On Loss, Gain, Acceptance, and Belonging: Spanish in the Midwest

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In this article, the authors analyze the creation of a performance piece in both English and Spanish with undergraduate students to creatively combine Latina/o/x oral histories and performance artists' personal experiences as Spanish speakers. Each performer selected an oral history collected by one of the authors in the digital and publicly available archive, Oral Narratives of Latin@s in Ohio. Through a Latino Critical Race Theory framework, and an analysis of the undergraduate student performers' and audience's reactions, the authors demonstrate how this kind of performance can be used as a pedagogical tool to strengthen Spanish as a heritage language learners' sense of belonging in predominantly white educational spaces by contesting epistemic violence and forging Latina/o/x networks of solidarity. Linguistic and cultural maintenance in the face of racialization is conceptualized as a tool for place-making and social justice, particularly in the Midwestern communities that have experienced backlash to growing Latino presence. The performance provides a model for future artistic work that harnesses the power of community cultural wealth as conceptualized by education and Latina/o studies scholar Tara Yosso (2005). Crucially, rather than insist on cultural and linguistic conformity for the sake of

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social and political unity, this work critically attends to the diversity among Latina/o/x experiences represented across the performance.

Keywords: Oral history, performance, linguistic and cultural maintenance, racialization

On March 27th, 2019, six individuals; the authors of this article, one of Foulis's high school-aged daughter, and three undergraduate Spanish as a heritage language students from The Ohio State University performed "Spanish in Ohio: Reflections on loss, gain, acceptance and belonging" at the Latino/a/x Issues Conference in Bowling Green State University[1]. Based on five of the oral histories of older and younger Latino/a/x generations from Foulis's *Oral Narratives of Latin@s in Ohio* (ONLO) collection, our ensemble devised creative work that combined voices to stimulate social transformation through conversations that are more inclusive of diverse language use. Each of us selected an oral history from the ONLO collection that both highlighted the complexities of bilingualism and resonated with our own experiences so that we could relate and testify personally with our own story. Throughout this article the authors will refer to each of the oral history transcripts used as *narrators* and the ensemble members who interacted with their narrator as *respondents*[2]. We layered these voices together as if in conversation although none of us had ever met the narrators except for Foulis during the original interviews. Each respondent took a turn stepping forward to the center of the stage to respond while the other six ensemble members took turns reading the narrator's transcript to which the respondent was reacting. While the performance was primarily about the struggles of being bilingual and racialized in the predominately white Midwest, it also underscored the painstaking recovery of dignity and pride through linguistic and cultural maintenance. This article endeavors to provide a model for performance art that draws on the knowledge of Latina/o/x communities found in oral histories as a vehicle for challenging epistemic violence and forging Latina/o/x networks of solidarity.

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[1] A podcast version of this performance can be found here: https://soundcloud.com/ohiohabla/performance

[2] We will also use ensemble members, where appropriate.

The performance seeks to create dialogue and connections between the daily lived experiences of oral history narrators, respondents, and audiences, so that the performance "may in effect bring imagined worlds into *being and becoming*, moving performers and audiences alike into palpable recognition of possibilities for change," as communication studies scholar Della Pollock (2005) describes. In organizing this performance, Foulis aimed to build a platform for her students to engage with the diversity of Latina/o/x experiences in the Midwest as well as shared experiences with the racialization of Spanish, that is, a process in which those who speak Spanish in the US are already perceived by those of the dominant race as associated with a particular race, social and economic status and education level. Flores and Rosa (2015) note that the racialization of a language, in this case Spanish, "not only marginalizes the linguistic practices of language-minoritized communities but is also premised on the false assumption that modifying the linguistic practices of racialized speaking subjects is key to eliminating racial hierarchies" (p.155). US Latina/o/x youth often face societal pressures to replace their Spanish with dominant English varieties. While many educational institutions stigmatize heritage language varieties of Spanish, some programs, including this performance initiative, endeavor to empower Latina/o/x students to preserve and build their linguistic repertoire. The undergraduate student members of this performance were invited to participate due to their previous enrollment in Foulis's Ohio State Spanish course, background as heritage language learners, and interest in Latina/o/x oral histories explored in the class. While our ensemble represented diverse cultural heritages: Salvadoran, Ecuadorian, Puerto Rican, and Honduran/Ladino, and engaged with primarily Mexican heritage-based oral histories, the undergraduate student members, as heritage speakers of Spanish shared the particularities of growing up as Latina/o/x and their own experiences with language in the predominantly white state of Ohio.

The Latina/o/x population in the Midwest is generally smaller than that of the overall US Latina/o/x population, ranging from 2% of the total population in South Dakota to 17% in Illinois, with an average of 6.4% across 12 states compared to 17% of the total US population (Pew, 2017). Latina/o/x students are often poorly represented across Midwestern universities. The number of Latina/o/x college students in many Midwestern states may appear to be proportionate to their state's Hispanic population. However, the Hispanic population is younger than the overall state population and therefore a

greater percentage are college aged. For example, while 5% of students enrolled in Ohio K–12 public schools were Hispanic (Ohio Department of Education, 2016), only 3.7% of incoming freshmen at Ohio State University were Hispanic, and only 2.3% were Latina/o/x and residents of Ohio (Mora, 2018). Even at universities where Latina/o/x students are represented proportionally in comparison with their Midwest Latina/o/x state population, Midwestern Latina/o/x youth may still be insufficiently represented due to large numbers of Latina/o/x students from other parts of the country. In the face of this broken educational pipeline for Latina/o/x youth, the authors examine the potential for oral history performance to be used strategically to promote linguistic and cultural maintenance while strengthening Spanish as a heritage language learners' sense of belonging.

