in each?

For example: Uptown (2 years), Pilsen (5 years)
10. Please rate how familiar you are with the locations mentioned in the descriptions from 0 (Not familiar at all) to 5 (Extremely familiar):
    a. Pilsen
    b. The Loop
    c. A local grocery store in Pilsen
    d. Starbucks
11. What are the ethnicities of your parents?
12. Where were your parents born? Your grandparents?
13. Do any of your parents speak Spanish? English?
14. Do any of your grandparents speak Spanish? English?
15. What is it like speaking Spanish where you live?
16. When meeting someone new, what information do you use to decide whether you will speak Spanish or English?

Block B: Participants' language background
In this section, we would like you to answer some factual questions about your language history by placing a check in the appropriate box. This is not a test, so there are no right or wrong answers. Please answer every question and give your answers sincerely. Thank you very much for your help.

17. At what age did you start learning the following languages: English? Spanish?
18. At what age did you start to feel comfortable using the following languages: English? Spanish?
19. How many years of classes (grammar, history, math, etc.) have you had in the following languages (primary school through university): English? Spanish?
20. How many years have you spent in a country/region where the following languages are spoken: English? Spanish?

21. How many years have you spent in a family where the following languages are spoken: English? Spanish?
22. How many years have you spent in a work environment where the following languages are spoken: English? Spanish?

In this section, we would like you to answer some questions about your language use by placing a check in the appropriate box. Total use for all languages in a given question should equal 100%.

23. In an average week, what percentage of the time do you use the following languages with friends: English? Spanish?
24. In an average week, what percentage of the time do you use the following languages with family: English? Spanish?
25. In an average week, what percentage of the time do you use the following languages at school/work: English? Spanish?
26. When you talk to yourself, how often do you talk to yourself in the following languages: English? Spanish?
27. When you count, how often do you count in the following languages: English? Spanish?

In this section, we would like you to rate your language proficiency by giving marks from 0 (not well at all) to 6 (very well).

28. How well do you speak the following languages: English? Spanish?
29. How well do you understand the following languages: English? Spanish?
30. How well do you read the following languages: English? Spanish?
31. How well do you write in the following languages: English? Spanish?

In this section, we would like you to respond to statements by giving marks from 0 (disagree) to 6 (agree).

32. I feel like myself when I speak: English, Spanish
33. I identify with: an English-speaking culture, a Spanish-speaking culture
34. It is important to me to use (or eventually use): English like a native speaker, Spanish like a native speaker.
35. I want others to think I am a native speaker of: English, Spanish

Block C: Language attitudes and experience
In this section, we would like you to respond to statements by giving marks from 0 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree)

36. In my perception, I have an accent when I speak Spanish
37. In my perception, I have an accent when I speak English
38. I have close friends who speak English as a first language
39. I have close friends who speak Spanish as a first language
40. Latinx/Hispanic children living in the US should learn Spanish
41. I am comfortable speaking Spanish in public
42. People are treated with respect when they speak Spanish in public
43. People are treated with respect when they speak English in public
44. Spanish is an important part of my daily life
45. English is an important part of my daily life

46. It is important to speak Spanish correctly
47. To speak Spanish well, it is important to not use slang
48. To speak Spanish well, it is important to only use Spanish in conversation (i.e. not switch between Spanish and English in a conversation)
49. Some dialects of Spanish are easier for me to understand than others
50. Some dialects of Spanish are more correct than others
51. People in my community speak Spanish well
52. People in my community speak English well
53. Using both Spanish and English in the same conversation helps me express myself better
54. Mixing two languages in the same sentence shows that someone can speak well or is comfortable in both languages.
55. Mixing two languages is as normal and as acceptable as speaking using the same language when talking to a person.

In this section, we would like you to respond to statements by rating how often they occur from 0 (almost never) to 7 (constantly)
56. I currently switch between or mix languages (Spanish and English) in the same conversation
    a. When speaking with some friends
    b. When speaking with some family members
    c. When speaking with strangers
    d. When speaking with some colleagues at work/school
57. I switched between or mixed languages (Spanish and English) in the same conversation when growing up
    a. When speaking with some friends
    b. When speaking with some family members
    c. When speaking with strangers
    d. When speaking with some colleagues at work/school
58. People have commented on my accent in English
59. People have commented on my accent in Spanish
60. People tease me about the way I speak in English
61. People tease me about the way I speak in Spanish
62. I feel comfortable conversing with native English speakers in English
63. I feel comfortable conversing with native Spanish speakers in Spanish
64. I switch languages in a conversation to avoid misunderstandings
65. I switch languages to add emphasis
66. I switch languages so that others won't understand (privacy)
67. I switch languages because I can't remember or don't know a word
68. I switch languages to help the person I am talking to feel more comfortable
69. I switch languages to show affection, caring, or concern
70. I switch languages because it is easier to speak or express myself in the other language

In this section, we would like you to rank the following statements by how important each aspect is to your choice of which language(s) you use in a conversation. A rank of 1 means that aspect is very important while a rank of 6 means it is not very important at all.
71. With whom I am speaking

72. Where I am having a conversation
73. My mood or energy level
74. The purpose of the conversation
75. The topic of the conversation
76. Others' perceptions

Appendix C: Social Evaluations Questionnaire

Intake Information (Included when administered post-listening task)
   i.   Please select how noisy the environment was in which you completed the listening section of this experiment. On the scale below, (1) corresponds to a very quiet location like a quiet office or library while (7) corresponds to a very noisy environment like a busy café or public transit.
   ii. Please select the option that best describes how you listened to the sounds:
      a. Laptop or device speakers
      b. Noise-cancelling headphones
      c. External speaker(s)
      d. Other

Block 1: Social Evaluations English-linked Bio
Below is a description of one of the speakers you heard during the listening task. We are interested in what impressions you have of this person. Please read the description and answer the following questions, making your best guess even if you're not completely sure.

