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Spanish in The Linguistic Landscape of San Diego County: A Case of Linguicism?

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Abstract

This study aims to document the prevailing languages and the place that Spanish, a heritage language of the region, occupies among them in the linguistic landscape of six neighbourhoods of San Diego County. Three areas with predominantly Latinx populations (Latin areas) and three areas with predominantly White populations (White areas) were analysed. Signage was reviewed using the following five analytical categories: (a) language(s) of the signs, (b) most prominent language(s), (c) informative vs symbolic function of the language(s), (d) types of translations, and (e) public vs private authorship. Results showed a preference for English in White areas, with greater use of both English and Spanish and English/Spanish bilingual signs in the Latin areas. Additionally, more diversity in the types of translations in bilingual signs was found in the Latin areas, and a good amount of symbolic function for Spanish. These patterns highlighted the local power relations between the area's two most widely spoken languages. They could reflect linguicism, as Spanish and bilingualism are almost referred to in Latino areas, and even in Latino areas, the presence of Spanish is low. This is interpreted as an expansion of the White public space and the linguistic imperialism of English, which perpetuates the racialisation and oppression of Speakers of minoritised languages.

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Palabras clave

Bilingüismo, español de California, paisaje lingüístico, lenguas minorizadas, español como lengua de herencia

Resumen

El objetivo de este estudio es documentar las lenguas predominantes y el lugar que ocupa el español, una lengua de herencia de la región, entre ellas en el paisaje lingüístico de seis barrios del condado de San Diego. Se analizaron tres áreas con poblaciones predominantemente latinas (áreas latinas) y tres áreas con poblaciones predominantemente blancas (áreas blancas). El paisaje lingüístico se revisó utilizando las siguientes cinco categorías analíticas: (a) lengua(s) de los signos, (b) lengua(s) más prominente(s), (c) función informativa versus simbólica del la(s) lengua(s), (d) tipos de traducciones, y (e) autoría pública versus privada. Los resultados mostraron una preferencia por el inglés en las áreas blancas, con un mayor uso de señales bilingües con inglés y español o inglés/español en las áreas latinas. Además, se encontró mayor diversidad en los tipos de traducción de las señales bilingües en las áreas latinas, así como una buena cantidad de función simbólica para el español. Estos patrones de señalización proporcionaron información sobre las relaciones locales de poder entre los dos idiomas más hablados en el área. Estos patrones podrían reflejar lingüicismo, ya que el español y el bilingüismo están prácticamente relegados a las áreas latinas, e incluso en las áreas latinas la presencia del español es baja. Además, esta cancelación del español priva a las personas de poder e influencia basados en el idioma. Este estudio reveló relaciones opacas entre el grupo dominante (blanco) y el subordinado (latino). Estas relaciones se entienden en términos de dinámicas de poder entre estos dos grupos y se interpretan como una expansión del espacio público blanco y el imperialismo lingüístico del inglés, que perpetúa la racialización y opresión de los hablantes de lenguas minorizadas, entre ellas el español. Esto tiene como consecuencia una serie de problemas, incluida la ansiedad lingüística en personas históricamente subrepresentadas e incluso crisis de identidad. Finalmente, este estudio nos permite comprender mejor el caso del español como lengua de herencia en el sur de California.

1. Introduction

This research documents the public presence of languages, with a focus on Spanish, in six areas of San Diego County, the southernmost county in California. Here, English is the official language and Spanish is one of several minoritized languages in use. Spanish is the most used language after English in the US. The local Spanish variety is constantly influenced by Spanish-speaking visitors from Tijuana, Baja California, the Mexican border city across from San Diego County, and by the Spanish varieties of new Spanish-speaking immigrants. Also, the Spanish of the U.S. is the second variety with most speakers after the Mexican variety. In California there is a situation of diglossia between English (public settings) and Spanish (private settings) and a social stable bilingualism.

Latinxs constitute the largest ethnic group in California, totaling 40% of the population, or more than 10 million people (Data USA, 2019a). However, they are a socio-

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politically minoritized majority. Of these Californian Latinxs, 28.8% speak Spanish (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019), and in 2019, 23.8% of San Diego County's population spoke Spanish (Data USA, 2019b). The sister cities of San Diego and Tijuana, an international metropolitan area with more 4.9 million people, is a transnational space with one of the largest and busiest ports of entry in the world (San Diego, California Population, 2020).

Studying the presence of Spanish in Southern California is relevant in view of the following considerations. First, the historical presence of Spanish in California. Since the annexation of California – and other Spanish-speaking regions– to the U.S. territory, Spanish, more than an immigrant language, has been a native language of the U.S. since the 16th century. Second, nowadays the Latinxs are the largest ethnic group in the Golden State. Many of these Californian Latinxs are also Spanish speakers. Therefore, studying the public presence of Spanish as a heritage language relates to the linguistic right –which are humans rights– of using and maintaining the heritage language of this population in this geographical area. Third, the results of this investigation are also relevant to researchers studying the visibility and vitality of heritage languages in contexts in which historically marginalized languages are surviving despite linguistic policies that contribute to their stigmatization and invisibility.

The current study aims to investigate the prevailing languages and the place that Spanish occupies among them in the linguistic landscape (LL) of six neighborhoods of the San Diego County. The LL is defined as "any sign or announcement located outside or inside a public institution or a private business in a given geographical location" (Ben-Rafael et al., 2006, p. 14). This paper is not a comprehensive evaluation of the current state of Spanish in the LL of San Diego County; instead, it focuses on certain neighborhoods and areas. Some of these neighborhoods have never been scrutinized using this approach.

The research questions guided this study are: RQ1. What are the prevailing languages in White and Latin areas in the LL of six neighborhoods in San Diego County? and RQ2. What is the place that Spanish occupies among them in White and Latin areas? Research question two was answered by using the following five analytical categories: (a) language(s) of the signs, (b) most prominent language(s), (c) informative vs symbolic function of the language(s), (d) types of translations, and (e) public vs private authorship.

