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DIALECTS, ENGLISHES, CREOLES, AND EDUCATION

Edited by

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Chapter 8

The English of Latinos from a Plurilingual Transcultural Angle: Implications for Assessment and Schools

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KEY POINTS

- Complex sociolinguistic context and language use of English-speaking US Latinos.
- Dynamic linguistic practices of US Latinos characterized as *plurilingualism.*
- Need to rethink dichotomies and traditional categories of bilingualism.
- Challenges to the narrow scope of language in high-stakes testing.
- Ways to bridge the gap between language use and assessment.

INTRODUCTION: US LATINOS BEYOND SPANISH

Latinos in the United States (US) are an important component of our national identity. Not only do people of Latino descent make up a large percentage of the US population (13%, according to the 2000 Census), but they have been a founding presence, albeit a marginalized one, in the forging of this nation's sociocultural and sociohistorical landscape. Despite both the massive presence of US Latinos today, the role that they historically played in the expansion and development of the United States, and the rapid growth that they will experience in the 21st century, US La-

tinos seem to catch national attention only as poor and uneducated Spanish speakers.

Language has played, and continues to play, a very important role in how we view US Latinos. The expansion of United States borders into Mexico and later into the Caribbean put Anglophones in close contact with Spanish speakers whose lands were claimed as US territories. The English language policy imposed in schools of the Southwest and Puerto Rico during the years of US expansion attempted to eradicate Spanish and speed up the language shift of Spanish-speaking children to English (see Academia Puertorriqueña de la Lengua Española, 1998 for Puerto Rico; Corona & García, 1996; Hernández-Chávez, Cohen, & Beltramo, 1975 for the southwest; and Pérez, 1982 for Cuba).

More than a century later, we continue to use Spanish as the identity category of US Latinos and simultaneously support language policies in school that eradicate Spanish. We view Spanish as the characteristic of Latinos that has to be eliminated, even when they are English speakers. In speaking of educational failure and poverty, we focus on those who speak Spanish only because we continue to have faith in the power of English monolingualism for all, without understanding on the one hand, issues of language loyalty, language identity, and intergenerational language memory that go beyond the here and now, and on the other hand, issues of racism and linguicism (for more on linguicism, see Phillipson, 1992; Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000).

Acknowledging that there are English-speaking or even bilingual Latinos would bring us closer to understanding the transculturation and bi/multilingualism of the United States. The educational issues facing Latino children today go beyond simply teaching them English or teaching those who are English Language Learners[1] (ELLs), and bring us face to face with the realization that as a nation we have failed in truly educating the majority of our citizens—those who speak English in bidialectal or bilingual contexts (Rumbaut & Portes, 2001).

This chapter is an attempt to make visible the English speaking Latino, bilingual and not, and to look at the languages of Latinos beyond the Spanish category. We analyze the complex sociolinguistic context of US Latinos that calls for ways of thinking about language beyond dichotomies or traditional categories of bilingualism. In light of this sociolinguistic complexity, the chapter examines the role that standard English plays in education today, especially as it is used in high-stakes assessment. We look at the disparate ways in which Latinos use English in their homes and communities when compared to the way in which English is used in standardized testing,

[1]Latino and other language minority students in need of language support services to succeed in English-medium classrooms are referred to as English Language Learners (ELL) in this document.

and the impact this difference has on the lives of Latinos. We conclude by proposing ways in which schools may help bridge those distances.

ENGLISH/SPANISH: PLURILINGUALISM IN A TRANSCULTURAL CONTEXT

Of the 35,305,818 Latinos in the United States in 2000, 72% of those who speak Spanish report strong English proficiency while just 10% speak only Spanish, making English a very important language for US Latinos (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). Yet little scholarly attention has been paid to the English of US Latinos, despite warnings since 1980 of this gap. Chicano English is the English spoken by the largest group of US Latinos (Fought, 2002; Peñalosa, 1980), and the influence of Spanish phonology on Chicano English, particularly in Los Angeles, has received the greatest research attention (MacDonald, 1989; Santa Ana, 1993, 1996). Sociolinguists have also shown the role of the speech setting, taking into account regional, generational, social and community-specific factors on what has been established to be Chicano English (Bayley, 1994; Santa Ana, 1993).

