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What Clinicians Should Listen for in the Speech of Latino Families: Communicative Concordance

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ABSTRACT

Language is a critical consideration for practitioners working with Latino children and their families. These families display a wide range of linguistic backgrounds—from recent immigrants with limited English proficiency, to extended families who speak only Spanish, to bilingual households, to those who primarily speak non-standard ethnic English with some Spanish influence. In this review article, the authors propose that the central goal for practitioners should be to achieve "communicative concordance," the ability to understand and be understood by Latino families. This extends far beyond merely speaking Spanish, which scholars call linguistic competence. Even bilingual practitioners in the fields of healthcare, education, law, and other services may unintentionally raise communicative barriers in their professional practice if they retain layperson's misconceptions about language that trigger harmful language ideologies. To address this, this article first offers a linguist's perspective on language, charting key concepts needed to optimize service to Latino families. These concepts are drawn from syntax, language acquisition, multilingualism, language socialization, indexicality, as well as cultural values, social capital, identity, and power differentials that are expressed via language. This article is structured into sections addressing these distinct aspects of language, each with its own recommendations. The key takeaway is that professional practitioners should develop deep functional awareness about how communication takes place across language and cultural boundaries to best understand and be understood by Latino families. Communicative concordance does not

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simply mean being able to speak Spanish. In short, effective communication with Latino families requires a nuanced, context-specific understanding of language diversity.

Keywords: Latino Families; Language Ideology; Clinical Services; Multilingual Cultural Competence; Healthcare Communication

1. Introduction

Language is a vital topic for clinical and other professional practitioners who serve Latino children and their families. In this article, we will provide frameworks of understanding to avert avoidable communicative challenges that professionals confront when serving Latino families at home, in clinics, or in schools. In terms of language, Latino families are made up of recent immigrants and their non-English-speaking children; extended families, some of whom only use Spanish, some who display a range of bilingualism, and some who only speak English; and families who principally use non-standard ethnic English with a sprinkling of Spanish. We propose that the practitioner's goal should be to develop what we call **communicative concordance**, namely, learning how to understand and be understood by Latino families. This does not simply mean being able to speak Spanish. As we will outline below in this review article, communicative concordance involves more and less than speaking in the dialects of the family.

Practitioners and their Latino clients/patients share the goal of clear and effective communication; however, unnecessary barriers arise as a consequence of misunderstandings about the nature of language. This happens when practitioners, who are trained in the medical, educational, judicial, or other institutional needs of Latino family clients, retain the layperson's flawed views about the language, so they play out a detrimental language ideology in their professional practice. To avert such problems, we will first offer a linguist's characterization of language, followed by an extended discussion on what practitioners should know about language and communication to optimize their professional service to Latino families. The principal challenge of understanding communication for practitioner and scholar alike is that language is a complex of notions, not a single entity. Thus, we designed our article in separate sections on the pertinent but very different aspects of communication. We place our recommendations at the end of each section to underscore that language is best treated as a complex set of notions.

2. What Is Language?

Of course, every professional who dedicates his or her career to the service of Mexican American children and families tries very hard to be courteous. Still, certain attitudes about a person's speech might undercut an otherwise respectful relationship. Lay people tend to conceive language to be a mental dictionary rather than a dynamic and complex set of means to communicate. Applied linguists Cook and Seidlhofer note that linguists have conceptualized language in at least twelve distinct ways:

> "Language is viewed…as a genetic inheritance, a mathematical system, a social fact, the expression of individual identity, the expression of cultural identity, the outcome of dialogic interaction, a social semiotic, the intuition of native speakers, the sum of attested data, a collection of memorized chunks, a rule-governed discrete combinatory system, or electrical activation in a distributed network..."[1]

Making sense of human language thus requires several conceptualizations, but its fundamental function is to communicate, in this case, between the practitioner and the Latino family.

A complicating problem for practitioners is that we are socialized to judge people by the way they speak, which has led to pernicious results. The origins of prescriptive language views in the Americas are 500 years old, when English and Spanish became languages of empire. The foremost empirical linguist of the 20th century, William Labov, noted 50 years ago that in the United States, this language ideology continues to be expressed in two disastrous beliefs: that languages other than English are harder to master, less expressive, and inherently second-rate, and that stan-

dard English is fundamentally a better way of speaking than non-standard English dialects[2]. In the US, this language ideology frames Spanish, non-standard English, and ethnic English varieties in deficit terms. These orientations are entirely wrong. Sadly, Latin America also suffers from its own colonizing language ideology. This touts the presumed superiority of standard Spanish as it disparages the indigenous languages of the Americas. Indeed, this is the linguistic expression of colonizing ideologies across the world that serve to demean dominated communities and to sustain unjust social hierarchies.

Consequently, the bilingual practitioner, who studied for years to develop high levels of professional competence in his or her own specialty, might still unthinkingly enact this prejudice when he or she silently judges the speech of Latino families: "My! They speak English poorly." Such condescension immediately objectifies the family. An English-speaking practitioner may mistake a native speaker's English dialect for a second language learner's accent, while native Spanish-speaking practitioners may consider their spoken Spanish to be inferior. The clinician might think to themselves: *Hablan pocho*, 'They speak pocho', where *pocho* is a derogatory term for mixing English and Spanish. In short, any reflection equivalent to "that family's problem is their language" is not a professional judgment; it is a prejudiced ideological assertion.

To help practitioners achieve communicative concordance with Latino families, we will consider language in three ways: language as a rule-governed system; language as a vehicle by and through which we enact our lives; and language as a platform to express cultural and individual identity. Language use is always contextualized, so our discussions of language acquisition, socialization, and identity will first be placed in the Latino family setting.

3. Language in the Family

3.1. Language Acquisition

Most people believe that a child **learns** his or her parents' language through trial and error. This is a mistake. A parent may teach their child a new word, such as a word that was only recently coined: *pescatarian* 'a person who eats fish but does not eat meat', or how to address an elderly relative. But parents do not teach their children language. They cannot teach them the indispensable sentence structures of language, such as the passive voice, the relative clause, or question formation. Passive voice converts active sentences to passive, relative clause formation embeds clauses using relative pronouns, and question formation uses techniques like inversion to create questions. No parent says:

> "Sweetie, it's time to teach you how to form English questions! To do this, you take a declarative sentence like: "*You want an ice cream cone*." Then you first invert the subject and verb, and second you pop in the auxiliary verb *do* at the front of the sentence and finally you transfer the tense from the verb to that auxiliary verb. Those moves produce the question form: "*Do you want an ice cream cone?*" Let's practice this transformation for a while before I teach you how to use the intonational pattern of question, since it's different from declarative intonation."

