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¿Cómo Se Dice...? The Spanish Use of Hispanic College Students

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by

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ABSTRACT

The Spanish language is very prominent in the United States. Millions of Spanish-speakers live there, and the use of the language in their day to day lives has augmented the presence of it in an otherwise Anglophone country. However, there are certain factors that may influence how often Spanish speakers actually use their language in this country. This study sought to analyze two: the existing anti-Hispanic attitudes in the United States and the parental/caretaker level of education of Spanish-speaking people. This study aimed to conduct an analysis of college-aged Hispanic students in order to conclude the extent to which those two factors may influence Spanish language retention. A sample population of 44 Hispanic students from the University of Southern Mississippi completed a survey through which they reported their experiences of being Spanish speakers in this country. The results from this study were analyzed and compared to existing research on language development, language retention, and societal attitudes toward Spanish speakers. The data from this study revealed that negative societal perceptions of Spanish speakers still have negative effects toward Spanish use. Those negatives effects include an avoidance or abandonment of speaking Spanish. This study also found that a parent's education level could influence the confidence their children have in the language, thereby also influencing Spanish use and possibly language retention. Additionally, this study found that the encouragement or lack of encouragement from parents heavily influences the confidence some Spanish speakers have in their language skills; this confidence in turn influenced participants' use of the language, which has important implications for the retention of the language.

Keywords: Spanish, English, language, retention, Hispanic, linguicism

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Located above the largest Spanish-speaking country in the world, the United States sees many Spanish-speaking visitors, as well as immigrants who bring their families or start their families here. Consequently, Spanish has become a widely spoken language in the United States. The country has an ever-increasing population of Hispanics, and it is expected that by 2050, "approximately 35% of the children living in the [United States] will be Hispanic" (López, Komaroff, Hammer, Rodriguez, Scarpino, Bitetti, & Goldstein, 2020, p. 1247). Because of this increase of the Hispanic population in the United States, Spanish has quickly become one of the dominant languages.

However, growing up as a Spanish speaker in a country that is predominantly English-speaking can present linguistic challenges. Certain factors in the United States affect the way many Hispanics, especially children, retain or forget their Spanish language skills. According to Lee, Shetgiri, Barina, Tillitski, and Flores (2015), "societal and school pressures [promote] monolingualism in the majority language," English, which can inhibit the Spanish language development of Hispanic children (p. 515). The assimilation into the life and culture of the United States causes many Hispanics to partially or entirely forget their mother tongue. The effects of losing a language are substantial: a person who forgets their native tongue loses the ability to communicate with other speakers of that tongue, including any family members that may speak only that language. Additionally, a person who loses the ability to speak a different language may be losing a skill that is beneficial to them in academic or vocational areas. Helping Spanish speakers retain and develop their language in the United States may depend on identifying those factors that have the greatest influence on language development.

The current study aims to analyze two of the factors that research has shown may have an influence on the Spanish retention among Hispanics who have grown up in the United States: societal perceptions of Hispanics and parental level of education. To analyze these two factors, this study evaluates Hispanic college students' opinions of their Spanish skills and development. Through this Honors College thesis and as a member of the demographic of Hispanics who grew up in the United States, I hoped to gain more insight into the development, retention, stagnation, and abandonment of the Spanish language in the United States by looking into the societal pressures and expectations of Spanish speakers, as well as the parental level of education for this group. Since many Hispanic people in the United States demonstrate a lack of confidence or a lack of skill in the Spanish language, analyzing the factors that lead to the lack of skills could have important implications for the use and retention of the language. This study reviewed existing relevant literature, developed an original experiment, and analyzed the recorded data to discuss what those data imply for the discussed demographic. The combination of existing research on language development as well as Hispanic people's personal input provides further insight into what can be done to nurture the Spanish language in the United States.

The following chapter contains the literature review of this study; it delves into existing literature pertinent to this study including research involving the language development of children, the way parents and caretakers influence the language development of their children and how negative societal attitudes toward Hispanics affect Spanish-speakers in the United States. Chapter III contains the methodology of this study; it describes the research questions and the hypotheses that I developed as a result

of the existing, relevant literature. Chapter III also contains the participant selection methods and the data collection procedures. Chapter IV presents the results gathered through this study and analyzes that data based on the existing research. It also interprets the data and considers how the results can be applied to future research in this area. Chapter V describes the final conclusions from this study.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Existing research attributes language development and retention to different factors, and among those are parent education level and societal factors. The general consensus is that the language a child learns early in life may set the course for language learning in the following years. Marchman, Martínez, Hurtado, Grüter, and Fernald (2017) hold that "the linguistic richness of a child's early learning experience is critical for language acquisition and cognitive growth, whether that child is learning one language or two" (p. 1). Since parents or caretakers are the primary source for infants' language interactions, parents can be thought of as a major influence in the language development of their children. Additionally, the richness of a parent or caretaker's language is also a factor. Beyond that, societal factors play some observable role in the language development of people. In many cases, the pressure to practice monolingualism in a country's majority language may bring about the disuse of a person's mother tongue. That pressure can cause native speaker children of foreign languages to forget those languages, thereby inhibiting the development of that language completely (Lee et al., 2015). While there is no one specific factor that affects language development, parental influences and societal influences seem to be very significant.

Language Development for Bilingual Children

Children in the United States that speak Spanish as their first language and learn English as a second language have a completely unique experience in comparison to monolingual children. For these dual language learners, there can be the presence of a societal pressure to assimilate and speak the majority language, as well as a familial pressure to speak their mother tongue (Lee et al., 2015; López et al., 2020). In many

cases, these children develop skills in English at the expense of the development and retention of their Spanish. Many of these children receive public schooling and instruction in English, while they communicate at home in Spanish (Marchman, Bermúdez, Bang, & Fernald, 2020). The unique, complex experiences of these dual language learners can make it difficult for parents and caregivers to promote bilingualism due to existing "outside pressures that prioritize English and concerns about their children's English-language acquisition" (Lutz, 2008, p. 37). To understand the complexity of language development for children, specifically bilingual children, the review of existing research and observations of the way bilingual children develop their language is necessary.

English-dominant or English-only instruction in schools has observable effects on the Spanish development of children who speak Spanish as their first language. According to Mancilla-Martinez and Lesaux (2011), gaps in the vocabulary of children in a sample demonstrated "significant weaknesses in Spanish" when compared to their English skills (p. 1547). The effects of English instruction have been observed as early as 4.5 years of age, where researchers have noted stronger reading and speaking skills in English than in Spanish (Mancilla-Martinez & Lesaux, 2011). Additionally, regarding the children that do speak in Spanish with their families, the number of children who do so has decreased to less than half of the originally measured average over a period of several years (Mancilla-Martinez & Lesaux, 2011). Mancilla-Martinez and Lesaux (2011) also found that "at age 11, Spanish oral language skills had not reached the equivalent of a 4 1/2-year-old monolingual speaker" (p. 1555). While English-only instruction was not the only factor in the stagnation of these dual language learners' Spanish skills, the

legislation that required English-only instruction in schools is at least partially at fault here (Mancilla-Martinez & Lesaux, 2011). This suggests that the problem with Spanish language stagnation may be helped, in part, by improving education and implementing bilingual-promoting instruction.

Other studies, however, have reached different conclusions on the relationship between English learning and Spanish retention/loss in Hispanics. Tran (2010) found that for some second-generation Latinos in the United States, over time, there is an observable increase in skill in both English and Spanish (p. 257). While some studies show that children are increasingly less likely to speak Spanish as they age, Tran (2010) found that "English and Spanish proficiency increase simultaneously over time among second-generation Latinos as they enter young adulthood" (p. 276). Subjects in Tran's (2010) study had an average age of 14, which suggests that language retention could be different for this group in comparison to younger children or older adults. Tran's (2010) findings are contrary to findings by Mancilla-Martinez and Lesaux (2011) and Lutz (2008). Lutz (2008) found that parents who were either bilingual or predominantly spoke English claimed that there is a difficulty in maintaining Spanish across generations. However, studies such as these do not discredit the findings discussed in Tran's (2010) work. Tran (2010) found that second generation immigrants of Mexican descent were the most likely to display Spanish retention. Mancilla-Martinez and Lesaux's (2011) study included mostly Hispanics of nationalities other than Mexican, while Lutz's (2008) study included only a small sample of Mexican people. Furthermore, according to Tran (2010), the relative size of the Mexican population in the United States "increases the opportunity for Spanish use and retention" (pp. 277-278). In addition, there was a positive relationship

between Spanish retention and the socioeconomic status (SES) of second-generation immigrants; that is, second-generation immigrants with a higher SES were more likely to retain Spanish skills, perhaps due to their access to resources (Tran, 2010, pp. 277-278).

Another factor that has been repeatedly observed is the apparent preference dual language learners have for English over Spanish. Various studies have found that Hispanic children prefer speaking English over speaking Spanish (Lutz, 2008; Lee et al., 2015; López et al., 2020). A study performed by López et al. (2020) on the communication in homes of Hispanic dual language learners found that those children were more likely to have a preference for speaking English as their parents became bilingual and proceeded to introduce English in their homes. López et al. (2020) further summarized that "the majority of Latino children, when provided the opportunity, are using English" and that "children typically respond in English," even when their parents speak to them in Spanish (pp. 1258-1259). This finding was echoed by a small focus group study performed by Lee et al. (2015) in which a parent reported the reluctance children had to learning Spanish, as well as in Lutz's (2008) study, where she reported that there was a persistence in children of speaking English against their parents' wishes to maintain Spanish. Lee et al. (2015) reported that teenagers felt "embarrassed by speaking Spanish, believing it was 'un-American'" (p. 512). This demonstrates not only the resistance to maintaining Spanish at home, but it also implies the influence of societal attitudes toward Spanish-speakers and their language retention. Hispanic parents interviewed by Lutz (2008) reported their observance of "the large influence that schools have on children's preference for English" (p. 58). However, since Tran (2010) observed some Mexican Americans to have high strength in Spanish retention, it can be assumed

that there are some Hispanic adolescents that do not prefer English over Spanish to the point of affecting the retention of their mother tongue.

Studies on the language development of bilingual children or dual language learners in languages other than English and Spanish have allowed a glimpse into the similarities and differences that occur across languages. In a study by MacLeod, Fabiano-Smith, Boegner-Pagé, and Fontolliet (2013), the effects on bilingual children's language development were measured based on how much exposure those children received to each language on a weekly basis. However, in this study, the surveyed children lived in the Canadian province of Quebec, where the majority language is French (Macleod et al., 2013). Additionally, the children had been raised German-French bilinguals, but at the time of the study, lived in a city that did not have German as an official language (Macleod et al., 2013). For all but one of the subjects, French was the language used the majority of the time, with German exposure being limited to only about a quarter of the time (Macleod et al., 2013). One of the main measures of this study was the development of receptive vocabulary specifically, and the findings included "generally strong receptive vocabulary abilities for the children in French…but much weaker receptive vocabulary abilities for German" (Macleod et al., 2013, p. 139). In Macleod et al.'s (2013) study, receptive vocabulary was the vocabulary that the children were observed to be familiar with as they correctly pointed to the images of each vocabulary word said by the evaluators. As is the case with bilingual children who speak Spanish and English, it seems that most of the time, the majority language spoken in a child's community is what develops faster, leaving the minority language to stagnate.

Parental Influence on Language Development

Though the process of language development involves different factors, it can be assumed that language interactions between children and caregivers account for much of early exposure to language for children. In the case of bilingual children or dual language learners, "early engagement with caregivers provides [them] with information that supports language knowledge and fundamental language processing skills in both of the languages they are learning" (Marchman et al., 2017, p. 1). Prevalent language interactions between caregivers and children include conversations and book reading. According to Raikes, Luze, Brooks-Gunn, Raikes, Pan, Tamis-Lemonda, Constantine, Tarullo, and Rodriguez (2006), there is an evident connection between language development and reading books during infancy to 2 years of age. This connection is reiterated by studies that focus primarily on fathers' language contributions and mothers' language contributions to child language development (Raikes et al., 2006; Pancsofar & Vernon-Feagans, 2010; Baralt, Darcy, & Brito, 2020). Parental influence on child language development can be influenced by a number of other factors, such as socioeconomic status, societal attitudes toward minority-language speakers, parent level of education, verbal ability, and cultural differences, among others (Raikes et al., 2006; Marchman et al., 2017; Baralt et al., 2020; López et al., 2020). As for studies that measure maternal vocabulary influence or paternal input influence, there is a lack of consensus. Various studies conclude that mother-child language interactions heavily influence the language development of children, while other studies suggest that language input from fathers may have more of an influence (Raikes et al., 2006; Pancsofar & Vernon-Feagans, 2010; Baralt et al., 2020). Others do not make a distinction between

mothers and fathers, opting for gender-neutral terms such as parents or caregivers (Marchman et al., 2017). These conflicting findings complicate the analysis of parental influence on language development.

Raikes et al. (2006) described the connection between maternal book reading and children language development as "reciprocal and snowballing" (p. 924). The appearance of this connection suggests that the frequency with which mothers read to their children also affects the developing vocabulary of the children. Raikes et al.'s (2006) study also establishes a connection between race, ethnicity, child gender, and mother education level. Additionally, Raikes et al. (2006) observed the effects of being either a firstborn or a later-born child. The report contained an assortment of participants, including African American mothers, Hispanic mothers that spoke English, Hispanic mothers that spoke Spanish, and white mothers (Raikes et al., 2006). Above all, white mothers were the most likely to read to their children on a daily basis, which suggests that Hispanic mothers and African American mothers were not imparting as much vocabulary to their children in comparison (Raikes et al., 2006). Furthermore, the more years of education a mother had after having received at least a high school diploma or a General Education Development degree (GED), the more likely she was to read daily to her child or children, which suggests a connection between parent education level and language development (Raikes et al., 2006). This does not explicitly suggest that parent education level and parent vocabulary use directly affect child vocabulary retention, although there does appear to be at least an indirect connection between parent education level and child language development.