2. Struggles of Spanish Speakers in California: Past and present

Understanding U.S. history is fundamental to understanding the racialization of ethnolinguistic minoritized groups in this country, Spanish speakers being among them. Spanish was the first European language spoken in the territory that is now California, imposed on the inhabitants by means of conquest and colonization in the 16th century. After U.S. annexation, many residents of the former Mexican states –U.S. states since then– have been neglected due to their ethnolinguistic and cultural diversity. In sum, through the history of the US, more and more sociopolitical power has been conferred on

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White people and native English speakers than on people belonging to other ethnic groups or to speakers of non-English languages.

Three years after the annexation of what is now California, in April 1849, all foreigners were forbidden to dig gold in the state (Peterson, 1980, 310). In 1850, just one year after California's annexation by the United States, an anti-Mexican initiative was passed. This law levied a tax of $20 per month on non-citizen workers, specifically targeting miners. This sum was an almost insurmountable financial burden for many workers. (Peterson, 1980, p. 310). Peterson (1980) explains these were forms to discourage Latin American workers from coming into the recently acquired territory by the US. Additionally, Carrigan and Webb (2013) documented mob violence –a type of organized racial violence (Carrigan and Webb, 2003, p. 412)– against Mexican decedents that peaked in the 1850s and 1870s (p. 20). Many White Anglos believed that winning the US-Mexico War was the confirmation of the Manifest Destiny, meaning that the California land should be used by White men and that Mexicans have lost any rights they have had in the Southwest (p. 21).

Menchaca (1995) affirms that racial minorities, including Latinxs and Mexicans, in California have been robbed their history, they have been erased from history, and the accomplishments of Mexican and Native Americans were attributed to Anglo Americans. Additionally, Spanish-speaking persons were segregated and excluded since the imposition of English in California –with the California Constitution of 1879– (Valdés, 2006, p. 29). By the 1920s, segregated schools, swimming pools, theaters, and restaurants for only Mexican started to appear. Segregation of Latinx students continues at present day as there are many schools with 100% of Latin enrollment (Valdés, 2006).

The conjunction of language policies, linguistic bias, and "nationalism rooted in nativism" contributes to expanding official English laws (Carter, 2018) and maintaining inequalities among diverse populations that share the same social spaces (Baugh, 2020, p. 65). In particular, English-only and assimilationist ideologies continue spreading institutionalized inequality (Schmidt, 2002, 156), thereby playing a central role in shaping the local LL (Gilinger et al., 2012). The Official English Movement or English-Only Movement oppresses Spanish-speaking students by introducing English only education. This has harmed many Spanish speakers' sense of self-worth (Velazquez 2021).

In 1972, California mandated English as its official language (California legislative information, 1972), ostensibly to protect the English language, even though English is not endangered in the state (Zentella, 2009a). Language standardization is also a way to implement language policies (Shohamy, 2006, cited in Ailanjian, 2017). Unfortunately, among the consequences of language officialization is the social stigmatization and racialization of speakers of non-official languages. Moreover, language officialization functions as an indicator of power that underwrites the legitimacy of authorities (Mooney & Evans, 2019; Spolsky & Cooper, 1991).

In the US, in general, monolingual English speakers are considered the linguistic norm, as they are at the top of the social hierarchy, while speakers of other languages are

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seen as inferior. Unfortunately, nowadays, "[t]he political climate towards Spanish-speaking persons is a hostile one in California" (Valdés, 2006, p. 40). Latinxs are being discriminated against for being Latinxs or/and Spanish speakers, as this report shows:

> four-in-ten Latinos say they have experienced discrimination in the past year, such as being criticized for speaking Spanish or being told to go back to their home country. These experiences are more likely among those who say others see them as Latino, black or another non-white group than among Latinos who say others see them as white (Lopez et al., 2018).

Likewise, some people have been detained or fined for speaking Spanish in the U.S. (Wax-Thibodeaux, 2019). Moreover, some Latinxs in the San Diego area have expressed and identified public spaces in which they don't feel welcome to speak Spanish (Alamillo, 2022).

Although the discriminatory and racial precept of "Speak English, this is America" is very much alive, "it cannot be said that the U.S. is simply an English-speaking country" (Schmidt, 2002, p. 146). The linguistic situation in the U.S. is complex, and ethnolinguistically minoritized populations are often inadequately served by authorities and institutions and the price of maintaining Spanish as a heritage language in California is usually paid with stigmatization and racialization of Spanish speakers.

3. Previous studies of Spanish in the public space of California

In his study of 2008, Franco Rodríguez analyzed the lexicon, syntax, morphology, and orthography in the LLs of Los Angeles County, California, and Miami-Dade County, Florida. Though bilingualism was apparent in both counties, he found less evidence of use of standard Spanish in Los Angeles County. In another study, Train (2016) took a diachronic approach to LL by comparing the Spanish in the 2015 canonization of Junípero Serra with that in the archives of the Californian missions. The purpose of this study was to demonstrate the utility of LL as a tool to examine the historicity of written languages. Next, Carr (2017) studied the LL of southeast Los Angeles by comparing the visibility of written English and Spanish and the perceptions and attitudes of Latinxs toward the languages. Most of the participants declared that Spanish was useful for communication and was the language of solidarity, while English was the prestige language. This research was valuable for evidencing the power relationship between English and Spanish in Los Angles. Similarly, Ailanjian (2017) studied the LL of two Hispanic Serving Institutions in Fresno, California, and Miami, Florida. Although Spanish was present in the LLs of both universities, it was more frequent in Miami, corresponding to the higher number of Spanish speakers there compared to Fresno. Moreover, Ramos Pellicia (2021) studied the LL of Escondido (North County San Diego) swap meet. She encounted Spanish to be a benefit to the local Spanish-speaking community and how racialized subjects used it to resist linguistic oppression.

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Recently, Colombi et al. (2020) searched the LL of various California communities, focusing on urban areas such as San Francisco, Sacramento, San Diego, and Los Angeles. Their goal was to observe the interaction between English and Spanish in marketing based on 173 signs and 215 advertisements and brochures. Literal translations from English to Spanish occurred most frequently. Also, evident were re-creations or adaptations of messages to suit each language/culture, was well as simultaneous use and mixture of both languages. The researchers concluded that marketers are trying to reach not only U.S. Latin communities, but also the mainstream population, and that Spanish is very much alive in the LL of California.

