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Language Attrition and Its Effect on the Identity of Second-Generation Spanish Speakers: To what extent does language attrition affect identity in second-generation Spanish speakers in the United States?

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ABSTRACT

The research question of this extended essay investigates language attrition and its impact on identity among second-generation Spanish speakers in the United States. The research uses Social Identity Theory, acculturation, assimilation models, and heritage language research as its theoretical framework. It investigates how declining Spanish proficiency affects perceptions of ethnic identity, experiences of belonging, and acculturative stress.

The method involves conducting a critical literature review that assesses psychological and sociolinguistic research through analysis of qualitative case studies and quantitative survey studies that utilize standardized assessment tools such as the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM), the ARSMA-II, and acculturative stress scales. Through its examination of extensive longitudinal studies, it encompasses representative national demographics. The research examines key studies by assessing their strengths and limitations, and investigates how Spanish-language loss affects identity, and it shows that ethnic identity remains stable or grows stronger despite English-language dominance.

The research shows that lower or stigmatized Spanish skills lead second-generation and 2.5-generation Latinos to experience diminished ethnic authenticity, heightened shame, and increased Spanish-related acculturative stress in educational environments. The study shows through longitudinal and survey research that most Latinos maintain their strong Hispanic identity while they disapprove of Spanish language requirements for group membership. Although some individuals create "reactive ethnicity," which enhances their discriminatory identity by decreasing Spanish usage. The research shows that second-generation Spanish speakers use Spanish as a meaningful cultural asset that shapes their identity development through language attrition.

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INTRODUCTION

Identity development among children of immigrants in the United States, specifically second-generation Spanish-speaking Latinos and Hispanics, has undergone a rapid shift (Duarte, 2014) from Spanish to English-speaking heritage-language dominance (Toppelberg and Collins, 2010; Hammer et al., 2024).

Language attrition affects the identity of second-generation Spanish speakers to a considerable but not a determinate extent. Evidence suggests that Spanish loss most strongly affects feelings of authenticity and experiences of pride or shame and levels of acculturative stress (Dennis et al., 2016; Ali, 2021). However, identity labels and sense of belonging can persist or be redefined, especially if discrimination and community narratives encourage a strong Latino identification even without Spanish (Lopez et al., 2016; Portes and Rumbaut, 2001).

Pew Research Center data show that only 68% of second-generation Latinos are literate in Spanish, compared to 90% of first-generation immigrants, and retention declines further in the third generation (Pew Research Center, 2009). The shift from Spanish to English in the second generation occurs in contexts where Spanish is standardized or symbolically tied to ingroup identification, in this case being Hispanic or Latino, raising questions about how losing or weakening Spanish affects ethnic identity and self-concept (Duarte, 2014; Hammer et al., 2024). Hispanic and Latino immigration to the U.S. has been a root cause of the emergence of larger second-generation populations (Toppelberg and Collins, 2010; Hammer et al., 2024). Many Latinos report that Spanish is essential, but not strictly necessary to be Hispanic (Lopez et al., 2016).

This essay will examine this through theories such as Social Identity Theory, acculturation and assimilation models, and empirical research. Spanish is a minority language in the U.S. often stigmatized in schools and public life, with some historical repression in some regions (MacGregor-Mendoza, 2000; Hammer et al., 2024). Heritage language (HL) is a minority or ancestral language that is learned and is weaker than a dominant language socially for a bilingual speaker (Johns and Vosburg, 2018; Boon and Polinsky, 2015).

Language attrition is the weakening or loss of a previously learned HL due to reduced exposure in a bilingual environment (Schmid and Sorokina, 2024; Yilmaz and Schmid, 2018). The processes of assimilation and segmented assimilation explain how immigrant youth adopt a dominant language and culture through different pathways, with some integrating more fully and others retaining stronger ethnic ties (Brown and Bean, 2006; Bonnett, 2024).

