

*¿Habla Usted Inglés?*

**The Linguistic Assimilation of Ethnic Mexicans in Texas**

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This study outlines the Spanish use and English ability of ethnic Mexicans in Texas, a border state with a large concentration of Mexican-origin individuals. Using data from the 2000 U.S. Census, the research considers geographic location, Hispanic concentration, and presence of Spanish-language media to understand linguistic assimilation. The results demonstrate that living in the South Texas border region and in an area with a larger Hispanic concentration and more Spanish-language media increases the odds of ethnic Mexicans speaking Spanish at home and reporting poor English-speaking skills. However, many who spoke Spanish at home also said they spoke English “Well” or “Very well.” Because second and later generations appear bilingual, results support the segmented assimilation framework and dissonant and selective acculturation. Our research suggests the root of the bilingual-America debate is not about whether Mexican immigrants are learning English, but rather whether or not they are maintaining Spanish. *Key Words:* Texas, ethnic geography, Hispanic culture, linguistic assimilation.

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In Kansas, a 16-year-old boy was suspended from school for speaking Spanish in the hallway. In Massachusetts, a little league umpire concerned that “illegal” instructions were being communicated ordered a team to stop speaking Spanish during a state tournament game, a decision the team’s coach said cost them the game. In Tennessee, a county judge who hears child and neglect cases ordered a Mexican woman to speak English at a fourth-grade level or face possible termination of her parental rights of her 11-year-old daughter. Meanwhile, ABC planned to make all of its primetime shows available in Spanish. And for the first time, the Spanish-language television network, Univision, ranked number one nationally among hard-to-reach viewers aged 18 to 34. Since the United States became a sovereign nation-state in the late eighteenth century, English has been the dominant language of power (Schmidt

2000). Even so, the hegemonic position of the English language – long branded a symbol of American culture and national identity (Schmid 2001; Portes and Rumbaut 2001; Huntington 2004) – seems challenged by the prevalence of Spanish throughout the nation. Are predictions of a bilingual United States well founded?

This study investigates linguistic assimilation among ethnic Mexicans using an analysis of 2000 U.S. Census language data in Texas, a border state with one of the largest concentrations of this ethnic group. Following Gutiérrez (1995), we use *Mexican immigrants* or *Mexicans* to describe persons born in Mexico and *Mexican American* for persons born in the United States or to refer to settings in this country, such as a *Mexican American* community or *Mexican American* history. To refer to the combined population we use *ethnic Mexican* or *Mexican- origin*. We examine the language use at home and English-speaking ability among ethnic Mexicans, using both descriptive and logistic regression analysis. We focus especially on broad contextual factors like region of residence, the percentage of Hispanics in the area, and the availability of Spanish-language media, since these variables are less understood in the literature. Through this analysis, we also test the current applicability of dissonant and selective acculturation and the segmented assimilation theory.

### Linguistic Assimilation

Because of immigrants' divergent experiences, scholars have turned to segmented-assimilation theory to explain the incorporation of the second generation of contemporary immigrants in the United States. This theory diverges from the classical-assimilation framework put forth by Gordon (1964). Gordon's framework identified a dominant group – namely white, Anglo Saxon, Protestant, and middle class – toward which immigrants assimilated. As Alba and Nee (1997) noted, Gordon's assimilation worked in one direction – the minority group took on the culture of the core group, which stayed unaffected. The segmented assimilation theory advances Gordon's framework by taking into account individual factors, such as education, place of birth, and length of stay in the United States, as well as contextual factors, including nature of migration, human and social capital, and context of reception (Rumbaut 1997; Zhou 1997; Portes and Rumbaut 2001). Under the segmented framework, it is the interaction between these sets of factors that influences immigrants' incorporation (Zhou 1997). Thus, achieving the white, Anglo, middle-class standard is no longer the only way to assimilate: while contemporary immigrants can move up in American society, they also can move down or somewhere in between (Zhou 1997).

Because acquisition and proficiency of English traditionally serves as a key measure of incorporation under the segmented-assimilation theory, three possible outcomes for linguistic assimilation among the second generation can

occur (Portes and Rumbaut 2001). Dissonant acculturation occurs when children's learning of English and American ways and simultaneous loss of the immigrant culture surpass their parents'; consonant acculturation takes place when the learning process and gradual abandonment of the home language and culture occurs at about the same rate across generations; and selective acculturation describes when the learning process of both generations is embedded in a co-ethnic community, which slows the cultural shift and encourages partial retention of parents' home language and norms (Portes and Rumbaut 2001). Thus, outcomes include retaining their parents' language as their primary language and acquiring only a limited proficiency of English, and becoming bilingual – fluency in both English and a foreign language – with a primary allegiance to foreign languages (Portes and Rumbaut 2001).

A number of factors influence the linguistic assimilation process, including individual factors, such as parental national origin, family socioeconomic status, gender, and length of stay in the United States, as well as broader, contextual factors, such as linguistic isolation and ethnic media (Portes and Rumbaut 2001). While scholars have done an excellent job in understanding the variety of individual factors that influence the linguistic assimilation process, broader, contextual factors are not as thoroughly outlined, even though these factors are recognized as being extremely influential.

#### *The Role of Geography and Ethnic Concentration*

There are some key studies that have begun to articulate the role of geography and ethnic concentration in the linguistic assimilation process. Stevens (1992) asserts that a person's language choice is influenced by the language of the people who are around them. While the pressures to speak English remain strong and opportunities to use it are readily available, Stevens (1992) notes that those who speak a non-English language in the United States are limited by the very real and manifest availability of other non-English speakers. If the non-English language group is large and segregated, then members of the language group are more likely to have neighbors, co-workers, and friends who also speak the non-English language, as well as institutions, such as churches, schools, and media, that foster non-English language use (Stevens 1992). Thus, members of a geographically concentrated language group are given plenty of opportunities and encouragement to use the non-English language and help to sustain and extend its predominance (Stevens 1992). On the other hand, as Liberson and Curry (1971) suggest, immigrants may be encouraged to acquire English if they live among numerous English speakers or other groups with a variety of mother tongues, in which case English becomes a necessary second language for group-to-group communication.