Moving to previous studies of the LL of San Diego County, Zentella and her students (2009b) conducted the first ethnolinguistic analysis of bilingual communities in San Diego city and adjacent areas. The chapters in their book reveal the segregation of ethnic groups and languages in San Diego. For example, Ariana Valle investigated the loss of Spanish in Barrio Logan, a traditionally Chicanx neighborhood. Part of the reason Spanish is maintained in Barrio Logan is that recent immigrants from Latin America who settle in the neighborhood prefer to communicate in Spanish. While second- and third-generation immigrants prefer to communicate in English, they honor the symbolic value of Spanish. Faina Shalts investigated the level of support for Spanish in public and private institutions. She documented that Christ the King Catholic Church offers reading materials in Spanish due to its predominantly Spanish-speaking congregation. Yet these materials are inaccessible because most of the parishioners are illiterate.

More recently, Escandon (2019) searched the LL of several areas of Tijuana and San Diego for instances of translanguaging. Applying critical discourse analysis to 2,000 images using a qualitative approach, the author showed that, in Tijuana, native Tijuanans tend to practice translanguaging. In contrast, newcomers prefer to communicate in standard Mexican Spanish. Additionally, Escandon documented lexical-level evidence of contact between Baja California Spanish and other dialects of Spanish, as local terminology was mixed with terminology from other Mexican dialects as well as other Spanish-speaking countries. Further reflecting the borderland context of Tijuana, lexical hybridity between Spanish and Chinese was also found. North of the border, Escandon reported that U.S. authorities made few efforts to return the courtesy by accommodating Spanish-speaking San Diego residents and Mexican visitors.

Finally, Alamillo (2022) conducted survey-based research which gauged the perceptions of 133 adult Spanish heritage speakers regarding the use of Spanish in public spaces of San Diego County. The findings showed that participants felt welcome and safe to speak Spanish in the south of the county, close to the Mexican border, but not necessarily in other areas of the county. Moreover, the public places where they preferred to communicate in Spanish were shopping centers, Latin grocery stores, and recreational spaces, while their least-preferred public places were luxury venues, government offices, and tourist spots such as beaches.

In contrast to these previous studies, the current investigation implements new

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parameters to the quantitative methodologies used in previous studies of the LL of types of translations of languages in bi/multilingual signs.

4. Theoretical Approaches

According to Shohamy and Waksman (2009) public space and language shape each other. The central object of study in LL research is space because it is in the public sphere where real or symbolic power is negotiated through language. Previous LL studies have identified the cultural heritage integrated into the public sphere (Gorter, 2006). Shohamy and Ghazaleh-Mahajneh (2012) identified the need to examine micro spaces—such as neighborhoods, shopping areas, and workplaces—in LL studies to better understand language patterns. Additionally, Fairclough (2013) has argued that micro events are conditioned by the products of macrostructures. For his part, Ben-Rafael (2009) claims that the structure of the LL should provide information about local power relations. Meanwhile, Ben-Rafael et al. (2006) noted the socio-symbolic importance of LL as the actual scene where a society's public life occurs and identified it as an attractive venue to uncover social realities. Finally, Higgins (2017) points out that spaces make visible social inequities and power relationships. In the same line of thought, Gorter (2006) argues that LL should be understood in terms of power dynamics between dominant and subordinated groups.

Those structural inequalities are often difficult to identify due to "often opaque relationships of causality and determination between (a) discursive practices, events and texts, and (b) wider social and cultural structures, relations, and processes" (Fairclough, 2013, p. 93). By opacity, a concept introduced by Bourdieu (1989, 1991), Fairclough means that the participants in the dynamics of discourse, ideology, and power may not be aware of those dynamics. This opaque relationship between discourse and society serves to assure power and hegemony (2013). LL methodologies are a way to unveil this opacity. In addition, the LL can be manipulated to conform to or resist patterns and hierarchies (Marten et al., 2012) – including, in the U.S. case, the dominance of English (Moreno-Fernández, 2020). Equally important is that the presence of minoritized languages within the LL serves as a form of power and resistance (Coulmas, 2009).

Also relevant for the further analysis is the concept of racialization. It refers to the processes by which a group of people is defined by their "race." Processes of racialization begin by attributing racial meaning to people's identity and, in particular, as they relate to social structures and institutional systems, such as housing, employment, and education. In societies in which "White" people have economic, political, and social power, processes of racialization have emerged from the creation of a hierarchy in social structures and systems based on "race." The visible effects of processes of racialization are the racial inequalities embedded within social structures and systems. (Schaefer, 2008)

The heritage Spanish speakers in California suffer the racialization process because they are not English monolingual; in the US, this is equivalent to not being American enough. Therefore, efforts to maintain Spanish as a heritage language in the

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U.S. implies risking discrimination.

From another perspective, English linguistic imperialism (Phillipson, 2014) is an example of linguicism, depriving people of power and influence based on language (Gynther, 2007). It is grounded on the constant feeding of existing cultural and structural inequalities between English and other languages. It results in more resources being allocated to English and proficient English-speakers than to speakers of other languages in the US. English linguistic imperialism permeates language planning through Anglocentrism and professionalization including in English-language teaching rules and methodologies (Philipson, 2014). English hegemony in the U.S. has been achieved at the expense of other languages and of tolerance for linguistic diversity (Philipson, 2014). Thus, in San Diego County, the absence of signs in Spanish or any language other than English may be interpreted as the propagation of English imperialism.

The linguistic anthropologist, Jane Hill, defined White public space as "an arena in which linguistic disorder on the part of Whites is rendered invisible and normative, while the linguistic behavior of members of historically Spanish-speaking populations is highly visible and the object of constant monitoring" (Hill, 1998, p. 684). In the U.S. context, linguistic expressions of White native English speakers are perceived as ordered (direct indexicality), while those of native speakers of other languages and national and ethnic minorities are perceived as disordered (indirect indexicality). Hill argued that the reason Whites permit linguistic disorder and heterogenic linguistic expressions is because they are not racialized subjects. Conversely, linguistic expressions of members of minoritized ethnolinguistic groups are constantly monitored. Having a foreign accent and speaking Spanglish, for example, are seen as dangerous signs of disorder and markers of race.