Acculturation, a sociocultural concept introduced by Berry, describes cultural and psychological changes that occur during intercultural contact, including the adoption or retention of heritage practices (Schwartz et al., 2010; Berry, 2005). Ethnic identity involves a sense of belonging, shared labels (such as Hispanic or Latino), values, and emotional attachments. According to Tajfel and Turner, Social Identity Theory

emphasizes that group membership helps shape self-concept and in-group distinctiveness (McLeod, 2023; Dixon, 2017).

Measures such as MEIM (Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure) and ARSMA-II (Acculturation Rating Scale for Mexican Americans-II) are standardized questionnaires and measurements that assess ethnic identity and cultural orientation through language use and cultural practices (Arredondo et al., 2016; Dennis et al., 2016). Acculturative stress refers to the psychological strain associated with navigating expectations from two cultures (Berry, 2005).

Large-scale studies, including CILS (Children of Immigrants Longitudinal Study), use a longitudinal methodology that follows children of immigrants over time to track language use, identity, and adaptation outcomes (Portes et al., 2011; Portes and Rumbaut, 2001).
Although HL research and community narratives portray Spanish as central to Latino identity and family connection (Val and Vinogradova, 2010; Hammer et al., 2024), large-scale surveys and some sociological work suggest that ethnic identity can persist or intensify despite English dominance.

This essay will address the research question of **"To what extent does language attrition affect identity in second-generation Spanish speakers in the United States?"** Research by Arredondo, Rosado, and Satterfield (2016), Nesterul, Marks, and Garrison (2009), Ali (2021), and Dennis et al. (2016) suggests that language attrition does affect identity in some contexts of second-generation Spanish speakers. On the other hand, Portes and Rumbaut (2001) and Mendoza (2000) showed that language attrition has little to no effect on identity or that factors aside from language attrition affect identity, while Lopez et al. (2015) suggest that identity can adapt along with Spanish attrition.

This research is discussed and evaluated, concluding that to some extent, language attrition affects the identity of second-generation Spanish speakers within specific social contexts. This paper implements a literature review methodology, which synthesizes and evaluates existing empirical research rather than presenting new primary data. It will utilize examining qualitative studies, large-scale surveys, and longitudinal research across theoretical
frameworks. This review will identify patterns and contradictions through a psychological sociocultural in the current understanding of how heritage language loss connects with ethnic identity formation among second generation Spanish speakers in the United States.

IDENTITY AND ATTRITION

Supporting Evidence

The following studies show that language attrition or loss affects identity to some extent among Spanish-speaking Latinos and Hispanics, as well as among second generations.

Arredondo, Rosado, and Satterfield's (2016) study investigates how participation in a Spanish HL program relates to both ethnic identity formation and early literacy among young U.S. Latino children. The authors worked with children enrolled in a Saturday Spanish heritage program, using standardized

Spanish literacy tasks and adapted ethnic-identity questions. The study reported that children who demonstrated stronger Spanish skills expressed more pride in speaking Spanish, described as a "secret" or special language with family. This was interpreted as early ethnic identity affirmation linked to HL proficiency. By implication, attrition of Spanish would weaken these pride and belonging-based identity expressions. This is highly relevant to the research question as it provides unique child-focused evidence.

A clear evaluative strength in this study is the use of MEIN as a standardized psychological metric, showing a clear operationalization of both language through the objective literacy tests and identity-related attitudes through structured questions. This allows for a measurable association between HL competence and positive ethnic self-concept, rather than relying on just self-report of feeling more inclined as a Latino when speaking Spanish. However, a significant limitation is that the sample is drawn from families who voluntarily enroll children in a Saturday Spanish program, which indicates strong pre-existing pro-Spanish attitudes. Thus, the association between language and identity can be inflated and not fully generalizable to all second-generation Spanish speakers who experience language attrition or live in English-dominant households.