According to Alba *et al.* (2002), because concentrations help maintain the minority language, linguistic assimilation may be reached more slowly or not at all. Specifically, they find that the presence of Spanish-speaking groups near

the United States-Mexico border (in the Mexican case) and in Miami (in the Cuban case) increases the odds that the third generation will be bilingual. At the same time, Chiswick and Miller (2002) demonstrate that immigrant/linguistic concentrations have a negative effect on English fluency while smaller linguistic concentrations have a positive effect (for those who spoke English “Very Well” or “Well”). The more an individual can avoid communicating in the dominant language, the slower the individual’s rate of fluency in the dominant language.

Expanding on Chiswick and Miller’s (2002) findings, Bauer, Epstein, and Gang (2002) find that the concentration-language relationship also works in reverse, since concentrations may attract immigrants who do not plan on staying long in the United States and/or those who have fewer incentives to learn English (see also Jasso and Rosenzweig 1990). Using data from the Mexican Migration Project, the authors find that Mexican migrants in part select their destination in the United States based on their levels of English proficiency. The need for English decreases as the size of the enclave increases at the same time that those possessing English proficiency are not as dependent on the social networks large enclaves provide. In other words, those with high English proficiency tend to choose locations with a small enclave while those with low English skills select locations with a large enclave. The authors conclude that immigrants’ destination choices influence whether their English proficiency will improve: small enclaves enable immigrants to improve their English over time, while large enclaves may serve as what the authors call a “language trap,” supporting their poor English abilities (Bauer, Epstein, and Gang 2002, 6).

#### *The Role of Spanish-Language Media*

Non-English language media is another contextual factor that may also help to create a supportive infrastructure for non-English language use (Fox 1996; Haverluk 1993; Alba *et al.* 2002; Stevens 1992). Ethnic media outlets strengthen efforts to pass a non-English language to the second generation and beyond (Portes and Rumbaut 2001). In the United States, Chiswick and Miller (2002) find that the number of Spanish-language radio stations affects the English-language acquisition and proficiency of Mexican immigrants. Greater access to Spanish-language radio is connected with poorer English skills.

Fox (1996) argues that Spanish-language media, particularly television, help create and sustain the Hispanic nation, encouraging the audience to consider themselves as “Hispanic,” raising group consciousness, and continually reinforcing their use of Spanish (Fox 1996, 40). While Fox (1996) asserts that Germans with their German-language press probably came the closest a hundred years ago, no other minority in the history of the United States has had such an extensive mediascape for maintaining language, including electronic media and a nationwide system of Spanish-language television, broadcasting

most hours each day to speakers of that language. Indeed, Spanish-language television stations, such as Univision, Telemundo, and Galavision, provide key mediums through which Spanish is maintained. Fox (1996) argues that the availability of Spanish media has in part (along with waves of immigration) contributed to bilingualism among Spanish-speaking immigrants and an increased number of their grandchildren choosing to speak Spanish.

Haverluk (1993) illustrates that the availability of Spanish-language media depends on the number of Hispanics in the area. A small newsletter with information on local events and immigration that is circulated in a new Hispanic community may expand into a weekly or daily Spanish-language newspaper as the Hispanic population of the community grows to about 50 percent. In addition, members of the English-only media may begin learning Spanish and hiring Hispanics in order to maintain readership. Spanish-language radio follows a similar trajectory, perhaps starting with an hour or two of Mexican music or community news, then expanding to around the clock Spanish-language stations as the population increases (Haverluk 1993). In Lubbock, Texas, for instance, Haverluk (1993) finds that when the Hispanic population was less than ten percent in the 1950s, there was no full-time Spanish-language radio station; in 1967, the city got its first full-time Spanish-language station; and by the publication of Haverluk's dissertation in the early 1990s, there were five full-time Spanish-language stations. Since Spanish-language television is not as dependent on the number of Hispanics as other mediums, the technology allows it to be transmitted with less regard to geography. Still, as the population grows, local Spanish-language cable programming may be created or a cable movie channel may be dubbed in Spanish, which were the cases in Lubbock and El Paso, respectively (Haverluk 1993).

### **Research Objectives and Hypotheses**

Alba and Nee (2003) express skepticism about what they called the "alarmist" prediction that parts of the United States will become bilingual and Spanish will be used as much as English. In particular, they demonstrate that linguistic assimilation is taking place among Mexican Americans and the third and especially later generations are progressing toward English monolingualism at home. Utilizing the 5% Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS) of the 1990 Census, Alba and Nee (2003) determine the extent of Spanish and English use at home as well as the English proficiency of Mexican Americans in relation to their proximity to the border. Because they suspect the influences promoting Spanish strongest at the border, they examined the linguistic situation in three geographic areas – one in close proximity to the United States-Mexico border, one elsewhere in the border state, and another in the United States interior. Alba and Nee (2003) find that foreign-born Mexican adults near the border spoke Spanish at home more than those living farther from the bor-

der. The geographic-linguistic trend was the same for Mexican American children, but more of this group compared to their adult counterparts spoke only English at home. Farther from the border, at least half of those in both generations spoke only English at home while fewer spoke Spanish or both languages at home. Interestingly, the scholars also find that proximity to the border does not affect the English proficiency of either generation: More than 95 percent of Mexican Americans in each location spoke English well (Alba and Nee 2003). Alba and Nee show that moving away from the border – both within the border state and elsewhere in the country – reduces chances for later generations of native-born Mexican Americans to continue speaking Spanish and that later generations have greater propensity for English monolingualism at home (Alba and Nee 2003). Alba and Nee's (2003) study demonstrates that while later generations of the Mexican American group seemed to be heading toward English monolingualism, linguistic assimilation had not been achieved entirely by the third generation.

The Alba and Nee (2003) study confirms that the use of both Spanish and English at home is influenced by both proximity to the United States-Mexico border and the presence of an ethnic concentration, but that these two factors do not affect self-reported English proficiency. Importantly, Alba and Nee's (2003) study highlights that the root of the bilingual-America debate is not whether Mexican immigrants and their offspring learn English – nearly all of them speak English well – but whether they maintain Spanish.