Still, this lay belief persists, which leads to false implications. These include that since children learn their parents' language, parents must teach it to them, and a child's speech must be corrected, or over time, allegedly 'better' forms of English come to exist alongside degraded varieties. Another language acquisition fallacy is that since it takes so much time to learn a language correctly, learning one language well is better than learning two languages simultaneously, since both languages might be shortchanged. These and similar misconceptions should be dismissed.

Rather than learn a language, children actually **acquire** their languages with their inborn biological capacities as Homo Sapiens. Acquisition is triggered by social interaction. Children unconsciously and perfectly deduce and acquire the grammatical rules of language from the linguistic input that they hear and use. They do so by listening to and interacting with people around them, which helps them understand sounds, words, and grammar, and they practice by speaking and writing. That means children are not taught, but generate their own language; they create the rules of their languages from the language input from their surroundings[3].

To underscore possibly surprising facts that follow from this more scientifically precise view:

- Language acquisition is not the consequence of teach-

ing, but rather of children's social interaction to fulfill their fundamental human need to communicate.

- Each child generates her own language in a process that is most dramatic from ages zero to four years of age, but which continues throughout life.
- Language is akin to a unique living organism that grows within each child, changing throughout our lives and dying with each of us.
- Language is a vast human endowment, so that each additional language enriches each child both socially and culturally, when the language is fully engaged.
- Most importantly, language acquisition is not restrained by time or cognitive limits, but rather by the external social values associated with the language. These values for the language ideologies that we will elaborate on below. The best research from developmental psychology indicates that children develop greater cognitive capacity as they mature. For example, in a given year, a three-year-old child does not acquire as much language as a ten-year-old child[4].
- Finally, monolingualism is not more natural or better than multilingualism. Every normal child can grow up speaking as many languages as he or she needs for real communication.

Today, every normal child growing up in the United States becomes a native speaker of a US English dialect, and US Latino children who grow up in a bilingual setting exposed to both Spanish and English can acquire full native speaker competence in both languages. The practitioner should realize that the monolingualism of the typical US citizen is principally the consequence of the nation's coercive language ideology. Speaking only English offers a child neither a cognitive nor an instrumental advantage, and in the end only restricts the individual's communicative capacity.

3.2. Bilingualism

Latino families often speak two languages at home, but the distribution is not simply two languages per person. In the household of one of the authors, Grandma Rosalina is a monolingual Spanish speaker, while her eldest son, Juve, is a second language learner who picked up some English at work, while her youngest daughter, Lily, is a bilingual mother who has spoken both English and Spanish since infancy. Finally, Rosalina's grandson, Daniel, may have lost most of his home Spanish as he developed English proficiency. About 80% of Latinos are English-dominant bilinguals, with far fewer Spanish-dominant bilinguals[5].

Since colonial times, the United States has been enriched by multilingualism, even as English speakers expressed an aversion and loathing toward languages other than English. Typically, monolingual English speakers sustain or accept this malicious language ideology. They believe the mistaken equation: English + Spanish < English, namely that speaking English as well as Spanish is less expressive than speaking English alone. They also claim that any sort of language mixing demonstrates an individual's linguistic weakness. In fact, when it is to their advantage, bilingual men and women can draw from, so to speak, two linguistic 'bank accounts' to express themselves, while their monolingual peers have only a single linguistic account. Bilinguals use their greater communicative resources in creative ways, as we will discuss in the next section.

3.3. Spanglish

This is not a technical term, but a colloquial catchphrase that refers to various types of blending of Spanish and English in the speech of Latino bilinguals. Although people might think that Spanglish is a third language, it is not. Each Spanglish sentence is either fundamentally a Spanish or English sentence. Spanglish is the result of two kinds of language mixing. The first is commonly called the word 'borrowing' but is better conceived as 'cloning' since that new term becomes a bona fide word in the recipient language. For example, the English word *mildew* is *mojo* in Spanish, but has also been cloned as *mildu*[6]. Consequently, there is now a second term for *mildew* in Spanish. Word cloning occurs in both directions. The English words *embargo* and *avocado* are clones of the Spanish words *embargar* 'to seize' and *aguacate*. One stage further in the past, *aguacate* was cloned from the Nahuatl word *ahuacatl*. For native bilingual speakers, mixing vocabularies serves a variety of social functions. However, for the child or adult second language learner, it is used to sustain communication when their second language is still being developed. They freely clone words from their first language to express themselves more fully in the second language.

3.4. Codeswitching

Another kind of mixing is more radical than vocabulary cloning. This creates sentences that combine phrases from the two languages. Technically, speakers can codeswitch between two languages only where the first language and the second language have structurally equivalent phrase structures[7]. What this means is that bilingual speakers invariably employ the rules of both grammars when they codeswitch; they generate entirely rule-governed, hence grammatical sentences.

For example, the Spanish sentence *"Mi mama nos hizo enchiladas verdes"* has an English equivalent: *"My mom made green us enchiladas."* In this example, we use bracketing to represent the hierarchical relationships between the noun phrases of both languages. Note the bracketed structures below:

English noun phrase: [[adjective] noun]
Spanish noun phrase: [noun [adjective]]

In this simple example, the noun is the grammatical "stem" onto which, like a leaf attaches, the dependent adjective. In unmarked Spanish noun phrases, the adjective follows the noun: [noun [adjective]]. In English noun phrases, the opposite pattern occurs, where the adjective precedes the noun: [[adjective] noun]. With respect to noun phrases, it turns out that bilingual speakers who code-switch between English and Spanish can create only one of the two following grammatical sentences, (1) and (2):

(1) Mi mama nos hizo [[green] enchiladas].
(2) My mom made us [enchiladas [verdes]].

Other logically possible combinations violate the noun phrase dependency relations, so bilinguals will not produce:

(3) *Mi mama nos hizo enchiladas green.