5. Methodology

5.1 Selection of the documented areas

To date, a few studies have explored the presence of Spanish in the LL of Southern California (e.g., Alamillo, 2022; Carr, 2017; Colombi et al., 2020; Escandon, 2019; Franco Rodríguez, 2008, Ramos Pellicia, 2021; Train, 2016; Zentella, 2009b). In a previous study (Alamillo, 2022), 133 adult heritage speakers of Spanish identified areas in which they feel (un)safe and (un)welcome to use Spanish in public spaces in the county of San Diego. The top three areas where they indicated they felt safe and welcome to speak Spanish were Chula Vista, National City, and San Ysidro. In 2022, the Latinx population of Chula Vista and National City was 60.2% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2022a) and was 65.3% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2022b) respectively, while in 2021 Latinx population of San Ysidro was 80.6% (City Data, 2021b).

Conversely, the top three areas where these speakers felt unsafe/unwelcome to speak Spanish were La Jolla, Downtown San Diego, and Santee (see **Fig. 1**). In 2021, the White population of La Jolla was 72.6% (City Data, 2021a), while in 2022, the White

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population of Downtown San Diego and Santee was 56% (Downtown San Diego Partnership, 2022) and 76.9% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2022c) respectively.
The present research adopted these areas to be scrutinized. Here, I refer to Chula Vista, National City, and San Ysidro as *Latin areas* because they have considerable Latinx populations, and to La Jolla, downtown San Diego, and Santee as *White areas* because they have predominantly White populations.

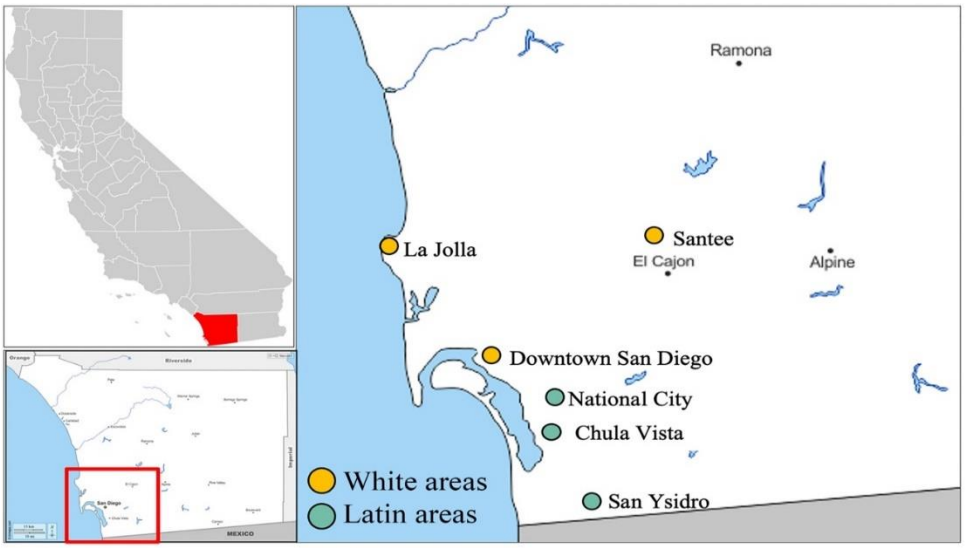

Figure 1. Map of San Diego County, indicating White and Latin areas

5.2 Unit of analysis

The unit of analysis in LL studies differs depending on the research perspective, this study follows the definition of sign given by Backhaus (2006):

A sign was considered to be any piece of written text within a spatially definable frame. The underlying definition is physical, not semantic. It is rather broad, including anything from the small handwritten sticker attached to a lamp-post to huge commercial billboards outside a department store. (p. 66)

5.3 Data collection

The corpus of this research is compounded by digital images of publicly displayed signs, defined as "written texts posted in public places where everyone can see them" (Betti, 2018, p. 2) and "all specimens of written languages visible to passers-by" (Muth, 2014, p. 32). Between February 2020 and April 2022, the author and a graduate research assistant collected digital photographs of 1,143 signs posted on major streets in social/commercial centers located in the six targeted areas. These types of centers have previously been identified as good locations to document public language representation/visibility (Ben-Rafael, 2009; Betti, 2018). The images we captured are

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merely a representative sample of the LLs studied. The corpus includes advertisements, billboards, street and building names, informational signs, warning notices, commemorative plaques, and others (Spolsky, 2009). Non-stationary texts, such as those on vehicles or on people's clothing and accessories, were excluded. Like Betti (2018), we encountered some documentation challenges. For example, some signs were obstructed by objects or people, incomplete, or illegible.

5.4 Data analysis

To answer the research questions, the following analytical categories were used to scrutinize each sign:

- The language(s) of the signs (RQ1): allows to know what the prevailing languages in the LL are, if there is linguistic diversity in the study's areas, and what is the place of Spanish among them (RQ2a).
- Most prominent language(s) in bi/multilingual signage (RQ2b): If a particular language is in a more prominent font or larger size, this signals that the sign's author is giving more importance to that language by making it more visible while diminishing the importance and value of the other language(s) used. Moreover, the frequency and prominence of a given language in signs can contribute to assessing whether the language is (de)valued (Ailanjan, 2017).
- Informative vs symbolic function of the prominent language(s) in bi/multilingual signs (RQ2c): The informative function of signs is to notify newcomers what language(s) are used in a particular region and where the borders of linguistic territories are. In contrast, the symbolic function refers to the significance that members of a linguistic group grant to their own language versus other languages (Landry & Bourhis, 1997). Language has an informative function when it is used "to communicate and obtain services" (Landry & Bourhis, 1997, p. 25); some examples are schedules, menus, and descriptions of services. The symbolic function complements the informative function and carries affective meaning related to ethnolinguistic identity (p. 27); examples are names of objects or places. The relevance of analyzing the function of the most prominent language in bi/multilingual signs is to determine whether that language is used with a symbolic, tokenistic, or folkloric value for purposes such as tourism (Van Mensel et al., 2012), commodification (Leeman & Modan, 2009), or to attract a certain population of shoppers; or if it is mainly used as a communicative tool. This helps evaluate whether Spanish is a communicative or symbolic language in Southern California.
- Types of translations in bi/multilingual signs (RQ2d): Reh (2004) proposed the following combinations of languages: (a) *duplicating text*, where the same information is presented in different languages (monolingualism is expected); (b) *fragmentary* or *overlapping texts*, where complete information is presented in one language and portions are translated into the other (some type of