Alba and Nee's research raises key questions about the role of place in maintaining a native language. Do contextual characteristics of Texas provide support for Spanish maintenance among Mexican immigrants? Is English use and ability affected by Texas' proximity to the border? To address these questions, we replicate Alba and Nee's study with three regions based on traditional and cultural Mexican settlements within the border state of Texas, an area known for its large and long-established Mexican communities and Spanish-language concentrations (Arreola 2002). Thus, this study tests whether Alba and Nee's findings (based on 1990 Census data) are applicable utilizing 2000 Census data in a particular place that has been continually inhabited by the presence of a significant minority, and in some cases, a majority ethnic Mexican population. During the time period since their research, the United States context has changed considerably. In Texas alone, the Mexican foreign-born population doubled between the 1990 and 2000 Censuses – from just under a million to nearly 2 million – suggesting that Spanish use may have a more significant role in the state. And as Texas recently became the nation's fourth "majority-minority state" – joining Hawaii, New Mexico, and California – according to July 1, 2004 census population estimates, it seems appropriate to study the dynamics of linguistic assimilation here.

This research also explores whether the data lends support for dissonant and selective acculturation and segmented-assimilation theory. It takes into

consideration both individual and contextual factors that may reduce the incentives for English and strengthen those for Spanish. Contextual factors include geographic location, Hispanic concentration, as well as the presence of Spanish-language media. Individual factors include nativity, age, education, gender, and marital status. We examine the combined effects of these factors on the language use and English-speaking ability of ethnic Mexicans in Texas, where Spanish speaking and lack of English speaking is expected to be common.

Our hypotheses are that the results of this study will mirror previous findings: (1) living in the Texas-Mexico border region is associated with speaking Spanish at home and reporting poor English-speaking skills among ethnic Mexicans, (2) those in areas with a larger Hispanic concentration and more Spanish-language media have greater odds of speaking Spanish at home and reporting poorer English-speaking skills, (3) Spanish use at home does not necessarily mean poor English-speaking ability, (4) and bilingualism will be evident, showing support for dissonant and selective acculturation and the linguistic assimilation of ethnic Mexicans under the segmented-assimilation framework.

### **Data and Methods**

Data for this study come from the 5% PUMS of the 2000 Census. The sample of this study includes those in Texas who reported that they were Mexican origin Hispanics. In the 2000 Census, more than 5 million reported being a Mexican Hispanic in Texas. The sample excludes the other 49 states and non-Mexican Hispanic categories. In addition, only those who lived in a housing unit were included in the sample. Those living in institutional group quarters and non-institutional group quarters were omitted.

Most centrally, this study considers responses to the three-part language question asked in the long form of the decennial census since 1980. The question addresses (1) language use at home, (2) what the non-English language is, and (3) the English-speaking ability of respondents aged five and over. However, in order to also consider education and marital status in the analyses, the sample excludes those under 25 years old, who may have not completed their education or had the chance to get married. Based on the answers to the language question, detailed below, the sample includes people who speak only English or Spanish at home. The total sample equaled 100,300.

The first part of the language question – “Does this person speak a language other than English at home?” – permitted the respondent to mark “Yes” or “No.” Respondents were instructed to answer, “Yes,” if the person sometimes or always spoke a language other than English at home, and “No” if the person did not speak a non-English language at home or if he or she spoke the non-English language outside of the home, at school or work, or if usage of the language consisted of a few expressions or slang (U.S. Bureau of the Census

2002). If the respondent answers “Yes” to the first part of the question, the respondent wrote in the answer to the second part, “What is this language?” This printed response was later coded and put into one of the approximately 380 Census Bureau-designated categories of single languages or language families (U.S. Bureau of the Census 2003). If the person spoke more than one non-English language at home, respondents were instructed to report the language spoken more frequently or the language learned first (U.S. Bureau of the Census 2002).

Reported language use serves as a basis for selection. The sample of this study includes respondents who answered both “Yes” and “No” to the first part of the language question. Of the “Yes” respondents, the sample consists of those who reported speaking Spanish at home. Those who reported other non-English languages were dropped from the sample. The “No” respondents – or those who reported speaking only English at home – also were included in the sample. Thus, a language spoken at home variable was created for this study, with Spanish spoken at home and only English spoken at home the variable’s two categories.

Respondents who answered that they speak a language other than English at home then answered the third part of the language question – “How well does this person speak English?” – by marking one of the following responses: “Very well,” “Well,” “Not well,” or “Not at all.” Respondents received no instructions for interpreting these categories (U.S. Bureau of the Census 2002). The answer to this question is a self-assessment of the respondent or the respondent’s assessment of other members of the household. In some cases, if a person reported speaking a non-English language at home, but did not report the ability to speak English, the English ability of a randomly selected person of the same age, origin, nativity, entry year, and language group was assigned (U.S. Bureau of the Census 2002).

For the English-speaking ability variable, the four categories were collapsed into two categories – one including “Not at all” and “Not well” responses and the other “Well” and “Very well” responses – making it a binary variable. While it would have been ideal to preserve all four categories, collapsing them simplified the analysis and appeared to be how Alba and Nee handled the four categories in their study (Alba and Nee 2003). Of the sample, about 90 percent spoke Spanish at home whereas about 10 percent spoke only English at home. Nearly 70 percent of the sample spoke English “Well” or “Very well” while the remaining 30 percent or so spoke English “Not well” or “Not at all.”

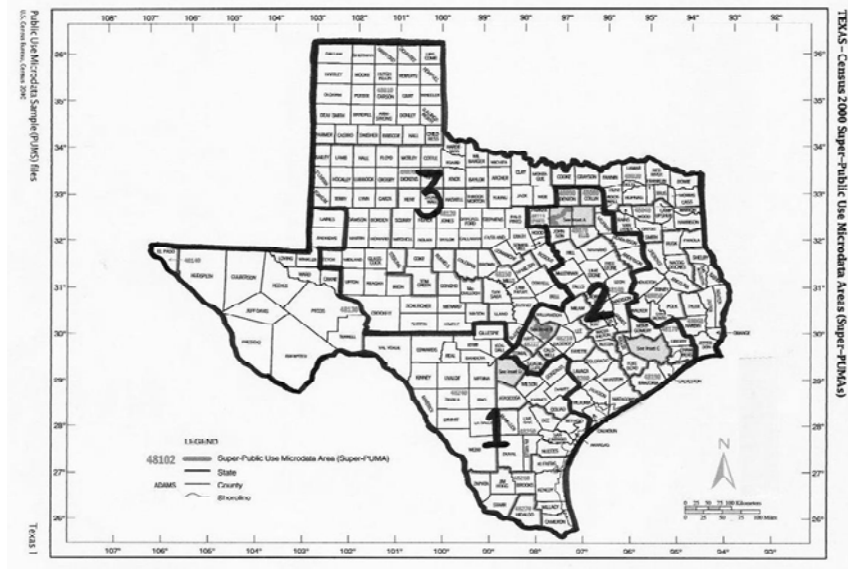
The nature of the census data limited this study. First, the census does not address respondents’ proficiency in the non-English language. Thus, evaluating populations’ bilingualism, or levels of bilingualism, is not possible with census data. In addition, those who spoke English and another language were not asked to designate their primary language (U.S. Bureau of the Census