As fathers become more involved in their children's lives, due to a larger number of mothers finding employment, there is an observable effect on the language development of their children (Pancsofar & Vernon-Feagans, 2010). As is the case with mothers in some studies, "fathers with more education may engage in more involved caregiving and socialization… than fathers with less education" (Pancsofar & Vernon-Feagans, 2010, p. 451). The implication of studies like these is that children who have parents with higher education have an increased chance at receiving language-nurturing interactions in comparison to children with less-educated parents. Findings from Pancsofar and Vernon-Feagans (2010) "suggest that father language input when children are as young as 6 months may be important in understanding children's language development even two and half years later," (p. 459). The conflicting part of Pancsofar and Vernon-Feagans' (2010) study is that it suggested that the vocabulary used by mothers may have almost no influence on language development, contrary to studies that came before it. Ultimately, Pancsofar and Vernon-Feagans (2010) concluded that their findings imply that mothers and fathers influence child language development differently, suggesting the possibility of both parents influencing the development in incomparable ways. While this study had various limitations and no concrete conclusion, it does establish further questions to guide future research into paternal contributions to language development.

Parents can also exert an influence on language development that is not explicitly caused by language interactions with their children. In a review of relevant literature, Perkins, Finegood, and Swain (2013) hold that "a lack of parental warmth may be implicated in the development of language problems" (p. 13). They reported that having

warm interactions with parents, including promotion of autonomy and words of encouragement, led to various positive developments in the following years, one of which was higher language skill (Perkins et at., 2013). Perkins et al. (2013) also found that being born prematurely and experiencing the effects of maternal stress "may contribute to the development of language delays" (p. 12). These connections show that parental influence on child language development goes beyond the language interactions between parent and child, although it is not revealed exactly how much these other factors affect language development. Regardless, the review reiterates the importance of parents' language use and reading to their children, saying they both "[predict] cognitive and language development" (Perkins et al., 2013, p. 13). In fact, the literacy of parents, specifically mothers, is thought to be able to reduce the effects of socioeconomic status on language development (Perkins et al., 2013). However, this literacy was reported as being independent of education level, suggesting that high levels of education are not entirely necessary for positive effects on language development (Perkins et al., 2013). Controlling for socioeconomic status, Perkins et al. (2013) found that the language used by parents of caregivers can predict language development. As a more extensive vocabulary is expected from parents with a higher level of education, this may suggest a direct connection between parent education level and the language development of their children. However, a higher education level does not always determine the language a parent uses, so education level may not be a highly influential factor for the language development of children.

Societal Attitudes Toward Spanish Speakers

Because the disuse of a language is evidently counterproductive to the retention of the language, the observation and analysis of factors that encourage language disuse or prioritization of English over Spanish are critical. One major factor that encourages disuse of minority language is the presence of anti-Hispanic and anti-Spanish language attitudes in the United States. Although racism towards Hispanics and anti-Spanish language attitudes can be considered two different things, in many cases, they are not mutually exclusive. The anti-Spanish ideology in the United States maintains a viewpoint that English should be the only language one speaks, and it is also a type of linguicism. Linguicism is a discriminatory attitude based on the language a person speaks (Murillo & Smith, 2011, p.147). Another term for linguicism is linguistic racism, as stated in different studies (Baralt et al., 2020). Regardless of the term used to describe the idea, discriminating against people based on the language they speak does have adverse effects on the use and retention of that language.

While some studies have established that Hispanic-immigrant parents generally would prefer to have their children retain their mother tongue, other studies have demonstrated that cases of linguicism have discouraged some parents, specifically mothers, from speaking to their children in their native Spanish (Lutz, 2008; Lee et al., 2015; Baralt et al., 2020). In Baralt et al.'s (2020) study, the effects of linguistic racism on Hispanic mothers were observed through focus group data. Her study found that anti-Spanish ideology in the United States "[caused] parents to abandon speaking their native Spanish with their children" (Baralt et al., 2020, p. 34). Because early-childhood language exposure is crucial to the language development of children, the abandonment

of the use of their native Spanish by some parents could prevent the proper development and retention of Spanish in their children (Baralt et al., 2020). Baralt et al.'s (2020) study, which included the development and use of a smartphone application, encouraged mothers to speak to their children in Spanish while also instilling the idea of linguistic pride within the mothers. The implementation of this application in the lives of 12 mothers in this study resulted in increased interactions between mother and child and an elevated sense of pride in their native Spanish (Baralt et al., 2020). Baralt et al.'s (2020) study suggests not only that anti-Spanish ideologies in the United States are harmful to the exposure to and development of Spanish for Hispanic children, but that promoting Spanish-speaking pride is as important as diminishing linguistic racism.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that the impact of English-only ideologies on Spanish speakers in the United States has spanned generations and is a deeply engrained aspect of society (Murillo & Smith, 2011). Murillo and Smith (2011) have gathered various anecdotes on linguicism on the United States-Mexico border from as early as 1920. Murillo and Smith (2011) present these stories to prove that "schools are often sites of language discrimination against children," while explaining that language is a "tool for self-expression" at the same time as being "a target for prejudice and discrimination" (p. 147). As a result of laws and policies that required schools to provide instruction only in English, students who were heard speaking Spanish often received punishment (Murillo & Smith, 2011). Punishments ranged from getting one's "[mouth] washed out with soap" to physical abuse, like getting hit with a ruler or a cane (Murillo & Smith, 2011, p. 148). Participants in Murillo and Smith's (2011) study also demonstrated that parents had abandoned teaching their mother tongue to their children, resulting in English

monolingualism for them (p.148). The study concludes that the lasting effects and presence of language discrimination requires conscious rejection of that discrimination in order to improve on school curriculum and bilingual instruction in schools (Murillo & Smith, 2011). These anecdotal cases demonstrate that anti-Spanish ideologies are still extant and that it may be necessary to deconstruct this belief system in order to ensure proper Spanish development for dual language learners.

The preceding review of relevant literature made it clear that it is necessary to record the experiences of Spanish speakers in the United States directly from that demographic in order to observe any connections between parental influences, societal influences, and Spanish language retention. The following chapter contains the methodology for this study. The chapter describes the research questions that guided the literature review, as well as the hypotheses that were formed based on those questions.. The methodology section discusses the targeted demographic for this study, the selection process, and the data collection and analysis process.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

This study sought to examine the effects that parental and societal influences may have had on the use and retention of the Spanish language for Hispanic college students enrolled at the University of Southern Mississippi. For the purpose of collecting their experiences and comparing it with the existing literature, it was necessary to interact directly with those students. The subsequent research questions and hypotheses were created taking into consideration the related literature. Since existing research points to connections between societal attitudes toward Hispanic people, parental level of education, and Spanish retention for Spanish speakers in the United States, the research questions focus on these ideas. From those, a survey was created with the goal of proving the hypotheses using data received directly from Hispanic college students who grew up speaking both English and Spanish. Utilizing their personal experiences and language tendencies, the results of this study reiterate that parents/caretakers and societal attitudes have an observable impact on Spanish language retention.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

1. Do anti-Hispanic attitudes influence Hispanic college students' Spanish use and retention?
2. Does the education level of the parents of these Hispanic college students affect their skill level in Spanish?
3. Do the mentioned factors affect Hispanic college students' level of confidence in their Spanish? What effect does that confidence have on their use and retention of the language?

I developed three hypotheses that are based on these research questions and my personal experiences. The first is that the education level of Hispanic parents has some measurable effect on the language development of their children, independent from other factors that affect language development. This hypothesis was developed from existing research that points out that there is a connection between parental level of education, parent literacy, parental vocabulary and use, and the language development of their children. The second is that societal factors, such as linguistic racism and anti-Hispanic attitudes, will negatively affect the Spanish of first-and second-generation Hispanic immigrants due to an avoidance or abandonment of speaking Spanish. This hypothesis was based on existing research which revealed that in many cases, there is a hesitance to speak Spanish when Spanish speakers have experienced prejudice or hateful comments toward their language in the past. The final hypothesis is that both factors, parental education level and societal attitudes toward Spanish speakers, will affect the confidence these students have in their Spanish skills, thereby also affecting their use and retention of the language.

Participant Selection and Data Collection

The study used a questionnaire designed on the software website Qualtrics to collect the necessary data. Participants were chosen through the distribution of the questionnaire to students' email address at the University of Southern Mississippi. The University of Southern Mississippi's Institutional Review Board approved this study (see Appendix B). The study is aimed at undergraduate Hispanic students of at least 18 years of age, who are either first- or second-generation Spanish speakers. These requirements were stated in the email distributing the link to the survey, and students self-identified as

such through the first four questions of the questionnaire. The first page of the questionnaire explained the purpose of the study. Responses from participants that do not self-identify as having the aforementioned traits were discarded and not included in the results. In an effort to encourage participants to complete the full survey, only two questions warranted a lengthy response; the rest were either multiple-choice or short answer. The questionnaire was available for a week, with the goal being to receive at most 100 responses, so as to allow ample time to analyze gathered responses. The email distributing the survey and the instruction page of the survey included a statement informing participants that completing the survey is giving consent to use the anonymous responses in this project (see Appendix A). However, participants had the option to exit the survey by closing their browser at any point, effectively withdrawing consent and indicating that their responses should not be used in this project.

Language and Demographics

The inclusion of demographic questions was necessary because these questions reiterate the population that this survey is aimed at: undergraduate Hispanic students of at least 18 years of age. Furthermore, this study was originally limited to first- or second-generation Spanish speakers, since they are likely to have learned English as a second language after learning Spanish at a young age. In the questionnaire, I defined a first-generation Spanish speaker as someone who was born in a Spanish-speaking country but moved to the United States. Second-generation Spanish speakers are people whose parents were born in a Spanish-speaking country, but they themselves were born in the United States. According to Tran (2010), the original idea of immigrant assimilation into the American society involved having immigrants speak only English by the third

generation, which is why this study originally intended to focus on first- and second-generation Spanish speakers. Studies have also found differences in Spanish retention among Spanish speakers with different nationalities in the United States, creating another reason for the inclusion of demographic questions in the survey (Tran, 2010; Mancilla-Martinez & Lesaux, 2011). While not the main focus of this study, differences in Spanish skills among different subgroups of Spanish speakers may be linked with the factors that are the main foci in this study: societal influences and parental influences.

Parental/Caretaker Influence

Based on the studies by Pancsofar and Vernon-Feagans (2010) and Raikes (2006), the second set of questions ask about participants' parents and caregivers. The questions contain specific inquiries about parents' nationality and ethnicity (should they differ from the participants), as well as their level of education. These questions address parental factors that could influence language use and development, such as education, vocabulary, cultural differences, and parent encouragement of Spanish retention (Pancsofar & Vernon-Feagans, 2010; Raikes, 2006; Lee et al., 2015). There is the possibility of a connection between the level of education a Hispanic parent has and how much they encourage their children to continue speaking Spanish, which this study might help reveal. Including nationality in this study will either support or contrast the findings of Tran (2010), where Mexicans were the group to have the strongest cases of Spanish retention. Based on Tran's (2010) findings, it is expected that Mexican college students will report a higher confidence in their Spanish abilities, compared to other nationalities.

Societal Influence

The goal of the third set of questions is to reveal any instances in which participants have experienced linguistic racism. Societal expectations of immigrants in the United States include learning English, and in some cases, completely abandoning speaking Spanish (Baralt et al., 2020). This expectation jeopardizes the retention of Spanish in Hispanic children growing up in the United States. If these first- and second-generation immigrants are expected to abandon their Spanish, the inadequate development of their Spanish skills may be inevitable, as that expectation is not conducive to the development and retention of a language.

Personal Language Preferences

The fourth set of questions is based on the apparent preference many Hispanic children have for the majority language, English. The preference for English stems from being surrounded by English speakers in various places, especially in schools (Lutz, 2008). Additionally, some Hispanic children find the act of speaking Spanish "un-American," and they find it to be embarrassing (Lee et al., 2015). Using the information from existing studies, the final set of questions seeks to identify how these college-aged first- and second-generation Spanish speakers feel about their ability with the language. They will rank their confidence in their Spanish skills in various areas, and this will provide a quantitative measurement that will demonstrate the areas where young Hispanics feel they are lacking. Tran's (2010) study inspired the question that asked participants to rank their confidence in their Spanish skills; in his study, Tran asked participants, "'How well do you understand/speak/read/write English/Spanish?'" and included "four response categories: (1. not at all, (2. not well, (3. well and (4. very well"

(p. 265). Because a preference for English can develop from societal expectations to speak the majority language, these questions are heavily influenced by the questions in the third set, which ask about any cases of linguistic racism that participants have experienced.

Data Analysis Procedures

Once all responses had been gathered, the answers to each completed questionnaire were closely analyzed for use in this project. Any responses that did not meet the intended demographic of undergraduate Hispanic student that are first- or second-generation Spanish speakers were discarded. Once responses had been limited to only those that fall within the necessary demographic, I analyzed the following criteria: the education level participants reported their parents to have, any experiences with linguistic racism or discrimination, each participant's self-reported confidence with the Spanish language, each participant's preference for either English or Spanish, and each participant's pride in their Hispanic heritage. Parent education level and existing experiences with discrimination were then compared with participants' self-reported confidence in the language as well as the self-reported frequency with which participants speak Spanish. The participants' responses were also grouped by generation so that each generation's confidence, pride, and experiences with discrimination could be analyzed. Analyzing these criteria might shed light on the existing connections between parental education level, societal attitudes toward the Spanish language, and Spanish use and retention consistent with findings in prior literature.

Limitations

Although the results of this study could echo findings found in other research projects, the results are not defining to the areas of language use and retention. This study relies on participants' self-reported evaluations, which are subject to opinions they form about their skills and experiences. Additionally, participants are not being evaluated through any Spanish language test, so their skills are not being examined in a quantifiable way. Participants could underestimate their abilities in different areas of the Spanish language, as they are relying on their perception of their skills which could be influenced by the factors observed in this study, particularly the societal factors. Furthermore, this study includes only a small population of students, chosen only from the University of Southern Mississippi. A larger population from various universities could yield different results.

