

## **The SEC Spanish Consortium: Working towards equity and documenting language change among Latinx populations in New Destination Communities of the U.S. South**

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Latinx populations in the U.S. South have grown considerably in the last several decades. Lipski (2015, p. 672), notes that “as Spanish speakers in southern states grow in numbers and prominence, the nuanced English and Spanish that result from this cross-fertilization will further enrich the linguistic profile of our communities.” However, relatively little work has been done in this area (some recent exceptions include Limerick 2019; Michnowicz et al. 2018; Ronquest et al. 2020; Wolfram et al. 2011). Wolfram et al. (2011, p. 6) compare an emerging variety of Hispanicized English in North Carolina with a long-term Latinx community from southern Texas to show that “there are current contact situations in which we can observe emerging socio ethnic varieties undergoing adaptation in process so that the application of the uniformitarian principle (Christy 1983; Labov 1994) allows us to understand the dynamics of language contact from the past based on our observation of language contact in the present.” Studying newly-forming Latinx cohorts across the U.S. South, especially in “New Destination Communities” (Kohn 2019; Rodríguez 2022), offers the opportunity to test these theoretical assumptions and answer the following broad research question: how do these communities compare ideologically, linguistically, and culturally to those of more established U.S. Latinx communities, such as those in New York, Los Angeles and Chicago?

The primary focus of our efforts in documenting the sociolinguistic landscape of emerging Latinx communities in the U.S. South is the creation of “The SEC Spanish Consortium” (<https://secspanish.org/>) which brings together scholars and key stakeholders, particularly at SEC (Southeastern Conference) Schools, working on these issues from interdisciplinary perspectives. These perspectives include: (1) Educational achievements and opportunities for Latinxs; (2) Migration and population studies related to these cohorts; (3) Issues related to language choices, linguistic landscapes, and bilingualism; and (4) Identity, ideology and cultural aspects of Latinx cohorts across the U.S. South.

The scholarly output of this collaborative effort has been situated within a discipline focused largely on more established U.S. Latinx communities. A deeper understanding of Spanish speakers and Latinx bilinguals in regions of the U.S. South might allow for better integration and greater success of this population in local schools and universities. With this in mind, we believe our project aligns well with the goals of the Workshop on Immigrant Languages in the Americas by demonstrating the real-world significance of comparing emerging Spanish and English language varieties in different Latinx regions of the U.S. South. In particular, a number of our ongoing projects and initiatives are focused on best practices for teaching Spanish as a heritage language as well as the importance of considering Indigenous language speakers from Latin America currently residing in the U.S. South. If accepted, we will present an overview of the work we have been engaged in thus far, specifically as it relates to and is articulated with research on heritage languages, sociolinguistic variation, and language documentation in the U.S. South.

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