2002). This information would have provided a more direct way to determine whether English was still a goal among immigrants. The census also does not address a person's possible previous use of non-English languages (U.S. Bureau of the Census 2004). Thus, respondents may have a non-English mother tongue that was not reported because they did not speak that language at home at the time of the survey. Finally, the census does not allow for diversity of language use. It does not address language use outside of the home, which could lead to the presumption that respondents who report speaking a non-English language at home also speak that language in environments outside of the home. This may not be the case.

In order to determine how geographic location in Texas may be associated with language use at home and English-speaking ability, a culture region variable was produced. Three culture regions within Texas were constructed according to the 2000 PUMS divisions of Texas into areas called Public Use Microdata Areas (PUMAs). Texas consists of 153 PUMAs, which each contain at least 100,000 residents (because of Census Bureau confidentiality requirements). The culture regions were created based on traditional and cultural Mexican settlements in Texas over time (Arreola 2002; Skop, Gratton, and Guttman 2006; Yoder and LaPerrière de Gutiérrez 2004). Culture region 1 is the region along the Texas-Mexico border and includes El Paso, which Skop, Gratton, and Guttman (2006) described as an established "gateway for migration from the south," and San Antonio, which Arreola (2002) portrays as the capital of his distinctive "Tejano South Texas." Culture region 2 includes three metropolitan areas in Texas: Houston, Austin, and Dallas. While South Texas and the lower Rio Grande valley were main settlement regions of Mexicans in 1910, the population dispersed northward by 1950 and the majority of immigrants and their children lived in metropolitan areas, which offered better employment opportunities (Skop, Gratton, and Guttman 2006). Culture region 3 comprises the remaining areas of the state, which historically has less of a Mexican American imprint. Figure 1 illustrates the division of Texas by culture region.

To assess the relationship between ethnic concentration, language use at home and English-speaking ability, we constructed a Hispanic population concentration variable. Hispanic origin was used to create this variable since non-Mexican Hispanics also speak Spanish and thus may play a part in the association between ethnic concentration and language use at home and English-speaking ability. Like culture region, this variable also was constructed according to Texas PUMAs. The number of Hispanics and non-Hispanics were found for each PUMA, and then the proportion of the Hispanic population for each PUMA was determined by dividing the number of Hispanics by the total PUMA population. This continuous variable measures the proportion of Hispanics in each Texas PUMA.



**FIGURE 1.** Texas divided into three culture regions based on the 2000 U.S. Census Public Use Microdata Areas and traditional and cultural Mexican settlements over time.

The 2000 *Broadcasting & Cable Yearbook* serves as another data source for this study. The publication provides a listing of television stations and programming on radio stations in Canada and the U.S., by state. This information allows a way to evaluate how the number of Spanish-language media outlets available is associated with language use at home and English-speaking ability. However, it is important to note that the presence of Spanish-language media may be an indication of the ethnic Mexican population in Texas. The ethnic Mexican population in the state may have prompted the existence of Spanish-language media. Of the media in Texas, Spanish-language television stations, Spanish-language radio programming, as well as Tejano radio programming, which includes Spanish broadcasts, were considered while other types of television stations and radio programming were disregarded. The listings of the Spanish-language media outlets in Texas included their participating Texas cities, and this data was used to construct a continuous variable that shows the total number of Spanish-language media available in each Texas PUMA.

Aside from contextual-level variables relating to media and culture, several individual-level variables are considered, such as those related to demographic factors, socioeconomic factors, and nativity. After excluding those under 25 years old, as previously mentioned, the remaining ages were grouped as follows: 25-34 years, 35-44 years, 45-54 years, and 55 years and above. The

education variable was divided into five categories – elementary school or less, high school or less, graduated from high school, some college, and completed college or more. Married persons include those widowed, divorced, or separated. The Mexican nativity variable was created primarily with the variable indicating place of birth, but also with the variable describing citizenship status. With the exception of Mexico, all other countries were excluded from the Mexican-born category. Those who made up the non-Mexican born category included those born in the U.S. Due to data limitations, it was not possible to distinguish the third and later generations. This study will consider those born in Mexico as members of the first generation and those who were born in the U.S. as part of the second and later generations.

A logistic regression technique using Stata statistical software was employed. Logistic regression models are appropriate when modeling binary dependent variables, as in the present case (Hoffmann 2004). We test three models for each outcome variable. Each model considers one contextual variable – culture region, Hispanic population concentration, or the number of Spanish-language media – since the three contextual variables used in this study were highly correlated. The first model of each analysis includes culture region as a control variable while the second model controls for Hispanic population concentration, and the third for the number of Spanish-language media. Weights were not used in the analyses, but a comparison was made and the weighted and un-weighted results are consistent.

### *¿Habla Usted Inglés?*

#### **Descriptive Results of Spanish Use and English Ability**

Table 1 presents the percentage distributions for English only and Spanish use at home by demographic factors, socioeconomic factors, nativity, and Texas culture region. The table also shows the mean Hispanic percentage and number of Spanish-language media. Perhaps most striking is large majority of each group – about 82 to 94 percent – speaks Spanish at home, highlighting the prevalence of bilingualism among Mexican Americans in Texas. Differences in language use at home can be observed in the percentage distributions by nativity. Nearly 15 percent of Mexican Americans in Texas spoke only English at home compared to about 6 percent of those who were born in Mexico. But the Mexican-born group spoke more Spanish at home – more than 94 percent – compared to about 85 percent of the U.S.-born.