The overall lack of interest in varieties of English other than US standard academic English has characterized our scholarly literature until recently, a deficit which this volume, among others, tries to address (see especially, Nero, 2001; Wolfram, Temple Adger & Christian, 1999). Only African American Vernacular English has been given the prominence it deserves (Baugh, 2000; Rickford, 1999; Smitherman, 1986). The disinterest is indicative of our naïve monolingual assumptions that languages other than English are foreign, and that speakers who undergo language shift leave behind all traces of their first language, using English in exactly the same way as those for whom the standard English of school has always been the language of the home.

On the other hand, the Spanish of US Latinos has received increased attention in the last two decades, especially since the publication of *Spanish in the United States* (1982) by Amastae and Elías-Olivares, and the development and institutionalization of an annual conference on Spanish in the US. The scholarship on US Spanish among different groups, focusing mainly on Spanish as a contact dialect, is extensive and growing.[2] This growing body of research reflects an acknowledgement of the use of Spanish in US society, as immigration from Latin America increases and the number of Spanish-speaking Latinos continues to grow.

[2]Some other scholars who have made substantive contributions to US Spanish scholarship are: Garland Bills, Margarita Hidalgo, Eduardo Hernández Chavez, Mary Ellen García, Carol Klee, John Lipski, Francisco Ocampo, Luis Ortiz, Ricardo Otheguy, Shana Poplack, Ana Roca, Carmen Silva Corvalán, A. Jacqueline Toribio, Lourdes Torres, Guadalupe Valdés, Daniel Villa, and Ana Celia Zentella, among others.

Traditional disciplines run the risk of seeing a reality only from their perspective. It has often been in nontraditional interdisciplinary programs such as Chicano Studies, Puerto Rican Studies, Latino Studies, or Bilingual Education, where the angle of the US Latino speaker has been adopted, expanding the lenses used to study one or the other language of US Latinos, and looking at the complex language use in US Latino literature (Aranda, 2000; Taylor, 1999) and communities (Anzaldúa, 1999; Bayley & Schecter, 2003; González, 2001; Otheguy, García & Roca, 2000; Poplack, 1983; Schecter & Bailey, 2002; Urciuoli, 1996; Zentella, 1997). This scholarship acknowledges the dynamism of US Latino speech communities, where multiple varieties of both English and Spanish are used, where members of dominant and nondominant groups, often speakers of nonstandard varieties of both US English and Latin American Spanish, communicate with one another. This occurs within and across communities that use different features of different languages (or even different languages) within a lifetime and intergenerationally. To capture this dynamic bilingualism–multidialectism, we use the term *plurilingual* in this chapter.[3]

This scholarship also acknowledges the *transculturation* of US Latinos in the sense given to us by Cuban ethnologist, Fernando Ortiz in his *Contrapunteo Cubano del Tabaco y del Azúcar* (1940/1978). Transculturation goes beyond the concept of simple acculturation and multiculturalism; it implies the creation of new cultural phenomena. Malinowski explains in the prologue of *Contrapunteo*: "It is a process in which both parts of the equation are modified. A process in which a new reality emerges, compounded and complex; a reality that is not a mechanical agglomeration of characters, *not even a mosaic*, but a new phenomenon, original and independent" (p. 4, our emphasis and translation). US Latinos, often transnational and comfortable being in borderlands and across borderlands, are situated in a complex linguistic and cultural context, using their plurilingualism as they attempt to negotiate a transcultural context. This more inclusive and expansive view of the languages of US Latinos, without compartmentalizing the English and/or the Spanish language experience, helps us understand the challenges that the English of assessment poses for all Latinos.

