

***Household perspectives on minority language  
maintenance and loss: Language in the small spaces***  
**Isabel Velázquez (2019)**

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*Reviewed by Judith Ansó Ros*

*Household Perspectives on Minority Language Maintenance and Loss* is a book about the costs of language maintenance or, as the author says: 'this book is about language and much more than language' (p. xi). The emotional implication of the author is noticeable throughout the book, especially in the preface and the conclusions, since she identifies with the Latino community in the USA. The book is the result of the study of 19 households of first-generation Spanish-speaking families in the US Midwest. It is based on the analysis of everyday home language dynamics and planning, in other words, family language policy (FLP).

The first point to note is the original structure of the book. At the beginning of each of the ten chapters a participating mother is presented, ten mothers in total throughout the book. The author, like a novel writer, combines the physical description, the biographical or attitudinal, as well as opinions and stories of the participating woman in first person, with the narration of common moments between the author and the participant. In that way, Velazquez brings us emotionally closer to her participants and consequently to her study. After developing the theme, the chapter always ends with a section that contains 'A Few Questions to Continue the Conversation', so that this book could be used as a pedagogical tool in a course, a class or a seminar.

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Chapter 1 (pp. 1–20) is a summary of the book, accompanied by a detailed theoretical background. The author presents three theoretical frameworks. The first part includes different theories, such as the *Ethnolinguistic Vitality Theory* (EVT) with a low vitality feature list of Spanish/English bilingual communities in the New Latino Diaspora (see, e.g., Wortham, Murillo and Hamann, 2002), and Fishman's (1991) *Reversing Language Shift Theory* (RLS). Secondly, she presents, with many theoretical contributions, everything that concerns *language planning* and *language management as a family language policy*. She goes on to present theoretical details on family language management in a minority language household and provides a variety of examples from the Spanish-speaking community, illustrating them with figures and tables. The third part is about the concepts of *social capital* and *social networks*, which are important for understanding the intergenerational transmission of Spanish and its success. Velázquez argues that Spanish constitutes personal capital, because it allows access to networks of support (p. 15). Chapter 1 ends with three journalistic stories that illustrate the daily life of the Latino community in Nebraska as well as the author's personal account from her position as a first-generation immigrant to the United States.

Velázquez begins the second chapter (pp. 21–39) by supplying a vision of Spanish immigration in Nebraska, more specifically the Mexican immigration in the last decades, and evaluates the importance of the second generation of Latinos in the state. The rest of the chapter is an extensive description of the participants' households. The discussion under the subheading 'Mothers' social networks' in this chapter is interesting for understanding home language dynamics. The author analyzes the mothers' social network features, closest interaction network and spoken interactions, which is the most effective way of gauging English and Spanish usage in everyday life.

As indicated by its title, chapter 3, 'Language in the small spaces: A description of this project', is the description of research design and methods (pp. 38–48). It includes the justification for studying language maintenance/loss in Latino families, the goals, the sample, the recruitment of participants and data collection instruments. This last point explains how participants were recruited, how and in what sites data were collected and how and by whom the interviews were conducted.

Parental policies and everyday language choices of all family members constitute the focus of chapter 4 (pp. 49–69). The data collected belongs to four types: language environment, language choice, parental language policies and efforts of language management. 'Parental language management efforts' is a very interesting subsection, firstly because there are several extracts from the

interviews (pp. 52–56) that help us to better understand the parents' different beliefs and the families' accommodation process, and, secondly, because it shows how parental policy and language use are not always aligned. In addition, the author describes the household language environment, through, for example, interactions, media, etc. She pays special attention to 'Household language dominance' (p. 59–62) where she transcribes different interviews between mothers and the researcher. Furthermore, Velázquez analyses the language choice in everyday parent–child interaction, in a way that makes it possible to deduce the viability of Spanish in everyday situations. She closes the chapter by showing the strategies that parents and children use.

In chapter 5 the author presents the mothers' beliefs and subjective perceptions about the use of Spanish (pp. 70–104). First, Velázquez discusses the mothers' perceptions against a particular theoretical background, then introduces data collection later on (p. 72). She explains in detail how maternal attitude data was classified and analyzed using a variety of examples of interviews. The responses are separated, according to the language, between Spanish and English.

The paragraph about 'Motivations to use Spanish' is very interesting (p. 80). The author develops five clusters for classifying the responses: instrumental, communicative, emotional/solidarity, religious and fear of discrimination. Moreover, she differentiates between motivation to use and motivation to transmit. At the end of the chapter there is a very interesting part about the youth's and children's perception of bilingualism. The author analyzes bilingualism qualitatively from the perspectives of youth and child agency. Positive attitudes, strong instrumental perception and social value stand out.

In chapter 6, entitled 'Mothers and children: Reported language competence' (pp. 105–111), the focus is on the speaker's self-perceptions of proficiency. Mothers and adolescents were asked to rate what literacy in Spanish and English was in their opinion. In this way, adolescents' perceptions are compared with mothers', and consequently they provide an understanding of the role of literacy in their lives. It is highlighted how the mothers found communicating in English hard or very hard, and this factor impacts on interactions in both languages.

In chapter 7 (pp. 112–130) the children's perceptions of proficiency and their attitudes towards English and Spanish are examined. The instruments that were used to evaluate the skills are very well clarified (p. 114), accompanied by tables on the results and extracts of interviews. Velázquez exposes proficiency skills in Spanish distinguishing between children and youth: the author found different language contact phenomena, for example code-switching, calques, semantic extensions and verbal morphology.

Chapter 8 (pp. 131–150) is an extension of chapter 7, where children’s storytelling in Spanish is analyzed. As in the previous chapter, the author describes the data and the methods of analysis. The results are presented in three blocks: vocabulary, narrative structure and verbal system. The first block shows that children employed only lexical words, and scores are higher in English than in Spanish. Borrowing is also more frequent than code-switching and calqued structures. As for the narrative structure, the author presents the results in terms of narrative coherence and organization. All children have the ability to produce a story in English and Spanish. The most common verbal errors occur in verb forms. In general, the results indicate lexical and structural pressure from English.

In the following chapter, ‘Toward a theoretical model of language maintenance in low vitality settings’ (pp. 151–161), Velázquez discusses whether language transmission is a gendered endeavor. She affirms that although mothers are the key, this is not the case. After observing the figure of the mother as central in 19 households, the author speaks about ‘the centrality of mothers’ (p. 153) and discusses maternal influence in general. She describes how both parents are engaged, although with a different distribution of tasks, the father’s role (p. 156) constituting an opportunity for using Spanish. Velázquez concludes that for the viability of families and the community, social bonds must be preserved, and this takes place through language maintenance.

The last chapter (pp. 162–165) presents the conclusions. They make a claim of multilingualism in the USA, even after President Trump’s policies. Velázquez ends, just as she begins, with an emotional story, including herself as part of the Latino community.

As stated at the beginning, this book is a good tool for understanding both the maintenance of a minority language as well as its loss. We must also hold up this work by Isabel Velázquez as an example of excellent research practice, and highlight the appendices (pp. 166–200), which include very varied material: models of questionnaires, examples of interactions, linguistic material found, etc., that will definitely be useful to researchers.

## References

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