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bi/multilingualism is expected); and (c) *complementary texts*, where different parts of the information are presented in different languages, on the assumption that viewers can read both languages (monolingualism is expected). Following Huebner (2009) and Spolsky (2009), I adopted the model proposed by Reh (2004), combined fragmentary and overlapping texts in one category, because it can be difficult to distinguish between them (see Yavari, 2012). The analysis of this category contributed to a better understanding of expectations about monolingualism, bilingualism, or multilingualism in the documented area.

- Public vs private authorship (RQ2e): Public (top-down) authors include official and institutional organizations (e.g., religious, governmental, municipal, cultural, educational, and public health; Ben-Rafael et al., 2006). Examples are street signs and signs in public the transport, public parks, and public parking lots. Private signs (bottom-up) are produced by retail stores and commercial businesses, including banks. Examples are signs advertising discounts, menus, descriptions of services offered, and hours of operation. Distinguishing public from private authorship assists in understanding the power dynamics between social forces with different 'amount' of social power in the LL and knowing which sector –private or public– has the main control of the LL.

Some complications emerged during the data analysis. For example, few signs lacked context (where they were placed and what elements were around them), making it difficult to confirm whether they were created by public or private agents. We made a reasonable guess based on the displayed information.

6. Findings

6.1 Language(s) of the signs

Seven languages were encountered in the sample: Chinese, English, French, German, Italian, Filipino, and Spanish. There were 1,024 (89.5%) monolingual signs. Monolingual signs were written in English (83.5%, 954/1143), Spanish (5.9%, 67/1143), French (0.17%, 2/1143) and Italian (0.09%, 1/1143). Bilingual signs (n = 117; 10.2%) used these combinations: English/Spanish (9.9%, 113), English/Italian (1), English/French (1), English/Chinese (1), and English/Filipino (1). Only two signs (0.2%) were multilingual: one English/Spanish/German, the other English/Spanish/Italian.

Most of the monolingual signs in English (60.7%, 579/954) were located in the White areas (downtown San Diego, La Jolla, and Santee), while the remainder (39.3%, 375/954) were in Latin areas (San Ysidro, Chula Vista, and National City). Almost all the monolingual Spanish signs (91%, 61/67) were found in Latin areas, with only six (9%, 6/67) located in the White areas. Additionally, three monolingual signs—two in French and one in Italian—were in White areas. More bilingual signs (61.5%, 72/117) were found in the Latin areas compared to the White areas (38.5%, 45/117). Regarding English/Spanish bilingual, most of them (61.1%, 69/113) were found in Latin areas rather

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than in White areas (38.9%, 44/113). Moreover, the only two multilingual signs displaying European languages other than English or Spanish (Italian and German) were found in La Jolla and Santee (see **Table 1**).

Table 1.

Number of signs encountered by language(s) and areas

	Monolingual				**Bilingual**					**Multilingual**		**Total**
	En	**Sp**	**Fr**	**It**	**En/Sp**	**En/It**	**En/Fi**	En/Fr	En/Chi	En/Sp/Ge	En/Sp/It	
Latin Areas												
San Ysidro	58	27	0	0	33	0	0	0	1	0	0	119
Chula Vista	77	11	0	0	21	0	0	0	0	0	0	109
National City	240	23	0	0	15	0	1	1	0	0	0	280
White Areas												
Downtown SD	121	2	0	0	8	0	0	0	0	0	0	131
La Jolla	210	2	2	1	11	1	0	0	0	0	1	228
Santee	248	2	0	0	25	0	0	0	0	1	0	276
Total	954	67	2	1	113	1	1	1	1	1	1	1,143

6.2 Most prominent language(s) in bi/multilingual signs

Figure 2 is an example of a bilingual sign in which both of the languages involved are prominent. Signs where English was most prominent were more frequent in White areas (56.3%, 27/48) than in Latin areas (43.7%, 21/48); while signs where Spanish was most prominent were in Latin areas (79.3%, 23/29) and only in 6 sign (20.7%, 6/29) in White areas; finally, bilingual signs where English and Spanish had equally prominent were more frequent in the Latin areas (68.4%, 26/38) than in White areas (31.6%, 12/38). In one sign, Chinese was most prominent; in two others, Italian was; and in one other Filipino was.

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Figure 2. Bilingual signs with both equally prominent languages

Table 2 shows that the most prominent language was typically English; except in Chula Vista, where there were more Spanish-prominent than English-prominent signs (10 vs. 3 respectively). San Ysidro had an equal number of English-prominent and Spanish-prominent signs (11 each). The area where English was most dominant was Santee (19 signs).

Table 2.

Numbers and percentages of bi/multilingual signs with prominent text by areas

Languages involved	**En/Spa**		**En/Spa**		**En/Spa**		**En/Ch**		**En/It**		**En/Fi**		**Total**
Most prominent language	English		Spanish		Both En/Sp		Chinese		Italian		Filipino		
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*
Latin Areas													
San Ysidro	11	22.9	11	38	11	28.9	1	100	0	0	0	0	34
Chula Vista	3	6.3	10	34	8	21.1	0	0	0	0	0	0	21
National City	**7	14.6	2	6.9	7	18.4	0	0	0	0	1	100	17
Total	21	43.8	23	79	26	68.4	1	100	0	0	1	100	72
White Areas													
Downtown SD	4	8.3	3	10	1	2.6	0	0	0	0	0	0	8
La Jolla	4	8.3	2	6.9	5	13.2	0	0	*2	100	0	0	13
Santee	*19	39.6	1	3.4	6	15.8	0	0	0	0	0	0	26

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Total	27	56.3	6	21	12	31.6	0	0	2	100	0	0	47
Grand total	48	100	29	100	38	100	1	100	2	100	1	100	119

*Multilingual sign, **bilingual English/French

In sum, English is more salient in all areas except Chula Vista, while Spanish, the heritage language, is more relevant and valued in San Ysidro and Chula Vista. In addition, bilingualism is more valued in the LL of the three Latin areas compared to the White ones.