The following chapter presents the results of the study. Chapter IV describes, analyzes, and discusses the data based on each participant's responses and anecdotal experiences. The analysis of the results is then interpreted to evaluate the implications the current study has for future research in field of Spanish language retention.

CHAPTER IV: ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

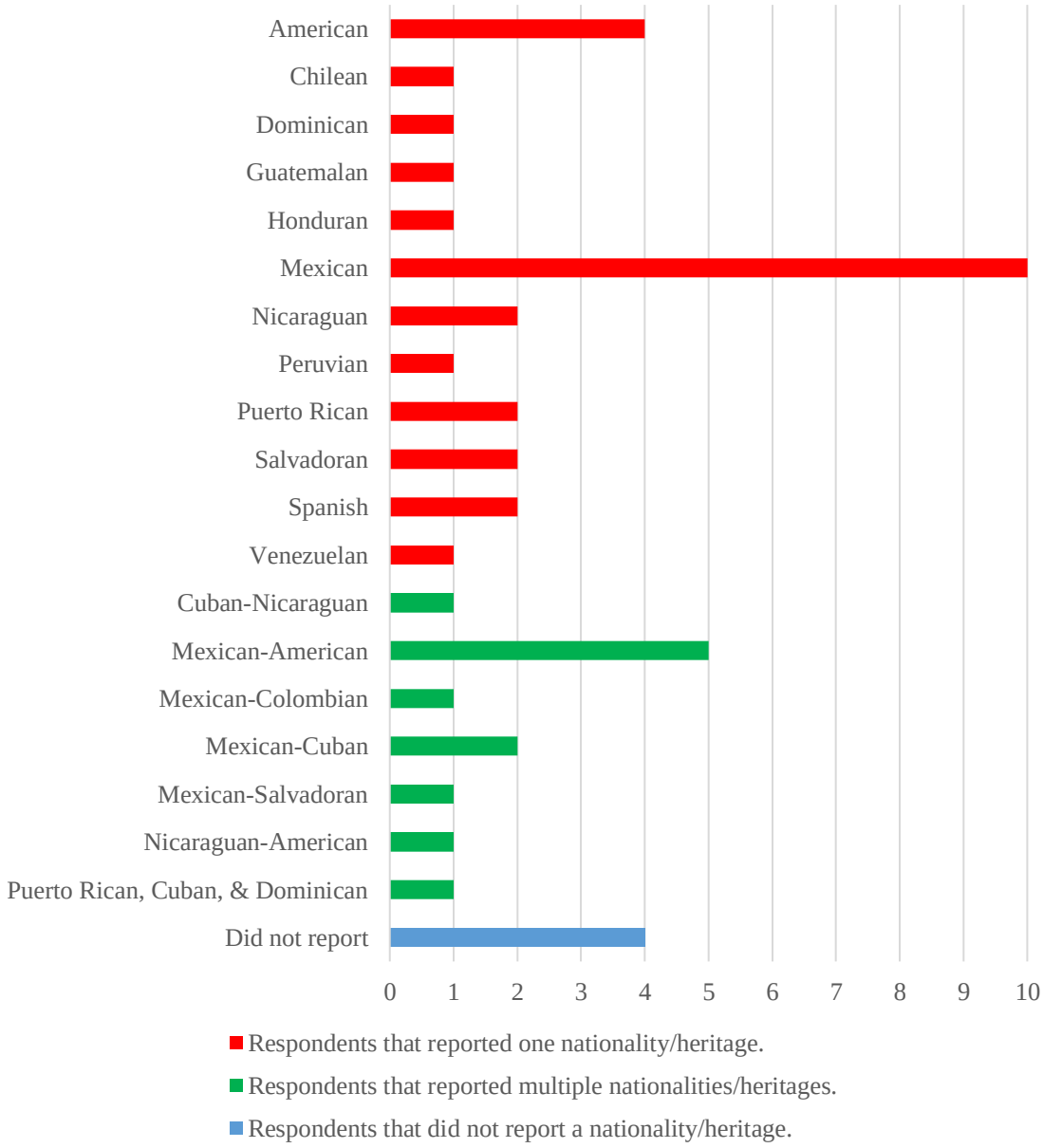
I distributed the survey to undergraduate students at the University of Southern Mississippi through email. Students had a week to complete the survey before I closed it. A total of 58 students completed the survey. There were certain respondents that did not identify as Hispanic, and those respondents also reported that they did not speak Spanish, nor did they have Spanish-speaking parents or caretakers. I filtered out those 14 respondents, which resulted in the use of the responses from the remaining 44 participants in this study.

Results

Respondent Demographics

The survey targeted undergraduate students, so the majority of respondents, 35, were between the ages of 18 and 23. The remaining 9 respondents reported as being older than 23, although that does not mean that they are not also undergraduate students. Nationalities for the respondents included Mexican, American, Cuban, Salvadoran, Colombian, Nicaraguan, Honduran, Puerto Rican, Dominican, Venezuelan, Guatemalan, Chilean, Peruvian, and Spanish, with some respondents reporting themselves to be a combination of these nationalities. Four out of the 44 respondents declined to provide a nationality. Figure 4.1 depicts the reported nationalities of the participants. It is necessary to note that since some participants reported more than one nationality for this question, there is the possibility that some reported their ethnic heritages, not just their nationalities.

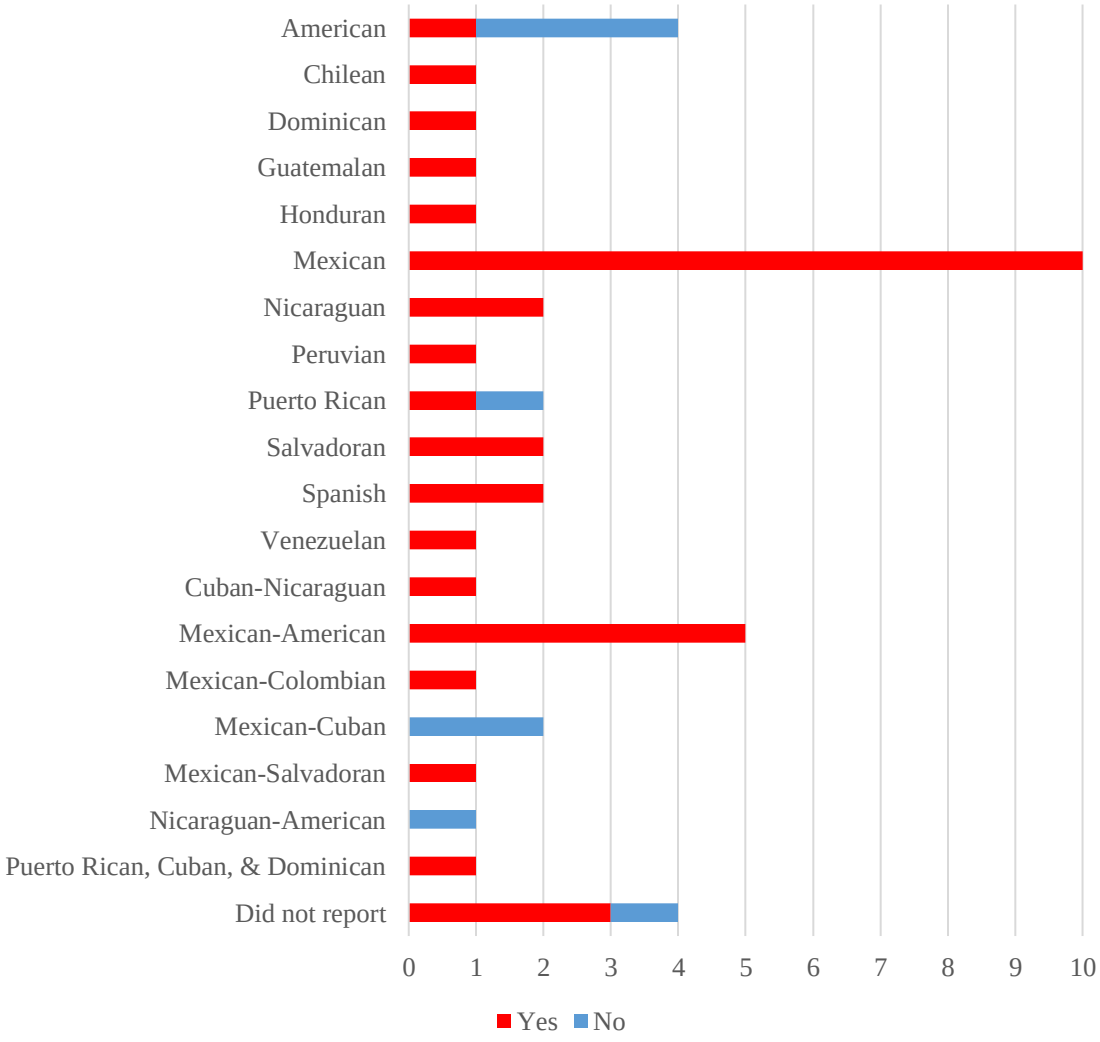
Figure 4.1: Nationalities/Heritages of all 44 Respondents



Of the 44 participants, eight indicated that they do not consider themselves as being English-Spanish bilinguals. However, the email announcement that distributed the survey specified that the appropriate demographic was students who grew up speaking both English and Spanish; therefore, this study assumes that these students who do not consider themselves English-Spanish bilinguals still have some level of Spanish. Not

identifying as bilingual may have less to do with actual skill in a language, and more with outside influences, so the current study includes these eight students. Figure 4.2 illustrates whether or not participants consider themselves an English/Spanish bilingual compared to their reported nationalities/heritages.

Figure 4.2 Do Participants Consider Themselves English/Spanish Bilinguals?



The remaining 36 students indicated that they consider themselves English-Spanish bilinguals.

Of the 44 respondents, 12 identified as first-generation Spanish speakers, 21 identified as second-generation Spanish-speakers, and 11 identified as neither. Table 4.1 shows how many respondents were in each generation.

Table 4.1: Participants by Generation

Generation	Number of Participants
First-Generation	12
Second-Generation	21
Third- or Later-Generation	11
Total Participants	44

Although the original methodology intended to focus on first- and second-generation Spanish speakers, I decided to include those respondents that did not identify as either, as those responses could contribute to the results of this study. The participants that did not identify as being first-generation or second-generation Spanish speakers were grouped together as being third- or later-generation Spanish speakers.

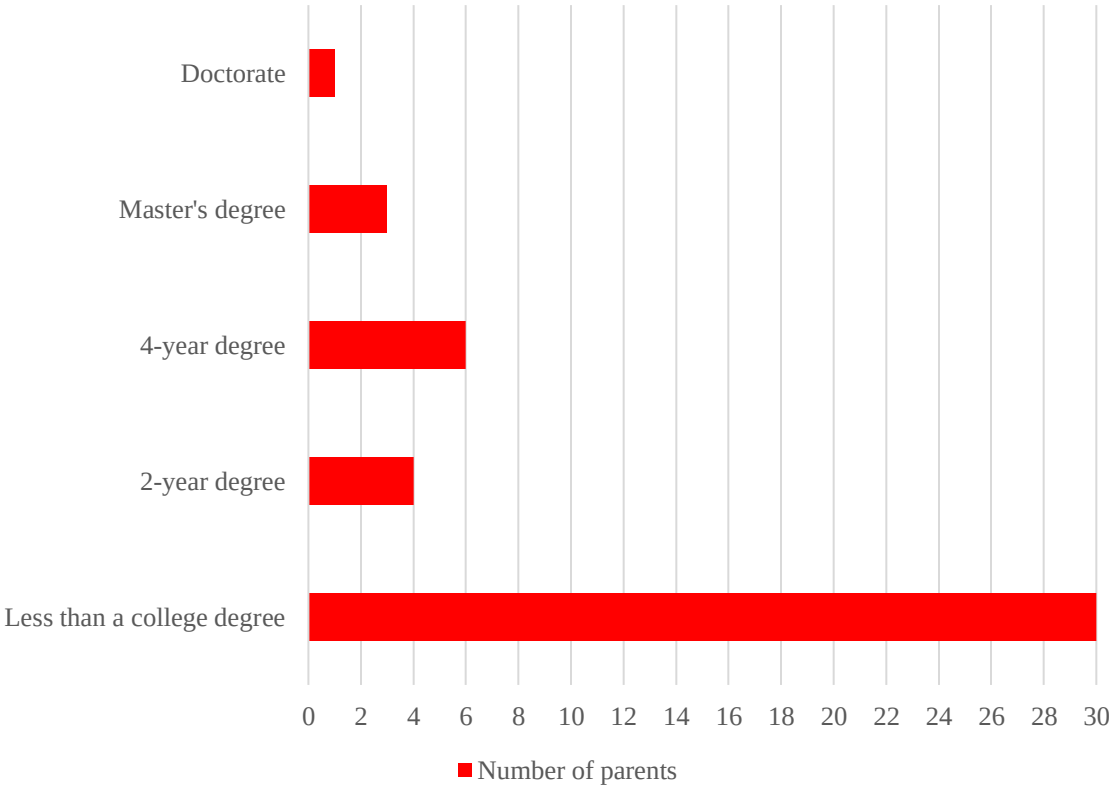
Parental Education and Influence

The reported nationalities of participants' parents included the same nationalities as the respondents', along with the addition of Ecuadorian. There was an apparent discrepancy between child and parent nationalities, possibly caused by respondents not reporting their own nationality or some respondents identifying as a nationality different from their parents or their caretakers. There was also a minor discrepancy among the responses when asked whether or not the respondents' parents or caretakers identified as Hispanic. A majority, 42, responded that their parents identify as Hispanic, like all of the

respondents in the survey. However, two participants responded that their caretakers do not identify as Hispanic. This discrepancy was inevitable, as non-Hispanic adoptive parents or caretakers of Hispanic children certainly exist. However, these two respondents reported that their parents were of a Hispanic nationality or heritage yet do not identify as Hispanic. One of these participants reported that their parent or caretaker is Mexican and Cuban, while the second participant reported that their parent or caretaker is American. There was no prompt in the survey for these two respondents to give any explanation as to why their parents do not identify as Hispanic, but I kept these survey responses for use in this project.

