# I Influence Too

## The Role of Professors in Developing Bilingual Teachers' Spanish Proficiency

**Zulmaris Díaz & Gina Lydia Garza-Reyna**

## Abstract

To support the growing number of English learners (ELs) across the nation, professors in the field of bilingual education are being called to prepare highly effective bilingual teachers who not only have linguistic proficiency in English and Spanish but can also successfully perform in academic settings. As a result, we, two bilingual education professors working at two different institutions along the Texas–Mexico border, conducted a duoethnography study to explore the question, How are our practices impacting the students we teach?—an area in the field of bilingual education that has been relatively unexplored. We examine our practices using the existing literature in (a) bilingual education teacher preparation and (b) the teaching of Spanish heritage language learners as our framework. In this article, we describe (a) the challenges we face, (b) the language strategies we use in our classrooms to build our students' language skills, and (c) the pedagogical activities we use with our students that have the greatest impact on their language

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and literacy development in Spanish. By providing curricular and linguistic strategy recommendations, we provide the reader with the opportunity to gather insight into how to go about helping preservice teachers develop what Valdés and Geoffrion-Vinci categorized as a "high-level register" Spanish, the language required to effectively teaching ELs.

## Introduction

The demand for qualified bilingual teachers, especially in Spanish, is at an all-time high (Boyle, August, Tabaku, Cole, & Simpson-Baird, 2015; Lachance, 2017, 2018; National Center for Education Statistics, 2016) because of the fast-growing number of bilingual and dual language programs in U.S. public schools (Lindholm-Leary, 2012; Thomas & Collier, 2012). One in every 10 students is an English learner (EL) (Sánchez, 2017). To service the ever-growing population of ELs and bilingual learners (BLs; Evans, 2017) in bilingual programs across the nation, bilingual teachers need to have the appropriate knowledge and skill set, including (a) content-area knowledge *and* (b) an understanding of best practices that enhance student learning (Texas State Board for Educator Certification [TSB], 2000).

In Texas, where this research took place, it is also expected that bilingual teachers will address the needs of the BLs they teach by having linguistic proficiency in English and the students' native language (L1), at communicative and academic levels (TSB, 2000). English–Spanish proficiency is a valuable skill in Texas, and to help preservice teachers develop it, teacher preparation programs across the state are constantly looking for ways to provide opportunities for the linguistic and literacy development of the preservice teachers they serve so that they successfully perform in academic settings. Once mastered, linguistic proficiency in two languages ultimately aids the bilingual teacher in developing lessons, materials, and assessments and facilitates communication with parents and other stakeholders who speak the EL/BL's native language (TSB, 2000).

Most of the current research on developing bilingual linguistic proficiency in preservice teachers has looked specifically at preservice teachers' development and competencies in Spanish (Ekiaka & Reeves, 2010; García, 2002; Guerrero & Valadez, 2011; Sutterby, Ayala, & Murillo, 2005)—this is understandable, because more than 70% of ELs in the nation are Spanish speakers (Ruíz Soto, Hooker, & Batalava, 2015). Other research in bilingual teacher preparation has focused on the curricula and classroom assignments given to help the preservice teacher prepare for the bilingual classroom (Aquino-Sterling, 2016; Aquino-Sterling & Rodríguez-Valls, 2016; Arroyo-Romano, 2016; Guerrero & Lachance, 2018; Musanti & Rodríguez, 2017). There also exists research that has centered on preservice teachers' perceptions and ideologies of their heritage languages (Alfaro & Bartolomé, 2017; Briceño, Rodríguez-Mojica, & Muñoz-Muñoz, 2018; Musanti, 2014; Rodríguez, 2007). One area that remains relatively unexplored, though, is the role of the profes-

sor in the preparation of these preservice bilingual teachers—specifically in their literacy and language development in Spanish.

It is important to note that few autoethnographies have focused on preparing Latino and/or bilingual preservice teachers. In those few, however, the emphasis was on the role of teacher educators in the development of preservice teachers' social consciousness as a means to social justice (Aguilar, 2017; Arce, 2013). Using a duoethnography approach (Chang, Hernandez, & Ngunjiri, 2012; Ellis & Bochner, 2000), we propose to add to the literature of bilingual education, more specifically looking at the role of the professor in aiding preservice teachers to develop Spanish, by asking ourselves, How are our practices impacting the students we teach?