6.3 Informative vs symbolic function of the most prominent language(s)

In this analytical category the value assigned to Spanish versus English based on the function of the more prominent language. Out of the 119 bi/multilingual signs, 52.1% (62) had an informative function, while 47.9% (57) a symbolic function. From the signage with informative function, 61.3% (38/62) were found in Latin areas, while the resting 38.7% (24/62) were found in White areas. Similarly, from the signage with symbolic function, 60% (34/57) were found in Latin areas, while the resting 40% (23/57) were found in White areas.

As Table 3 shows, most of the English-prominent signs had an informational function in White areas (41.7%, 20/48), followed by in Latin areas (27.1%, 13/48). Where Spanish was the more prominent language, the most common function was symbolic in Latin areas (58.6%, 17/29), followed by informational function (20.7%, 6/29) in Latin areas as well. In the instances where English and Spanish were equally prominent (see Figure 2 above), the most frequent function was informational in Latin areas (60.5%, 23/38), followed the symbolic function in White areas (21.1%, 8/38). The only two instances of Chinese and Filipino as prominent languages are showing an informational function in Latin areas, while the two instances of Italian-prominent have a symbolic function in the White areas.

Table 3.

Function of the most prominent language by areas

Languages involved	**En/Spa**		**En/Spa**		**En/Spa**		**En/Ch**		**En/It**		**En/Fi**		**Total**
Most prominent language	**English**		**Spanish**		**Both En/Sp**		**Chinese**		**Italian**		**Filipino**		
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*
Informational function													
Latin Areas													
San Ysidro	2	4.2	4	13.8	9	23.7	1	100	0	0	0	0	16

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Chula Vista	1	2.1	2	6.9	7	18.4	0	0	0	0	0	0	10
National City	**4	8.3	0	0.0	7	18.4	0	0	0	0	1	100	12
Total	7	14.6	6	20.7	23	60.5	1	100	0	0	1	100	38
White Areas													
Downtown SD	3	6.3	0	0	1	2.6	0	0	0	0	0	0	4
La Jolla	3	6.3	0	0	1	2.6	0	0	0	0	0	0	4
Santee	*14	29.2	1	3.4	1	2.6	0	0	0	0	0	0	16
Total	20	41.7	1	3.4	3	7.9	0	0	0	0	0	0	24
Symbolic function													
Latin Areas													
San Ysidro	8	16.7	7	24.1	3	7.9	0	0	0	0	0	0	18
Chula Vista	2	4.2	8	27.6	1	2.6	0	0	0	0	0	0	11
National City	3	6.3	2	6.9	0	0.0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5
Total	13	27.1	17	58.6	4	10.5	0	0	0	0	0	0	34
White Areas													
Downtown SD	1	2.1	3	10.3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4
La Jolla	1	2.1	2	6.9	4	10.5	0	0	*2	100	0	0	9
Santee	6	12.5	0	0	4	10.5	0	0	0	0	0	0	10
Total	8	16.7	5	17.2	8	21.1	0	0	2	100	0	0	23
Grand total	48	100	29	100	38	100	1	100	2	100	1	100	119

In sum, in bi/multicultural signs, either English or balanced English/Spanish is prominent for delivering information, while Spanish is more prominent in the symbolic or tokenistic function.

6.4 Types of translations in bi/multilingual signs

Following Reh (2004), multilingual texts were categorized as duplicating information in multiple languages (perhaps implying monolingualism), using

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fragmentary/overlapping translations (only some parts of the text are translated, implies some degree of bi/multilingualism), or using complementary translations in which different information is presented in each language (implies bi/multilingualism). Complementary texts appeared most frequently (47.9%, 57/119), followed by duplicated (26.9%, 32/119), and lastly fragmentary/overlapping ones (25.2%, 30/119). More duplicated (53.1%, 17/32), fragmentary/overlapping (73.3%, 22/30), and complementary (57.9%, 33/57) signs occurred in Latin areas, in opposition to duplicated (46.9.1%, 15/32), fragmentary/overlapping (26.7%, 8/30), and complementary (42.1%, 24/57) signs in White areas.

The most duplicated texts were found in bilingual signs with both English and Spanish as prominent in Latin areas (36.8%, 14/38), followed signs with English as the most prominent language (22.9%, 11/48) and English/Spanish-prominent (10.5%, 4/38) in White areas (see *Table 4*). The order of frequency for fragmentary/overlapping translations was first in signs with Spanish-prominent (20.7%, 6/29), second English/Spanish-prominent (18.4%, 7/38), and third English-prominent (16.7%, 8/48) in Latin areas. For complementary translations, the order of frequency was first Spanish-prominent (55.2%, 16/29), second English-prominent (22.9%, 11/48) in Latin areas, and third English/Spanish-prominent (21.1%, 8/38) in White areas.

Table 4.

Typology of bi/multilingual signs by languages and areas

Languages involved	**En/Spa**		**En/Spa**		**En/Spa**		**En/Ch**		**En/It**		**En/Fi**		**Total**
Most prominent language	**English**		**Spanish**		**Both En/Sp**		**Chinese**		**Italian**		**Filipino**		
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*
Duplicate													
Latin Areas													
San Ysidro	0	0	1	3.4	5	13.2	0	0	0	0	0	0	6
Chula Vista	1	2.1	0	0	5	13.2	0	0	0	0	0	0	6
National City	1	2.1	0	0	4	10.5	0	0	0	0	0	0	5
Total	2	4.2	1	3.4	14	36.8	0	0	0	0	0	0	17
White Areas													
Downtown SD	2	4.2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
La Jolla	0	0	0	0	1	2.6	0	0	0	0	0	0	1