Latinas/os/xs who grew up in Ohio, or moved from states with high ethnolinguistic vitality, often experience language shift or loss. Potowski (2017) lists several studies throughout the Midwest in places like St. Paul, MN, Iowa, Northwest Indiana, and Chicago, where there is a clear decline of the use of Spanish by the second and third generation (p.126). To date, there are no studies that look at language loss in Ohio, except for a few studies that analyze language contact and dialect preservation in Lorain, Ohio's Puerto Rican community (Ramos-Pellicia, 2004). For these communities, Spanish is tied to home and their relationship to language is an intimate and integral part of their identity. A growing body of work on the Latina/o/x Midwest challenges the misconception that Latinas/os/xs are newcomers and traces the long history of employer recruitment as well as tension and racialization in this region. In the face of discriminatory practices, Latina/o/x communities have survived and thrived by creating businesses, parallel social institutions, and support systems (Valerio-Jimenez, Vaquera Vásquez & Fox, 2017; Diaz McConnell, 2004).

It is within the context of this Midwestern Latina/o/x research that Foulis founded ONLO as a statewide initiative to collect, catalog, and preserve oral narratives of Latinos/as in Ohio, which is archived at the Center for Folklore Studies at The Ohio State University. Its oral histories capture present and past reflections on school systems, family life, and people's efforts to keep the language alive for themselves and for younger generations. These first-person narratives provide unique life perspectives of newcomers and long-standing community members on language use, and, most importantly, they allowed the ensemble to see and hear the complexities of *latinidades.* Through this work, the authors demonstrate how the creative use of Latina/o/x oral histories in

performance art serves as a vehicle to create Latina/o/x networks of solidarity while contesting epistemic violence that racially subjugates Spanish speakers.

1. Epistemic Violence and Language Justice

Using a Critical Race Theory framework allows the authors to center their analysis on the racialized nature of discriminations represented in the performance. It also allows the authors to examine how the performance may confront this epistemic violence. Critical Race Theory has been developed by scholars such Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw (1993) to position race as central to understanding oppression as it intersects with class and other social factors. Latino Critical Race Theory (LatCrit) builds on Critical Race Theory to also examine how culturally specific issues such as language and immigration status are also key to understanding systemic violence and considering possibilities for resisting oppression (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Baugh, 2018). Elizabeth Iglesias (1997) explains that Latina/o/x Studies scholars have developed LatCrit in order to examine "how Critical Race Theory might be expanded beyond the limitations of the black/white paradigm to incorporate a richer, more contextualized analysis of the cultural, political, and economic dimensions of white supremacy, particularly as it impacts Latinas/os in their individual and collective struggles for self-understanding and social justice" (p.178). This analysis endeavors to make race central while also considering the impact of factors specific to Latina/o/x communities.

Maria Fricker's (2017) work is crucial to our analysis of epistemic violence. Fricker theorizes epistemic injustices as,

> consisting, most fundamentally, in a wrong done to someone specifically in their capacity as a knower. I call them *testimonial injustice* and *hermeneutical injustice*. Testimonial injustice occurs when prejudice causes a hearer to give a deflated level of credibility to a speaker's word; hermeneutical injustice occurs at a prior stage, when a gap in collective interpretive resources puts someone at an unfair disadvantage when it comes to making sense of their social experiences. (p. 1)

The authors find that Latinas/os/xs often experience testimonial injustice by the way they are perceived and experience discrimination by the simple act of speaking Spanish in public in the United States—we explore this further in the article—where such practice can escalate to physical and verbal

violence or harassment. They also experience hermeneutical injustice because the use and sound of Spanish becomes racialized, leading to "structural prejudice in the economy of collective hermeneutical resources," (Fricker, 2017, p. 1) which threatens Latinas/os/xs' agency.

We interpret our own oral history-based performance as a tool for resisting epistemic violence. That is, we endeavored to build this resistance through a collective voice grounded in Latina/o/x knowledge. Through both the experience of creating and performing the piece for a primarily Latina/o/x audience, we find that performance art and oral history[3] can be used as vehicles to empower Latina/o/x groups by valuing our lived experiences and allowing us to see ourselves as knowledge producers and create powerful social networks. This is particularly important in this type of work because we are, intentionally, using orality to create meaning and engage in conversation that promotes language justice and the revitalization of language.