(Note: The asterisk preceding (3) indicates that the sentence is ungrammatical.)

Bilingual English/Spanish speakers will unanimously state that (1) and (2) are grammatical, and that (3) is not. The fact that all the logically possible combinations of words are not acceptable proves that the bilingual speaker observes the different rules of each language when creating a sentence with code-switching. Given the linguistic richness that two linguistic bank accounts offer, codeswitching is often used for aesthetic effect. It also expresses solidarity. Indeed, a family practitioner should realize that when Latinos code-switch in his/her presence, they are signaling a positive comfort level with the practitioner. While much more can be said about the creative and innovative aspects of these natural linguistic processes, let us now turn from mixing languages to ethnic English dialects.

3.5. Chicano English

Chicano English refers to an ethnic dialect spoken by native speakers of English who grow up among Mexican Americans[5]. Chicano English varieties in different regions of the nation are recognizably different, for instance, distinguishing a *Tejano* (Mexican American Texan) from a homeboy from Los Angeles. Moreover, the histories of these dialects are distinct. Chicano English arose when the Mexican Revolution (1910–1920) drove many refugees to the United States. Prejudiced Anglo-Americans of the time ridiculed the English pronunciation of these immigrants. For example, Anglo Texans (namely, white Texans) scorned the Tejanos' tendency to pronounce *shoes* and *choose* in the same way, since Spanish does not have the *sh/ch* consonant distinction. (In the International Phonetic Alphabet, the grapheme *sh* is /ʃ/, the voiceless palato-alveolar fricative (as in *she*); and the *ch* is /tʃ/, the voiceless palato-alveolar affricate (as in *church*).) However, the children of these refugees became native speakers of English and controlled the consonantal distinction perfectly. But at home and in community settings, they spoke and speak English that at times merged the consonant distinction; in other social settings, they articulate the distinction. For them, the partial merger signals (or 'indexes') ethnic solidarity. Elsewhere, Chicanos similarly use other features that had their origin in their home Spanish dialects[8]. Chicano English does not disappear across generations; it will persist so long as the wider society discriminates against the community[5].

3.6. Challenge and Recommendation

This tiny sample of Mexican American language varieties exemplifies the linguistic heterogeneity of all Latino families. Practitioners should not prejudge Mexican Americans' linguistic heterogeneity as a limitation, but rather rec-

ognize that it affords individuals great communicative flexibility. Professionals should reject ideological views that characterize bilingualism as a societal problem, as a barrier to learning English, as a source of cognitive deficits among children, or defining mixing English and Spanish as a broken way of speaking. These rich varieties constitute the language of Mexican Americans' home and hearth, which we will elaborate on in the following section on language socialization.

4. Language Socialization

Although language acquisition is an innate developmental process[9], by itself, this human endowment does not ensure that a child learns to use language in socially appropriate ways. Thus, we have to think about language in an entirely different way. Humans have a fundamental motivation not only to express simple wants and needs, but also to use their home language as integral members of their community. This is accomplished through language socialization. Like all other children, Mexican American children are exposed to cultural norms through linguistic interaction with their family and other community members. We will discuss the language socialization of Mexican American children, where it first occurs within the family.

We should first put to rest the two frequently repeated misrepresentations. One, some people make the silly claim that you can learn Spanish simply by watching *telenovelas*. This highlights fundamental facts of language acquisition and socialization: you will not magically begin to speak Spanish simply by obsessively watching TV in the privacy of your bedroom; you've got to speak with people to acquire it. Nor will you learn how to speak Spanish like Mexicans unless you spend years in their company. Two, because most governmental agencies refer to Latinos as one homogeneous group, some practitioners follow suit. In fact, linguistic and cultural diversity follows as a consequence of the nature of language socialization: wide variation is to be expected across communities and families. Of course, Anglo Americans are socialized differently from Latinos. Similarly, different Latino families also socialize their children in distinctive ways. The way children are socialized through language will be expressed in the social roles they ultimately enact across environments and circumstances.

Indexicality and Emotion

The concept of indexicality is key to understanding how language socialization takes place, but the simplicity of the notion belies the complexity and variety of the social processes it covers. An index is like a finger; it points from one thing to another. The verbal indexes used in language socialization are called indexicals[10]. Linguistic features, such as the pronunciation of the vowel /æ/ (as in *cat* or *hat*), terms of address, intonational patterns, and the use of codeswitching, become indexicals that signal ways of acting, values, social obligations, responsibilities, and the capacity to "infer, predict, generalize"[11]. As Mexican American families socialize their children by speaking to them, the children construct a symbolic system that links culture to these indexicals that communicate "being and doing"[12]. For example, the Spanish personal pronouns (informal *tú* and formal *Usted*) are indexicals that respectively signal intimacy, e.g., when conversing with a close friend, and maintain greater social distance, e.g., when dealing with your boss.

Social emotions power the engine of socialization. Children learn the verbal indexicals for familial, community, and even national spheres by way of the associated social emotions[13]. For example, a Mexican mother restates her love each time she addresses her daughter, *mija* 'my daughter', whether in Spanish or in Chicano English. It is an emotionally laden phrase that can both address the daughter and express the mother's relationship to her child. Of course, English-speaking mothers express their love to their daughters, but no culturally equivalent term of endearment exists in English. As with all children, Chicanitos growing up immersed in the love and other social emotions expressed in the speech of their families go on to embrace these varieties of English and Spanish as indexicals of their individual identities and badges of membership to family and community[14].

5. Language beyond the Family

Indexical words and phrases also relay the emotions felt for people beyond the household. Christian Pentecostal church youth, for example, are socialized to use Spanish words that index solidarity and love in ways that articulate their affinity with the members of the church community and God. Their preferred terms of address, *hermano* and *her-*

mana, which translate as 'brother' and 'sister,' not only index solidarity among the congregants, but also their emotional commitment to each other[15] as members of their church. Terms of address and other indexicals, which vary across Latino communities, bind individuals together by articulating their emotions.

People socialized through language gain tacit knowledge of group cultural norms and social organization[16]. The esteemed sociolinguist Ana Celia Zentella elaborates: "Cultural groups orient their children in keeping with their particular worldview"[6]. Thus, socialization ensures that cultural norms and beliefs are transmitted to the child. Mexican American adults articulate culturally relevant information, and children actively apply these conventions to their own speech and behavior. As they grow to be adults, they reenact and modify these roles, as well as learn new roles throughout their lives.