Additionally, the cross-sectional design and the young age of the participants mean the study can't show that HL loss causes further or later identity confusion or crisis. Language can aid in cementing early identity while additionally pairing with adolescent or young adult longitudinal research that can track across development and their lives. Despite these limitations this study supports the research question by providing empirical evidence that Spanish proficiency correlates with positive identity expressions in early development. The use of standardized literacy assessments strengthens the claim that language competence predicts identity-related pride, not just exposure. However, the self-selected sample means the strength of this relationship may be overestimated for the border second-generation population, particularly those in English-dominant households without access to heritage programs.

Nesterul, Marks, and Garrison's (2009) qualitative study on "Immigrant Parents Concerns Regarding Their Children's Education in the United States" explores how Eastern European immigrant parents perceive their children's schooling and adaptation in US schools, using in-depth interviews with professionally employed mothers and fathers [n = 50]. The authors used open and axial coding, as they identified parents fearing assimilation.

However, the study's primary focus is on highlighting parents' worries that as children assimilate linguistically and culturally, they will become more "American", and lose the family's original values and drift away from their heritage. This makes this study indirect to the research question, as it reflects first-generation parents' fears about assimilation and language shift weakening heritage identity.

A significant evaluative strength of this study is the rich and semi-structured interview data that allows discussion of parental representations of language and culture as protective factors for children's sense of identity and belonging. However, a distinct evaluative limitation is that the sample is centered as Eastern European, not Latino, which indicates that this concept of attrition in terms of identity does not only happen to Latino communities, but it generalizes across immigrant groups, and does not provide direct evidence for specific Spanish-speaking communities.

Additionally, the study only includes parents' commentary and perspectives, not children's self-reports or standardized identity measures, as this study explores what adults fear specifically will happen to their child, not what the child fears about their identity as they assimilate, rather than empirically measuring the extent to which language attrition actually affects the children's ethnic identity. This study is used as supportive contextual evidence that immigrant parents conceptually link language maintenance, values, and identity, but the indirectness to different ethnic groups and the parent-only data, and educational focus reduce input compared to directly assessing identity among second-generation Spanish speakers.

Ali's (2021) qualitative case study "Identity and investment in language learning: A case study of heritage Spanish speakers" investigates how heritage identity shapes university students' motivation or "investment" to develop their Spanish in a heritage track course in upstate New York. In the study, 10 heritage speakers completed background questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and two written reflections on their histories with Spanish, along with experiences as heritage speakers and reasons for taking the course, which were analyzed using narrative analysis to identify recurring themes.

The key findings show that early exposure to Spanish at home and in ethnic neighborhoods initially supported a strong sense of belonging, but that schooling in English-dominant environments, and negative feedback from family in Latin America about "bad" Spanish produced shame, linguistic insecurity, and feelings of not being "Latino/o enough". Participants frequently linked their sense of legitimacy as Latinas/os to their Spanish proficiency, reporting that insecurity about their Spanish reduced their willingness to use the language and shaped how much they invested in improving in class.

This study is highly relevant to the research question as it focuses directly on second-generation Spanish speakers in the U.S and shows that weaker (attrition) or stigmatized Spanish is experienced as a threat to ethnic authenticity, which suggests that language attrition can undermine identity security rather than simply reducing communication ability. A significant evaluative strength is first-person data, as the study captures the emotional mechanisms, like shame, through which language loss and negative evaluation translate into identity conflict, which goes beyond correlation in discussing internal processes of identity.

However, the small and non-randomly selected sample limits generalizability to the broader population of second-generation Spanish speakers. The evidence is most concrete in identity among those who are actively trying to reclaim or formalize their Spanish, and not just to all heritage speakers experiencing attrition. Additionally, because the study is cross-sectional and interpretive, it cannot directly demonstrate that language attrition or loss causes identity instability. But it does show a complex bidirectional relation where prior identity insecurity can also shape how much students invest in Spanish.