The performance piece we devised goes beyond presenting the perspectives of Latinas/os/xs growing up in environments where they—at different times and in different situations—experienced loss, gain, acceptance and belonging. The performance and the conversations around this topic also invite audiences to consider the limitation and possibilities for language justice, that is, the ability and choice of communities to freely communicate in the language they choose in both public and in private spaces. Language justice requires that this communication occur without being reprimanded or singled out, which is a type of linguistic profiling because "it occurs when a person is the victim of linguistic discrimination based purely upon his or her manner of speaker" (Baugh 2018, p. 56). Denying language is denying existence, and it negatively impacts us on many levels. There are a plethora of examples pointing to how language loss or policing disrupts familial intimacy, cultural pride, social history and our sense of belonging (Davis & Moore, 2014; Hill, 1998, 2009; Leeman, 2004, 2018; Potowski, 2010; Valdés, 1996, 2010). We embody language in everything we do, in our thoughts, interactions with others, and in our utterances. Language is also racialized. Flores

[3] There is a growing number of digital archives that document Latina/o/x presence throughout the Midwest, including, Chicagolandia Oral History Project https://www.chicagolandiaoralhistory.org/; Cartas a la Familia: De la migración de Jesusita a Jane/Family Letters: On the Migration from Jesusita to Jane, https://familyletters.unl.edu/; and Migration is Beautiful, http://migration.lib.uiowa.edu/, among others.

and Rosa (2015) explain that raciolinguistic ideologies "produce racialized speaking subjects who are constructed as linguistically deviant even when engaging in linguistic practices positioned as normative or innovative when produced by privileged white subjects" (p. 150). Spanish and the non-white subjects who speak it, in this case, have suffered marginalization, erasure and terror in the media, in personal encounters with the majority language, and in print. To talk about language justice is to talk about racial and social justice.

To nurture the language of the family and to allow it to exist freely in all spaces is to build a structure of equity and resistance to the dominant view of language hierarchy. The performance piece described here is a step towards language justice and can challenge and dismantle structures of privilege and language dominance by inviting those who listen to practice empathy, reflect on their positionality, and consider their own power to demand equality.

2. Performance Ensemble Methodology

In this section, we will explain how Foulis collected the oral histories used in the performance as well as how respondents were invited to participate and asked to co-create the script. We will also provide an example of how respondents connected with the narrators to relate shared experiences with racialization as Spanish-speakers in the Midwest. The growing oral history archive, ONLO, documents life stories of the Latina/o/x community across generations, decades, and heritages. To date, Foulis has collected over 100 oral histories throughout the state over the last six years (2014–2020) and includes them as a central part of her service-learning course at The Ohio State University entitled "Spanish in Ohio." Table 1

The oral histories included for this performance come specifically from narrators from Dayton, Columbus, and Lorain, Ohio. Both heritage language and L2 students enrolled in this course typically report that these narratives allow them to better connect with the historical and cultural content throughout the rest of their coursework and appreciate the diversity of Latina/o/x experiences to which they otherwise would have little exposure. Several of the oral histories have been collected with students, who learn crucial skills in interviewing, cultural competency, synthesizing, and digital literacy. We believe that oral histories can be used as a powerful tool for teaching about the Latina/o/x experience in the US and in the Midwest specifically. When

Table 1. Total Numbers of Oral Histories as of Fall of 2020

Oral Narratives of Latin@s in Ohio Archive		
City (listed by number of participants)	Number of Oral Histories collected	Heritages or nationalities represented
Columbus	49	Mexican, Dominican, Puerto Rican, Salvadoran, Colombian, Peruvian, and Cuban
Lorain	17	Mexican and Puerto Rican
Cincinnati	8	Mexican, Guatemalan, and Cuban
Cleveland	12	Puerto Rican
Dayton, OH	5	Mexican and Puerto Rican
Gambier	5	Mexican and Salvadoran
Celina	3	Mexican
Portsmouth	3	Mexican
Toledo	2	Colombian
Akron	1	Puerto Rico

paired with opportunities for critical thinking about language justice and epistemic violence, oral histories provide depth and human connection that underscore the urgency of these issues.

While narrators of the ONLO project discuss many aspects of growing up and living in the state, they are always asked to describe their language. The narrators choose what language they prefer for the interview and are encouraged to use both Spanish and English when they prefer.

In the fall of 2018, Foulis decided to explore new ways to bring aspects of bilingualism expressed across her ONLO collection to more diverse audiences while involving three of her undergraduate heritage language students

Table 2. Typical Questions Used During These Oral History Interviews

Example Questions Asked during Interviews for Oral Narratives of Latin@s in Ohio
1. Did you grow up speaking Spanish?
2. Who did you speak Spanish with the most?
3. What are some positive or negative experiences you've had with Spanish?
4. Did you speak different languages in different settings, such as home, school, or work?
5. Do you avoid using Spanish with different people or in specific situations?
6. Did/do you try to pass on the language to your children?

in the process. The performance, then, was devised to engage conversations with narrators' experiences and reveal instances of similar and different encounters with language, expand heritage speaker students respondents' and audiences' understanding of who speaks Spanish (i.e., Afro-Latinas/os/x) and accept the uniqueness and diversity of US Spanish, despite Latina/o/x families' insistence that heritage speakers speak the wrong variation (Potowski, 2005). To prepare for this performance, the five Ohio State ensemble members (the authors and 3 undergraduate students) chose a narrator from the ONLO collection with whom they connected personally.