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Santee	*9	18.8	0	0	3	7.9	0	0	0	0	0	0	12
Total	11	22.9	0	0	4	10.5	0	0	0	0	0	0	15
Fragmentary/Overlapping													
Latin Areas													
San Ysidro	5	10.4	3	10.3	3	7.9	1	100	0	0	0	0	12
Chula Vista	1	2.1	2	6.9	1	2.6	0	0	0	0	0	0	4
National City	2	4.2	1	3.4	3	7.9	0	0	0	0	0	0	6
Total	8	16.7	6	20.7	7	18.4	1	100	0	0	0	0	22
White Areas													
Downtown SD	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
La Jolla	1	2.1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	50	0	0	2
Santee	6	12.5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	6
Total	7	14.6	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	50	0	0	8
Complementary													
Latin Areas													
San Ysidro	6	12.5	7	24.1	3	7.9	0	0	0	0	0	0	16
Chula Vista	1	2.1	8	27.6	2	5.3	0	0	0	0	0	0	11
National City	**4	8.3	1	3.4	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	100	6
Total	11	22.9	16	55.2	5	13.2	0	0	0	0	1	100	33
White Areas													
Downtown SD	2	4.2	3	10.3	1	2.6	0	0	0	0	0	0	6
La Jolla	3	6.3	2	6.9	4	10.5	0	0	*1	50	0	0	10
Santee	4	8.3	1	3.4	3	7.9	0	0	0	0	0	0	8
Total	9	18.8	6	20.7	8	21.1	0	0	1	50	0	0	24
Grand total	48	100	29	100	38	100	1	100	2	100	1	100	119

* Multilingual sign, **bilingual English/French

6.5 Public vs private author/ship

In both areas, there were more private than public signs. This is because most of the areas where signs were documented were commercial centers with more private than public

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establishments. White areas have more signs produced by both public (69.6.%, 172/247) and private (51.7%,463/896) authors (see **Table 5**).

Table 5.

Distribution of private and public signs by language and White/Latin areas

	Latin Areas		**White Areas**		**Total**
	n	%	*n*	%	
Public En	53	5.6	158	16.6	211
Private En	322	33.8	421	44.1	743
Public Sp	8	11.9	1	1.5	9
Private Sp	53	79.1	5	7.5	58
Private Fr	0	0	2	100	2
Private It	0	0	1	100	1
Public Bi En/Sp	12	10.6	13	11.5	25
Private Bi En/Sp	57	50.4	31	27.4	88
Public En/Other	2	50	0	0	2
Private En/Other	1	25	1	25	2
Private Multi	0	0	2	100	2
Total Public	75	30.4	172	69.6	247
Total Private	433	48.3	463	51.7	896
Grand total	508		635		1143

As shown in **Table 5**, more monolingual English signs produced by private authors (44.1%, 421/954) as well as by public authors (16.6%, 158/954) were found in White areas. For monolingual Spanish signs, the majority of private (79.1%, 53/67) and signs public (11.9%, 8/67) were located in Latin areas. Most of the private bilingual English/Spanish signs (50.4%, 57/113) were found in Latin areas, while the public signs of this type were located in White areas (11.5%, 13/113). **Table 6** shows the distribution of private and public signs in each neighborhood.

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Table 6.

Distribution of private and public signs by language and areas

	Latin Areas						White Areas						Total
	San Ysidro		Chula Vista		National City		Downtown SD		La Jolla		Santee		
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	
Public En	29	3	5	0.5	19	2	31	3.2	48	5	79	8.3	211
Private En	29	3	72	7.5	221	23.2	90	9.4	162	17	169	17.7	743
Public Sp	7	10.4	0	0	1	1.5	0	0	0	0	1	1.5	9
Private Sp	20	29.9	11	16.4	22	32.8	2	3	2	3	1	1.5	58
Private Fr	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	100	0	0	2
Private It	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	100	0	0	1
Public Bi En/Sp	6	5.3	3	2.7	3	2.7	0	0	5	4.4	8	7.1	25
Private Bi En/Sp	27	23.9	18	15.9	12	10.6	8	7.1	6	5.3	17	15	88
Public En/Other	1	25	0	0	1	25	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Private En/Other	0	0	0	0	1	25	0	0	1	25	0	0	2
Private Multi	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	50	1	50	2
Total	119		109		280		131		228		276		1143

6.6 Summary of the findings

In summary, the LLs of the analyzed areas are predominantly English monolingual (83.5%). There were more monolingual English signs (60.7%) in White areas, and more monolingual Spanish (91%) and bi/multilingual signs (61.5%) in Latin areas; additionally, the two multilingual encountered signs appeared in White areas. Regarding the more prominent language in English/Spanish bilingual signs, English (56.3%) was more predominated in White areas, while Spanish (79.3%) and both English/Spanish (68.4%) signs did so in Latin areas. The two areas with the Spanish as the most prominent language were San Ysidro (37.9%) and Chula Vista (34.5%), while Santee (39.6%) had the most English prominent signs. Among bi/multilingual signs with informational function, most

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featuring English-prominent language were in White areas (41.7%), while those featuring Spanish (20.7%) or both English/Spanish-prominent (60.5%) were primarily in Latin areas. For signs with symbolic function, more English-prominent (27.1%) and Spanish-prominent (58.6%) signs were found in Latin areas, while signs with both English/Spanish-prominent (21.1%) tended to occur in White areas. With regard to types of translations in bi/multilingual texts, signs with duplicated (51.3%), fragmentary (73.3%), and complementary (57.9%) texts were concentrated in Latin areas. Finally, concerning authorship, White areas had more signs created by public (69.9%) and private (51.7%) authors. Therefore, no patterns were found between White and Latin areas.

7. Discussion

The prevailing language in the LL of the six studied areas was English (RQ1). English being the official language of California is not surprising since in this state the English linguistic imperialism (Phillipson, 2014) reigns and actively combats the maintenance of Spanish and other heritage languages in the state.

Spanish was the second most encountered language after English in the studied areas, encountered with 15.9% (182/1143) of the signage (RQ2a). This is in accordance with the most current demographic information of the region; however, in position to the percentage of spoken Spanish, the written documented Spanish is low. The scarce presence of Spanish and languages other than English in the White areas analyzed indicates little to no value of the heritage languages (Hill, 1998; Landry & Bourhis, 1997). Also, this pattern may serve to reinforce diglossia and strengthen the dominant language (Landry & Bourhis, 1997).