LANGUAGES IN CONTACT, CONTINUUM, AND DISCONTINUUM IN SCHOOLS AND SOCIETY

In the United States, much attention has been paid to the acquisition of English by Latinos over the last forty years, in both educational research and policy. Since the passage of the first Bilingual Education Act by Congress in 1968, politicians and educators, as well as the general public, have debated the merits of using only English, or English and Spanish, to educate Latino children who enter US schools without sufficient English language proficiency. We have seen the proliferation of educational programs to teach English to these children, some insisting that only English be used, others using the children's mother tongue temporarily and even throughout the child's education. Although bilingual programs are widespread, English as a second language (ESL) programs are prevalent; as such, the majority of English Language Learners spend their day in schools where English is the only medium of instruction (National Center for Education Statistics, 1997). The debate that sometimes pits those who support English-only instruction against those who believe in the use of Spanish in instruction is indicative of the lack of sociolinguistic understanding of how US Latinos actually use language. The debate, rooted in the standard English monolingual angle of US language policy and carried out mostly through education, focuses on whether Latinos are to be English monolingual speakers or bilingual speakers of standard English and standard Spanish. But much more is involved. The increasingly transcultural context in which US Latinos currently live demands that we adopt a more dynamic model of bilingualism and bidialectism that takes into account the *language contact* situation and the complex *linguistic continuum*, as well as the *discontinuities*, in which US Latinos participate.

The academic dichotomy of Spanish on the one hand and English on the other, using classical models of monolingualism and bilingualism, with some in the group speaking one or the other standard and others speaking both, is too simple to characterize the sociolinguistic situation of US Latinos today. US Latinos have complex histories and relationships to the United States. Some are descendants of those living in US territories that were once Spanish speaking, and others are victims of a colonial relationship in Puerto Rico and imperialistic policies in much of Latin America. Some US Latinos have been English speakers for generations and have undergone *language shift*. Others are in the process of *reversing their language shift* by studying what is now an ancestral language, while still others have only recently arrived in the United States and bring their Spanish to the US context (for more on language maintenance, language shift and reversing language shift, see Fishman, 1991, 2001).

US Latinos are a highly hybrid group sociolinguistically. Most US Latinos are not English Language Learners (ELLs) as the academic literature, especially on education, leads us to believe. For most US Latinos, English exists in *contact* with Spanish and many times in contact with nonstandard varieties of English, especially African American Vernacular English (AAVE) and Caribbean Creole English (CCE). Their Spanish many times shows evidence of contact with English, as well as with the many languages of Latin

[3]The term plurilingualism has been used by Michael Clyne (2003) to capture the dynamics of the variability that bilinguals exhibit in Australia, differing from two double monolinguals and is increasingly used in the European Union.

America's indigeneous minorities. US Latinos come from increasingly diverse Latin American countries, joining Latinos who have been in the US for different generational periods. US Latinos come into contact with ethnolinguistic groups who speak languages other than English as well as different varieties of Spanish. But US schools insist that US Latino children, living and participating in homes and communities that are highly plurilingual, use only standard English in schools, and on occasion, only standard Spanish.

In the modern context of transculturation, especially in the urban centers where the majority of Latinos live, communication proliferates with speakers moving along a *bilingual and bidialectal continuum*, using linguistic resources from the other language or from other English varieties or Spanish varieties when needed and possible. Sometimes, speakers use *loanwords*, bringing both form and meaning from the other language. An example would be *Voy a hacer overtime* (pronounced [*oBertain*]) (I'm going to do overtime). Other times, they alternate languages or code-switch. *Calques*, meanings taken from words in the other language and borrowed without their corresponding word forms, are also prevalent in the language of bilinguals. An example would be *Está corriendo para alcalde* (He's running for mayor; see Otheguy, 1993; Otheguy, García, & Fernandez, 1989). US Latinos, whether bilingual or not, often participate in discourse that falls somewhere along the continuum between one language and the other.

US Latino literature written in English or Spanish about life in the US uses code-switching and calques as literary devices reflecting the oral discourse of many US Latinos (Aranda, 2000). However, schoolchildren are most often forced to write in standard English only and sometimes, when they are fortunate, in standard English and standard Spanish. Features of their spoken discourse along the bilingualism continuum are stigmatized and discouraged.