You run into this person at a Starbucks in the Loop. They look like they are in their late teens or early twenties and are by themselves. You haven't seen them before. You are waiting behind them in line when you hear them speak.
   1. What else might someone assume about this person?
   2. What language do you think this person was speaking?
   3. What gave you that impression?
   4. What language(s) do you think this person knows?
   5. If you had to guess, what do you think is this person's nationality?
   6. If you had to guess, what do you think is this person's race or ethnicity?
   7. Are there any other things that stood out to you about this person or that you'd like to share?
   8. Please rate the speaker on the following scales:
      a. Not attractive – Attractive
      b. Not friendly – Friendly
      c. Casual – Formal
      d. Not confident – Confident
      e. Not affluent – Affluent
      f. Not warm – Warm
      g. Not intelligent – Intelligent
      h. Not feminine – Feminine
      i. Not Spanish speaker – Spanish speaker
      j. Not enthusiastic – Enthusiastic
      k. Not cool – Cool
      l. Not American – American
      m. Not educated – Educated
      n. Not accented – Accented

Block 2: Social Evaluations Spanish-linked bio

Below is a description of one of the speakers you heard during the listening task. We are interested in what impressions you have of this person. Please read the description and answer the following questions, making your best guess even if you're not completely sure.

You run into this person at a local grocery store in Pilsen. They look like they are in their late thirties. You've seen them there several times before shopping with an older woman. Today, as you're both waiting in the line to check out, you hear this person speak.

1. What else might someone assume about this person?
2. What language do you think this person was speaking?
3. What gave you that impression?
4. What language(s) do you think this person knows?
5. If you had to guess, what do you think is this person's nationality?
6. If you had to guess, what do you think is this person's race or ethnicity?
7. Are there any other things that stood out to you about this person or that you'd like to share?
8. Please rate the speaker on the following scales:
    a. Not attractive – Attractive
    b. Not friendly – Friendly
    c. Casual – Formal
    d. Not confident – Confident
    e. Not affluent – Affluent
    f. Not warm – Warm
    g. Not intelligent – Intelligent
    h. Not feminine – Feminine
    i. Not Spanish speaker – Spanish speaker
    j. Not enthusiastic – Enthusiastic
    k. Not cool – Cool
    l. Not American – American
    m. Not educated – Educated
    n. Not accented – Accented

Appendix D. Social Evaluations of the Social Primes during the Norming Study

Table 18. *Ratings on seven-point semantic differential scales of the two bios presented in the listening task.*

Seven-point Likert scale (1 = left term, 7 = right term)	Bio indexing Spanish language knowledge	Bio indexing English language knowledge
*(p < .05), **(p<0.01)	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)
Not attractive – Attractive	4.23 (0.68)	4.60 (1.14)
Not friendly – Friendly	4.97 (1.27)	4.60 (1.22)
Casual – Formal	3.73 (1.64)	3.90 (1.54)
Not confident – Confident	4.87 (0.97)	4.67 (1.06)
Not affluent – Affluent	4.23 (1.28)	4.53 (1.17)
Not warm – Warm	4.87 (1.28)	4.57 (1.17)
Not intelligent – Intelligent	4.63 (1.00)	4.50 (0.94)
Not feminine – Feminine	4.33 (1.15)	4.73 (1.22)
Not Spanish-speaker – Spanish-speaker**	4.93 (1.61)	4.37 (1.45)
Not enthusiastic – Enthusiastic	4.47 (1.14)	4.37 (1.03)
Not cool – Cool	4.63 (1.28)	4.46 (1.04)
Not American – American*	5.17 (1.29)	5.87 (1.14)
Not educated – Educated	5.13 (1.22)	4.86 (1.07)
Nativelike – Not Nativelike (Accented)*	3.67 (1.41)	2.73 (1.12)
Not English-speaker – English speaker	5.53 (1.47)	6.10 (1.34)

Note. Participants during this norming task did not hear any audio; their evaluations are based on only the written information about the individual presented in the two bios (the social primes).

Appendix E. Social evaluations of Voices by Participants in the Norming Study

Table 19. *Ratings on seven-point semantic differential scales of the two voices selected for use in the listening task.*

Seven-point Likert scale (1 = left term, 7 = right term) *(p < .05), **(p<0.01)	Voice A Mean (SD)	Voice B Mean (SD)
Not attractive – Attractive	3.5 (1.58)	4.11 (1.60)
Not friendly – Friendly	4.17 (1.54)	4.28 (1.56)
Casual – Formal	3.06 (1.35)	3.28 (1.56)
Not confident – Confident	4.17 (1.75)	4.00 (1.46)
Not affluent – Affluent	3.56 (1.29)	3.78 (1.26)
Not warm – Warm	3.83 (1.47)	3.83 (1.65)
Not intelligent – Intelligent	4.06 (1.55)	4.00 (1.41)
Not feminine – Feminine*	5.61 (1.61)	5.11 (1.64)
Not Spanish-speaker – Spanish-speaker	3.61 (2.33)	2.61 (1.88)
Not enthusiastic – Enthusiastic	3.83 (1.54)	2.94 (1.66)
Not cool – Cool	3.72 (1.67)	3.67 (1.57)
Not American – American	3.94 (2.13)	5.17 (1.82)
Not educated – Educated	4.00 (1.78)	4.22 (1.31)
Nativelike – Not Nativelike (Accented)	4.06 (1.92)	2.78 (1.73)
Not English-speaker – English speaker	4.33 (2.03)	5.11 (2.19)

Note. Participants during this norming task did not see the written primes; their evaluations are based on only the information about the individual available in the acoustic continua (the stimuli for the phoneme categorization task).