Of the six ensemble members, five were Latina/o and one was a white female. Three of the ensemble members were bicultural, Latina/o undergraduate Spanish as a heritage language students, one was a white graduate student and mother of a heritage speaker of Spanish (Alex), one a Latina faculty member (Foulis), and one was Foulis's Latina high-school-aged daughter. More specifically, Adriana (undergraduate student) chose a narrator (Ramona) who grew up in Texas—a high language vitality region—and moved to Ohio for college; Cami (undergraduate student) picked a narrator (Gabriela) who is also an artist and talks about identity and place as rooted in the land and among compañerismo with other immigrants; Carlos (undergraduate student), chose his own oral history from 5 years earlier because he felt that he could add much more to his perception of language and identity after his years in college, working with the Latina/o community and reflecting on his own life; Alex (graduate student and mother of a bilingual child) chose a narrator (Grace) who addresses motherhood and helping her daughter feel empowered by her family's heritage and culture; and Foulis (faculty) chose the oral history of a narrator (Guillermo) whose story reveals the many times he had to "relearn" Spanish for different reasons. Each of the members connected with the transcripts in unique ways, pointing out connections, empathy, fears, and calling out the need for inclusive educational policies(Table 3,Fig 1).

Five of the six ensemble members (all but Author's daughter) individually read through her/his chosen transcript and identified instances where the narrator spoke specifically about language and identity. Due to the limited time of a 25-minute performance at the Latino/a/x Issues conference in Bowling Green State University in 2019, the ensemble selected and creatively combined only small portions of each oral history to highlight the

Table 3. Some Demographics Information on Narrators and Ensemble Members

Backgrounds of Respondents, Narrators, and Shared Experiences					
Ensemble Respondent	Maria Camila	Adriana	Carlos	Foulis	Alex
Ensemble Respondent sociolinguistic Background	1.5 generation Ecuadorian, grew up in Quito & OH	Puerto Rican father, Anglo mother, grew up in OH	Second-generation Honduran/Garifuna, grew up in NY	First-generation Salvadoran, grew up in Mexico	Anglo, L2 learner, grew up in IA
Narrator background	Gabriela, 1st generation, born in Mexico, lives in Dayton, OH	Ramona, 2nd generation Mexican, grew up in Texas	Carlos himself, interviewed 5 years earlier	Guillermo, 2nd generation, born in OH to Mexican parents	Grace, 2nd generation Mexican, grew up in Texas
Respondent reasons for selecting narrator	Narrator's artistic interests and connection to land and female ancestors	Narrator's fear of losing Spanish and connection to her grandmother	Narrator's struggle with having to relearn Spanish and to show his own growth in relation to growing up in two cultures.	Narrator's role as an educator and support of culture/language maintenance	Narrator's efforts to make daughter feel cultural pride, author is raising bilingual son.

Figure 1. . Performance Ensemble, 2019

experiences that were most relevant to language, identity, and our own stories. Respondents then conversed or "talked back" to the narrators by expressing their connection to each oral history. While each respondent was responsible for selecting key moments of their oral history and interweaving it with their own experiences, all members collectively discussed what material should be included during rehearsals. We were also able to connect our experiences collectively as an ensemble group, interlacing them during the performance The work of oral history and ensemble devised performance is one that is done in community; by practice and definition, it is collaborative. While it is always necessary to have a lead deviser, in this case (Foulis), who can make directorial decisions, the final piece underscores the power of Latin/o/x communities to produce knowledge through co-creation.

Each ensemble member also identified particularly significant phrases from each of their transcripts to be read chorally by all to emphasize feelings of loss, gain, acceptance and belonging—and perhaps too, not belonging through language. Projecting these phrases through multiple voices highlighted the often collective, shared nature of these experiences. For example,

to underscore the racialized violence of monolingual norms and language loss, we chorally read "Don't speak Spanish!"; "empecé a perder mi lengua"; "she started refusing to speak Spanish"; "Will he stop speaking Spanish altogether?"; "no two Latinos could sit by each other and, if you spoke Spanish, you got paddled for it"; "So our language was literally almost taken away from us" and " I realized that I was the only Hispanic teacher teaching." To draw attention to resistive efforts to maintain language and culture we chorally read, "I've had to relearn my language twice"; "quise yo reencontrarme con mi cultura a través de mi propio arte"; "The *cucuy* did roam this house for a long time," referring to a boogy-man figure used to motivate good behavior in children; and, "una persona negra, morena puede hablar el español." While choral reading emphasizes shared experiences with racialization, language, and culture, we also endeavored to underscore difference across experiences through a multiplicity of voices and constructed dialogue.

Ensemble members found that the narrators' often reveal a complicated relationship with growing up bilingual, one that is sometimes marked by violence (physical or verbal), fear of loss and inadequacy as they move into the education system, interact with family members, or find themselves removed from a region with rich ethnolinguistic vitality. One narrator, Guillermo, describes being shamed and punished for speaking Spanish at school. As educators, the authors work with Latina/o/x students as teachers, mentors, and collaborators in different contexts such as heritage language classes and mentoring programs which often lead to conversations about language and identity. Both authors find that, by incorporating oral histories such as Guillermo's, educators can invite students to reflect on their experiences with discrimination or privileged positionalities while considering their power to combat language injustice.