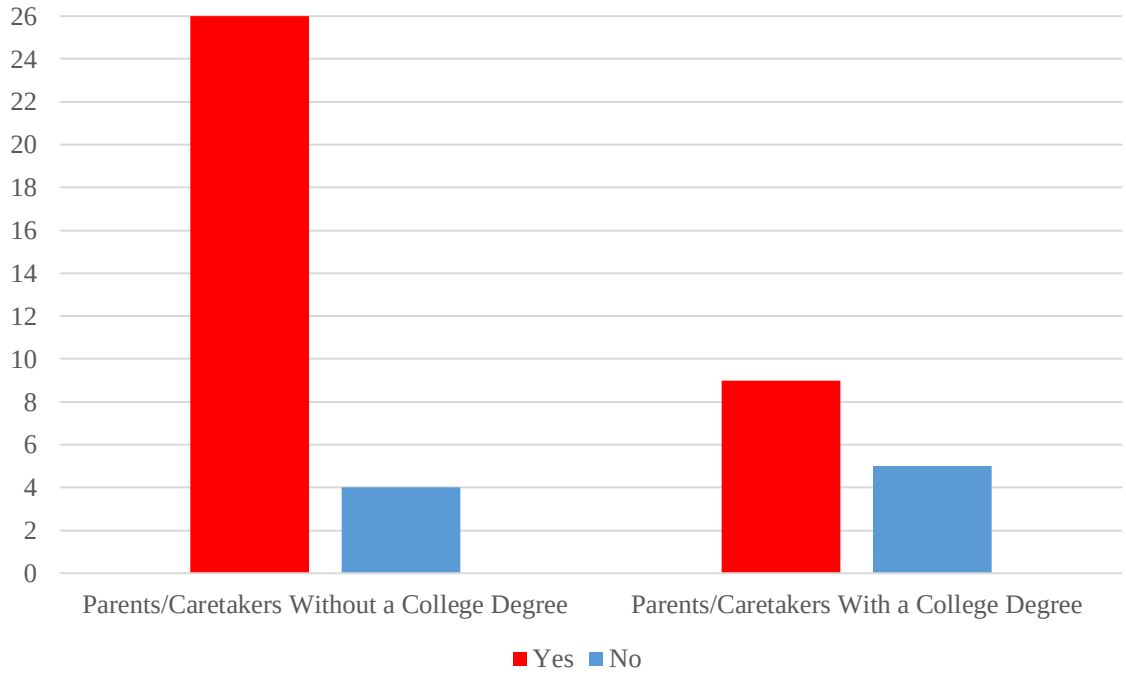
The respondents of the survey reported that the majority of their parents had not completed a college degree. Only 14 respondents had parents or caretakers that had completed a college degree. Of those 14, 4 had completed a 2-year degree, 6 had completed a 4-year degree, 3 had completed a master's degree, and 1 held a doctorate. Figure 4.3 illustrates the extent of education of participants' parents.

Figure 4.3 Education Level of Participants' Parents



Of the 14 parents that completed a college degree, nine received their education in a Spanish-speaking country. Furthermore, nine participants reported that their parents did not encourage speaking Spanish within their homes, while the remaining 35 said their parents did encourage speaking Spanish. When considering level of education, 64% of parents with a college degree encouraged speaking Spanish within the home, while 87% of the parents without a college degree were reported to encourage Spanish speaking within their homes. Figure 4.4 illustrates the parents' encouragement toward speaking Spanish at home, compared to their education level.

Figure 4.4 Did Respondents' Parents/Caretakers Encourage Speaking Spanish at Home?



The number of parents/caretakers that did not encourage speaking Spanish at home was relatively small, but there was an observable difference between parents without a college degree and parents with a college degree. It appears that parents without a college degree are more likely to encourage speaking Spanish at home.

Since differences may arise between generations, I divided the answers to the question on parental encouragement by generation as well. Table 4.2 lists these responses.

Table 4.2 Parents and Caretakers' Spanish Encouragement by Generation

	Parents/Caretakers encouraged speaking Spanish at home	Parents/Caretakers did not encourage speaking Spanish at home	Total by generation
First-generation Spanish speakers	12	0	12
Second-generation Spanish speakers	19	2	21
Third- or Later-Generation Spanish Speakers	4	7	11
Total Participants	35	9	44

First-generation Spanish speakers appeared to be the most likely to have parents or caretakers that encourage speaking Spanish at home. Spanish speakers in the third generation or later seemed the least likely to be encouraged to speak Spanish at home; only about a third of these participants were encouraged to do so.

Discrimination

The current study also compared participants' experiences with discrimination by their reported generation. Almost half of the participants reported to have experienced discrimination, ridicule, or teasing for speaking Spanish in public. Table 4.3 shows how many participants have experienced discrimination or teasing and how those behaviors affected the frequency with which they speak Spanish.

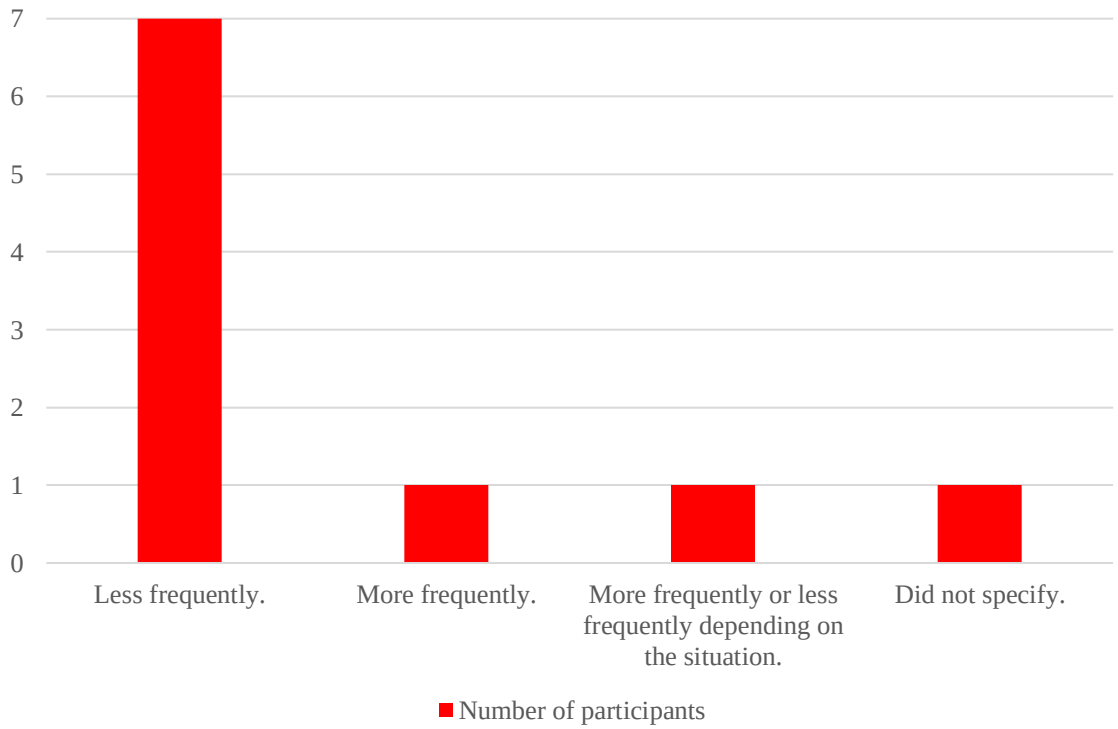
Table 4.3 Effects of Discrimination by Generation

How many of the participants have experienced discrimination?			
	Have experienced discrimination for speaking Spanish	Have not experienced discrimination for speaking Spanish	Total by generation
First-generation Spanish speakers	6	6	12
Second-generation Spanish speakers	10	11	21
Third- or Later-Generation Spanish Speakers	2	9	11
Total participants	18	26	44
Of the participants who have faced discrimination, did experiencing those behaviors affect how frequently they spoke Spanish?			
	Yes	No	Total by generation
First-generation Spanish speakers	2	4	6
Second-generation Spanish speakers	7	3	10
Third- or Later-Generation Spanish Speakers	1	1	2
Total participants	10	8	18

Of the 18 respondents who said they have experienced discrimination, a majority of 14 participants, or 78%, reported that complete strangers or peers were the ones perpetrating the behaviors. Four participants even said that they experienced this behavior from people they considered friends. Furthermore, ten respondents said that experiencing discrimination or ridicule influenced the frequency with which they spoke Spanish. It appears that the third generation of Spanish speakers is the least likely to experience discrimination or linguicism, based on the responses to the survey. First- and second-

generation Spanish speakers seemed to be about equally as likely to experience discriminatory behaviors; in both groups, about 50% of the respective participants reported having experienced them in the past. As for the participants that experienced discriminatory behaviors, a little more than half, 56%, reported that those experiences influenced how frequently they spoke Spanish. More specifically, two respondents reported that they spoke Spanish more often, while 7 explicitly stated that they spoke Spanish less often. Figure 4.5 illustrates the responses of the ten respondents that experienced discrimination.

Figure 4.5 How Frequently Did Participants Speak Spanish After Experiencing Discriminatory Behaviors?(10 out of 44 Participants)



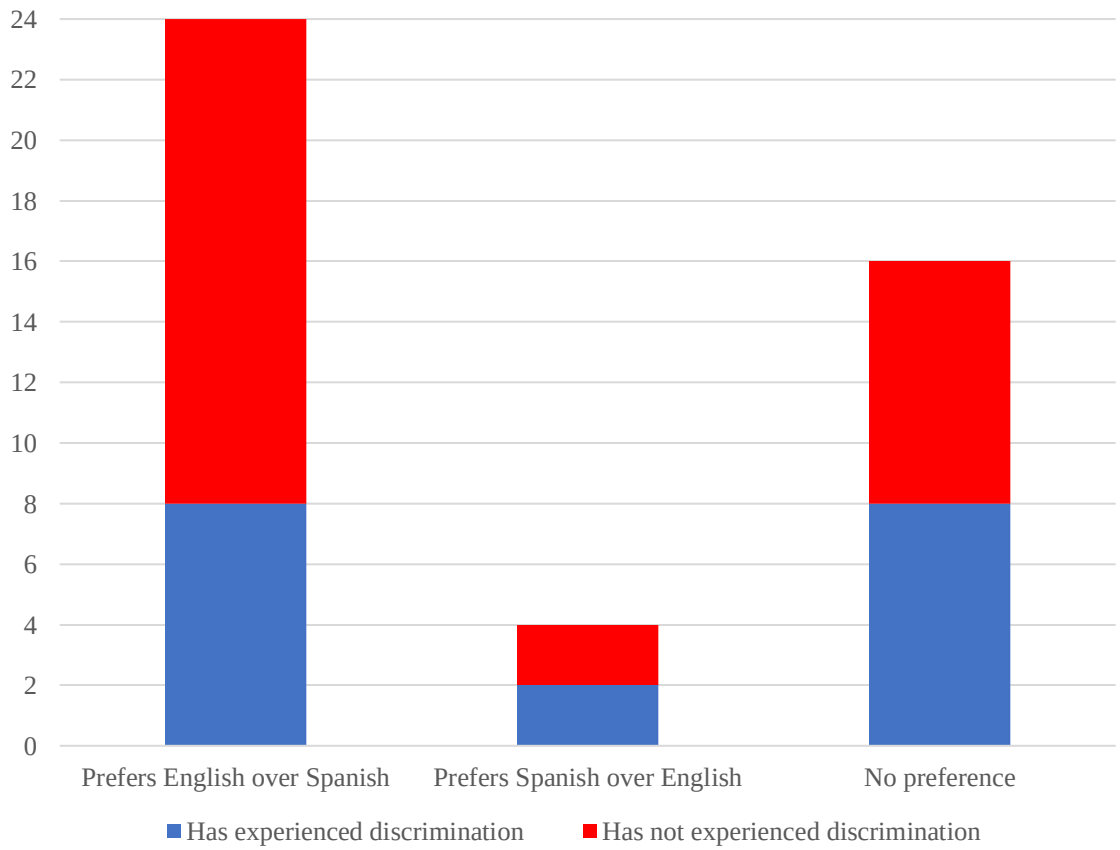
Seven of those ten respondents reported that they spoke Spanish less often because of their experiences. “We live in America; we speak English here” is an idea that was echoed by three of the respondents’ answers. One claimed that their use of the

Spanish language fluctuates depending on the situation, but if someone became upset by their use of Spanish, they would use it more often. This matches a second participant's response, who claimed that they would also speak more Spanish if faced with a hostile reaction. Both of these respondents were Mexican and second-generation Spanish speakers.

Language Preferences and Confidence

When asked about language preferences, a majority of respondents reported that they prefer to speak English over Spanish. Figure 4.6 displays participants' language preferences and compares it against whether or not participants reported experiencing discrimination.

Figure 4.6: Language Preferences of Participants vs. Experiences with Discrimination



24 out of the 44 participants reported that they prefer to speak English, and this included 8 of the respondents that reported having faced discrimination for speaking Spanish. 16 of the respondents claimed to have no preference for either Spanish or English, and only 4 respondents said they prefer to speak Spanish over speaking English. Those respondents that claimed to have no preference or that claimed to prefer Spanish included the remaining ten respondents that reported facing discrimination for speaking Spanish. In addition to this, 30 participants reported that they tend to reply to their parents in English even when their parents speak to them in Spanish, while 14 said they do not do so.

I also compared participants' language preferences based on their reported generation. Table 4.4 displays language preferences by generation.