Successful language socialization, namely when the child can freely use language to communicate within her cultural contexts, relies on the practices of parents and caregivers. However, successful language socialization is also "dependent on institutions, school systems, historical experiences and affinity to native country"[17]. Knowing how to address your grandmother, when to speak, and when to remain silent at a family meal, or how to address members of your church are demonstrations that a child has achieved successful socialization. Language socialization continues beyond the household in social practices that are enacted in community and national spheres.

5.1. Identities and Power

Practitioners can better understand Latino families when they recognize that individuals create their group and individual identities through language socialization. Identity is the outward expression of status, roles, positions, beliefs, and relationships that are either claimed and/or assigned to an individual or group[18]. Note that identities are not fixed categories and that a person's unique and fluid complex of identities is expressed both verbally and nonverbally. "Latinos create group identity during community interactions that articulate circumstance, status and beliefs." Social identities are formed in the environment into which a child is socialized. Consider once again the young people associated with the Pentecostal church. They use the terms *hermano* and *hermana*, not only to index solidarity, but also their shared commitment to their Christian lifeways[15].

5.2. Challenges and Implications

Conversely, the negative expectations of a society and its institutions can harm a child's socialization. Negative attitudes toward Latinos, the monolingual language ideology of the United States, and undue expectations to be familiar with or conform to Anglo middle-class cultural norms can complicate a child's motivation to acquire a language and to be socialized in that language. For example, a child might consciously or tacitly concede that English is the only legitimate language to speak. Or the child might believe that someone else's Spanish is better than her own. These pressures impact how the child ultimately uses the information transmitted to them through language socialization[19].

Many Latinos also experience the negative "emotion of minority status"[17]. This feeling may be attributed to national ideologies connected with speaking Spanish or the experience of living as Latinos in the United States. Note that Anglo-Americans are not the only oppressors. Professor of education Magaly Lavadenz[20] discusses the emotional cost of undocumented Central American immigrants who try to hide their national origin from Mexicans who disparage them. They must constantly monitor the dialect features that betray them as they try to adopt the Mexican variety of Spanish. The premier 20th-century scholar of race, W.E.B. Du Bois, provides insight with his crucial concept of "double consciousness"[21]. Just as the African American is forced to view himself or herself not only through one's own lenses but also through the racist lenses of whites, and thus resulting in a conflicting and fragmented identity, so must both Central Americans and the US Latinos face this struggle. Add to this, the undocumented immigrant's constant fear of arrest and deportation. However, family practitioners and clinicians do not need to control the precise dialect differences. Instead, they must recognize that power relations are expressed in speech.

Individuals use specific linguistic features, code-switching, or whole language varieties such as Chicano English to project their ethnic and individual identities and to achieve communicative goals[22]. In one case study, a Mexican American mother described herself as active in her children's academic endeavors, in spite of her economic hard-

ships. She conveyed this through her language and actions to her children. She affirmed that in spite of their material struggles, they were an emotionally supportive family. Thus, language is a vehicle of agency that shapes individual and cultural identity[17]. However, non-Latino outsiders who do not recognize the speech indexicals with which she expresses her identity are far more likely to deprecate her speech and misunderstand her. Clinicians and other practitioners should be aware that an unfamiliar speech feature may actually be signaling an emotional register, and seek confirmation elsewhere in the conversation; otherwise, they will have less successful professional interaction with these patients[23].

5.3. Social and Cultural Capital

Language identity performs an additional social function, namely, granting or denying access to various social networks[24]. In the traditional view, "social capital" refers to the web of connections that privileged groups enjoy. Their wealth and privilege create a cycle that transfers "cultural capital," that is to say, the schooling, informal knowledge, and mastery of standard English[25]. Some family practitioners maintain the traditional and wrong-headed view that most Latino families have little chance to accumulate much social and cultural capital—unless they eschew all things Latino, abandon Spanish, speak standard English, and strive to pass for white and a white middle-class life.

However, cultural capital is more than a big bank account and well-to-do friends. Tara Yosso, a first-generation college student who became a powerful scholar of education and ethnic studies, described the autonomy, energy, and creativity of Latinos and their communities in terms of six types of capital: aspirational, linguistic, navigational, resistant, social, and familial[26]. Each contributes to community cultural wealth on which Latino families draw as they make their way in the US. Aspirational capital fosters hope in the face of adversity by providing cultural history to inspire resiliency. Through storytelling and proverbs, linguistic capital is a communicative support system, allowing the Latino family to better navigate social structures that otherwise would marginalize them. In doing so, families dismiss the traditional deficit view of social capital and instead develop their own social connections[26]. Finally, most immigrant Latinos do not live in single-family units, but live in multigenerational families, which they put to good use. Like other immigrants, Latinos have strategically responded to the challenges of life in the United States. Anthropologist Carlos Vélez-Ibáñez characterized this as a multigenerational "funds of knowledge"[27]. These funds of knowledge underwrite the creation of ingenious tools for survival, education, and social advancement. Add to this, Latinos often create robust support networks. In sum, wealth and success should not only be measured in terms of middle-class values. Family practitioners will better serve their patients by recognizing the Latino community's cultural and social capital.

5.4. Language Brokering

At times, bilingual children are called upon to facilitate communication between their Spanish-speaking families and the English-speaking professionals, such as clinicians and attorneys. When dealing with family practitioners, the child translator or *language broker* carries outsized adult responsibilities since she serves as the English-language lifeline for her parents. In doing so, the child spans maturational as well as linguistic chasms to speak with grownups about serious adult issues; she becomes a veritable advocate for her family[28].

When the child becomes the family communicator, parental authority becomes conditional. The eldest child tends to assume the role since they are seen as having more capacity than younger siblings to translate and interpret dialogues, documents, or directions. At times, the family imposes an unwanted role on the child; at other times, the child considers brokering to be a routine matter. In all cases, the child's emotional strength is tested since the child bears greater responsibility to translate adult matters to her parents. Younger children may be nervous due to insecurities about their limited translating skills, while older children tend to feel that they contribute to the family in a special way[28].