Guillermo's oral history also expresses anguish at being racialized as a sixth grader, exclaiming, "God why didn't you make me White? Why did you make me who I am?" Carlos, an Afro-Latino member of the ensemble, performed this line from Guillermo's oral history, giving it a doubled meaning. While it originally references Guillermo's racialization as a Mexican-American, it also invites audiences to consider Carlos's unique racialization as he is of Garifuna Honduran descent. While racialization is experienced across Latina/o/x communities, it is crucial to examine the particularities of these experiences. During a talk-back session with the audience after the performance, Carlos shared the need to dialogue and explore colorism in the

Latina/o/x community as an Afro-Latino man. As Candelario (2007) explains, all Latinas/os/xs are marked as non-white and marginalized, but those with visible indigenous or African features are even more disadvantaged. In response to his own oral history, Carlos describes having to defend speaking Spanish to those who question his language because he is black. This connection and contrast between Carlos's and Guillermo's experiences with racialization point to the further need for scholarly and artistic work that explores not only the differences between nationality-based Latina/o/x groups but how skin-color within subgroups shapes life chances.

Respondents looked for explicit connections between themselves and the narrators, who described similar experiences in the 1950's, 1970's and early 2000's. Several narrators prompted undergraduate respondents to reflect on their shared experiences growing up bilingual in Ohio. For example, Grace, a narrator who moved to Ohio from Iowa, talks about her own daughter's embarrassment of her parents speaking Spanish. A second narrator, Ramona, moved to Ohio in the 90's from Texas to attend the university and shares her fear of losing Spanish during college. The narrators often expressed a struggle to maintain their Spanish and build a sense of community in a new home. Respondents were struck to see how Spanish or bilingualism continues to be a topic of contention but also an opportunity for reconciliation.

3. Community Cultural Wealth Model and Pedagogical Applications

In the section, we draw on Yosso's (2005) model of Community Cultural Wealth Model as a resistive framework in the face of racialized language discrimination. We also provide some practical applications on how to integrate this work in the heritage language classroom. The following analysis of the performance draws on Yosso's work to examine how Latina/o/x undergraduate respondents draw on both the narrators' and respondents' cultural background to restore a sense of strength and promote language justice throughout the script.

Even though Spanish is the second most spoken language in the United States, it is also one that is constantly stigmatized, racialized, and erased, as discussed earlier. US Spanish is a stigmatized variety for speakers of Spanish outside of the States (I.e. Mexico, Cuba, Colombia, etc.). Juan Gonzalez (2011) and others document how, in the United States, the English-only movement of the 1990s and the dismantlement of bilingual education resulted as

backlash to growing Latina/o/x demographic and political influence. Many Spanish-speakers have reported being ostracized and reprimanded for speaking the language in public spaces such as schools (Escobar & Potowski, 2015). As just one example, two women in Montana were asked to show their identification because they were speaking Spanish at a convenience store[4] (Chappell, 2019). Lourdes Torres's (2019) lists several similar incidents throughout the United States within both large and small Spanish-speaking populations. Overwhelmingly, these occurrences happened to people of color, making the issue not only a matter of 'official language' but of whiteness and citizenship. Torres states, "Make no mistake, the criticism hurled at Latinos for speaking Spanish is not based simply on a perceived failure to adhere to monolingual American norms; it is predicated on the fact that the Spanish language emerges from racialized bodies and thus is heard as illegitimate by white supremacists" (p. 3). Each of the narrators and respondents, as they express their experience of language loss, gain, acceptance and belonging as tied to language, demonstrate that citizenship and race are key components of those experiences. Zentella (2014) rightly refers to this type of linguistic profiling as "Talking while Bilingual" mimicking the expression "Driving while Black" to point out a similar type of harassment. She notes, "Despite the purported Latinization of the United States, and the popular belief that Latina/o bilinguals are favored over Anglo monolinguals in the workplace, in reality bilinguals are being unfairly targeted at work for accented English and/or for speaking Spanish" (Zentella, 2014, p. 623). We found this stigmatization was experienced by many of our narrators.

In response to the racialization of Spanish-speakers reported by narrators across the ONLO collection, the authors analyze the ways that both the original oral histories and our creative work with them draw on and constitute "community cultural wealth." This is a term developed by Tara Yosso (2005) to acknowledge Community of Color resources and knowledge in a crucial shift away from judging all groups against white middle-class communities and to work toward social and racial justice. As it is informed by a Latino Critical Race Theory approach to education, this model resists dominant white institutions' deficit view of Communities of Color. Yosso describes six forms of often overlapping capital: aspirational, social, navigational, linguistic, resistant, and familial.

[4] https://www.npr.org/2019/02/15/695184555/americans-who-were-detained-after-speaking-spanish-in-montana-sue-u-s-border-pat

Social capital is defined by Yosso (2005) "as networks of people and community resources...[that] can provide instrumental and emotional support to navigate society's institutions" (p. 79). Some examples of social capital explored in the piece include the creation of Latina/o/x social organizations in Ohio, such as dance troupes and international student organizations to build community and emotional support. One undergraduate respondent, Adriana, shared that, in addition to building community with the audience, she felt that respondents also forged community as an ensemble. During rehearsals and while traveling to the conference, the performance group often discussed upcoming job interviews and life plans. By exchanging advice and sharing experiences, the ensemble built collective social capital to provide one another with both instrumental and emotional support.