Age also appears to have a strong relationship with language use at home. In general, younger Mexican Americans tend to speak only English at home the most. While more than 12 percent of those aged 25 to 34 – the youngest age group in the sample – spoke only English at home, about seven percent of those aged 55 and above spoke only English at home. By contrast, Spanish speaking at home was less common among younger Mexican Americans and

more common among older Mexican Americans. More than 87 percent of those aged 25 to 34 spoke Spanish at home compared to nearly 93 percent of those aged 55 and above. At the same time, ethnic Mexicans who were not married spoke only English at home more often and spoke Spanish at home less often than their married counterparts. However, only English and Spanish speakers at home are fairly evenly distributed among men and women. Around 10 percent of both men and women spoke only English at home and about 90 percent of both genders also spoke Spanish.

Education also seems to be a strong indicator of Mexicans' language use at home. Overall, those with lower levels of education spoke Spanish more and only English less at home compared to those with higher levels of education. For instance, of those who completed elementary school or less, about seven percent spoke only English at home while nearly 18 percent of those who completed college or more spoke only English at home. More than 92 percent of the elementary-or-less group spoke Spanish at home while about 82 percent of those who completed college or more spoke Spanish at home.

In addition, geographic location within Texas appears to matter. A near majority of the sample – almost 48 percent – lived in culture region 1, the area along the Texas-Mexico border, while fewer – about 41 percent – made up culture region 2, which includes three major metropolitan areas, and only about 11 percent of the sample lived in culture region 3, the remaining areas of Texas. It was more common for ethnic Mexicans who lived in culture region 1 – the South Texas border region – to speak Spanish at home (more than 91 percent) than those in culture regions 2 and 3. These findings are consistent with the Alba and Nee (2003) study, which shows that the use of Spanish at home is associated with proximity to the border. However, those in culture region 2, which includes the three metropolitan areas, spoke only English at home more than their counterparts in culture region 1 and 3 (nearly 12 percent).

The mean Hispanic percentages and number of Spanish-language media shown in Table 1 provide clues about other contextual forces in Texas that may be associated with the home language use of ethnic Mexicans. For example, those who speak Spanish at home live in an area that has a population that is, on average, about 53-percent Hispanic. Meanwhile, those who speak only English at home live in an area with a population that is less concentrated with Hispanics, about 43-percent Hispanic on average. These figures also confirm Alba and Nee's finding that the presence of an ethnic concentration is related to language use at home. Those in culture region 1 lived in a PUMA that was on average about 75-percent Hispanic while those in culture region 2 lived in a PUMA that was about 33-percent Hispanic on average, and those in culture region 3 lived in a PUMA that was on average about 23-percent Hispanic. Also, ethnic Mexicans in Texas who speak only English at home live in an area where there are, on average, about six Spanish-language media outlets, but

**Table 1.** Percentage Distributions and Means for Only English and Spanish Use at Home, 2000

	Only English	Spanish
Age		
25-34 years	12.5	87.5
35-44 years	10.9	89.1
45-54 years	8.5	91.5
55+ years	7.3	92.7
Gender		
Men	9.8	90.2
Women	10.6	89.4
Education		
Elementary or less	7.4	92.6
High school or less	6.9	93.1
High school	11.3	88.7
Some college	15.3	84.7
College or more	17.8	82.3
Marital status		
Married	9.4	90.6
Unmarried	12.0	88.0
Mexican born		
No	14.8	85.2
Yes	5.8	94.2
Culture region		
1: Border	8.7	91.3
2: Metro	11.8	88.2
3: Other	10.8	89.2
Mean percent Hispanic	43.3	52.7
Mean number of media	6.1	6.9
N	10,230	90,070

Total N = 100,300

Sources: U.S. Census 2000, *Broadcasting & Cable Yearbook* 2000.

Note: May not total to 100% because of rounding.

those who speak Spanish at home live in an area where there are slightly more Spanish-language media available – about seven on average. The number of Spanish-language media available in the three Texas culture regions ranges from 0 to 14, with culture region 1 having the highest average of Spanish-language media presence – about 10 Spanish-language media outlets – and culture region 3 with the smallest average – about two Spanish-language media outlets.

Table 2 displays the percentage distributions for “Not well” and “Well” English-speaking ability by demographic factors, socioeconomic factors, nativity, and Texas culture region. Like Table 1, Table 2 also shows the mean Hispanic percentages and numbers of Spanish-language media. With the exception of those with the lowest education levels and those born in Mexico, it was more common for ethnic Mexicans in Texas to say they speak English well than not well, which supports the notion that speaking Spanish does not necessarily mean having poor, self-reported English-speaking skills.

Again, nativity proves noteworthy. Almost 93 percent of those who were not born in Mexico – the second and later generations – reported speaking English well compared to less than half of the first generation, or those who were born in Mexico. By contrast, only about seven percent of the American born said they do not speak English well while 55 percent of the Mexican born reported poor English-speaking skills.

Age also seems to be associated with the English-speaking skills of Mexican Americans in Texas. Those aged 55 and above reported speaking English well the least and said they do not speak English well the most compared to their younger counterparts. The other age subgroups – 25 to 34 years old, 35 to 44 years old, and 45 to 54 years old – display fairly even percentage distributions of those who reported speaking English well (about 70 percent) and not well (about 30 percent). At the same time, ethnic Mexicans in Texas who are married generally fall behind their unmarried counterparts in English-speaking skills. Compared to unmarried people, married people have the highest distribution of those who reported not speaking English well (about 33 percent). Meanwhile, it was more common for unmarried people to say they speak English well (about 71 percent). As was the case with language use at home, gender does not seem to have a strong relationship with English-speaking ability. Ethnic Mexican men and women show about the same distributions in both English-skill sets – around 30 percent of both men and women said they do not speak English well while close to 70 percent of both genders said they do speak English well.

Education may reveal the most about the English-speaking ability of ethnic Mexicans in Texas. Overall, education appears to be positively associated with good English-speaking skills. For example, more than 91 percent of those who completed some college or more reported speaking English well, compared to 37 percent of those who completed elementary school or less. On the

other hand, those with the lowest levels of education – elementary school or less and some high school or less – display the largest percentage distributions of those who said they do not speak English well, 63 percent and about 33 percent, respectively. Meanwhile, between eight and nine percent of those who completed some college or more reported not speaking English well.