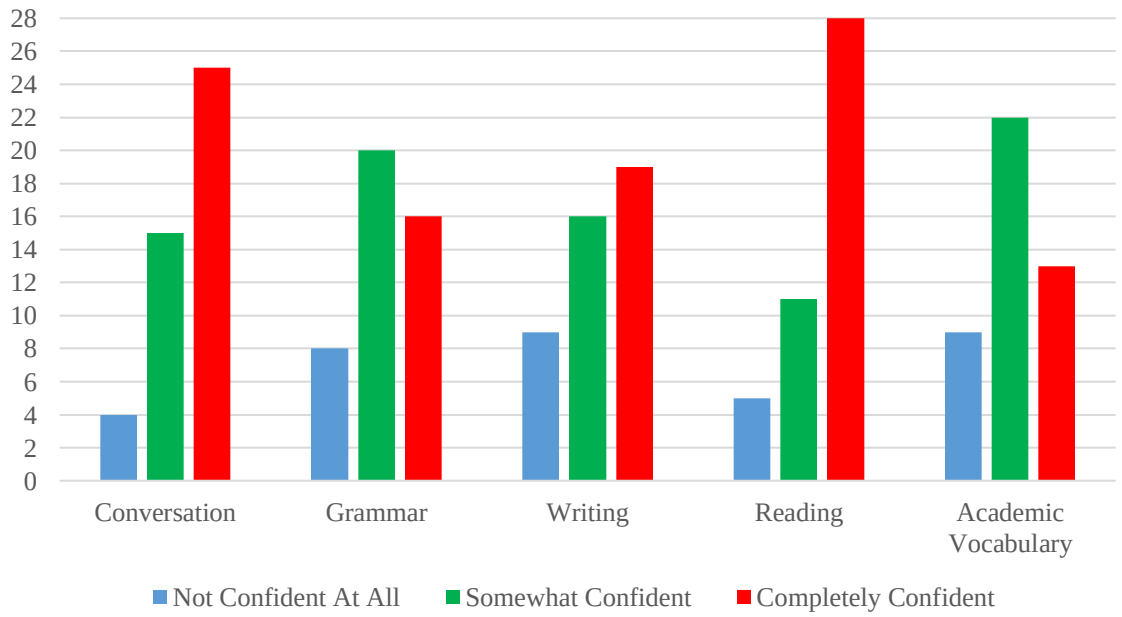
Table 4.4 Language Preferences by Generation

	Prefers to speak English over Spanish	Prefers to speak Spanish over English	Has no preference	Total by generation
First-generation Spanish speakers	6	1	5	12
Second-generation Spanish speakers	10	3	8	21
Third or Later-Generation Spanish Speakers	8	0	3	11
Total Participants	24	4	16	44

Interestingly, only about 9% of respondents appeared to have a preference for the Spanish language, and those students that preferred the Spanish language were either first- or second-generation Spanish speakers. None of the participants in the third generation or later preferred Spanish over English.

The 13th question of the survey asked participants to rank their confidence in their Spanish skills across five areas: conversation, grammar, writing, reading, and academic vocabulary. Participants reported their confidence on a scale from one to three, one being *Not at all confident,* two being *Somewhat confident,* and three being *completely confident.* To help visualize any observable trends, I arranged the 44 responses to the 13th question in different ways based on different criteria. Figure 4.7 depicts the self-reported confidence of all 44 respondents.

Figure 4.7 Confidence of All 44 Participants



As depicted by the graph, the majority of respondents feel either somewhat confident or completely confident in their Spanish abilities. In each of the five categories, the average response never fell in between *Not Confident At All* and *Somewhat Confident*; the average always falls somewhere between *Somewhat Confident* and *Completely Confident*.

Figure 4.8 depicts the self-reported confidence of the 30 respondents whose parents or caretakers do not have a college degree.

Figure 4.8 Confidence of Participants with Parents That Have College Degrees (14 out of 44 Participants)

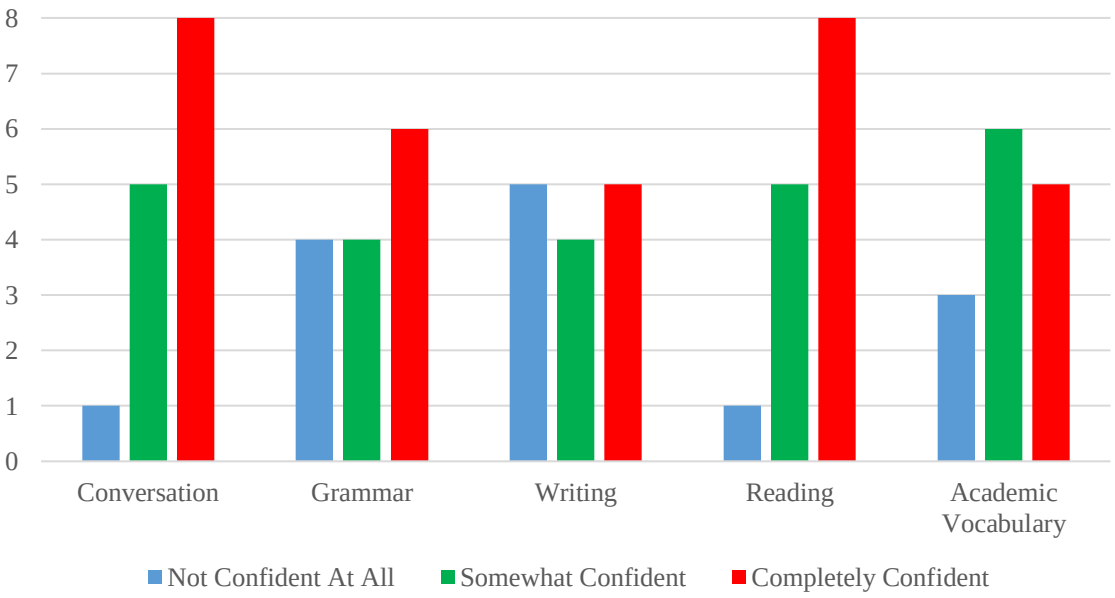
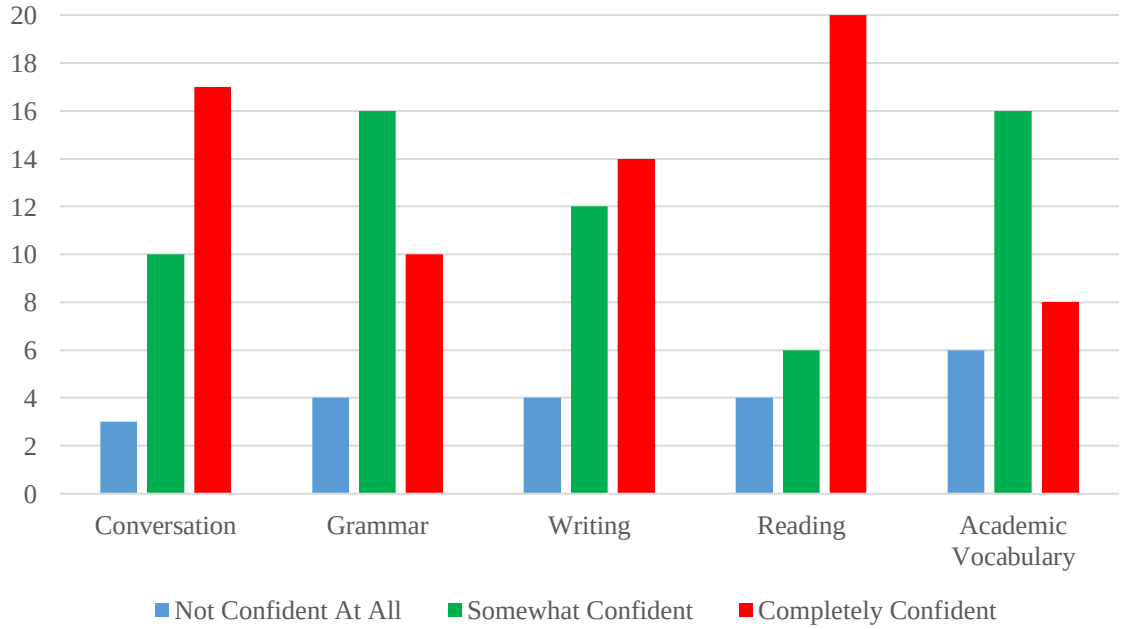


Figure 4.9 depicts the self-reported confidence of respondents with parents who do not have a college degree.

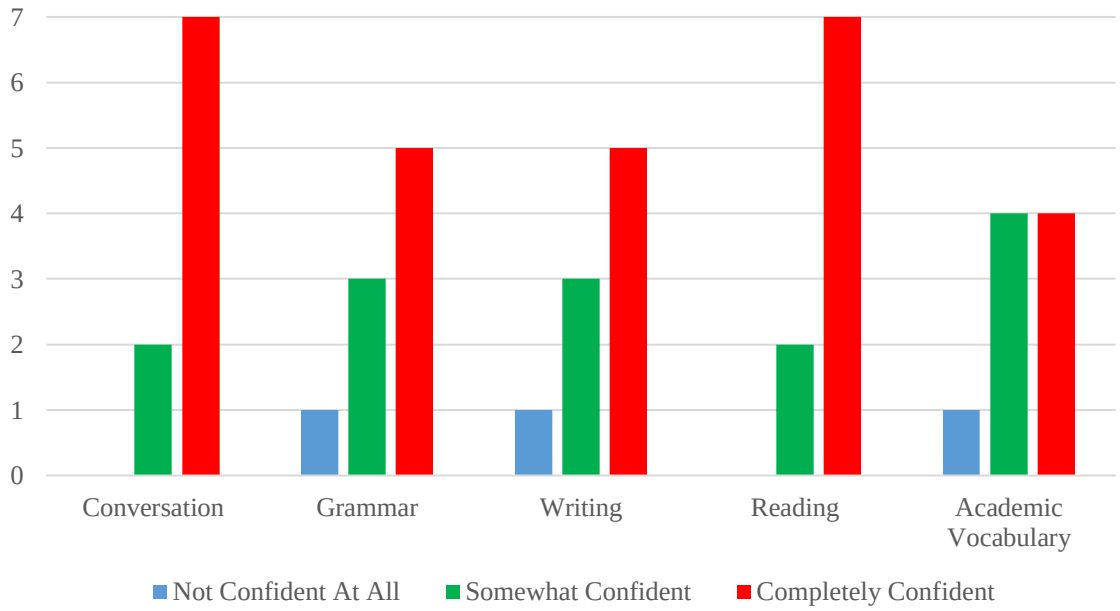
Figure 4.9 Confidence of Participants with Parents That Do Not Have a College Degree (30 out of 44 Participants)



There are some observable trends when comparing figures 4.8 and 4.9. In terms of grammatical skills, almost 43% of participants that have parents with a college degree are completely confident, compared to only 33% of participants whose parents do not have a college degree being completely confident in their grammatical skills. When considering participants who have parents with a college degree, *Completely Confident* made up 46% of the total responses. The participants who have parents that do not have a college degree trailed by only a little; *Completely Confident* made up 45% of their total responses. For the participants whose parents have a college degree, *Not Confident At All* makes up 20% of total responses. Surprisingly, when considering the participants whose parents do not have a college degree, the number of *Not Confident At All* responses drops to only 14% of total responses. Contrary to what might be expected, it appears that the participants whose parents have less than a college education are more confident than participants whose parents have a college education.

Figure 4.10 depicts the self-reported confidence of respondents with parents who have a college degree from a Spanish-speaking country.

Figure 4.10 Confidence of Participants with Parents That Have a Degree from a Spanish-Speaking Country (9 out of 44 Participants)

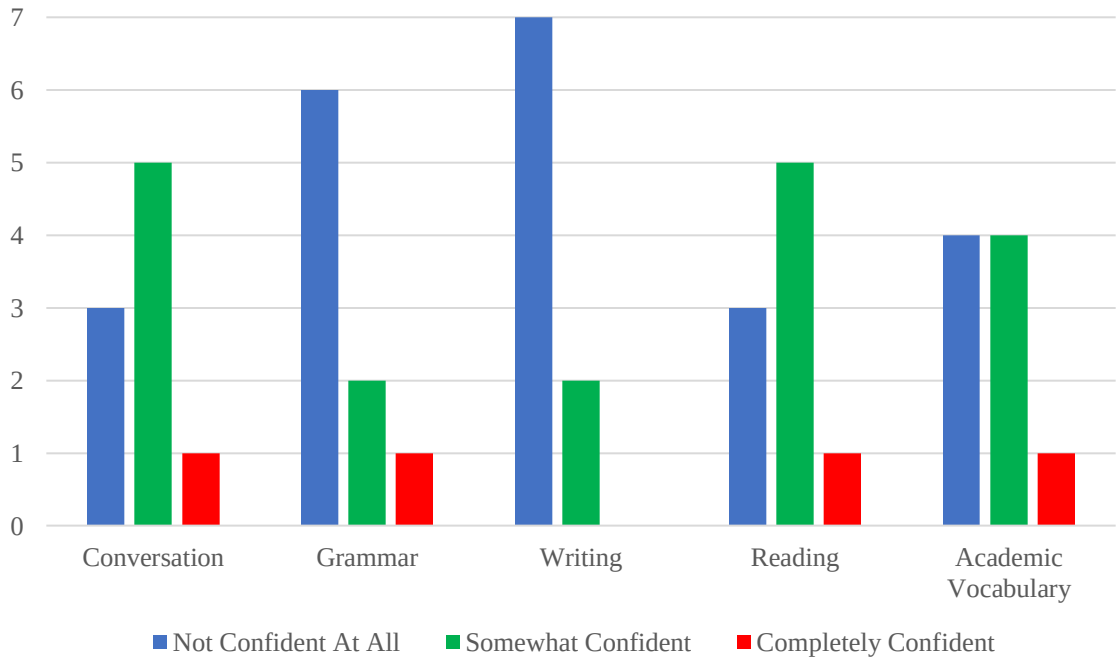


When considering the participants whose parents received their education in a Spanish-speaking country, they seem even more confident; about 56% of these respondents reported having complete confidence in their grammatical skills. Across all categories, the participants who have parents that received a college degree in a Spanish-speaking country were most likely to rank themselves as *Completely Confident* in their Spanish skills; that choice made up 62% of their total responses. To consider the opposite side of the responses, participants that had parents with a college degree from a Spanish-speaking country were the least likely to choose *Not Confident At All* as an option; they only chose it 7% of the time across all categories.