Yosso (2005) defines familial capital as engaging "a commitment to community well-being and expands the concept of family to include a more broad understanding of kinship" (p. 79) and aspirational capital as the ability to maintain hope and high aspirations for their children's future in the face of obstacles and "dream of possibilities beyond their present circumstances..." (p. 78). During the performance, an undergraduate respondent, Carlos, shared that he was able to graduate because of his mother's aspirations, and was empowered to believe that he would be the first in his family to go to college and succeed. Another undergraduate respondent, Cami, spoke about the artistic legacy of her family and the importance of her connection to nature in Ecuador. This evoked her community history, memory, and cultural intuition central to familial capital.

Cami also explored her narrator's reference to the power of Día de los Muertos in Mexico, prompting the respondent to reflect on similar traditions in Ecuador, her connection with past generations in her family, and how they continue to guide her. She said:

> *mi bisabuela me cuida. la siento susurrando en mis oídos, guiándome en esta vida de almas, abriendo mi camino. mi vida está en sus manos en las de sus abuelas y las abuelas de ellas. cuando me reúno con mi familia para hacer guaguas de pan con colada morada, en nuestro día de difuntos, su espíritu se siente en mis tías, mis primas, mi mama. somos ella.*[5]

[5] All quotes from the performance have been edited for clarity.

Here, the respondent highlights how she is supported by both familial and aspirational capital that connect and uplift the women in her family. The ensemble chose to underscore this moment by creating a V-shape with our bodies. With Cami positioned front and center, two other respondents stepped close behind her on both sides to place a hand on her shoulder. Then, the final two respondents repeated this motion to place their hands on the first pair's shoulders to represent the continuation and inheritance of family knowledge and power. During a talk-back session at the end of the performance, one audience member said she appreciated how identity was represented as powerfully grounded in a long-line of *abuelas* and *abuelos (*Fig 2*)*.

In addition to familial and aspirational capital, linguistic capital is both celebrated through and constituted by the performance. Yosso (2005) defines linguistic capital as "intellectual and social skills attained through communication experiences in more than one language and/or style" (p. 78). It includes storytelling skills such as facial affect, vocal tone, volume, rhythm, timing, as well as previous experiences with "storytelling tradition, that may include listening to and recounting oral histories" (p. 78). The linguistic capital of Spanish and/or storytelling skills underpin the performance.

Figure 2. . V-Shape formation during performance, 2019

We find that this kind of performance invites Latina/o/x students to recognize and take pride in the value of all forms of community cultural wealth and how they often but not always intersect with Spanish. By performing in Spanish, particularly without translation, our piece both promotes language justice and interrogates the mechanisms of language violence.

In moving beyond the idea of community, we analyze our performance as developing the concept of "Latina/o/x" as a verb rather than a subjectivity that is simply given. As suggested by Cristina Beltrán (2010), "subjects marked as 'Latino' do *not* represent a pre-existing community but, rather, Latino politics is best understood as a form of enactment in which subjects create new patterns of commonality and contest unequal forms of power" (p. 157). She argues that we must not imagine that Latina/o/x power is a sleeping giant that must be awakened by some unitary core, such as Spanish. In this vein, we interpret our performance as exploring diverse Latina/o/x sociopolitical formations that not only underscore shared experiences but also difference and contradiction. Throughout the performance, narrators express different relationships to Spanish that urge us to move away from glossing over Spanish as holding the same function and value for all Latina/o/x communities. While several narrators express a need to preserve Spanish, relearn and resist the physical violence they were made to endure after speaking it at school, others challenge us to recognize that Spanish is not a prerequisite for strong Latina/o affiliations and identities. Rather, several oral histories, while at times expressing regret that Spanish was not passed onto the next generation, point to a great wealth of other community resources, from dance to food to other languages such as Garifuna that bind familial and social networks together.

4. Constructing Community between Respondents and Narrators

While the performance is intended to symbolically create community in an imagined dialogue with narrators during this performance, it may also build community between each of the ensemble members and audiences. The performance piece relies on orality much more than movement because the basis or context of the piece is oral history. Indeed, the central point of the performance is language, speaking, listening, and hearing people's words,

and how those words express lived experiences of language expression. Yet, the six bodies and ten voices represented in the piece resonate and invite the audience to participate, to bearwitness and to acknowledge the presence of those not there—the narrators—but also the oral histories of Latinas/os/x in Ohio in general, as many of their stories were gifted to build and document a growing and sometimes neglected history of Midwest Latinas/os/xs. The performance invites a collective history and a collective complicity in voicing a community's concern with language injustice.

Della Pollock (2005) explains that performance is at the heart of oral history, and that "insofar as oral history is a process of *making history in dialogue,* it is performative" (p. 2). The performativity of this piece involves constructing a fictional relationship between multiple oral history narrators who address similar subjects although they do not know one another. Furthermore, we have also added a layer of performativity by adding our own voices and creating further dialogue between ourselves and the narrators. For example, the first respondent (Adriana), interacts with the narrator in deeply personal ways. The narrator identifies herself as having been born in the Midwest, like many of her siblings, due to her family's constant migrations, as migrant farm workers. This narrator, Ramona grew up in Texas, speaking Spanish at home and English at school. Adriana responds:

> *En mi casa fue casi el opuesto, mi papá, el puertorriqueño, no quería que nosotros habláramos español en casa porque* he was worried that we'd get confused as children about which language to use. This concern was completely valid, because my dad has worked so hard to achieve his level of English and he has faced many criticisms about his language and accent that it's understandable he did not want his children to face the same criticisms. *Pero, mi mama, la no nativa del español y una maestra del español*, was the one who pushed for us to learn and use Spanish in our youth because she recognized the importance of language exposure at a young age."