5.5. Challenge and Implication

While it is unremarkable for a parent to turn to a child to translate an unexpected phone call, it is a breach of professional protocol to call upon a child to translate in a clinic or principal's office. The professional will have improperly imposed an unreasonable responsibility on a child, as well as violated federal law, which mandates that the practitioner provide translation for crucial communications[29].

6. Latino Health Care

In this section, we look at the first of two institutions, the health care system, as a setting where communication difficulties are exacerbated when practitioners do not know the basics about language. Whether explicitly or tacitly held, deficit views of Latino language and culture create problems for Latinos as they navigate institutions beyond the family. As the Latino population continues to grow, health care and other professionals must fully address the needs of these clients. Practitioners can build better patient/provider relationships by striving for more reciprocal lines of communication.

In order to address the needs of Latinos, we should have a clear picture of their current status within the health care system. First, we must debunk the view that they are a dysfunctional minority group. Latinos are statistically healthier than other racial or ethnic groups in terms of mortality, mental health, infant health, and other health behaviors such as substance abuse. Further, within the Latino population, immigrants are also healthier than their US-born counterparts [30]. David Hayes-Bautista, Professor of Medicine and Director of the Center for the Study of Latino Health and Culture in the UCLA School of Medicine, first recognized and called this epidemiological phenomenon the Latino Health Paradox. It is a testament to the cultural wealth that Latinos exercise as they navigate US society [31]. Hence, practitioners should become familiar with the cultural assets of families within this community in order to build on them. But it is also important to express caution against considering Latinos to be a homogeneous group; each subgroup's distinct socio-historical and cross-generational experiences result in different health outcomes and concerns [32].

Despite these advantages, Latinos face significant challenges. They have limited access to and underutilize health care services because of financial constraints, undocumented status, and language barriers [33]. Moreover, the omnipresent monolingual national language ideology damages the mental health of Latinos. Latino children suffer in the hostile societal environment that disparages Spanish and insists that they speak only English, especially when their primary socialization is in Spanish. Latino youth who experience discrimination often exhibit depressive symptoms [34]. This is unfortunate because bilingualism in itself has also been shown to result in better mental health outcomes [35]. In short, practitioners need a nuanced view of the consequences of the Latino language setting for better health outcomes.

A key problem among US health care professionals is their belief that the language of Spanish-speaking individuals is an unwarranted extra burden, as Clinical Professor and self-described nurse practitioner, educator, and leader, José Parés-Ávila and his colleagues discussed in their important overview [36]. However, since the practitioner's goal is to provide the best quality care possible, the linguistic needs of Latinos must be met. Since Latinos constitute a large and rapidly growing proportion of the population, the lack of proportional growth of Latino health professionals has exacerbated the problem. Parés-Ávila et al. report that language concerns lead to more diagnostic problems and medication errors, and hence to lower patient satisfaction [36]. Moreover, Pippins et al. [37] found that non-English speakers are less likely to have a regular or continuous source of care, and over the phone are more likely to have to wait a significantly longer time, and to have greater difficulty getting information.

Interpreting and Translator Training

When practitioners need help, professional interpreter services can alleviate some of the healthcare discrepancies for Latino patients. In their overview, Parés-Ávila et al. note that interpreter services in health care settings continue to be uneven, even though it is mandated by Title VI of the 1964 Civil Rights Act [36]. Consequently, most states have written laws regarding non-English-speaking patients' access to health care, such as mandates for clinics to provide interpreters. But unfortunately, there are no federal regulations regarding medical interpreter training. These certification programs run from weeks to months; we doubt that informally trained interpreters can effectively serve practitioners with diverse Latino patient populations.

Also, some physicians believe that requiring certified translators is overly burdensome for small practices. As mentioned above, one all-too-common substitute is the ad hoc use of untrained staff or the patient's younger family members. Whether young or old, interpreters lacking training in medical terminology and translation techniques always jeopardize the patients, particularly in urgent situations [36].

A well-trained interpreter can increase patient satisfaction by bolstering patient understanding of the medical situa-

tion and treatment. In the short run, providing interpreters may seem like a financial burden, but they are a cost-effective measure that prevents misdiagnosis, unnecessary tests, and medication errors. Alma Sofía, the 97-year-old mother of the first author, was far more comfortable speaking to a minimally trained nurse who spoke Spanish to her, rather than her highly trained English-monolingual general practitioner. This led to serious failings in the treatment of the elderly woman's health issues when the GP relied too heavily on the nurse. Anecdotes aside, studies have found that whereas interpreters help in the technical aspects of care (e.g., explaining self-care or clinical procedures), there is no substitute for what we call 'communicative concordant' health providers in terms of patient-centeredness and responsiveness [36]. Thus, although well-trained professional interpreters are not the ultimate solution to providing quality care, they represent a large advance in the service of Latino patients.

7. Principal Recommendation: Communicative Concordance

In the absence of a large professional Latino health care staff, practitioners and institutions can still take specific steps to overcome communication barriers with their Latino patients. Quality patient care is the responsibility of professionals. For Spanish speakers in the nation's English-dominant health care system, quality care depends both on the communication ability of practitioners, namely doctors, clinic staff and interpreters, as well as the communicative practices of institutions, such as clinics, insurance agencies, and pharmacies, to establish a client-oriented setting for Latinos that attends to their language needs and cultural expectations; hence, both institutional and clinician interventions are required.

A bilingual staff dramatically improves the quality of care that Latinos receive. However, bilingualism does not invariably lead to communicative nirvana. The cultural skills that serve Mexican newcomers in Philadelphia, who only recently left urban Puebla, Mexico, will not necessarily open hearts among the Mexican community in Chicago, who hail from remote ranchos in the highlands of Jalisco, much less Salvadorians or Guatemaltecos in Los Angeles. Of course, speaking Spanish is a great asset, but nevertheless, the practitioners' methods and attitudes as they communicate with Latino patients can dramatically affect their quality of care.