As for the students that did not consider themselves English-Spanish bilinguals, there is also a trend in their responses. As mentioned beforehand, out of all 44 respondents, there were eight students that did not consider themselves to be bilingual. Of these eight, seven reported that their parents did not encourage speaking Spanish within

their homes. Due to this correlation, there was yet another analysis of respondents' reported confidence; this analysis involves the respondents who reported that their parents did not encourage speaking Spanish at home. Figure 4.11 shows the self-evaluated confidence of this group.

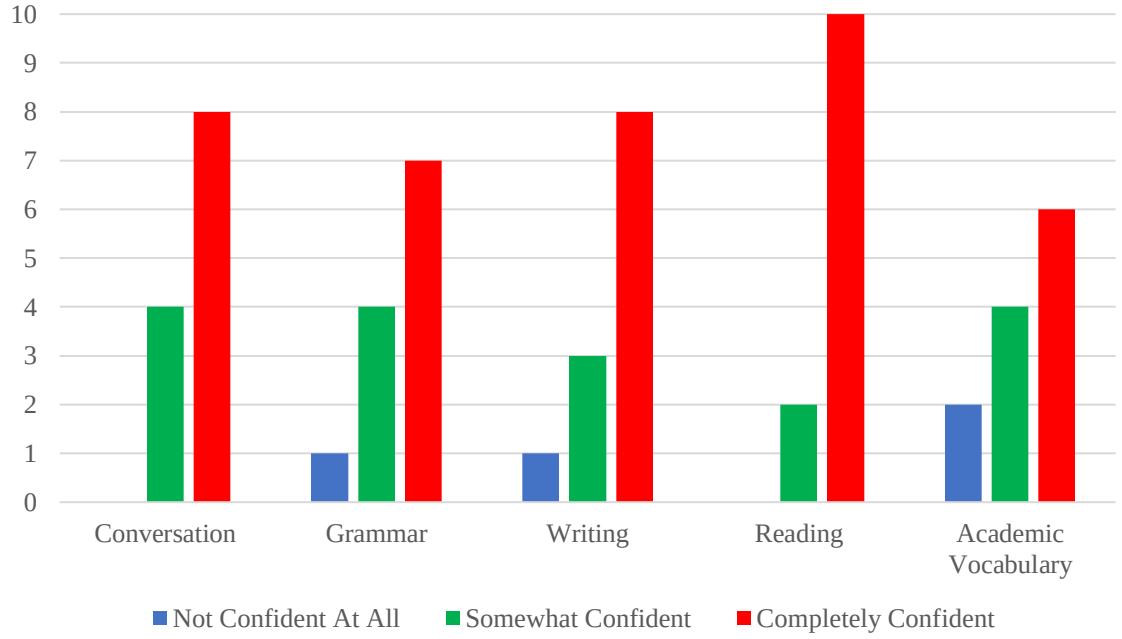
Figure 4.11 Confidence of Participants Whose Parents or Caretakers Did Not Encourage Speaking Spanish at Home (9 out of 44 Participants)



Nine participants reported that their parents or caretakers did not encourage speaking Spanish at home. This group appears to be the least confident of all respondents: across all responses, the students chose *completely confident* only about 9% of the time. In contrast, this group chose *not confident at all* 51% of the time across all responses.

In order to better understand trends in confidence, the current study compared the respondents' reported confidence in their Spanish skills to the generation they identify with. Figure 4.12 displays the reported confidence of first-generation Spanish speakers.

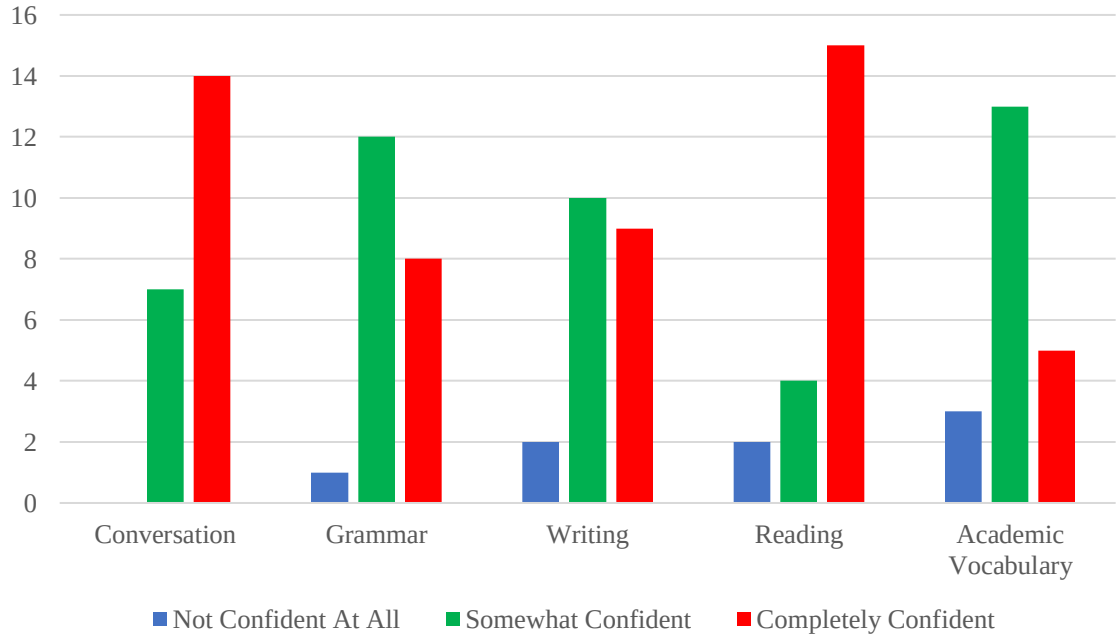
Figure 4.12 Confidence of First-Generation Spanish Speakers (12 out of 44 Participants)



When isolated by generation, the participants who reported being first-generation Spanish speakers appeared to be very confident in their Spanish skills. When considering total number of responses, *Completely Confident* made up 65% of answers. *Not Confident At All* only made up about 7% of their answers and *Somewhat Confident* only made up 28% of the responses.

Second-generation Spanish speakers appeared to be comparatively less confident to first-generation speakers. Figure 4.13 displays the responses from the second-generation.

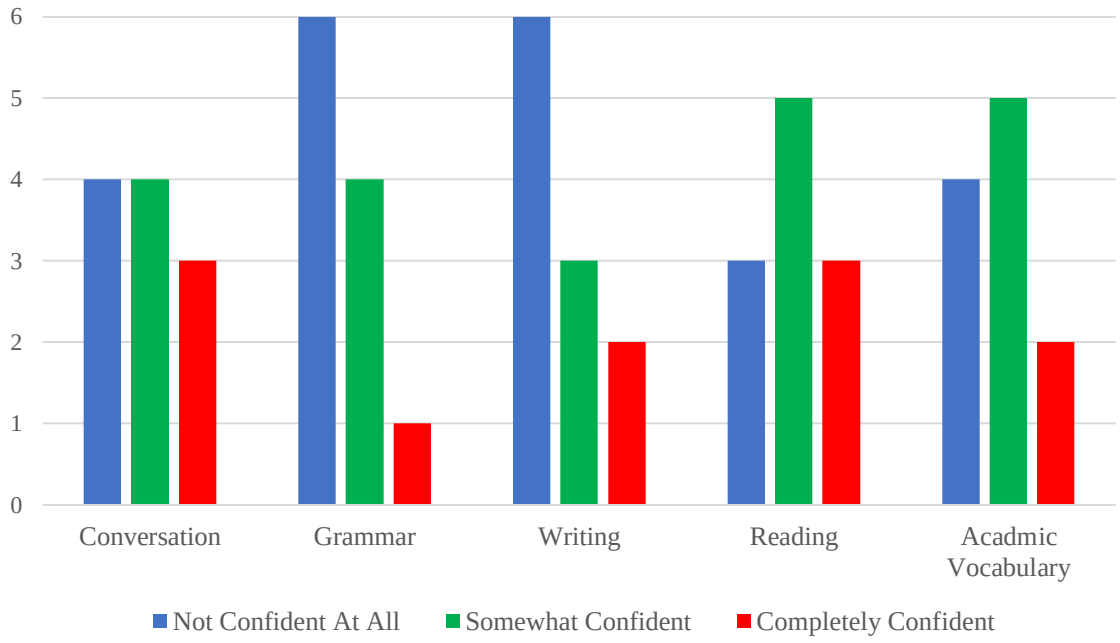
Figure 4.13 Confidence of Second-Generation Spanish Speakers (21 out of 44 Participants)



These participants only chose *Completely Confident* about 48% of the time, but that means that these second-generation Spanish-speaking students feel completely confident in their Spanish skills almost half of the time. This group chose *Somewhat Confident* more frequently than the first-generation; *Somewhat Confident* made up about 44% of their total responses. *Not Confident At All* constituted a small 8% of their total responses, close to the figure for the first generation.

Upon isolating respondents' reported confidence by generation, it appeared that participants of the third generation or later felt the least confident in their Spanish abilities. Figure 4.14 displays this group's reported confidence.

Figure 4.14 Confidence of Third- or Later-Generation Spanish Speakers (11 out of 44 Participants)

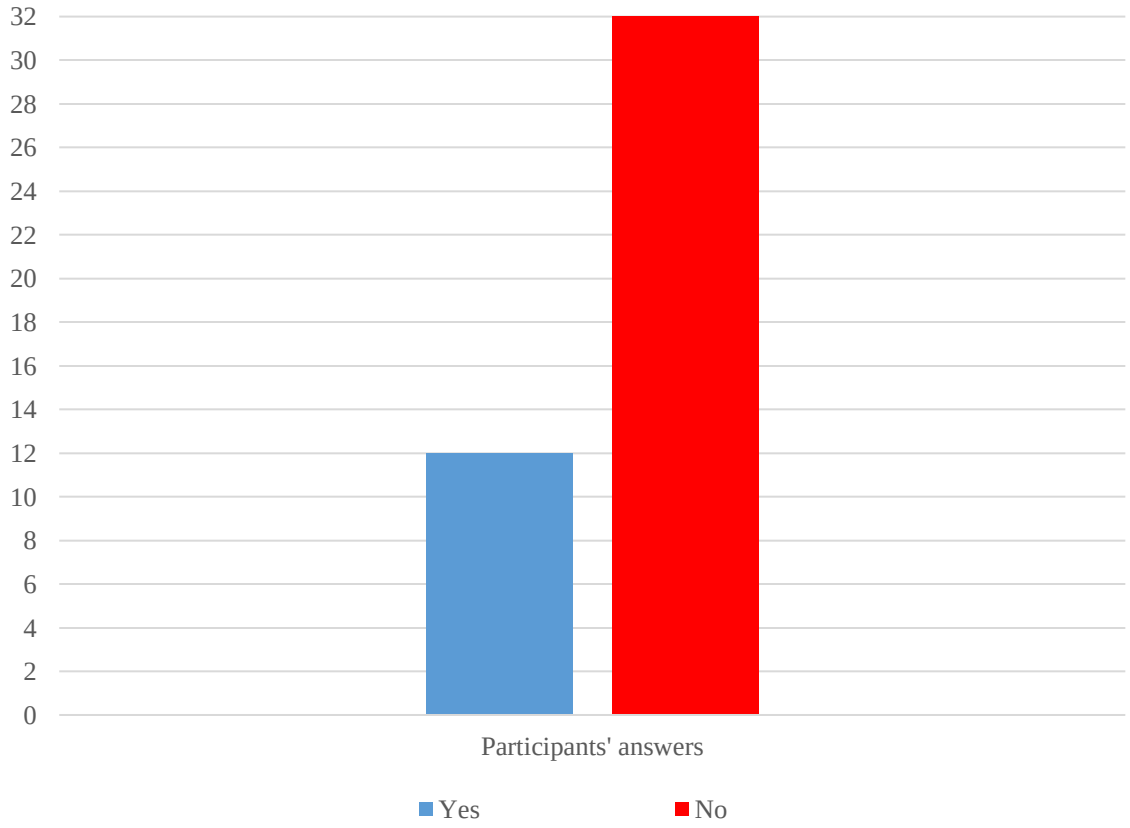


Participants in the third generation or later of Spanish speakers in this study reported a low confidence in their Spanish skills. *Not Confident At All* made up approximately 42% of their total responses, five times more than the first and second generations. *Completely Confident* only accounted for 20% of their total responses, and the final 38% of total responses consisted of *Somewhat Confident*.