This study does show support for the claim that language proficiency and ethnic identity are somewhat related in second-generation Spanish speakers. Methodologically, the narrative analysis approach allows Ali (2021) to capture psychological mechanisms like shame and linguistic insecurity. This also supports that language attrition translates into identity conflict, which directly addresses how language attrition affects second-generation Spanish speakers. The first person accounts reveal that participants internalize judgements about their Spanish as judgments about their Spanish as judgments about their ethnic

authenticity, which directly supports the claim that attrition affects identity. However, these findings are most applicable to heritage speakers with sufficient motivation to enroll in formal Spanish courses, limiting the ability to generalize to second-generation speakers who have stopped Spanish use entirely or lack access to reclamation opportunities.

Dennis et al.'s (2016) article "Bicultural Competence and the Latino 2.5 Generation" explores how Latino young adults with one U.S.-born and one foreign-born parent differ from first, second, and third generation peers in cultural orientation, ethnic identity, acculturative stress, and parental ethnic socialization. The study used two questionnaire studies with Latino college students in Southern California. In the first, participants completed standardized measures of cultural orientation, like ARSMA-II, cultural knowledge, MEIM, acculturative stress scales, and Spanish competency pressure. And in the second, the parents completed a questionnaire on cultural and racial socialization.

The key findings showed that 2.5-generation youth report a stronger ethnic identity and more native cultural participation than third generation, which resembled earlier generations in ethnic identity but had lower Spanish use than the first- and second-generation. They also report higher acculturative stress from Spanish competency pressures than first-and second-generation, which suggests that partial language loss or attrition is experienced as a stressful liability within their own group rather than as neutral.

This study correlated with the research question as it directly links generation status along with Spanish competence and ethnic identity and acculturative stress among U.S. Latinos, indicating that weaker Spanish can coexist with high ethnic identity but only at the cost of greater stress and perceived pressure around Spanish not being "good enough".

A major evaluative strength is the use of validated psychometric scales such as MEIM, ARSMA-II, and MASI, which allow the quantifiability of ethnic identity and language-related stress rather than self-reported descriptions. The comparative generational design also argues that identity and language interact differently across 1st, 2nd, 2.5, and 3rd generations, which provides nuance instead of just directly claiming that language loss automatically means identity loss.

However, the sample is restricted to only Latino college students at a specific Hispanic-serving institution where Latino culture is very visible, meaning it can inflate ethnic identity and opportunities for bicultural competence compared to second-generation Spanish speakers in more English-dominant settings. This limits generalizability to only the broader second generation. Additionally, the study shows that 2.5-generation youth maintained relatively high ethnic identity despite reduced Spanish use. This partially counters that language attrition does not automatically erase identity but instead reshapes it into a high identity and stress profile where Spanish proficiency becomes a source of intergroup pressure and acculturative stress.

COUNTERARGUMENT

The studies presented have established that there is an effect on identity, but other research suggests a limited or even opposite effect.

In "Legacies: The Story of the Immigrant Second Generation," Portes and Rumbaut analyze longitudinal survey data from the Children of Immigrants Longitudinal Study (CILS) to explore language, identity, discrimination, and outcomes among second-generation youth in Miami and San Diego. "Lost in Translation" documents rapid shifts toward English dominance. In another chapter, "Defining the Situation" classifies patterns of ethnic self-identification and shows that some groups display "reactive ethnicity," which, in contexts of discrimination and blocked mobility, young people affirm or intensify their minority identity even if they acculturate linguistically.

This source complicated the research question claim, as prior research has suggested that losing Spanish weakens ethnic identity or produces insecurity, as it showed a correlation where, despite assimilation or a language shift, youth can strengthen their minority identity in response to perceived exclusion and racism. In "reactive ethnicity", the second generation can be highly English-dominant and still strongly identify as Latinos, showing identity can serve as resistance.

This study includes evaluative strengths such as having a large, longitudinal, and multi-ethnic sample (CILS), which strengthens external validity. It also directly addresses language and identity in HL versus English and explicitly theorizes that "reactive ethnicity" is an outcome under certain social conditions, which demonstrates that identity is not just determined by language proficiency.