To this end, as our principal recommendation to practitioners, we will amplify the ideas of Parés-Ávila and his colleagues when we offer the term **communicative concordance**. This notion fulfills the professional practice goal of Parés-Ávila and his colleagues to maximize health care "safety, effectiveness, patient-centeredness, timeliness, efficiency, and equity" [36] by strategically attending to the language and culture of the non-English-speaking patient. Please note that communicative concordance is a richer concept than care that is "language-concordance," a term used by some scholars referring to clinical encounters in which the patient and care provider speak the same native language. Those scholars argue that language concordance should be the goal of health care professionals [34]. The six criteria of Parés-Ávila and his colleagues center on communication, but in our view, the practitioner does not necessarily have to speak the particular Spanish dialect of each patient. As our discussion of language socialization underscored, effective communication is more than speaking the same language or dialect. Instead, the practitioner first must be respectful and knowledgeable about the particular cultural and communication practices, as well as health care practices of the community, and second, must diligently use all means, including capable and qualified staff, to both understand the patient and to make himself/herself understood by his/her patient.

Clinicians and other professionals can become aware of communicative concordance by reading a textbook, but reading alone will not lead to mastery. Rather, it is the daily professional practice of attending to the language and cultural practices of each particular Latino family in order to serve the family well. The practitioner's awareness and sensitivity toward Mexican and other immigrant families will lead to on-the-spot adjustments of his/her attitudes and behavior when meeting with them. It will also lead the practitioner to work to adjust the prevalent institutional policies with the goal of open lines of communication with non-English-speaking patients [38].

Figure 1 depicts the range of communicative relations of clinicians and other professionals with their Latino patients and clients. On the left, there will be more frequent communication breakdowns and discord (represented by more red area in the total communicative space) when the professional

sustains the pernicious US monolingual ideology that disparages the speech of Latino families, whether consciously or unconsciously. On the right, there will be more communicative concordance with greater appreciation and knowledge of the nature of multilingual communication (with an increasing area of green communicative space). We must underscore a crucial observation: a bilingual practitioner can manifest the pernicious language ideology that holds that the non-standard Spanish of the Latino family is inferior to standard Spanish of the practitioner. Such attitudes, whether held by a bilingual or monolingual professional, will poison the professional communicative relationship with Latino families. Bilingualism does not guarantee high-quality communicative concordance. What matters is the clinician's attitude, as well as knowledge about, the language and culture of the Latino families.

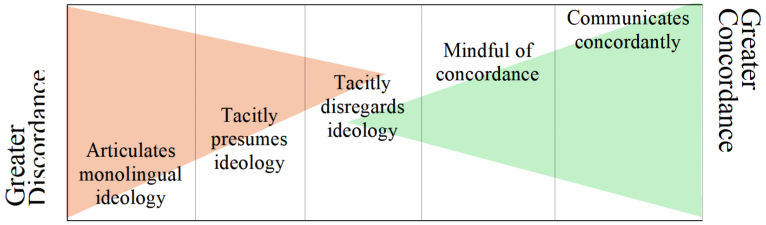


Figure 1. Clinician Communication Patterns with Latino Families.

Practitioners should seek out and validate Latino cultural knowledge. Joseph Betancourt, MD, MPH, an internationally recognized expert in health policy, health care disparities, diversity, and cross-cultural medicine, says one tactic is to become a student of the patient's culture. Changing the practitioner's communication style, from expert on all matters to novice regarding Mexican American cultures, can open up space for real dialogue between practitioner and patient[39]. By listening to patients, one family at a time, practitioners will both better understand the patient's background and be more able to evaluate how to proceed with treatment. Brach and Fraser discussed the practitioner's cultural competency as a complex construct that has the potential to reduce racial and ethnic health disparities. It encompasses four key pillars: self-awareness, attitude towards cultural differences, knowledge of diverse cultural practices and worldviews, and cross-cultural skills to increase the patient's understanding of medical situations and treatments[38]. Another tactic is to listen and watch the family for signs of the family dynamics, in order to optimize the treatment of the patient. Latinos often, but not always, come from hierarchical family-centered backgrounds, and so in some cases, adult patients may require the family's consent regarding medical treatments.

Practitioners, within and outside of the medical workforce, can optimize Latino families' experiences as they navigate through US public institutions. With communicative concordance practices, practitioners can bring down the barriers to high-quality clinical service. Now, in the final section, we discuss the repercussions of the deficit perspective on Latino language in US public education.

8. Latinos in School

Latino children face an unnecessary array of challenges, both in and outside of the classroom, to obtain a quality education in US public schools. We will review the various factors that create an exceptionally difficult experience that should enhance their intellectual growth and social mobility.

We focus on the Latino children of immigrants since their education is the most impacted by language ideology and other systemic problems that imperil all Latinos in public schools[40]. The children who do not speak English when they arrive at the schoolhouse door are referred to as English Learners or English Language Learners (often referred to as ELs or ELLs). In older literature, they have been referred to in deficit terms as Limited English Proficient (LEPs). Over five million English Learners are enrolled in America's schools[41].

Latino students most often attend schools in impoverished urban and rural areas that are becoming increasingly segregated[42]. In addition, these schools are grossly underfunded. The one-two punch of segregation and underfunding creates inferior schools with inadequate facilities, underprepared teachers, and textbooks, curriculum, and pedagogies that are inappropriate for optimal English Learner advancement[43].

English Learners are further segregated within large schools when they are "tracked," that is to say, separated and educated in different groups based on their purported abilities. Even the most eager and talented English Learners arrive at school with more challenges than native English speakers, so they are more likely to be falsely labeled as 'low achieving'. Even worse, they may internalize an unwarranted sense of inferiority about themselves and their communities, again because the nation's language ideology and racism scorn their inherent potential to learn.

Despite the rapidly increasing Latino population, the nation's elected officials have done little to positively address these students' needs. In fact, many of their policies have aggravated the ineffectual pedagogy (teaching methods) and second-rate curriculum (content) for immigrant and other working-class Latino students. When dealing with Latinos, schools have often focused on assimilationist policies and practices that, in effect, divest these students of their cultural and linguistic wealth[44]. When they attend impoverished schools, presented with lessons that are altogether extraneous to their life experiences—white picket fences and pockets full of poesies—by ineffectual teachers who hold unfairly diminished expectations about their academic potential, these students unsurprisingly lose interest in school. When teachers incorporate mere tokens of a culturally responsive curriculum—tortillas and tamales—it is not enough to make significant changes to the children's education outcomes.

