

Language identity and economic outcomes among Spanish bilinguals

Rebecca Ash-Cervantes

Studies analyzing bilingualism's benefits have often looked at bilinguals through the individual facets of their lives, looking at their earnings separate from their persons as statistics (Shin & Alba, 2009), or looking at their language usage from a theoretical angle, with a disregard for concrete reasons, such as wage, that a speaker may consider when making the decision to use language (Amos, 2016). Research has also shown that bilingual Spanish speakers in the US traditionally earn less than their monolingual English-speaking counterparts (Gandara, 2015). This study aimed to provide holistic view of bilinguals, taking both wage and language identity into consideration when looking at the decision to use language in the workplace.

This qualitative study looks at the relationship between language identity (Norton, 2019; Peirce, 1995) and wage among 11 Spanish bilinguals in 3 US cities in the United States. The study implemented a survey to collect wage data and one-to-one interviews to elicit speaker's perceptions of bilingual identity in the data collection process. Wage data was compared to federal wage statistics and interviews were transcribed and coded for themes using grounded theory and the software Nvivo. The research surveyed the speakers' identity in the context of whether their language identity affected their inclination to use their language for perceived economic gain.

Overall, the research found that Spanish bilinguals are often asked or inclined to use their bilingual abilities in the workplace without compensation due to need from the employer, a type of cultural burden (Padilla, 1994). In addition, speakers are moved to use Spanish in the workplace by a perceived usefulness from the identity aspect of belonging to the Spanish-speaking Latinx community. This research suggests that it is the combination of work and social pressures that leads to Latinx' using Spanish in the workplace place, even though they are undercompensated.

The presenter will describe the study and suggest further research.