

## Helping Spanish heritage speakers decolonialize their attitudes towards the language: The classroom as a community that aims to heal generational linguistic wounds.

Despite the rich cultural diversity of the country, only 20% of Americans can converse in two or more languages, compared to nearly 50% of the world. This is because for generations, bilingual and multilingual families, whether immigrant, second or third generation, or indigenous, were made to feel like outsiders, less than, and/or unsafe because of their language and culture.

According to Dr. Verónica Benavides, “generational language wounds speak to this idea that languages aren't lost just by chance or accident across the generations. Rather, there was some sort of trauma, discrimination, or deficit narrative that caused this language loss.” (Benavides, 2023). Language loss in this context can be tied back to colonialism. Across the world, colonialism has used language control as a tool for conquest and dominance of power, which is evident in the history of Latin America, Native American boarding schools, English-only policies in the U.S., and “the general lack of bilingual programming for a student population that has the foundations for bilingualism.” (Benavides, 2023).

Spanish heritage speakers (SHS) may manifest these generational language wounds in several ways, such as shame for not speaking the heritage language (HL) fluently or speaking it through anxiety, or extreme pressure of not being “good enough,” and even through the desire for perfection around the HL (Prada et al, 2020; Sevinç, 2020; Xiao and Wong, 2014).

The HL classroom can become a safe community where students are provided with tools and resources to help them deal with these wounds, understand them, and work through them, so they can start the healing process. We provide information on best practices that develop that sense of community among the students, create empathy and respect to build collaborative, meaningful and sustainable relationships, as well as help them understand the colonial history of Spanish. SHS may not be aware of these wounds, but they deserve to have a healthy relationship to their HL, which will never be without complexity.

Key words: generational linguistic wounds, colonialism, community, Spanish as a heritage language, language anxiety, language maintenance.

**Sources:**

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