Latino children bring their multigenerational "funds of knowledge" to the schoolhouse door[27]. Sadly, US public school pedagogy rarely incorporates these culturally distinctive ways that Mexican American children learn[26]. As anthropologist Nancy González[45] and education researcher Tara Yosso[26] have independently demonstrated, Latino students respond enthusiastically when their teacher integrates their home cultural capital into their lessons, because it is more meaningful for the children. Again and again, education researchers like Tamara Lucas, Rosemary Henze, and Rubén Donato have documented public schools that fully engage a Latino-based curriculum, which unsurprisingly show remarkable successes[46]. Even though the first year curriculum studies in colleges of education across the country underscore the fact that engaging a student's social capital and community cultural wealth enforce the child's positive sense of self[28] and consequently is pedagogically effective, US public schools generally view the Latino culture as an impediment, rather than a boon to educational achievement.

Over the past thirty years, the public has become aware of the terribly low education outcomes of Latino schoolchildren, but instead of addressing the systemic problems in public schools, renowned educational psychologist Patricia Gándara decried educational leaders who adopt deficit perspectives that place the blame on the Latino community[42]. Latino family practitioners, in particular, should understand how public education addresses, or fails to address, the needs of their clients' children. Therefore, we provide a basic view of the compounding inequalities that place Latino students at a disadvantage.

8.1. Bilingual Education

The *Lau v. Nichols* (1974) US Supreme Court decision declared public schools are legally responsible for making sure each English Learner child does not sit mute and unable to understand his or her teacher. This ruling led to bilingual education. In the US, bilingual pedagogy evolved into two types: bilingual maintenance and transitional to English. The most effective type in terms of student learning and personal growth, maintenance of bilingual education, is found in the private schools of the rich and develops high levels of proficiency in both the child's home language and in English. It is optimal because it takes full advantage of the child's language acquisition processes for two languages. Maintenance types go by names such as Two-way, Dual Language or Developmental Bilingual programs. For most immigrant children, however, our nation's calamitous language ideology ordains participation in "transitional bilingual education," a euphemism for discarding the children's home language. Optimally, this kind of program eases a Latino immigrant child's move from Spanish dominance to English dependence without harming her educational trajectory. However, the nation's language ideology demands that schools focus on English learning, so the de facto priority has been a rapid changeover, not effective educational achievement. Education scholars, such as Patricia Gándara and her colleagues, repeatedly note "a consistent finding that it takes at least five to seven years for the typical English Learner to learn the language well enough to be considered fluent"[42]. Despite the preponderance of evidence to the contrary, xenophobic and ill-advised citizens who hold the monolingual language

ideology believe English-only for all America's schoolchildren is the best policy. Legislators respond by mandating shorter transitions across the country. For example, in 1998, a California referendum decreed, or at least presumed that students shall achieve English language fluency in 180 days. This is one more cause of the vast achievement gap that impedes US Latino students.

Still, American public school educators work hard within this adverse climate. About 80% of all federally eligible English Learners are immigrant Latino children. Some English Learners attend high-quality transitional programs that go by names such as English "scaffolding"[47]. These are English as a Second Language (ESL) monolingual English classrooms. At best, they employ highly trained and experienced teachers who have mastered English grammar, and an operative understanding of language acquisition and child cognitive development, as well as grade-level curriculum. In their classes, these professionals attend carefully to each child's language and weave English Learner instruction into grade-level courses of standard curriculum. The programs go by many names: Sheltered English, Content-based ESL, or Structured English Immersion. Still, the best English scaffolding program does not compare to an excellent bilingual maintenance program that educates in, and advances development of, the child's two languages.

Other less fortunate English Learners students attend programs that focus exclusively on English development at the expense of other curricular content, such as sciences, civics, or math. These are called English Language Development (ELD) or ESL Pull-out classes. Arizona legislators, in particular, achieve the distinction of the nation's worst ELD program. In an astonishing display of willful pedagogical ignorance, they instituted a statewide program requiring four hours of daily direct instruction in English[43]. Finally, most Latino English Learners receive no classroom accommodation whatsoever for their language needs. They attend classes with minimal modification of the standard curriculum to ease their language needs[48].

8.2. Challenge and Recommendations

The practitioner should advocate for three things for their English Learner student clients. One: bilingual education programs that are staffed with teachers who have mastered their content areas, as well as instruction in teaching English grammar, and courses in language acquisition and child cognitive development. Of course, this is an expensive challenge for cash-strapped rural and working-class urban school districts. Two: English Learner classrooms and programs that emphasize lots of verbal interaction with other students who are native English speakers. Segregation of English Learners in "schools within schools" does not allow them to acquire English naturally from English-speaking classmates. Three: sufficient time to develop basic educational content and skills in Spanish, such as literacy, and then more time to develop the academic English literacy that is the core of education. There is much more to discuss, but we must now turn to literacy.

8.3. Literacy

Even educators tend to conflate language acquisition and literacy development. These are wholly dissimilar processes. In brief, acquisition is to literacy as running is to soccer. Language acquisition is the instinctual process by which every US Latino child develops native proficiency in conversational English. In contrast, literacy does not blossom spontaneously in any child. Literacy, the skill we use to interpret meaning from the written word, is a learned social practice. It is a skill that requires guidance and training. People become literate in the specific kinds of texts that they use regularly, and not in other kinds of texts that they rarely peruse. The first author of this article, for example, avidly reads the *New York Times* every day but remains effectively illiterate regarding the sports section of the same newspaper. All English Learner schoolchildren develop conversational English proficiency, but they need adult guidance to develop the superior literacy skills that will allow them to acquire the higher-level academic English proficiencies to do well in high school and beyond.

The challenge is compounded by the nation's language ideology that deems Spanish literacy irrelevant for a Spanish-speaking child. This is tragic since Spanish literacy is a relatively easy skill to begin to develop. The lightbulb that goes off in a child when she realizes she can draw meaning from words on the page occurs relatively quickly. A bright six-year-old can pick up the fundamental idea in weeks, because Spanish spelling corresponds tightly to its pronunciation. On the other hand, literacy of any kind, even basic literacy, takes years for English-speaking children—since English

spelling does not match its pronunciation. Thus, it makes sense to encourage primary literacy in Spanish among native speakers, since once the literacy lightbulb ignites in the child's mind, that meaning can be extracted from words on the page; it never goes out. However, US public schools do not promote this. Moreover, schools do not strategically implement programs to capitalize on family Spanish literacy, even though it would make a significant positive influence on children's educational experience. When the school has no use for Spanish literacy, an important educational connection between the Latino child and parent is passed over.

