

Advertising rental housing in Spanish puts off many potential renters, study finds

October 12 2023, by Sophia Vento



Credit: Unsplash/CC0 Public Domain

Publishing an ad for an apartment or rental home in Spanish may seem like it would broaden the pool of potential renters, but new research shows it can harm rental-seekers' perception of the property and its

neighborhood.

Finding a new apartment or home to rent can be nervewracking and tedious. It is increasingly digital and there are thousands of websites and Facebook groups for prospective renters to peruse. It can be a fraught endeavor—from vetting Craigslist listings to scrolling through hundreds of different listings to find the right place.

For some Americans, negative perceptions of Spanish in online rental housing advertisements can make the housing search even more difficult while also reinforcing residential segregation.

A [recent study](#) from Max Besbris, a University of Wisconsin–Madison sociology professor, in collaboration with researchers at Washington University in St. Louis and Michigan State University, reveals that non-Spanish speaking Americans perceive Spanish housing ads as indicative of less desirable housing options. These individuals may then choose to avoid these apartments, homes and neighborhoods entirely—inhibiting racial integration across communities.

The work is published in *Sociological Science*.

"The overarching goal of the research is to understand how housing is advertised and how those advertisements might affect people's mobility decisions," says Besbris, whose research focuses on how individuals make economic decisions and how these decisions reproduce inequality. "We're interested in understanding how the information shapes people's perceptions of their potential destinations when they move."

Although there has been a long-standing sociological interest in understanding racial segregation in the United States, Besbris emphasizes the importance of a shifting focus to Latinx and Hispanic communities, as they are now the second largest ethnic group after non-Hispanic white

people in America. The first part of this study determined that Spanish advertisements largely depict residential units in areas and neighborhoods with higher Spanish-speaking immigrant populations.

"We found there's not a lot of overtly discriminatory language in online rental housing advertisements," Besbris says. "However, people are assuming the demographics of particular places and the desirability in particular places based on non-racialized language. Those choices then have effects on residential segregation more broadly."

A [previous study](#) from Besbris and his collaborators found that renters are increasingly exposed to different types of online housing information depending on the socioeconomic and racial makeup of the neighborhoods of interest. The most recent study takes these findings a step further, instead focusing on the language and not the specific contents of the information.

The researchers, through a survey experiment, found both white and Black Americans, as well as non-Spanish speaking Hispanic and Latinx Americans, reacted negatively to the Spanish language advertisements, which affects their perceptions and understanding of the housing market.

"Americans react negatively to seeing Spanish housing advertisements," Besbris notes. "They tend to think Spanish ads indicate that housing is less desirable and in neighborhoods that are less white, have poor quality schools and have low incomes."

In simple terms, Besbris says, "people are making assumptions about the quality of neighborhoods based on the content of ads."

However, researchers were surprised to discover that non-Spanish speaking Hispanic and Latinx Americans and their Spanish-speaking counterparts would be divided by language in such stark terms.

"Hispanic people who do not speak Spanish had basically the same reactions as white and Black Americans," Besbris says. "That was not something we were sure we would find."

This pattern, in the researchers' view, ultimately reinforces existing patterns of residential mobility and segregation.

"We suspect that non-Spanish speakers are going to avoid looking for housing in those neighborhoods because they see Spanish in these advertisements," says Besbris. "That means they're less likely to move there."

Given the segregated and racialized nature of American society and the housing market specifically, Besbris stresses the importance of continued research on the subject and for policymakers to consider housing discrimination through a more holistic lens.

"We want regulators to understand that it's not just overt, racialized language that matters for people's [housing](#) decisions," Besbris says. "There are other ways people are making assumptions about the demographics of different places that influence where they choose to live."

More information: Ariela Schachter et al, Inclusive but Not Integrative: Ethnoracial Boundaries and the Use of Spanish in the Market for Rental Housing, *Sociological Science* (2023). [DOI: 10.15195/v10.a21](#)

Provided by University of Wisconsin-Madison

Citation: Advertising rental housing in Spanish puts off many potential renters, study finds

(2023, October 12) retrieved 28 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2023-10-advertising-rental-housing-spanish-potential.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.