However, there are evaluative limitations, especially as identity is operationalized mainly through self-labels and survey items and not in-depth psychological constructs, and does not measure internal identity conflict. The book also covers many national-origin groups, not just Latinos, and within Latinos, it explores multiple ethnicities and nationalities. This generalizes the discussion in the book to the Latino subexamples, as there are patterns needed to assess second-generation Spanish speakers.

Finally, it does not present reactive ethnicity as a universal outcome, as it's a segment of "segmented assimilation", so only some youth maintain or intensify identity despite acculturation. It is also not proven that language attrition never affects identity. Overall, his source shows that even if Spanish use declines, ethnic identity can still remain strong or be important for contextual reasons, which challenges the claim that less Spanish or attrition means an effect on identity. Methodologically, the longitudinal design and large multi-site sample provides strong external validity, allowing CILS to track actual identity trajectories as language short occurs rather than relying on retrospect.

The finding that reactive ethnicity emerges specifically under conditions of discrimination reveals that identity outcomes depend on social context and not just language. This directly challenges the research questions actually by demonstrating that language attrition is neither necessary nor sufficient to weaken ethnic identity. It shows that discrimination and structural exclusion can intensify identification despite linguistic assimilation. However, the survey methodology measures identity labels rather than internal

security or authenticity concerns, leaving the possibility that individuals maintain strong identity labels while experiencing the shame or insecurity documented in qualitative studies like Ali (2021).

Lopez et al's (2015) "Is speaking Spanish necessary to be Hispanic?" Most Hispanics say no." explores a national survey of Latinos, which asked U.S. Latino adults whether speaking Spanish is necessary to be considered Hispanic [n=1500]. It showed that about 71% of Latino adults answered that speaking Spanish is not necessary to be Hispanic. In the article, among immigrants, a majority rejected the idea that Spanish is essential, and among U.S.-born Latinos, the view was even stronger, with 87% agreeing. Similarly, it was reported that 95% said it is important that future generations speak Spanish, which shows that the language is still seen as valuable, just not a determining factor for belonging.

This relates to the counterargument of the research question, as Lopez et al's (2016) findings challenge the claim, as most Latinos say that one can still be generalized and genuinely Hispanic without speaking Spanish. This suggests that ethnic identity can remain intact even when language proficiency declines. This argues that identity is socially and cognitively a flexible concept, suggesting identity centers on culture and ancestry. This source has an evaluative strength of having a large and nationally representative sample of Latino adults and clear survey writing to give this study a high external validity. It also directly asks about the link between language and identity among Hispanics, which is centered on the research question in terms of group beliefs of identity.

However, there are evaluative limitations, as the study measures attitudes and opinions, but it does not measure internal psychological outcomes like identity security, shame, or conflict, as people can express that Spanish is not necessary while still feeling less authentic without it.

Additionally, it is not specific to only second-generation youth, as it includes adult Latinos, which also leaves questions for generalizability on other age groups across the Latino community. Thus, this study is being used to show how a wider community conceptually separates identity from language and does not measure actual identity change after signs or language loss or attrition. Overall, this study demonstrated that for many Latinos, ethnic identity can survive or even adapt when Spanish declines.

This finding directly challenges the research question as it suggests that majority Latinos conceptually isolate language from ethnic belonging, indicating that identity labels may be resilient to language attrition. However, the study's reliance on a single survey question about whether Spanish is "necessary" does not measure the psychological experience of identity security or authenticity. Thus, while Lopez et al (2016) challenges the claim that attrition eliminates identity, the findings are not contradicted by Ali (2021) and Dennis et al (2026) that attrition can produce shame and acculturative stress. Respondents may simultaneously believe Spanish is not necessary while feeling less authentic without it, This highlights a key distinction between identity maintenance and identity security.