8.4. Assessment

English Learner testing to determine the immigrant child's language dominance, fluency, and proficiency is often problematic at three crucial points: (i) for initial classroom placement; (ii) to determine when to transition to mainstream classes; and (iii) to gauge the English Learner's academic advancement. Many teacher assessors are monolingual English speakers, and separate tests of both the child's Spanish skills and English skills are rare. Even when bilingual assessment personnel are available, they often do not possess the training to accurately distinguish student-learning problems from language or cultural differences [49]. When the student does not have command of the language of the test, or the test does not measure the right things, then the results do not reliably assess what the student knows and can do. Consequently, many English Learner students are often misidentified.

Assessment is particularly problematic during the process of moving students beyond English Learner status. The nation's noxious language ideology is often at play here. Some students repeatedly fail to test out of ESL classes because their teachers do not foster the academic English literacy that the tests require. Under such circumstances, it is no surprise that so many Latinos who are becoming native English speakers become dispirited students. Appropriate and accurate assessment is essential to inform educators about a child's progress, as well as to reveal the school's successes and failures.

8.5. Parent Education

A common misconception is that Latino parents do not value education. In fact, Latino parents place a high value on education, but their own knowledge and experience do not lend themselves well to the US education system. Recently, teachers have been assigning more homework, which requires more academic support beyond the classroom. Some Mexican parents fear that they do not possess the right skills to help their children with their homework. Thus, as M. Beatriz Arias, of the National Center for Applied Linguistics, and her coauthors argue, public schools must prioritize greater Latino parent access to obtain these academic skills [50].

Furthermore, in order to assure that their children's needs are met, Latino parents must also navigate the school system itself. Obtaining institutional knowledge is an especially challenging task for immigrant parents. But parents must become full partners with teachers to educate their children in today's public schools. To end a grim review on a relatively bright note, as José Bolívar and Janet Chrispeels have shown, the surefire way to build better public schools is to enhance parent leadership by building on their funds of knowledge. They document schools that have successfully reached out to Latino families to provide them with the needed academic skills as well as institutional capital [51].

8.6. Challenges and Recommendations

Schooling has a lifelong impact on the child. The aforementioned problems in the components of US public education, such as school site conditions, bilingual education, literacy, assessment, and parent education, make it fraught with challenges for the Latino family. To achieve communicative concordance with Latino family clients, practitioners should understand how public education addresses, or fails to address, the needs of Latino children. Practitioners should strive to develop a fuller understanding of the compounding inequalities that place their Latino student clients at a disadvantage. This requires a global, a local, and an insider's perspective. First, in this review article, we can only scratch the surface of the circumstances of public schooling in this country, and recommend broad reading on the topic. Second, each local school district has its particular circumstances, and it is paramount that the practitioners become familiar with the people, programs, and problems that stand out in local schools. To this, we add a caveat: Since public schooling is a highly politicized institution, accepting the view of one partisan position will provide only a skewed perspective. Third, to attain communicative concordance also requires

some greater understanding of how the various educational components mentioned above (and several others) work in relationship to each other.

No silver bullet will eliminate the educational challenges of Latino children. Apart from the systemic challenges of the nation's public school system, each child is unique. What one child struggles with may be another child's strong suit. The same is true for schools. One school may have a strong bilingual education program, while another may have better-trained monolingual teachers with high standards. Choosing between schools and programs is particularly difficult for Latino parents who are entirely unfamiliar with the US school system. However, the goal should always be to help the student thrive academically. Practicing communicative concordance places the practitioner in a better position to identify—for a particular child in a particular school—the institution's weaknesses and strengths, and ways to supplement the school experience, or to support the Latino family who must deal with the consequences of inferior schooling. Our final recommendation is that practitioners urge parents not to forego the child's native tongue and cultural practices as a foundation of knowledge on which to build an education.

Bilingualism offers the Latino child lifelong advantages, but our nation's self-righteous monolingual language ideology continues to impose an imperious nationalism. It has rendered most US citizens entirely dependent on English, judges our neighbors who speak Spanish or other languages as foreign and inferior, creates a wholly false deficit view of bilingualism, and undermines our public institutions' goal of a healthier and better-educated populace. We presented the findings of linguistics and other social sciences regarding the language of Latinos to contest this ruinous ideology and to offer family practitioners a fuller appreciation of the linguistic richness that they hear when Latino families speak to them.

9. Conclusions

Communicative concordance is an indispensable goal for clinical practitioners and other professionals who have committed years of specialized training to serve Latino families. It complements the technical and institutional expertise that professionals developed within fields such as healthcare, education, and law. It enlarges their professional proficiency beyond disciplinary knowledge to include culturally and linguistically responsive communication. This review article advances the argument that a career objective of clinicians and other practitioners should be to achieve communicative concordance. This concept surpasses the notion of mere linguistic competence, or the ability to speak Spanish. Even bilingual practitioners may unintentionally create communicative barriers if they hold unexamined assumptions about language that perpetuate harmful linguistic ideologies.

To address this challenge, the article presented a nontechnical linguistic description of various distinct features of language. It outlines key theoretical and practical concepts necessary to optimize professional services to Latino families. These concepts draw upon insights from studies of syntax, language acquisition, multilingualism, and language socialization, as well as from broader sociocultural domains such as indexicality, cultural values, social capital, identity, and power differentials that are expressed through language. The article is organized into sections corresponding to these dimensions; each section provides targeted recommendations for practice.

Ultimately, the central argument is that professionals must cultivate a deep, functional awareness of how communication operates across linguistic and cultural boundaries in order to effectively understand and be understood by Latino families. Communicative concordance, therefore, entails more than fluency in Spanish; it requires a respectful engagement with the communicative practices of Latino families, and an appreciation for the linguistic richness of multilingual and nonstandard English varieties. In short, effective professional communication with Latino families depends on informed, respectful, and context-sensitive engagement with their diverse linguistic and cultural repertoires.

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The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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