Language Pride

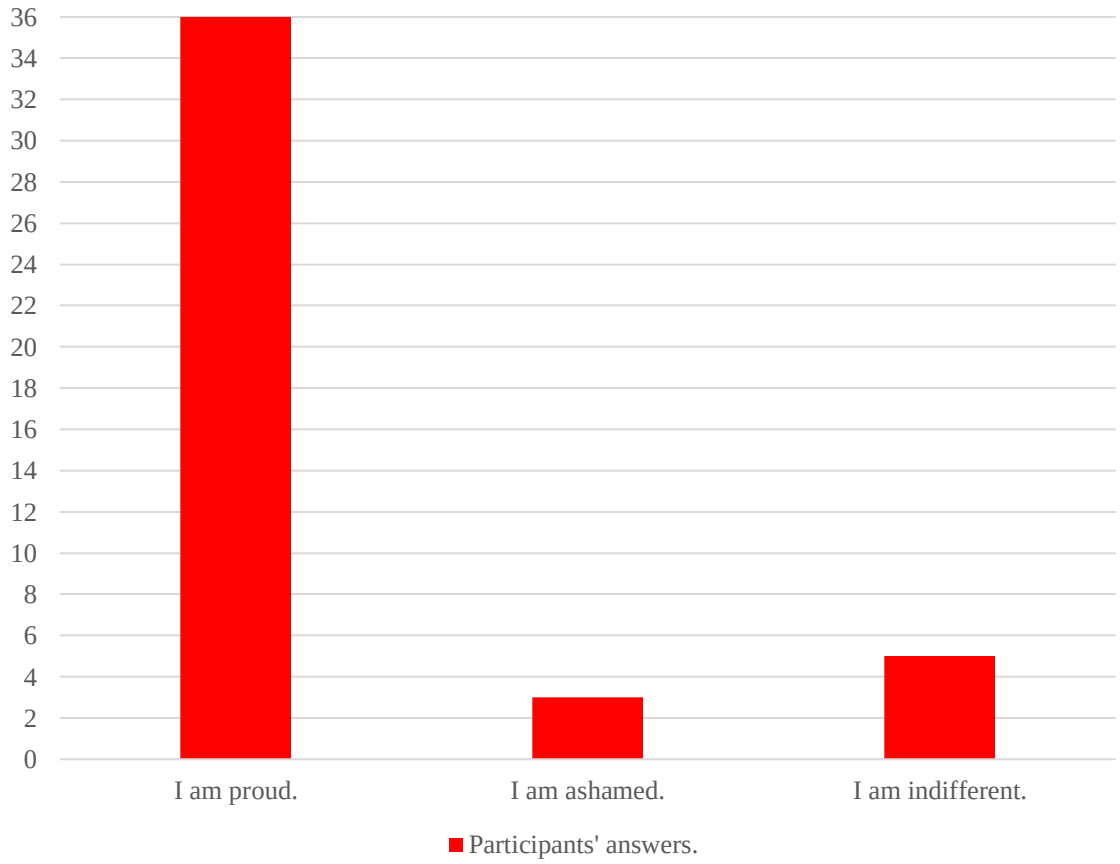
The final two questions in the survey aimed to discover the level of pride the Hispanic students have in their abilities to speak Spanish. Figure 4.15 displays participants' answers to the question "Have you ever felt embarrassed or ashamed to be heard speaking Spanish?"

Figure 4.15 Have the Participants Ever Felt Embarrassed or Ashamed to be Heard Speaking Spanish?



In response to the penultimate question, the majority, 32 students, said that they have never felt embarrassed or ashamed to be heard speaking Spanish. The minority, 12 students, said that they have experienced some embarrassment or shame in being heard speaking Spanish. Figure 4.16 illustrates the responses to the final question of the survey.

Figure 4.16 Overall, How Do Participants Feel Toward Their Hispanic Heritage and Their Ability to Speak Spanish?



The results of the final question are mostly consistent with the previous question; 36 of the 44 students reported that they have pride in their Hispanic heritage and their ability to speak Spanish. A small minority, 3 students, reported as being ashamed of their heritage, and the remaining 5 students claimed to be indifferent towards their heritage.

The feeling of pride in the participants' Hispanic heritage and Spanish skills seems to transcend their parents and caretakers' level of education. Table 4.5 shows respondents' reported pride in their heritage compared to their parents' level of education.

Table 4.5 Participants' Overall Pride Toward Their Heritage (Compared to Parent Education Level)

	I am proud.	I am ashamed.	I am indifferent.	Total
Participants with parents that do not have a college degree	25	2	3	30
Participants with parents that have a college degree	11	1	2	14
Total participants	36	3	5	44

Both groups of participants appear to be proud of their heritages, regardless of the education level of their parents. Both groups have very few respondents that reported to be ashamed or indifferent toward their heritages.

There was, however, a small trend when the participants were instead grouped by generation. Table 4.6 displays participants' pride, arranged by generation.

Table 4.6 Language Pride by Generation

	I am proud.	I am ashamed.	I am indifferent.	Total
First-generation Spanish speakers	9	1	2	12
Second-generation Spanish speakers	21	0	0	21
Third- or Later-Generation Spanish Speakers	6	2	3	11
Total participants	36	3	5	44

The second-generation appeared to feel the most pride toward their heritage and Spanish-speaking skills; none of the participants in this group said they felt ashamed or indifferent. In the third generation of Spanish speakers, about half said they felt proud,

and the other half reported they were indifferent or ashamed. Only one-fourth of the first generation did not say that they felt pride in their heritage.

Discussion

The responses gathered in this survey were analyzed in order to identify any consistencies based on the existing research and the research questions and hypotheses that guided this project that were discussed in the Methodology chapter. The first question sought to analyze the extent to which anti-Hispanic social attitudes influence the use and retention of the Spanish language by Hispanic college students. Through the surveying of various students at the University of Southern Mississippi, I found anecdotal evidence of discriminatory behavior being perpetrated toward Hispanic students. 18 students out of 44 surveyed reported that they have experienced discrimination or ridicule when they spoke Spanish in public. According to the respondents of this study, the perpetrators are not one specific type of person; the perpetrators of these behaviors include strangers, peers, and even friends. The prominence of these anti-Hispanic behaviors in the United States is the subject of other studies on the Spanish language, and those attitudes have existed for many years (Murillo & Smith, 2011). Based on the current study, those attitudes are still affecting Hispanic people in the United States today.

Of the 18 respondents that reported having experienced discrimination, ten said those experiences affected how often they speak Spanish. Those ten respondents expressed their experiences in different words, but seven responses explicitly stated that experiencing discrimination caused them to speak Spanish less often. Reflective of the information gathered in Baralt et al.'s (2020) study with Hispanic mothers, the current

study reiterates that the common anti-Hispanic attitudes in the United States are causing at least a part of the Hispanic population to avoid or abandon speaking Spanish. These avoidances and abandonments may cause these students, or other Hispanics, to forget some of their Spanish as it falls into disuse.

The short-answer responses provided by some of the participants offer more insight into the treatment of Hispanic students by their communities, peers, and friends. Three of the responses to the survey explicitly reiterated the idea of the English monolingualism that the society in the United States expects of all people. One said perpetrators of discriminatory behaviors bullied them and said, “Spanish was not a language that we speak in the US and to go back to my country.” As a result, this participant reported that they stopped speaking Spanish in public and only used the language at home. Another respondent reported that at their job in retail, a customer became upset with them for speaking Spanish. The respondent reported that the customer insulted them and said, “‘We live in America, we do not speak Spanish.’” The third participant reported, “When I am speaking with my family, there are strangers who will tell me to speak American.” A different participant said that they pretend they do not speak Spanish well; they said this was because they want to “be viewed as more American and less Mexican by my peers” so they would not be teased as often. One particularly concerning response said that “I would be looked at as if I am less than, causing me to speak less Spanish in public.” The idea of feeling “less than” other people simply for speaking Spanish is alarming. These experiences may be highly influential in the use, or disuse, of the Spanish language by the younger generation of Spanish speakers in the United States. If these experiences continue to cause Spanish speakers to avoid

using the Spanish language, there will continue to be a subset of Hispanic people in the United States who do not speak the Spanish language, creating a loss of the language in favor for English monolingualism.

However, these instances of linguistic discrimination did not deter all the students in the survey from speaking Spanish. The two respondents that reported that they would speak Spanish more often as a result of experiencing discrimination suggest that at least some Hispanic people have a sort of rebellious attitude toward adverse opinions of Spanish speakers and the Spanish language. One of these respondents said "if someone got upset that I spoke in a different language, I would speak in said language more often." The second respondent said, "I speak more Spanish so they would get even more upset." This shows that pride may help combat these negative attitudes in some cases; both of the aforementioned respondents answered, "I am proud," when questioned on their overall attitude toward their Hispanic heritage and ability to speak Spanish. If pride is a factor in language confidence, use, and retention, it may be worthwhile to research more into instilling ideas of linguistic pride for Spanish speakers; Baralt et al.'s (2020) study can attest that this has worked to make Hispanic mothers speak Spanish more often. Based on the responses to the survey, a large majority of Hispanic students at the University of Southern Mississippi feel pride in their Hispanic heritage and their ability to speak Spanish; this was reported by 36 out of 44 students or about 82%. A smaller majority, 32 out of 44 respondents, revealed that they have never felt embarrassed or ashamed to be heard speaking Spanish. These responses have optimistic implications for the future generations of Hispanic people in the United States. The more widespread this sense of

pride in one's Hispanic heritage becomes, perhaps the less Hispanic people will find themselves forgetting the Spanish language.

The second research question sought to observe the connection between the education level of these parents and the skill level in Spanish of the surveyed college students. As there was no official Spanish skill test utilized in this study for the purpose of analyzing participants' proficiency in the language, participants self-evaluated the level of confidence they have in different areas of the Spanish language. Participants also reported whether or not their parents encouraged speaking Spanish at home, which may help with retaining the language. Figure 4.4 compared parent level of education to how likely they were to encourage speaking Spanish at home. These results imply that non-college educated parents are more likely to encourage speaking Spanish at home, and thereby possibly lessening the amount of Hispanic people who avoid or abandon speaking Spanish. This reiterates what López et al. (2020) found in their study: "Factors such as low levels of parent education…may play a role in language decisions made by the family" (p. 1259). There may be a correlation between parents' lower levels of education and making the decision to encourage their children to speak Spanish at home. The current study, however, does not corroborate Tran's (2010) findings; he found that "first-generation immigrants learned some English but preferred the use of their mother tongue" (p. 260). The current study found that the majority of surveyed first-generation Spanish speakers either have no preference between Spanish and English, or they prefer to speak English over Spanish. However, the average age for Tran's (2010) study was 14, while all the participants in the current study were 18 years of age or older. Age may be a factor that influences language preference, but location may also be a factor since 14-

year-olds would most likely be living with their families and college students might be living at a university away from their families.

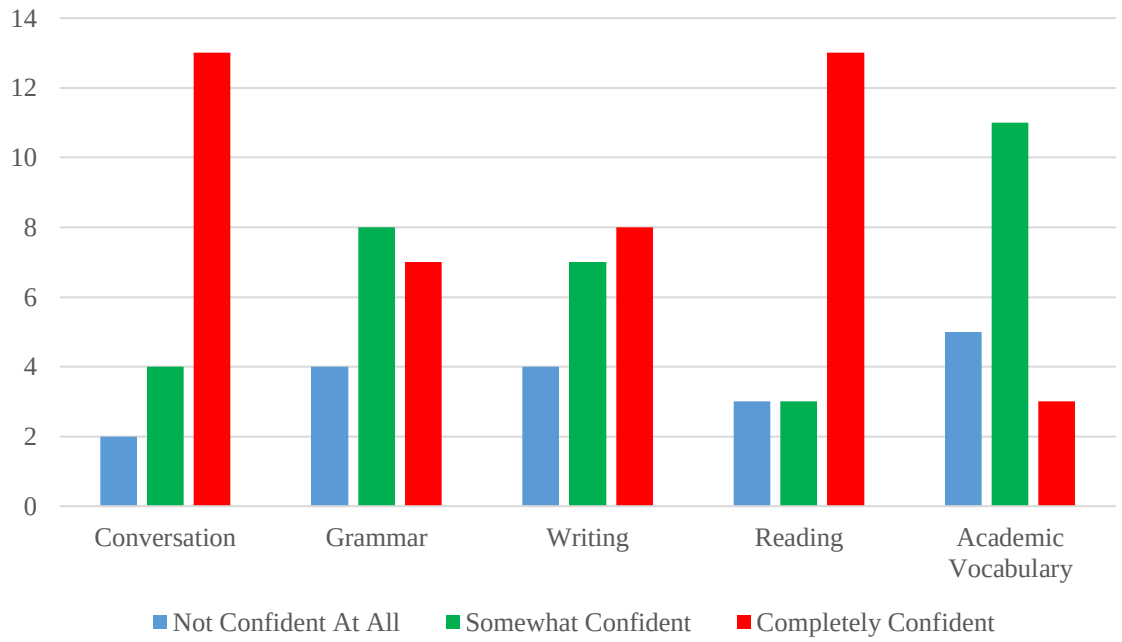
The third research question aimed to observe how the two mentioned factors, parental education level and societal attitudes toward Hispanic people, affect Hispanic college students' confidence in their Spanish and how that confidence affects their use and retention of the language. The 44 students that responded to the survey reported as being fairly confident in three areas: conversation, reading, and writing. In each of those three areas, the majority of students reported as being completely confident in their skills. However, there was less confidence in areas such as grammar and academic vocabulary. When the respondents were filtered down to include only participants whose parents do not have a college degree, this uncertainty in grammar and vocabulary skills became more apparent. The most confidence appeared in the group of participants who reported having parents that have received their college degree in a Spanish-speaking country. This suggests a connection between the education level a parent or caretaker has, the language they received their education in, and their children's confidence in their language skills. While a parent's education level may not influence the exact skill their child has in a language, confidence may be an important factor in language use and retention.

An interesting result arose when analyzing participants' self-reported levels of confidence in their Spanish skills in the areas of writing, grammar, and academic vocabulary. The result was the most evident in the demographic of respondents whose parents do not have a college degree. It appears that this group was confident in their writing skills; almost half of them, 14 out of 30, reported as being completely confident

in their writing skills. This result is interesting because the confidence in grammar and vocabulary for this group was about 33% and 27%, respectively. Grammar and vocabulary are integral parts of writing, so the high level of confidence in writing juxtaposes the lower levels of confidence in grammar and vocabulary. There are a couple of possible explanations for this, one being that the survey did not specify what type of writing the study called into question. A person could hypothetically write or type out a small number of sentences confidently but may not be able to write lengthy compositions. On the other hand, some participants could be underestimating their grammar and vocabulary skills. As stated in the Limitations subsection, an actual Spanish level test could serve in future investigations to gather quantifiable data on participants' Spanish skills in order to make more precise conclusions. Additionally, questioning participants further about their skills in areas such as writing, grammar, and vocabulary could reveal why there seems to be high confidence in writing, yet low confidence in grammar and vocabulary.