It is interesting to note the percentage distributions across culture regions of ethnic Mexicans in Texas who reported speaking English well. More than 71 percent of those who lived in culture region 1 along the Texas-Mexico border and in culture region 3 said they speak English well. The majority (about 64 percent) of those who lived in culture region 2 near three metropolitan areas also reported speaking English well. These results match Alba and Nee's: proximity to the border is not linked to self-reported English proficiency. Ethnic Mexicans who lived in culture region 2 reported speaking English poorly more than their counterparts in culture regions 1 and 3 – about 36 percent in culture region 2 said they do not speak English well.

The mean Hispanic percentages and number of Spanish-language media shown in Table 2 are nearly equal across English-speaking abilities. Ethnic Mexicans in Texas who reported speaking English both not well and well live in areas with a population that is about 51-percent Hispanic on average. The evenness of the mean Hispanic percentages also provides further support of Alba and Nee's finding that the presence of an ethnic concentration is not associated with self-reported English-speaking ability. In addition, ethnic Mexicans in Texas who said they speak English both not well and well live in areas where there are, on average, about seven Spanish-language media outlets available. This figure also suggests that the availability of Spanish-language media has little to do with the English-speaking ability of ethnic Mexicans in Texas.

### *¿Habla Usted Inglés?*

#### **Logistical Regression Models of Spanish Use and English Ability**

Table 3 presents the results of the logistic regression models demonstrating the association between the Spanish use at home of ethnic Mexicans in Texas and demographic factors, socioeconomic factors, nativity, culture region, Hispanic population concentration, and availability of Spanish-language media. Coefficients are displayed in the form of odds ratios. Three models are shown in this table, each including one of the contextual-level predictors – culture region, Hispanic concentration, or Spanish-language media – along with all of the remaining, individual-level predictors. The table reports coefficients that are significant at the  $p < .10$  level. For each model in Table 3, all coefficients are statistically significant. The primary goal of these models is to determine the relationship between contextual-level factors and Spanish use at home among ethnic Mexicans in Texas. In general, these models support the

**TABLE 2.** Percentage Distributions and Means for Not Well and Well English Ability, 2000

	Not Well	Well
Age		
25-34 years	30.3	69.7
35-44 years	29.5	70.5
45-54 years	29.4	70.6
55+ years	38.3	61.7
Gender		
Men	30.4	69.6
Women	32.8	67.2
Education		
Elementary or less	63.0	37.0
High school or less	32.8	67.2
High school	14.0	86.0
Some college	8.4	91.7
College or more	8.5	91.5
Marital status		
Married	32.9	67.1
Unmarried	28.7	71.3
Mexican born		
No	7.3	92.8
Yes	55.0	45.1
Culture region		
1: Border	28.7	71.4
2: Metro	35.9	64.1
3: Other	28.3	71.7
Mean percent Hispanic	51.4	51.3
Mean number of media	6.7	6.8
N	31,695	68,605

Total N = 100,300

*Sources:* U.S. Census 2000, *Broadcasting & Cable Yearbook* 2000.*Note:* May not total to 100% because of rounding.



expectation that living in the border region and in an area with a denser Hispanic concentration and more Spanish-language media increases the odds of speaking Spanish at home.

Model 1 considers the geographic location of ethnic Mexicans according to Texas culture region. Overall, the results suggest that living in culture region 1 – the border region – enhances the odds of speaking Spanish at home. Ethnic Mexicans in culture region 2 exhibited about 40 percent lower odds of speaking Spanish at home and those in culture region 3 showed about 28 percent lower odds compared to their counterparts in culture region 1. Model 2, which includes the Hispanic-concentration variable, also confirms the expected association between Hispanic concentration and Spanish use at home. The odds of ethnic Mexicans in Texas speaking Spanish at home are increased by about one percent for each additional one percent of the population that is Hispanic (in the PUMA). As Model 3 shows, the number of Spanish-language media also is positively related to Spanish use at home. One additional Spanish-language media outlet (in the PUMA) increases the odds of Spanish use at home by about five percent. Even so, across models, controlling for contextual-level variables results in small changes in individual-level coefficients.

Several of the individual-level variables result in expected associations with ethnic Mexicans' Spanish use at home. Consistent with previous findings, nativity appears to be strongly associated with the home Spanish use of ethnic Mexicans in Texas. Those who were born in Mexico exhibited about three times the odds (in each model) of speaking Spanish at home than those who were born in the United States or of American parents. As previous literature suggests, this may be explained by generational differences. Those who were born in Mexico belong to the first generation, which is expected to speak more Spanish than English. Meanwhile, ethnic Mexicans are expected to speak more English than Spanish.

As age increases, the odds of speaking Spanish at home also increases. Ethnic Mexicans in Texas aged 55 and above have about 86 percent higher odds in models 1 and 2 and about 97 percent higher odds in Model 3 of speaking Spanish at home compared to those aged 25 to 34. At the same time, the models demonstrate that married, ethnic Mexican men have greater odds of speaking Spanish at home. ethnic Mexican women have about five percent lower odds (in each model) of speaking Spanish at home than ethnic Mexican men while ethnic Mexicans who are not married have around 15 percent lower odds (also in each model) of speaking Spanish at home than those who are married.

In terms of education, the overall patterns show that more education reduces the odds of speaking Spanish at home. Ethnic Mexicans in Texas who completed college or more have about 27 to 30 percent lower odds (across the three models) of speaking Spanish at home compared to those who finished

elementary school or less. These results offer further evidence that education, and thus more exposure to English, is associated with less Spanish speaking.

Table 4 provides logistic regression coefficients, also in the form of odds ratios, revealing the association between the English-speaking ability of ethnic Mexicans in Texas and individual- and contextual-level factors. As in Table 3, three models are provided in Table 4, with each including one of the contextual-level predictors in addition to all of the individual-level predictors. This table also reports coefficients that are significant at the  $p < .10$  level. For each model in Table 4, the coefficients of all variables except for the unmarried group are statistically significant. Similar to the analysis given in Table 3, the main purpose of these models is to show the relationship between contextual factors and the English-speaking ability reported by ethnic Mexicans in Texas while also providing insight on how individual characteristics may be associated with English-speaking skills. Overall, these models offer evidence that a relationship exists between contextual factors and the self-reported English-speaking ability of ethnic Mexicans in Texas.