With the advent of the Internet in recent years and the global village it seeks to create, we have witnessed increased participation by many in literate discourse structures that were previously reserved for the elite. Chat rooms and electronic communication have, for the first time, allowed hybrid language varieties to be used in written communication. The explosion of the multidimensional written word and multimedia literacies, all used in simultaneous synchronous communication, has allowed for the public display of the linguistic continuum of US Latinos.

But Latino plurilingualism also involves *linguistic discontinuities*. Unlike bilingual situations where languages have equal power or where populations are stable, harsh English-only language policies in school create linguistic discontinuities between the home and the school, between children and parents, between modes of language use in individual children. Often parents speak only Spanish, while children speak English only. Other times

only Spanish is spoken and allowed in the home, whereas only English is spoken and allowed in school. And children most often can understand Spanish well, can speak Spanish hesitantly, but cannot read or write it. Improved air travel and our global economy create much of the movement across national and linguistic borders that created Latino linguistic hybridity at the start, but now is responsible for other discontinuities. The question of length of residence in the United States is a difficult one for many Latinos. Many have to explain that they've been back and forth numerous times. Many Latino children are sent back to live in Latin America with grandparents and extended family for long periods of time so that parents can work in the US. Other Latino children are left behind after parents immigrate to the US. Many move back and forth with families whose social circumstances change with work opportunities. The picture that emerges here is a sociolinguistic context for Latinos in the 21st century that goes beyond Spanish or English, encompassing instead a dynamic plurilingual context where there is contact between languages and varieties, where speakers move along a continuum developmentally as they engage in second language acquisition, language shift and reversing language shift, and where speakers experience linguistic discontinuities as they go in and out of different geographic spaces and social domains.

WHEN THE TEST IS WHAT COUNTS: THE LANGUAGE OF ASSESSMENT IN 21ST-CENTURY US

US schools have responded to this more expansive sociolinguistic situation of US Latinos (and of other ethnolinguistic groups in the United States) by adopting more narrow definitions of academic language, this time assessed in standard English only by high-stakes tests that focus on literacy. The change has been subtle, but significant. Most academic language assessments in the late 20th century focused on reading comprehension, asking students to answer multiple-choice questions. Although language minority and second dialect students never did well in standardized assessments of reading, the receptive language skills that these exams tapped were more easily acquired by those who spoke English as a second language, who spoke varieties of English other than the standard, or who used language in the complex ways just outlined. Written essays, which require productive skills, were most often used by classroom teachers only for internal assessment and evaluation.

But recent decades have brought about changes in our conception of knowledge and the ways in which it is acquired. The United States, and other countries, created and adopted educational standards for each grade level, providing a set target to measure student growth and thereby

a means of accountability for that growth (for an insightful analysis of the consequences of the US educational standards movement for poor and minority populations, see Ohanian, 1999). New performance-based standardized assessments, developed in an effort to measure student attainment of the standards that had been set, started tapping students' multifaceted use of literacies, including making sense of graphic, literate and technological texts. But despite the complex use of literacies that new technologies require, schools and standardized assessments continue to depend on traditional skills of writing in standard English as the vehicle to evidence complex understandings that only multimedia literacies may, in fact, encompass.

At the same time as assessments have neatly partitioned standard English from more dynamic language use, testing itself has become more important than ever before. Assessment for accountability purposes is a pivotal theme in current standards-based education reforms, cutting across much of the legislation passed by Congress in recent years. US mandates such as *Goals 2000* (H.R. 1804, 1994), Title I, and most recently Title III of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (as amended in 2001) require that standardized assessments apply to all students, placing great emphasis on the inclusion of English Language Learners. With this new emphasis on the inclusion of all students as part of evolving accountability systems, and the visibility of test scores in the public and political eye, performance by Latino students on assessments greatly impacts the evaluation of a teacher, school, or school system (García, 2003; Menken, 2000, 2001, 2005).