## Background

The region where this research took place has a population of approximately 1.3 million; 80% of individuals aged 5 years and older speak a language (i.e., Spanish) other than English at home, and about 37% of households live in poverty (according to U.S. Census data from 2010 to 2014). All of our students are of Latino descent; for most, their first language is Spanish. However, within our university classes exist students with varying linguistic proficiency levels in Spanish and English. One group has received formal schooling in Spanish, while the other has received all of their schooling in English. Within the English group, a subgroup exists—those who were educated in bilingual transitional programs where Spanish instruction may have been used but in a limited capacity. For the majority of our students, the result has been few opportunities to develop reading and writing skills in the Spanish language, presenting a challenge for them as they seek bilingual certification. Owing to the students' educational experiences, the majority of them fall into the category of Spanish *heritage language speakers*: by definition, individuals who have been brought up in a household that speaks a minority language and later on, with exposure and instruction in the majority language, become dominant in it (i.e., English; Boon & Polinsky, 2015; Valdés, 2005).

Enrolled in a university-based education preparation program, our students are pursuing bilingual education certification at one of our universities. In Texas, declared bilingual majors pursuing certification are mandated by the state to take four exams. The first exam, Core Subjects, tests knowledge in the areas of math, English language arts, science, history, fine arts, health, and physical education. The second, the Professional and Pedagogical Responsibilities exam, assesses knowledge of educational theory and pedagogy. The Bilingual Supplemental, the third exam, tests foundational knowledge and comprehensive knowledge of language development, literacy, and content-area teaching in students' L1 and second language (L2). The fourth and final exam, the Basic Target Language Proficiency Test (BTLPT), measures listening and reading comprehension as well as oral and writing abilities in Spanish within the context of education. By passing the BTLPT,

teacher candidates demonstrate that they have enough fluency and vocabulary to give instruction in the content areas in Spanish (Arroyo-Romano, 2016).

## Review of Literature

### *Preparing Future Bilingual Teachers*

With the exponential growth of bilingual programs across the United States, and the implementation of rigorous standards (i.e., Common Core Standards, Next Generation Science Standards, Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills), teacher preparation programs are the first ones called to prepare highly effective bilingual teachers capable of using specialized language in each of the content areas (Boyle et al., 2015; Lachance, 2017). For professors in Texas, the expectation to prepare bilingual teachers who have communicative competence and proficiency in the language needed for teaching in the L1 and the L2 is understood. Texas is not alone in this endeavor; 38 states across the United States also require bilingual teachers to demonstrate fluency in a non-English language (Boyle et al., 2015).

While these expectations in theory are sound, some researchers have pointed out that not all in-service and preservice bilingual teachers have developed the academic level of Spanish language proficiency outlined in the state standards and required to deliver effective lessons across the content areas to ELs/BLs (Ekiaka & Reeves, 2010; Guerrero & Valadez, 2011; Lachance, 2018; Sutterby et al., 2005). Researchers have described that many of these bilingual educators experience conflicting language ideologies that undermine Spanish language development (Alfaro & Bartolomé, 2017; Briceño et al., 2018; Ek, Sánchez, & Quijada Cerecer, 2013; Guerrero & Guerrero, 2017), thus making their journey to become bilingual certified teachers difficult. To assist them and address this concern, researchers, and those who prepare bilingual teachers, are looking for practices deemed effective in preparing the preservice bilingual teacher for the classroom. Through the years, published research has put forth recommendations to aid in accomplishing this task. Among those recommendations are (a) giving the preservice bilingual teacher access to Spanish by providing opportunities to read, write, and speak through Spanish bilingual preparation courses (Arroyo-Romano, 2016; Flores & Guirao, 2017; Rodríguez & Musanti, 2017; Sutterby et al., 2005); (b) providing the preservice bilingual teacher with a preassessment of Spanish language proficiency to identify areas of strength and improvement (Arroyo-Romano, 2016; Flores & Guirao, 2017; Rodríguez & Musanti, 2017); (c) creating a supportive environment that builds on language strengths (Aquino-Sterling, 2016; Hornberger, 2003; Sutterby et al., 2005); and (d) offering preservice bilingual teachers opportunities for understanding the practices of bilingualism in bilingual contexts (García & Kleifgen, 2010; Kleyn, 2016; Palmer & Martínez, 2013; Zentella, 2013).

Teaching bilingual preparation courses fully or partially in Spanish may

provide opportunities for language development. However, even in a supportive environment, it is not enough to prepare proficient bilingual preservice teachers to have the necessary competence to teach in Spanish (Aquino-Sterling, 2016; Aquino-Sterling & Rodríguez-Valls, 2016). Moreover, although giving students a preassessment may highlight areas of need, it does little for the student if there is no follow-through on the exam. Though reading and writing in Spanish supports the development of language, it is essential that when preparing bilingual preservice teachers' language for specific purposes (LSP), *pedagogical Spanish* should be considered. Aquino-Sterling (2016) defined *pedagogical Spanish* as

> the language and literacy competencies bilingual teachers require for the effective work of teaching in Spanish across the curriculum in K–12 bilingual schools, and for competently meeting the professional language demands of working with students, colleagues, administrators, parents, and the larger bilingual school community. (p. 51)

Nevertheless, what else must be considered when preparing Spanish heritage language learners to be certified to teach in English–Spanish?