Model 1 considers the association between geographic location of ethnic Mexicans, according to Texas culture region, and their reported English-speaking ability. Ethnic Mexicans in culture region 2 have about five percent higher odds of reporting that they speak English well and those in culture region 3 have about 41 percent higher odds of saying they speak English well than those in the border region. These results suggest that proximity to the border is related to reporting poorer English-speaking skills among ethnic Mexicans in Texas. Model 2 considers the Hispanic-concentration variable. The odds of ethnic Mexicans in Texas reporting good English-speaking abilities are decreased by about 0.4 percent for each additional one percent of the population that is Hispanic (in the PUMA). Model 3 also shows an association between the presence of Spanish-language media and self-reported English-speaking ability. One additional Spanish-language media outlet (in the PUMA) decreases the odds of ethnic Mexicans in Texas saying they speak English well by about two percent. Across the three models, controlling for contextual-level variables leads to small changes, if any, in the individual-level coefficients. This illustrates that the contextual factors cannot explain the differences in English ability associated with individual factors.

The individual-level variables provide the expected results. Nativity is strongly related to the reported English-speaking ability of ethnic Mexicans in Texas. Those who were born in Mexico have about 91 percent lower odds (in each model) of reporting that they speak English well compared to those who were born in the United States or of American parents. This result may be explained by generational differences described in previous research. The Mexican born belong to the first generation, which is expected to speak English poorly, while the U.S. born, or the second or later generations, are projected to speak better English than their foreign-born parents.

**TABLE 3.** Odds Ratios for Logistic Regression Models  
Predicting Spanish Use at Home, 2000

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Age			
25-34 years	---	---	---
35-44 years	1.15**	1.16**	1.17**
45-54 years	1.57**	1.58**	1.62**
55+ years	1.86**	1.86**	1.97**
Gender			
Men	---	---	---
Women	0.95**	0.94**	0.95*
Education			
<Elementary	---	---	---
<High school	1.64**	1.64**	1.61**
High school	1.19**	1.22**	1.18**
Some college	0.88**	0.90**	0.87**
College+	0.71**	0.73**	.70**
Marital status			
Married	---	---	---
Unmarried	0.86**	0.84**	.85**
Mexican born			
No	---	---	---
Yes	3.01**	2.88**	2.77**
Culture region			
1: Border	---		
2: Metro	0.60**		
3: Other	0.72**		
Percent Hispanic		1.01**	
Number of media			1.05**

Sources: U.S. Census 2000, *Broadcasting & Cable Yearbook* 2000.

† p<.10 \* p<.05 \*\* p<.01

**TABLE 4.** Odds Ratios for Logistic Regression Models Predicting Well or Very Well English Ability, 2000

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Age			
25-34 years	---	---	---
35-44 years	1.25**	1.27**	1.25**
45-54 years	1.27**	1.31**	1.29**
55+ years	0.85**	0.89**	0.86**
Gender			
Men	---	---	---
Women	0.72**	0.73**	0.72**
Education			
<Elementary	---	---	---
<High school	2.68**	2.67**	2.68**
High school	5.69**	5.65**	5.69**
Some college	9.31**	9.26**	9.33**
College+	9.63**	9.47**	9.58**
Marital status			
Married	---	---	---
Unmarried	0.97	0.97	0.97
Mexican born			
No	---	---	---
Yes	0.09**	0.09**	0.09**
Culture region			
1: Border	---		
2: Metro	1.05*		
3: Other	1.41**		
Percent Hispanic		1.00**	
Number of media			0.98**

Sources: U.S. Census 2000, *Broadcasting & Cable Yearbook* 2000.

† p<.10    \* p<.05    \*\* p<.01

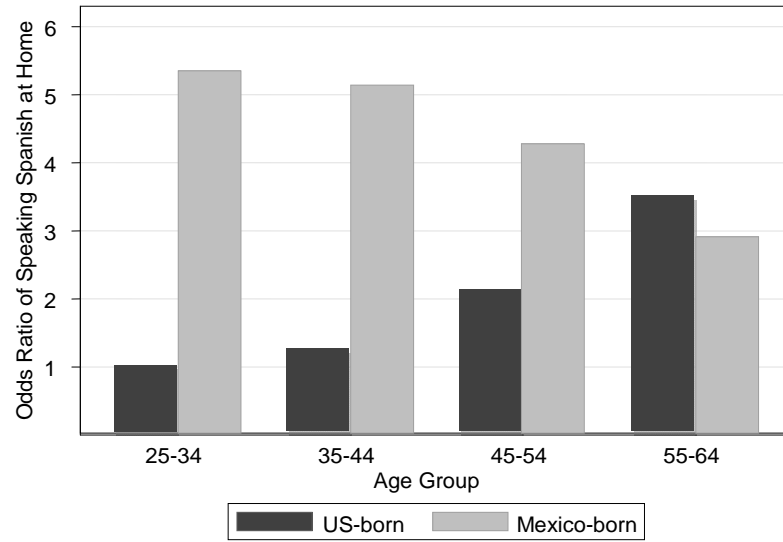
In general, old age is associated with poorer English-speaking skills. The odds of ethnic Mexicans in Texas aged 55 years old and above saying they speak English well is reduced by up to 15 percent (in each model) compared to their counterparts aged 25 to 34. However, those 35 to 54 years old have 25 to 31 percent greater odds (across the three models) of reporting that they speak English well than 25 to 34 year olds. At the same time, ethnic Mexican women and ethnic Mexicans who are not married have greater odds of reporting they speak English poorly. The three models reveal that women have about 27 percent (model 2) and about 28 percent (models 1 and 3) lower odds of reporting speaking English well compared to men. In addition, unmarried people have about three percent lower odds (in each model) of saying they speak English well than those who are married. The results for unmarried ethnic Mexicans in Texas are not statistically significant in the case of English-speaking ability, after controlling for other factors. This suggests that marital status is not strongly associated with the self-reported English-speaking ability of ethnic Mexicans in Texas.

Consistent with prior studies, education proves to be strongly associated with English-speaking ability. Ethnic Mexicans in Texas who completed some college or more exhibited more than nine times the odds (in all three models) of saying they speak English well compared to those with an elementary school-level education or less. Ethnic Mexicans in Texas who completed high school show more than five times the odds (in all three models) of reporting they speak English well compared to those with the lowest levels of education. Even those with only some high school education show more than two times the odds (in each model) of saying they speak English well than those who are less educated. These results provide more evidence that obtaining more education significantly increases the odds of reporting good English-speaking skills.