Standardized tests also now carry higher stakes than ever before for individual students in most states, as they are used as the primary criteria for high school graduation, grade promotion, and placement into tracked programs (Heubert & Hauser, 1999). In 2001, 25 states required high-stakes tests for graduation, up from 18 the prior year. But the tests that count are in standard English, and were developed for the assessment of native-English speakers—not plurilingual students.

In the case of students who use English differently from standard English speakers, and those who lack English proficiency, the test in itself is an assessment of their knowledge of standard English, and thus an unfair measure of what they know. One of the standards for educational and psychological testing developed by the American Psychological Association (APA), the American Educational Research Association (AERA), and the National Council of Measurement in Education (NCME) in 1985 says: "for a nonnative English speaker and for a speaker of some dialects of English, every test given in English becomes in part a language or literacy test" (APA/AERA/NCME, 1999, Standard no. 13). Likewise, Wiley & Lukes (1996) point out how a lack of proficiency in standard English negatively impacts speakers of nonstandard varieties, using tests as the sorting mechanism to

position these students at the low end of a social hierarchy that values the standard.

We seem to be in a bind. On the one hand, we have raised our expectations and made school systems accountable for language minority students, but on the other hand, we have failed to develop fair assessments that can distinguish what students know from the way in which English is used by plurilingual students.

ASSESSMENT IN SCHOOLS OF THE MULTILINGUAL APPLE

As one of the most multilingual cities of the world (García & Fishman, 1997/2001), New York City offers a case in point. An examination of its policy regarding assessment and high school graduation may help us understand the disparity between language use in society and language use in assessment. It can also shed light on the grave societal impact of this disparity, as educators develop ways of helping language minority students show that the standards have been met.

The New York City Department of Education reports that as of December 2002 the total school enrollment was 1,087,255 children, of whom thirty-eight percent were Latinos and twelve percent were English Language Learners (ELLs). In 1995, the New York State Board of Regents raised curriculum and graduation standards, requiring that all students pass five core Regents examinations in English, mathematics, global history and geography, US history and government, and science, in order to graduate. All of these exams are highly literacy-based, regardless of the content area. Unlike the majority of states in the US (Rivera & Stansfield, 2000), New York State does permit the use of native-language assessments for content-area subjects. Translated editions of the Regents Examinations in all core areas required for graduation are available in Spanish, Korean, Chinese, Haitian-Creole and Russian. Despite the fact that translations of the content examinations are offered for students who have been in US schools less than three years, the English Regents examination, a two-day six-hour exam, is required by all students to graduate from New York City high schools (New York State Department of Education, 2003). The English Regents exam is the accountability mechanism of the four English Language Arts Standards which require that students read, write, listen and speak for: (1) information and understanding, (2) literary response and expression, (3) critical analysis and evaluation, and (4) social interaction.

The English Regents exam also includes an essay, written in standard English, that is given twice the weight as the multiple-choice questions. The directions for the essay portion of the August 2002 English Regents exam

read, "Guidelines: . . . Be sure to follow the conventions of standard written English." The exam makes explicit that evaluation of students' writing will be based not only on their ability to convey knowledge, but rather on their ability to do so in standard English. We know that productive language, whether written or spoken, reveals the dynamics of language contact and discontinuities in ways that receptive language, whether listening or reading, seems to mask. Therefore, an exam that burdens writing will negatively affect plurilingual students.

Data pertaining to graduation and dropout rates offer a glimpse of the seriousness of this issue for all Latinos. The New York State Department of Education has four-year completion outcomes for the Class of 2002. According to this data, Latino students had the lowest graduation rate (41.1%) and the highest dropout rate (26%) of all ethnic/racial groups in New York City. Performance rates were even poorer for ELLs, with a graduation rate of just 30.3% and a dropout rate of 31.5%. After a decade-long decline, dropout rates for Latinos and ELLs have increased in recent years, a trend that is directly linked to the new graduation testing policy (Del Valle, 2002; New York City Department of Education, 2001).