Although Adriana's experience was the opposite of her narrator's, Adriana still relates to the social compartmentalization of language and racialization of Spanish. Adriana then responds directly to the lack of educational resources available to her in her K–12 schooling. She responds:

> Growing up in Ohio, it's hard for me to imagine an environment where Spanish is spoken *como si fuera nada* in a public institution, like a school. Although they offered introductory classes in 7th grade, my level was too advanced, so my first interaction with Spanish in school was not until the 10th grade. As a heritage speaker, the traditional Spanish courses did not meet my unique needs, resulting in a continued feeling of inadequacy *en mi nivel del español y una falta de confianza*.

Adriana knows now that her needs were unique and that although she did not experience an overt prohibition of her heritage language, she did not have a nurturing environment either.

Adriana's narrator underscores the need to create nurturing environments and communities of high language vitality to not only learn the heritage language but maintain it. The narrator comments on her shock of not finding anyone who spoke Spanish when she arrived at the university in Ohio, she said, "Había un tiempo donde yo pensé, aquí me olvido el español, se me va a salir y ya nunca lo voy a aprender". The verbs she uses to express her fear of forgetting such as "olvidar" associated with memory and "salir" associated with leaving, losing or escaping "se me va a salir" point to a sort of anguish which makes us think of sorrow and grief of losing a part of who you are and a connection to family and community.To this, Adriana reflects:

> I feel like this all the time, if it has been more than a semester without taking a course in Spanish or visiting Puerto Rico, I feel my language fluidity deteriorating and this disconnection from the language definitely has an impact on my sense of belonging. *Si estoy siendo honesta, cumplir el estereotipo de la latina nacida en los Estados Unidos quien no puede hablar su lengua nativa me preocupa mucho.*

Here, Adriana identifies Spanish as her native language because she has grown up in Ohio and in Puerto Rico and lives with a parent who is a native Spanish speaker. Her response to the narrator offers insight into how the fear of losing the language and its connection to family and culture is an ever-present concern, particularly due to the low numbers of Spanish-speakers in the Midwest. She later describes how family and professors helped her overcome being ashamed of Spanglish.

Adriana's performance invites the audience to reflect on their own experiences with language and expand their understanding of how language justice can be achieved. That is, we do not expect that one person alone decides to embrace their bilingualism but, rather, a community of support can combat the negative effects of lower ethnolinguistic vitality on one's fluidity and identity. Furthermore, Adriana's reflection helps us understand that her identity as Latina is not threatened by how or when she speaks Spanish.

5. Audience Reactions

The ensemble closed its performance at Bowling Green University by asking conference attendee audience members to reflect on their reactions to the piece and their personal experiences with the central topics that we investigated throughout. Richard Bauman (1986) describes performance as an intentional and conscious decision to embody and share an experience that is transformative to the performer and the audience. We explicitly asked the audience for feedback to better understand the experience potentially shared between performers and audience.

Most conference attendees were Latina/o/x and non-Latina/o/x Bowling Green faculty and students or local Latina/o/x local high school students and their teachers. We distributed the following questions in written form to audience members as they entered the performance hall:

Reflect on your own languages and identities.
1. What have you lost?
2. What have you gained?
3. What gives you a sense of belonging?

For the first question, "What have you lost?," several audience members resonated with the pain of being treated differently. They identified with the pressure to learn English to be successful in school and the consequent fear of losing one's language and culture. Others described losing dignity and their own experiences with rejection and violence: being reprimanded for speaking Spanish at school, being told to "speak American" or "stop speaking Mexican." Sharing instances of being bullied for speaking Spanish in public—and underscoring how it continues to happen today, signals a loss of self-worth but also opens space for solidarity and works against the isolating effect of this mistreatment.

For the second question, "What have you gained?" several audience members shared their experiences with relearning a heritage language. Several undergraduate ensemble members remarked on feeling empowered by creating a public space in which they could name this violence and hear their own experiences with racialization and resiliency echoed by others.

For the third question, "What gives you a sense of belonging?" several audience members discussed feeling connected to cultural experiences and concepts incorporated in the performance, such as getting children to behave with stories of *El cucuy* and talking about making *tortillas*. Others said that the performance reminded them of who they are and where they are going. Several individuals remarked on how they enjoyed the bilingualism throughout the performance because it marked their identity as belonging to two worlds and made them feel, as bilingual Latinas/os/xs, like insiders. Others shared how the performance made them feel that they are not alone and realize that others share similar experiences.

In addition to three questions, the audience gave general feedback about their experience viewing the performance. One individual mentioned sensing the performers' vulnerability in telling not only the narrators' stories but their own stories as well. Another audience member said she connected emotionally with the performers, saying "I got emotional with you." Although we cannot know of the audience's reactions beyond the talk-back session, their comments signal the power of this kind of performance to facilitate affective connections between performers and audiences that may promote deeper engagement with language justice and forge a politics of possibility.