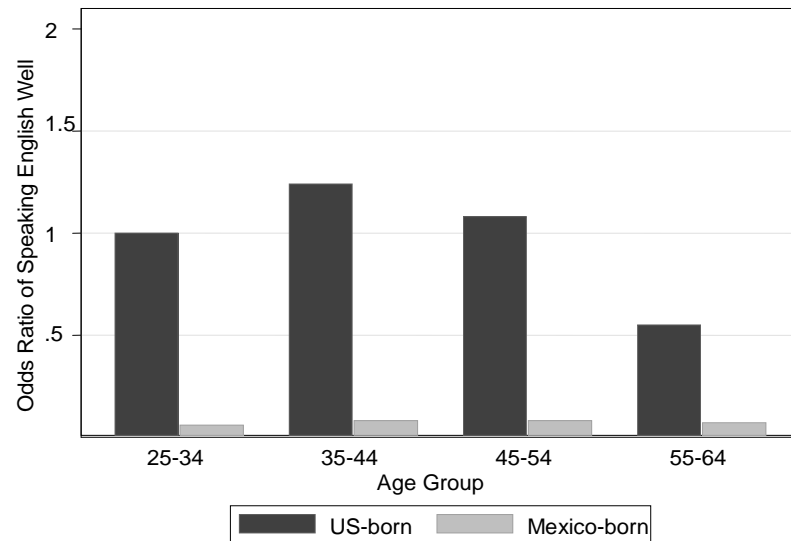
Figure 2 illustrates the main and interaction effects of age and nativity on the odds of speaking Spanish at home among ethnic Mexicans in Texas. The native-born group, aged 55 and above, have greater odds than their Mexican-born counterparts of speaking Spanish at home. This may reflect occurrences of marriages within the same Mexican American group. Stevens and Swicegood (1987) find that the native born are more likely to marry endogamously if their non-English language group is relatively large and has a low rate of linguistic assimilation. Figure 3 shows the main and interaction effects of age and nativity on the odds of speaking English "Well" or "Very well."

## Conclusion

Texas has been deemed part of the "Mex-America" region, which includes states that were part of the original Spanish or Mexican settlement, where ethnic Mexicans make up the bulk of the minority population (Haverluk 1993; Skop, Gratton, and Guttman 2006). Thirty-two counties are more than 50-



**Figure 2.** Main and interaction effects of age and nativity on the odds of speaking Spanish at home.



**Figure 3.** Main and interaction effects of age and nativity on the odds of speaking English Well or Very Well.

percent ethnic Mexican and more than 70 percent of residents in 20 of these counties are of Mexican-origin (Arreola 2002). Thus, not only do ethnic Mexicans predominate numerically in this state, but are also highly concentrated in particular communities. At the same time, the process of Hispanization legitimizes the language and culture of Hispanics, particularly in places like Texas (Haverluk 1993). Spanish is beyond a doubt an important feature of this region.

Arreola (2002) argues that South Texas, specifically, is a distinct culture region of the borderland. South Texas is the largest ethnic subregion in the United States. He suggests that a variety of factors combine to create "Tejano South Texas," and among those significant factors is speaking Spanish. Indeed, Arreola (2002) found that Spanish is the most "geographically resilient" along the South Texas portion of the borderland; in about 18 counties there, Spanish is the primary language spoken at home (Arreola 2002, 198). He contends that tolerance in the region, then, helps to reinforce the use of Spanish by residents.

This study provides further proof of the role of broad contextual factors in understanding the linguistic assimilation process. Living along the Texas-Mexico border region and in areas with denser Hispanic concentrations and more Spanish-language media is associated with speaking Spanish at home and reporting poor English-speaking ability among ethnic Mexican Americans. However, Spanish use at home does not necessarily mean poor English-speaking skills. Indeed, we found that many of those who speak Spanish at home also said they speak English "Well" or "Very well," emphasizing further the prevalence of bilingualism among ethnic Mexicans in Texas. On the whole then, Mexican Americans in Texas exhibit lower odds of speaking Spanish at home and higher odds of reporting that they speak English "Well" or "Very well" than those in Texas who were born in Mexico.

Since members of the second (and later) generations appear to be bilingual while still speaking their parents' language, these results provide support for the segmented-assimilation theory. Both dissonant and selective acculturation occur, as children's learning of English surpasses their parents and the co-ethnic community encourages partial retention of parents' home language, respectively. Our research provides further evidence that the root of the bilingual-America debate is not about whether Mexican immigrants are learning English, but rather whether or not they are maintaining Spanish.

Indeed, in the ongoing public debate on immigration reform in the United States, much attention has been given to whether English is a goal for immigrants, particularly from Mexico. After being inactive for nearly half a century, the English-Only movement again appears to be on the rise (Schmid 2001). Now the focus is on Mexican immigrants, their Spanish use, and their English abilities. Some raise doubts that Mexican immigrants in the United States will ever assimilate linguistically. Mirroring the concerns during the turn of the last

century, critics like Huntington (2004) argue that Mexican immigrants will not speak English and instead continue speaking Spanish. Furthermore, he predicts that the continued use of Spanish in the United States will divide the nation, leading to a bicultural and bilingual national identity that will threaten the nation's English-speaking core: "There is no Americano dream. There is only the American dream created by an Anglo-Protestant society. Mexican-Americans will share in that dream and in that society only if they dream in English" (Huntington 2004, 256). Yet, in the end, the debate surrounding language may be more about struggles for power than about anything else. As Haverluk states:

Language both mediates the power struggle between groups in a place, and the struggle within an ethnic group to maintain its identity. Because of this dual role, language is a sensitive gauge of a social group's position within the community. Language helps define the inhabitants of a region and therefore the region itself. (Haverluk 1993, 97-98)

Thus, the emergence of bilingualism may be seen as what Castles and Miller (2003) described as a separate, "symbol of otherness" to members of the English-speaking majority who see cultural difference as a threat (Castles and Miller 2003, 248). President George W. Bush has asserted his English-only stance, saying that the national anthem should be sung in English, not Spanish. But as this study showed, the question is less about whether English is a goal, and more about whether bilingualism and retaining Spanish will become more common.

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