The statistics provided in the preceding passages paint a dire picture of how the current emphasis on high-stakes testing impacts Latino plurilingual students, whether ELLs or not, exposing disparities that must be addressed. Although the first stage of improving our educational systems is to expose those problem areas of inequity and disparity, to do so alone is not enough. We need solutions. We turn now to ways in which schools can help young people, and especially US Latinos, to succeed.

BEYOND THE CHALLENGES: POSSIBILITIES

In our discussion above, we have argued that there is a discontinuity between the actual language use of US Latinos and definitions of success in public schools that are based on standard English proficiency, creating a new set of educational challenges that need to be addressed. The demand for standard English is most acute where standardized testing is concerned, because of the gatekeeper role such tests currently play. We now offer possibilities for helping Latino students acquire the standard English that is required for them to succeed, and we suggest ways that schools and educators must also change to meet the needs of these students.

Given the standard English language policy that has been implicitly adopted in New York State, it is imperative that we do better at teaching standard English to ELLs and speakers of nonstandard varieties, while also seeking a space for the bilingual/bidialectal continuum in school. Many educators today insist that standard English and academic discourse be explicitly taught to language minority students (Delpit, 1998; Langer, 1991; Rogoff, 1990; Scarcella, 2002). Ways must be found to engage language minority students in meaningful written discourse, extend their use of language, require that they attend to form, and give them the respectful audience and practice they need to develop the advanced English literacy that schools in the 21st century require.

In the case of Latino students, instead of just focusing on student development, teachers must also consider possibilities for meeting their students half way. We must look for ways of being in the borderlands with language minority students, and so increase more authentic interaction and heteroglossia (Bakhtin, 1981). This requires continual interaction and negotiation of meaning, whereby all voices are heard, thus creating a "third space" for Latino students in US schools (Gutierrez, Rynes, & Larson, 1995).

García and Traugh (2002) have described ways of transforming the education of urban bilingual students. The pedagogy that García and Traugh have called "of the borderlands," and that they have used successfully in expanding understandings as well as developing standard English, put the students' and the faculty's different English voices alongside each other, and alongside the academic text written in standard English. The pedagogy holds, and makes visible, the range of differences—conceptual differences, as well as cultural and linguistic ones. Both students and faculty describe, in a disciplined fashion, using language carefully and non-judgementally, and without any interruptions from either the instructor or other students, what has struck them about the readings or the ideas being discussed. Students are encouraged to share and read specific passages, to contribute details, and to use images and stories from their own lives, experiences and understandings, in sharing their reactions. This process encourages speakers to cut across abstractions and generalities. It gives all students an opportunity to participate, and to hear each other's voices, as well as the writer's, although passing is allowed. As a result of the discipline, slowness, and inclusiveness of the process, it builds over a time a safe, equitable, and collaborative classroom environment, in which individual understandings and voices, including those of the faculty member, are enlarged and amplified. As conceptual, cultural and linguistic understandings expand, ideas for collective action are generated, and individual voices acquire understanding of other varieties. Not only do language minority students gain bidialectal ability while acquiring a standard English voice, but faculty also become more knowledgeable of their students' many different English varieties, increasing their ability to teach these students. The attention given to detail, as well as to language, coupled with the respect for different voices and opinion, expands possibilities for students. This pedagogy of the borderlands has connections to poststructural feminist pedagogies, insisting that all class participants, including the instructor, be engaged in constructing knowledge as they develop a voice that is continuously shifting, as individu-

als connect their own experiences and voices with those in the academic readings and in the social structures in which they're positioned (For more on poststructural feminist pedagogies, see Tisdell, 1998).

A tool in carrying out this pedagogy of the borderlands is the use of *double-entry journals*. As students write their thoughts and experiences alongside those of the academic texts they are reading and from which they copy, they attend to the reading, to the words and the form, and to their own thinking (Berthoff, 1995; Traugh, 2002). As teachers read the students' work and listen to the particularity of their stories, they pay attention to form as well as to what the student is saying. This kind of writing results in students' ability to make connections with texts, infer messages, extend meanings, and think independently, as they develop ways of using informational, literary, analytical and social language. It also makes it possible for teachers to gain understandings of students' ways of using language in order to construct meaning, building upon the language use of their Latino students as a resource in their education. Double-entry journals is one way of extending students' writing in standard English and achieving the intersubjectivity of their voices and language.