English (22.7%) was the most prominent language in bi/multilingual signs in White areas, but both Spanish and English were the most prominent languages in bi/multilingual signs in Latin areas (21.8%). This means that both Spanish and English are the preferred/valued language in bi/multilingual signs in Latin areas (RQ2b). This was opaque (Fairclough, 2013) in the LL. This might be an indication that bilingualism is expected and preferred in the Latin areas, even in public spaces. For example, the author lives in San Ysidro and the language used in the monthly neighborhood meetings is Spanish or Spanglish with translation to English. The use of English in Latin areas well could be the acceptance of the status quo and/or coercion and with acceptance of oppression, as well as the obedience to institutional, local, state, and federal laws. In other words, in this neighborhood many people speak Spanish on daily basis, and for some of them English is used only when there is no option to communicate in Spanish.

Spanish (75.9%, 22/29) has a more symbolic function, while English (56.3%, 27/48) a more informative one (RQ2c). Also, a non-surprising result. Though, it is not a good knowing that only 1 out 4 signs with Spanish have a communicative function in the LL. This symbolic use of Spanish, although relevant, reduces the communicative function of the language in the public sphere. Symbolic use of minoritized languages in the public

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space also implies that Spanish/English bilinguals know English is the dominant language, at the same time, it contributes to linguistic hierarchies and linguistic oppression.

About the same duplicated translations were found in White areas (15/32) and Latin areas (17/32); while more complementary translations were encountered in Latin areas (33/57) than in White areas (22/57). Duplication might imply social monolingualism, while complementation might imply social bi/multilingualism. This suggests that social bi/multilingualism is expected in Latin areas but not in White areas (RQ2d). In the collective imaginary of the US, English monolingualism is at the center of the most desirable archetype of an *American*. Therefore, the identities of bi/multilingual individuals are also racialized (Schaefer, 2008). In general terms, Bilingualism in the U.S. is viewed with suspicion and as linguistically disordered. Being an English monolingual is more desirable as it contributes to the maintenance of English linguistic imperialism (Phillipson, 2014) and to the expansion of White public space (Hill, 1998).

In both English and Spanish, the LLs of the documented areas were dominated by private authors. (RQ2e). This means that the social power of the LLs is in the hands of the private sector. However, that does not mean that this sector is not being pressured by the language policies that the public authors have created.

The (almost) absence of written Spanish in the LLs of some areas of the San Diego County can be due to several factors such as the expansion of the English imperialism, White public space, racialization of Spanish speakers, social oppression, or even social coercion. In this case, I would say, the absence of Spanish in some areas is also due to segregation. Althoug in California, there are efforts to diversify the ethnic population of neighborhoods (e.g., owners of habitational properties must have certain percentage of historically underrepresented tenants), there is still racial segregation as you can attest by looking at the demographics of the studied areas (see **methodology**). These outcomes show segregation of ethnolinguistic groups, similar to Zentellas's (2009b) study. The social reality unveiled is that each neighborhood is a linguistic territory in which local power is exercised, and linguistic attitudes are mirrored in the LL.

Similar to the concept of White public space, Carter (2018, p. 44) has referred to the *double figuration of Spanish*, in which Spanish serves as a valuable resource for non-Latinxs and as problematic cultural baggage for U.S. Latinxs. This double standard contributes to the racialization of Latinxs and Spanish speakers in the US, and to linguistic assimilation toward the majority language at the expense of the heritage language (subtractive bilingualism), based on the promise of what English represents. This is, the idea that socioeconomic success requires the adoption of White cultural values and behaviors (Leeman, 2004) and alignment with Whiteness and the national ideology of monolingualism (Zentella, 2009a). The sparse presence of Spanish in San Diego County speaks to the stigmatization and low value of heritage languages.

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8. Conclusion

The analysis of the LL makes it possible to visualize social inequities (Higgins, 2017). This research concludes that linguistic oppression from the hegemonic group and linguistic resistance from Spanish speakers continue nowadays, as English is the language of power and Spanish is racialized. This racialization of identities compounds ethnolinguistic inequity and social disparity. It can lead to a range of issues, including language anxiety in historically underrepresented people and even identity crises. The absence or avoidance of using Spanish in the public sphere in San Diego County could be interpreted as a way to avoid racialization or as behavior resulting from social coercion which adds to social inequity.

This study has also revealed the linguistic imperialism of English and the expansion of White public spaces in the study areas. Also, it has unveiled opaque linguistic dynamics in different areas allowing us to better understand the case of Spanish as a heritage language in Southern California. The outcomes of this study show a tendency toward linguistic segregation in San Diego County, probably because of racial/ethnic segregation in the six analyzed areas.

Spanish subordination is almost always in favor of the normative White (Schwartz, 2011). Therefore, to continue subordinating historically subordinated groups it guarantees the continuation of White supremacy, because "native speakers of English and those identifying with the White majority often actively aid in subordinating non-White, non-English speaking Others" (Schwartz, 2011, 649). However, rejecting non-English languages affects not only their speakers but all of society as we reject resources that make our society poorer (Reagan, 2009).

However, visibility does not always correlate with language vitality (Franco Rodriguez, 2018). Spanish in the U.S. is vital, in 2023, 23.5% of the San Diego County population spoke Spanish (World Population Review, 2023); however, it is not sufficiently visible based on the outcomes of this study. In this case, the invisibility of Spanish in the LL compounds the racialisation of Spanish speakers and the U.S. Latin communities (Colombi et al., 2020)

To maintain and revitalise a language, it has "to secure a sustained future, it needs to be used in written texts, and consequently, it will appear in the linguistic landscape" (Marten et al., 2012, p. 11). Because languages are resources that provide cultural capital, it is important to support linguistic differences of different ethnic groups (Yataco & Córdova Hernández, 2016). One way of doing this is by demanding policymakers to create more linguistically equitable policies that contribute to heritage languages' maintenance in favor of a linguistically diverse society and a world in which many worlds fit (Zapatista saying).

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Declaration of conflicting interest

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