Mendoza's article "Aqui No Se Habla Espanol: Stories of Linguistic Repression in Southwestern Schools" collected over 100 retrospective narratives from adult Spanish speakers in Las Cruces, New Mexico, about the punishment and stigma they experienced for speaking Spanish in school. It described that there were "No Spanish" rules, including corporal and non-corporal punishments, along with

humiliation in terms of isolation whenever they used Spanish or even pronounced English with a Spanish accent. These accounts showed how institutional repression pushed children to abandon Spanish and internalize the idea that their HL and, by extension, their families were considered inferior.

This study links to the research question as it shifts the focus to external and structural repression, as language loss does not simply happen because schools punish Spanish use. This allows for a counterargument that, instead of the conclusion that Spanish loss automatically weakens Latino identity, Latino identity outcomes depend heavily on the social context. Some
participants described the deep shame and long-term distancing from Spanish, but others framed that repression as unjust and later reclaimed Spanish as resistance.

This source includes a detailed narrative that makes the mechanisms of fear, shame, and punishment visible through which institutions produce a language shift, which can be contrasted with more individual-level psychological models. It also shows that attrition is not just a personal failure but a result of power and policy, which complicates the theory that language loss directly equals identity lost, as there are more factors at play.

However, this study has its evaluative limitations as it does not systemically measure ethnic identity, as there is no comparison of strong and weak identity. Therefore, this cannot directly show whether density ultimately weakens, remains strong, or becomes reactive.

Additionally, the data is retrospective and limited to only a Southwest community and generation, and it is not generalizable due to focusing on school-age experience, and not specifically second-generation contemporary Spanish speakers. This source serves as a theoretical counter-argument that language attrition's impact on identity can be mediated by social repression and agency, and is not a uniform psychological consequence.

DISCUSSION

Studies show mixed evidence on how Spanish attrition affects identity. Though patterns align with predication from Social Identity Theory and acculturation frameworks. Consistent with Tajfel and Turner’s Social Identity Theory, showing that group membership shapes self-concept through in-group distinctiveness, Arredondo et al. (2016) found that higher Spanish proficiency in childhood predicts greater pride and belonging, suggesting that language functions as a marker that reinforces in-group membership. Similarly, Ali (2021) showed that weak or stigmatized Spanish in university students can produce shame and feelings of inadequate Latino heritage, demonstrating how language competence becomes integrated with perceived legitimacy as an in-group member. Dennis et al. (2016) investigated that 2.5-generation youth showed strong ethnic identity alongside Spanish-related acculturative stress. Nesteruk et al. (2009) found similar concerns among Eastern European parents, implying this pattern extends beyond Latino groups to a border immigrant phenomenon.

In contrast, large-scale and longitudinal work can complicate this claim, as Portes and Rumbaut (2001) introduced "reactive ethnicity", a component of segmented assimilation theory, where identity intensifies even as English becomes dominant. This connects to Berry's acculturation framework, specifically the integration pathway, where individuals maintain ethnic identity while adopting dominant culture practices such as English language use. This phenomenon suggests that discrimination and blocked mobility can trigger heightened ethnic identification independent of heritage language maintenance. This challenges linear assimilation models that assume cultural and linguistic connections weaken ethnic ties. Similarly, Lopez et al (2016) exemplified that most Latinos do not consider Spanish necessary to be Hispanic. Macregror-Mendoza (2000) showed how repression shaped later reclamation.

Findings in Ali (2021), Dennis et al (2016), and Arredondo et al. (2016) suggest that reduced and stigmatized Spanish often affects feelings of authenticity and belonging. Other studies, such as Portes and Rumbaut (2001) and Lopez et al (2016), suggested that ethnic identity can be maintained or even intensified despite language attrition, specifically under discrimination.