Engaging the audience at the beginning and end of the performance provided valuable feedback for future work, as Author continues to work with a different ensemble group during the 2019–2020 academic year. Foulis and her students consider the ways in which the audience is invited to participate and contribute to knowledge production. Indeed, our model creates a multitude of voices; narrators, respondents, and audiences that may join to undo the ways that Spanish-speakers are stripped of credibility through the testimonial and hermeneutical injustice described by Fricker. Our model confronts this injustice by validating the experiences of Latina/o/x communities who share similar encounters with language injustice and combats epistemic violence by endeavoring to create a collective performative space to support and value Latina/o/x knowledge production.

Working with heritage language learners (HLL) means that the authors provide opportunities for them to see their lived experiences as sources of knowledge and community wealth. Indeed, in the classroom we work to build community with our students and for them to build community with each other. Semester after semester, we see how they learn from one another and value each other's experiences of growing up bilingually and biculturally. Building this type of work into the HLL classroom requires that we, as instructors, build opportunities into our class time for creative expression, not only to allow students to develop and nurture linguistic self-confidence, but also because these are opportunities that require intentional community building. In the work we describe throughout this essay, students listen to oral histories of other Latinas/os/xs, we come together to share our reaction with the group and discuss the things that are most relatable to our own histories and begin to think, as a group, how we might collectively build something together. In the classroom, this type of work should be done in the second half of the semester, when students are more familiar with peers and instructors and when we, together as a class, can build interactive activities—such as theater games—that allow us to build trust. For example, students stand in a circle and take turns crossing to the other side while completing the sentence "*Vengo de…*" and describing their identity through sensorial or abstract details rather than a literal location. These activities are key, because we negotiate space, model listening, feedback and storytelling, and we begin to see each member of the class as integral part of the creation process by building community and a sense of belonging. This work is centered on identity, both as Latinas/os/xs and college students, and language as students build their skills through listening, discussing, reading and writing. Most importantly, this work allows students to use Spanish in ways that most have never done before, that is, talking about their experiences as part of the creation process.

As a lesson, allow two to three weeks to develop this performance by breaking down pieces of the work in days. For example, 1) create groups of 3–5 students and assign one oral history to each group; 2) collectively identify key topics and moments that resonated with each of the students in the group, assigning a notetaker; 3) allow time for activities in the classroom for building trust; 4) allow each group to create a script or a product collectively based on the oral history and brainstorming sessions or explain that each creation

has to coherently build on each group's work; 5) give short and specific instructions about what should be included in each piece (4–5 minutes long, group movement, 2–3 direct quotes from oral histories, code-switching, 2 solo moments, 20 seconds of sound, etc.); 6) present the performance piece; 6) talk-back session from class. All these steps, except number one, should be completed during class. It is important to note that, as instructors, we must be willing to model and be vulnerable ourselves in each step of this process. Students trust the work when they see instructors participating collectively. As we model each step, we remind them that to make this a success, we must work collectively, offering feedback and encouragement, and helping each other feel valued in the process. We suggest that instructors assign a grade to the group, rather than to individuals, and a short reflective essay should be assigned individually.

6. Final Thoughts

This article offers a model of performance art grounded in oral history as a vehicle for challenging epistemic violence and forging Latina/o/x networks of solidarity. By combining oral histories with testimonial accounts of the respondent's lived experiences and soliciting audience feedback, the performance draws on diverse Latina/o/x perspectives and knowledge production. This work relies on Latino Critical Race Theory to examine the crucial role of race in the subjugation of Spanish-speaking communities, identity construction, and a politics of possibilities for language justice. By incorporating Yosso's (2005) Community Cultural Wealth model in its analysis, the authors strive to underscore the ways that Latina/o/x communities bring collective knowledge and power with them to act as agents of social change. Both narrators and respondents in this performance call on deep reserves of social, familial, linguistic, and aspirational capital to push back against epistemic violence and demand to be treated with dignity and as equals.

While this article highlights the power of shared experiences with language, Spanish should not be treated as a unitary core to Latina/o/x identity or a solution to solidifying Latina/o/x influence because it naturalizes the exclusion of Latina/o/x communities who are primarily non-Spanish-speaking. As we have seen, Spanish takes on many different forms and meanings

across Latina/o/x communities and individuals. However, examining these differences and shared experiences with racialization of both language and culture allow us to frame linguistic and cultural maintenance as a tool for place-making and social justice. We find this particularly urgent in Midwestern communities that have experienced backlash to growing Latina/o/x presence, but also for the work that educators must continue to do with heritage language learners of Spanish to help them navigate language acceptance and agency. Indeed, as educators, we must allow opportunities to creative expression and model collaborative innovative work that centers on students experiences as US Spanish speakers. Further scholarly approaches to artistic work that demands language justice will be crucial to continue meeting new challenges and building Latina/o/x spaces of belonging.

The authors find that this type of work models ways in which Latina/o/x students, whether in the heritage language classroom, or outside of it, can see themselves as knowledge producers and build community doing creative work that centers on life experiences. Indeed, the new performance for the 2019–2020 academic year, despite our pandemic restrictions, proved to be an effective tool of community-engaged work—one that works towards preserving, reviving, and building linguistic self-confidence among Latina/o/x students in the Midwest.

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