Many schools have also shown much creativity in helping plurilingual students meet the new English standards. In some New York City high schools, the response to testing reforms and demand for standard English has been to develop the advanced Spanish literacy of Latino students—with promising results. Believing that native language literacy skills transfer to the second language, a high school in the Bronx has greatly improved scores by Latino ELLs on the English Regents exam by increasing the opportunities for these students to formally study Spanish in school. The Spanish *Advanced Placement (AP)* class is a way to teach informational, literary, analytical and social language, the language skills needed for the English Regents. When offered to native Spanish speakers, it has also been found to bridge the distance between students' language abilities and the language use of the English Regents exam. Because of the success at this high school, where Spanish AP courses are taught in combination with intensive ESL, other Bronx high schools have now begun implementing this approach and offering their Latino students intensive Spanish studies (Shapiro, 2001). If this approach were to take hold and be developed, even in elementary schools, NYC schools would be supporting and developing advanced literacy in standard Spanish. This would do much to connect some of the linguistic gaps and discontinuities in which Latino children's lives are now lived. Not only would the children's English, alongside their Spanish, be improved, but US society would have much to gain from this greater plurilingualism.

Despite educational efforts (with limited creativity), the challenges faced by language minority students are great. It is important to continue to seek

assessment alternatives. Although the New York Commissioner of Education recently rejected a bid by nontraditional schools to substitute individually tailored projects for the English Regents (Keller, 2000), there are alternative assessments suitable for Latino students both in the classroom and on a wide scale that are worth exploring. Portfolio assessments offer one example, and have been used at schools in Philadelphia to successfully evaluate performance by bilingual education students who are classified as "English-dominant," yet do not have the English proficiency necessary to display their knowledge of content-area subjects in English-medium standardized tests. Portfolios can be implemented on a large scale as well, and efforts to do so are currently underway across Vermont and Delaware, with promising results for speakers of nonstandard varieties of English and English Language Learners (Northeast Islands Regional Educational Lab, 1999).

CONCLUSION

The United States today reflects not the immigration of our past history, but the greater flow of people, information, goods, and services within and across national boundaries that is evident in the world. But yet, the approach to language that we continue to follow in schools mirrors that of the past where language is perceived as monolithic, and standard English occupies most of the space. When this educational approach does not work, we impose accountability measures, using standard English literacy as the only measure of educational success.

In the transcultural context of the 21st century, success will be increasingly measured by the ability to use multiple languages and multiliteracies, including multimodal technologies. Because the use of standard English may be the most demanded literacy for citizens worldwide, it is essential that US schools do a better job of ensuring that all our citizens have this advanced literacy. We must find ways of doing so that use the multiplicity of languages and literacies in which the world communicates. For US Latinos, this means understanding the plurilingual context in which they live, and the circumstances of language contact in continuum and discontinuum. US schools must take some responsibility to ensure that Latinos have access to the full continuum of their plurilingual repertoire, and that their languages are not subject to the great discontinuities which the present educational policy intensifies. Assessment of languages and literacies must respect the difference between knowledge and standard English use. Only then can we hope to provide the educational opportunities that are the makings of a democratic society, and become a nation with highly advanced English literacy that is equitably distributed, where varieties other than the standard and languages other than English are respected and valued.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION AND REFLECTIVE WRITING

1. García and Menken paint a complex picture of the language practices of US Latinos that includes language contact, language shift, reverse language shift, and linguistic discontinuities. To what extent does this picture challenge prevalent language attitudes and policies towards Latinos?
2. Should assessment for Latinos be allowed in something other than the standard variety of English or Spanish? If so, in what contexts? If not, give reasons.
3. What are the likely effects (short-term and long-term) of high-stakes testing for language minority students and their teachers?

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