One assumption of this study was that it would support or contrast Tran's (2010) study in which he found that Mexican people in the United States display the most Spanish language retention. Based on his work, the assumption was that the people of Mexican heritage or nationality would report the highest confidence in their Spanish skills. For clarity, Figure 4.17 displays the confidence level of all participants who reported to be Mexican or part Mexican. 19 out of 44 participants reported as being of Mexican descent.

Figure 4.17 Confidence of Participants of Mexican Descent (19 out of 44 Participants)



Based on the data in Figure 4.17, it appears that the participants of Mexican descent are most comfortable with speaking and reading, and they are least comfortable with academic vocabulary. According to Tran (2010), "the relative high proficiency among Mexicans is partially due to the group's relative size, which increases the opportunity for Spanish use and retention" (pp. 277-278). The opportunity for Spanish use within conversations may be what caused high levels of confidence in that area for the participants of this study. However, the Spanish skills and confidence for the participants of Mexican descent in the current study cannot be considered superior across all categories in this study, since the Mexican participants did not report as much confidence in grammar, writing, or academic vocabulary. Furthermore, no other Hispanic nationality or heritage in this study comes close to matching the number of respondents of Mexican descent. There are too few participants of other nationalities to make an accurate

comparison. Therefore, there is no comparison between participants of Mexican descent and the participants of other Hispanic heritages and nationalities.

The results from this study demonstrate connections between parental level of education, societal attitudes toward Spanish-speakers, the confidence Spanish-speakers have in their language skills, and the use and retention of the Spanish language. While it cannot be concluded that these factors directly influence each other, nor that they are exclusively the most influential factors for language retention, these factors clearly influence each other in an observable way. The connections observed in this study have important implications for future research in this field of study, and those implications may also be important for the purpose of promoting English/Spanish bilingualism in the United States.

Implications and Future Research

There are two main implications that resulted from the execution of this study. The first is that negative attitudes toward Hispanic people may be detrimental to the Spanish use and retention of people who experience those attitudes. This implication reflects what has been found in other studies, such as those by Baralt et al. (2020) and Murillo and Smith (2011). Since negative attitudes are causing some Hispanic people to speak Spanish less often, as reported in this study, then continuing to combat those negatives attitudes toward Hispanic people could be beneficial to increasing the use of Spanish. The increased use of Spanish may lead to increased development and retention of the Spanish language for Hispanic people in the United States.

The second implication is that education level of a Hispanic parent may indirectly influence how confident their children are in speaking Spanish. Based on the results of

the study, Hispanic parents and caretakers who do not have a college degree are much more likely to encourage their children to speak Spanish at home. This encouragement may lead to more confidence in their Spanish skills, which may increase use and retention of the language. Upon grouping participant responses by generation, Spanish speakers of third generation or later appeared to be the least confident in their Spanish skills. The results demonstrated that this group was also the least likely to have been encouraged to speak Spanish at home. This implies that parents' encouragement may be directly linked to Hispanic students' confidence in their Spanish skills. Since confidence may be important to language use and retention, Spanish speakers of the third generation or later may need to be encouraged to speak Spanish more often in order to help them retain the language. Future investigations may need to focus on parents with college degrees as the current study found that they are less likely to encourage their children to speak Spanish at home. Although this study had a relatively small sample size of Hispanic students' college-educated parents, this same conclusion could be found in future research.

The results from this study show that both negative societal attitudes and parental encouragement may have important effects on the language retention of Spanish speakers, although the two factors affect language retention differently. Negative societal attitudes toward Spanish speakers may be harming their language retention, while parental and caretaker encouragement may increase confidence and language retention. Future research and investigations may need to explore the reasons why certain sets of parents are less likely to encourage speaking Spanish and how to address that in order to help younger generations of Spanish speakers be more confident in their skills. Future

studies may also need to explore ways for Spanish speakers to overcome negative attitudes that are held against them.

CHAPTER V: CONCLUSION

With the increase of Spanish speakers in the United States, Spanish is becoming a more prominent language within the country. Despite existing linguistic racism and the expectation for Spanish speakers to completely immerse themselves in the English language, Spanish is developing and thriving in the United States. Various populations of different nationalities and heritages who speak Spanish can be found in the country. In some schools, Spanish is taught at every grade level, from elementary schools to higher education. It is also the first language of many people, which includes native speakers and heritage speakers; some non-native speakers also seek to learn it as a second language. Considering how prominent the language appears to be, one might assume that using Spanish and practicing the language in an effort to retain it would be simple, at least in areas with a large Spanish-speaking population.

Regardless of the prominence Spanish has in the United States, being a Spanish speaker in this country can be complex in terms of Spanish use and retention; the simple act of speaking Spanish can result in hostility from people who have a negative perspective on Spanish speakers. This study analyzed two factors that can influence the Spanish use of Hispanic people: the education level of their parents and societal attitudes toward Spanish speakers. To analyze the experiences of Hispanic people with these two factors, it was necessary to gather details on these experiences directly from that group of people. As a result, 44 undergraduate students at the University of Southern Mississippi consented to the completion of a survey in which they reported their experiences as a Spanish speaker in the United States, as well as their comfort in the Spanish language and their confidence in their Spanish skills. The analysis of their responses revealed that anti-

Hispanic attitudes are still something Hispanic people experience, and that those experiences, for some people, can be what causes them to start abandoning the Spanish language. The participants' responses also revealed that parental/caretaker education may have a sort of indirect influence on their Spanish use and retention. This study found that having a higher education level may not be necessary for parents to positively influence their children's language use and retention in Spanish, and that perhaps having a higher level of education may decrease the likelihood that a parent encourages their children to speak Spanish. This study also demonstrated that, independent of parental education level, parental/caretaker encouragement of speaking Spanish can positively influence speakers' confidence in their Spanish skills. That confidence may be key to helping Hispanic people use and retain their language.

This study has also shown that progress can still be made in respect to the treatment of the Spanish-speaking population in the United States. The country has undoubtedly already made some progress in this aspect. Murillo and Smith (2011) reported one woman's harrowing experience as a Spanish speaker in the 1940s:

> One woman, now in her eighties, described a time, as a 3rd-grader in the 1940s, when she was slapped by the principal for speaking Spanish: I was leaving school…and talking to my friend, talking in Spanish. They had told us that we couldn't speak even a word of Spanish inside the school. And we were very careful, but on that day I just forgot.… as we were leaving the building, there was the principal. She was a lovely teacher but really tough. She slapped me twice, really hard, and she said, "You know you cannot speak Spanish in school," and she turned away and started leaving.… I will never forget that. (p. 148)

The United States has progressed from being a country that prohibited speaking Spanish in certain areas, to being a country where Spanish is a prominent language. However, there is still more progress to be made.

People have spoken Spanish in the United States for generations, and people will more than likely continue speaking it for generations to come. Instead of turning a blind eye to the experiences of Spanish speakers, their language development should be properly nurtured and encouraged. With the proper help, perhaps less Hispanic people will turn away from the language or forget it. Maybe one day, Spanish will be spoken as widely as English is in the United States.

APPENDIX A: SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

PROJECT INFORMATION
Project Title: ¿Cómo Se Dice...? The Spanish Use of Hispanic College Students
Protocol Number: 22-1459
College: Arts and Sciences
Phone: 601-746-7147
School and Program: School of Social Science and Global Studies
Principal Investigator: Christopher Castaneda
Email: christopher.castaneda@usm.edu
Purpose: The purpose of this study is to observe any existing connections between parental/caretaker education level, societal attitudes, and Hispanic college students' Spanish skills. By observing these connections, this study could provide a reference for future studies on the Spanish development of Hispanic people growing up in the United States.
Description of Study: This study will utilize a questionnaire created through the survey software Qualtrics to ask undergraduate Hispanic students about their experiences being first- or second-generation Spanish speakers in the United States. The study will specifically survey Hispanic students who grew up in the United States after having learned Spanish as a first language. Participants will provide anonymous responses, and the responses will serve as the data for this study. The survey will last approximately 20 minutes. A maximum of 100 responses will be collected. The survey will need to be filled out only once, with no follow-ups after completion.
Benefits: Participants will receive no benefits from participating in this survey.
Risks: Participating in this survey presents no risks.
Confidentiality: No identifiable personal information will be gathered through this survey. Only the principal investigator and his research advisor will have access to the responses. All responses to this survey will be anonymous. All of the data gathered through the use of Qualtrics for this project will remain within that software until they are recorded in a document for use in this project. The survey on Qualtrics and the data will be kept on a password-protected computer, while Qualtrics itself also requires a different password. After participants' anonymous responses have been translated into the appropriate terminology for this study, the responses will be deleted, as well as the survey.
Alternative Procedures: There are no alternative procedures to participating in this study.
Participant's Assurance: This project and this consent form have been reviewed by the Institutional Review Board, which ensures that research projects involving human subjects follow federal regulations. Any questions or concerns about rights as a research participant should be directed to the Chair of the Institutional Review Board, The University of Southern Mississippi, 118 College Drive #5125, Hattiesburg, MS 39406-0001, 601-266-5997. Any questions about this research project should be directed to the Principal Investigator using the contact information provided above.
CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH
I understand that participation in this project is completely voluntary, and I may withdraw

at any time without penalty, prejudice, or loss of benefits. Unless described above, all personal information will be kept strictly confidential, including my name and other identifying information. All procedures to be followed and their purposes were explained to me. Information was given about all benefits, risks, inconveniences, or discomforts that might be expected. Any new information that develops during the project will be provided to me if that information may affect my willingness to continue participation in the project.

If you consent to participate in this survey, click the arrow in the bottom right corner to begin the survey.

If you do not consent to participate in this survey, please close your browser now.

What is your nationality? *(Example: Mexican, American, Puerto Rican, etc.)*

_____

Do you identify as Hispanic?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

What is your age?

- ○ 18
- ○ 19
- ○ 20
- ○ 21
- ○ 22
- ○ 23
- ○ Older than 23

Are you a first- or second-generation Spanish speaker? *(As a first-generation Spanish speaker, you and your parents were born outside of the United States but are now living in the United States. As a second-generation Spanish speaker, your parents were born outside of the United States, but you were born in the United States).*

- ○ I am a first-generation Spanish speaker.
- ○ I am a second-generation Spanish-speaker.
- ○ I am neither of these.

Do you consider yourself an English/Spanish bilingual?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

Is Spanish the first language you learned to speak?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

What is the nationality or ancestry of your parent(s) or caregiver(s)? *(Ex: Mexican, American, Puerto Rican, etc.)*

_____

Do your parents/caregivers identify as Hispanic?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

What is the highest level of education your parent(s) or caregiver(s) achieved?

- ○ Less than high school
- ○ High school graduate
- ○ Some college
- ○ 2-year degree
- ○ 4-year degree
- ○ Master's degree
- ○ Doctorate

Did your parents receive their education in Spanish?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

Were your parents/caregivers your main source of interaction and communication in Spanish growing up?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

Did your parents encourage speaking Spanish within your home?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

Have you ever been discriminated against, ridiculed, or teased for speaking Spanish in public?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

By whom? (Display this question if "Have you ever been discriminated against, ridiculed, or teased for speaking Spanish in public?" is Yes.)

_____

Did experiencing any instances of linguistic racism or discrimination cause you to speak Spanish more often or less often?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

Please explain in detail any experience with linguistic racism or discrimination and how it affected how often you speak Spanish. (Display this question if "Did experiencing any instances of linguistic racism or discrimination cause you to speak Spanish more often or less often?" is Yes.)

_____

How confident are you about your Spanish skills in the following areas? *(1 being not confident at all, 2 being somewhat confident, and 3 being completely confident.*

	1 2 3
Conversation	
Grammar	
Writing	
Reading	
Academic Vocabulary	

What is your language preference?

- ○ I prefer to speak English over Spanish.
- ○ I prefer to speak Spanish over English.
- ○ I have no preference.

Do you ever reply to your parents in English even if they speak to you in Spanish?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

Have you ever felt embarrassed or ashamed to be heard speaking Spanish?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

In what context? (Display this question if "Have you ever felt embarrassed or ashamed to be heard speaking Spanish?" is Yes.)

_____

Overall, how do you feel about your Hispanic heritage and your ability to speak Spanish?

- ○ I am proud.
- ○ I am ashamed.
- ○ I am indifferent to my Hispanic heritage and my ability to speak Spanish.

APPENDIX B: IRB APPROVAL LETTER

Office of Research Integrity

THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN MISSISSIPPI

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NOTICE OF INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD ACTION

The project below has been reviewed by The University of Southern Mississippi Institutional Review Board in accordance with Federal Drug Administration regulations (21 CFR 26, 111), Department of Health and Human Services regulations (45 CFR Part 46), and University Policy to ensure:

- The risks to subjects are minimized and reasonable in relation to the anticipated benefits.
- The selection of subjects is equitable.
- Informed consent is adequate and appropriately documented.
- Where appropriate, the research plan makes adequate provisions for monitoring the data collected to ensure the safety of the subjects.
- Where appropriate, there are adequate provisions to protect the privacy of subjects and to maintain the confidentiality of all data.
- Appropriate additional safeguards have been included to protect vulnerable subjects.
- Any unanticipated, serious, or continuing problems encountered involving risks to subjects must be reported immediately. Problems should be reported to ORI via the Incident submission on InfoEd IRB.
- The period of approval is twelve months. An application for renewal must be submitted for projects exceeding twelve months.

PROTOCOL NUMBER:	22-1459
PROJECT TITLE:	¿Cómo Se Dice...? The Spanish Use of Hispanic College Students
SCHOOL/PROGRAM	World Languages
RESEARCHERS:	PI: Christopher Castaneda Investigators: Castaneda, Christopher~Carracelas-Juncal, Carmen~
IRB COMMITTEE ACTION:	Approved
CATEGORY:	Expedited Category
PERIOD OF APPROVAL:	23-Feb-2023 to 22-Feb-2024

Donald Sacco Jr.

Donald Sacco, Ph.D.
Institutional Review Board Chairperson

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