The methodological and theoretical strengths of Arredondo et al. (2016) and Dennis et al. (2016) use standardized scales like MEIM, ARSMA-II, and acculturative stress, providing good construct validity but may miss culturally specific nuances. Ali (2021) provided in-depth qualitative data on emotional mechanisms, such as shame, clarifying specifically how language loss translates into internal conflict.

The developmental range across studies, such as Arredondo et al. (2016), focuses on early childhood, whereas Ali (2021) and Dennis et al. (2016) focus on late adolescence or young adulthood. In terms of generalizability, Arredondo et al. 's (2016) sample included highly motivated families in a heritage school, which likely had a stronger pre-existing identity or pro-Spanish norms than average.

Ali (2021) and Dennis et al (2016) relied on university samples, which limit generalizability as not all second-generation youth attend college or take heritage courses. However, it is important to note that the evidence is stronger on perception and correlation than just on strict causation. Counterstudies on the macro level and longitudinal studies have strong external validity. Portes and Rumbaut (2001) and Lopez et al (2016) rely on broad self-reports, showing identity labels but not internal security.

In contrast, MacGregor-Mendoza (2000) focuses on a particular region or older group, showing that long-term distancing and, later, the re-embracing of Spanish do not uniformly affect identity positively or negatively. This counter-evidence is strong in scope and representation, but it is weaker on the general internal psychological processes.

Many studies included are U.S.-specific, as they rely on urban, educated, or self-selected samples, which limit how well the findings generalize to other national contexts or Latinos outside heritage school and college settings. Additionally, common measures like MEIM may overlook culturally specific pressures,

while qualitative accounts reveal ethical concerns like past institutional punishments that shaped both language trajectories and identity in ways not captured by standardized scales.

Overall, studies show that Spanish often functions as a symbolic marker of authenticity, belonging, and security for many second-generation Latinos, even though its loss does not uniformly determine ethnic identity. These findings align with Social Identity Theory's emphasis on distinctive group markers, while also supporting Berry's multidimensional acculturation model, allowing for various pathways, including high ethnic identity despite language shift. Language attrition can produce shame or stress in some contexts, particularly when heritage language competence is central to perceived in-group membership or authenticity, yet identity can also remain stable or even strengthen under discrimination or shifting community norms. This is consistent with the reactive ethnicity pathways within segmented assimilation theory.

Together, the evidence suggests that language shapes how identity is experienced and negotiated, but it is not a strict predictor of whether individuals maintain their identity.

CONCLUSION

Language attrition affects identity among second-generation Spanish speakers by shaping feelings of authenticity, belonging, and acculturative stress, but does not erase a Spanish-speaking identity, like being Latino or Hispanic. The evidence reviewed shows a conditional relationship, as stronger Spanish often supports pride and ethnic affirmation, while weaker Spanish can create shame or insecurity. Yet, large-scale and longitudinal studies demonstrate that many Latinos maintain or even intensify ethnic identity despite English dominance and that Spanish is valued but not viewed as strict and necessary for being Hispanic or Latino.

Limitations in existing research, like heavy reliance on cross-sectional designs, self-selected educated samples, and limited psychological measures, leave gaps, as there is a future need to distinguish between identity strength, security, and content. There is also a need to follow Spanish psychology and identity across developmental stages in second-language Spanish speakers. Research in more diverse contexts is also needed to separate the effects of language loss from discrimination and community attitudes. Research also needs to be designed to expand
generalizability.

The observed patterns are best explained by Social Identity Theory's emphasis on group-based authenticity and belonging, Berry's acculturation model or multiple adaptation pathways, and segmented assimilation theory's account of reactive ethnicity under discrimination. Heritage language should be understood as one of many identity resources, as its attrition may increase insecurity, but identity can also be maintained or redefined through other cultural markers. Second-generation identity is best viewed as flexible and context-dependent, as language attrition shapes rather than determines the identity of Spanish speakers. Language attrition affects second-generation Spanish speakers' identity to a considerable extent, but not to a deterministic extent. Identity is also dependent on specific sociocultural contexts.

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