

# Oregon Latinos retaining Spanish language more than previous generations

October 17 2012

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(Phys.org)—Mexican-Americans in Independence, Ore., are retaining Spanish at a rate much higher than previous immigration waves, according to in-depth interviews of 120 Latino families.

These initial research findings, part of a larger study being conducted by Oregon State University researcher Susana Rivera-Mills, will be presented on Friday, Oct. 12, at the Linguistic Association of the Southwest conference.

Rivera-Mills, interim director of OSU's Center for Latin@ Studies and Engagement, or CL@SE, is also a professor of Spanish and diversity advancement at OSU. She is an expert on the way language is used, and the effects of language use on society, particularly that of the Spanish language.

She has spent several years interviewing families in Independence, where Latinos are 35 percent of the total population. Rivera-Mills said this is one of the first studies to look at language retention of fourth- and fifth-generation immigrants.

"I found that children of immigrants are either retaining the Spanish language, or going back to reacquire it," she said. "This is a completely new trend. Fifteen years ago, we saw the same pattern in the Latino community as you did with early European immigrants – the native language was almost completely erased by the third generation."

Rivera-Mills said the reason for this language retention was two-fold, a desire for cultural preservation by fourth- and fifth-generation Latinos; and in the case of more recent immigrants, economic and cultural benefits of being bilingual.

"These fourth- and fifth-generations are going back to acquire their roots and fighting against language loss," Rivera-Mills said. "They feel a need to recapture the loss they experienced as children who primarily spoke English."

Rivera-Mills said these young people were often descendants of [braceros](#), who came to Oregon in the 1940s to work in the Emergency Farm Labor Program. More than 15,000 workers came from Mexico to Oregon during this period.

"I also spoke to children of more recent immigrants who were learning Spanish for communication purposes and to further themselves by becoming competitive for jobs that require bilingual skills," she said.

Rivera-Mills said these are initial findings from her detailed interviews with families in Independence. More detailed results will be published next year.

In addition to her presentation, two OSU graduate students studying with Rivera-Mills will present at the conference. Maralisa Morales Ortiz will discuss how second-generation Latinas who have grown up within their heritage cultural value system, but also exposed to U.S. education system, are redefining what their sexuality means to them. These interviews with college-age Latinas indicate that the women are becoming empowered through their exposure to the United States education system, but feel pressured to respond to accepted social parameters that tell them to stay virgins until they are married.

Another graduate student, Michelle Ofelt, will discuss her paper on Latinos and television viewing. Her findings conclude that children of Spanish-language speakers do not continue to watch Spanish [language](#) television once they leave the home. Importantly, her study participants were more critical of Spanish programming, and said they felt the content and entertainment value was higher for English programming.

"Future generations of Latinos are in danger of losing their own cultural knowledge if they continue this pattern of not watching Spanish programming," Rivera-Mills said. "Interestingly, she found that any consumption of Spanish programming was based on the collective, so there was a much greater chance of choosing Spanish TV when there was a large group instead of an individual."

Both Morales Ortiz and Ofelt are considering these studies as possible exploratory research for future dissertation work.

Provided by Oregon State University

Citation: Oregon Latinos retaining Spanish language more than previous generations (2012, October 17) retrieved 24 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2012-10-oregon-latinos-retaining-spanish-language.html>

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