### Teaching Spanish Heritage Language Speakers

First and foremost, our practices in the field of bilingual teacher preparation are informed by a sociolinguistic lens for understanding preservice teachers' abilities (García, 2002; García & Kleifgen, 2010; Kleyn, 2016; Palmer & Martínez, 2013; Sutterby et al., 2005) and uses L1 and L2 acquisition theories (Flores & Guirao, 2017; Rodríguez & Musanti, 2017) as means to instruct the preservice bilingual teacher. Because most of our students are Spanish heritage language speakers, it is crucial that we look into the applied linguistics field to guide how we facilitate the development of Spanish for heritage language students (Boon & Polinsky, 2015; Valdés, 2005; Valdés, Fishman, Chávez, & Pérez, 2008).

To empower Spanish heritage speakers, it is essential to take into consideration, without undermining it, the language knowledge they already possess (Dumitrescu, 2015; Fairclough & Belpoliti, 2016; Grosjean, 1997) and help them develop and strengthen their linguistic and literacy skills in the "standard" language. According to Valdés and Geoffrion-Vinci (1998), stressing the reading of literary texts, focusing on traditional grammar, and having students carry out community or language ethnographies may not be enough in developing students' ability to produce the "high-level register" Spanish. According to Valdés and Geoffrion-Vinci (1998), high-level register Spanish is the language needed to deliver university lectures or lessons in a K–12 setting. Rather, researchers argue that students benefit more from authentic classroom activities that allow them the opportunity to practice the language registers needed for their professional career as bilingual certified teachers (Pascual y Cabo & Prada, 2018; Valdés & Geoffrion-Vinci, 1998). Moreover, Gatti and O'Neill (2017) suggested that to help heritage language speakers develop

writing skills in Spanish, scaffolds should be provided. Instructors must build from students' oral language skills and explicitly point out the differences between oral and "standard" written language skills, but at the same time being reflective of and responsive to students' language repertoires (García & Kleifgen, 2010; Kleyn, 2016).

It is equally important to allow, at times, spaces for dynamic bilingualism in which Spanish heritage students can make use of their full linguistic repertoires, whether in English, Spanish, or both (Kleyn, 2016; Musanti & Rodríguez, 2017; Palmer & Martínez, 2013). For this reason, bilingual preservice teachers ought to be exposed to student-led oral, reading, and writing learning activities (Pascual y Cabo & Prada, 2018) that draw on LSP, developing pedagogical Spanish competencies (Aquino-Sterling, 2016) without being rejected because of their language abilities.

## Method

Our research follows a duoethnography approach (Chang et al., 2012; Ellis & Bochner, 2000). *Duoethnographies*, also referred to as *co-ethnograhies* (Ellis & Bochner, 1992) or *collective autoethnographies* (Coia & Taylor, 2006), fall under the umbrella of ethnography research and involve the sharing of personal narratives by two or more individuals who share experience on a common happening (Pinner, 2018; Rose & Montakantiwong, 2018). For this research, we assumed the role of researcher and research participant, sharing and analyzing our experiences as we reflected on the impact our teaching practices have on the Spanish language and literacy development of the preservice bilingual teachers we instruct. For us, this research serves the purpose of stimulating in us professional growth and self-efficacy (Pinner, 2018). We opted for a duoethnography approach because we shared a similar interest in the topic. Having known each other for 10 years professionally, the interest in this research grew when we began discussing our roles as professors, specifically sharing ideas on how we assist the preservice teachers we prepare for the BTLPT and the EL/BLs they will soon teach through the content we teach in Spanish.

As Chang et al. (2012) explained, duoethnographies allow for the building of strong stories that allow the researchers and fellow readers to gain insight into the topic in ways that could not be accomplished alone; with increased data and sources come multiple and richer perspectives on the topic that elicit understanding and change within the researchers and the wider community. Through this research lies the hope of extending an ongoing conversation regarding the academic preparedness of bilingual teachers across, not just the state of Texas, but the nation. We invite you, the reader, to connect with our experiences so that you, too, can reflect on the topic and help move the conversation forward.

### Participants' Background

We are two university professors with very different linguistic backgrounds

who work teaching preservice bilingual teachers at different universities in South Texas.

**Gina's linguistic background.** I am a heritage language speaker born and raised in Texas. I grew up with Spanish (i.e., home, church Mass, when interacting with aunts/uncles, etc.). I also was exposed to English (i.e., cousins, television, radio, etc.). However, upon entry into the public school system, I was placed in a setting where English was spoken all day. With time, English became my dominant language (receptive and productive), and in Spanish, I retained only receptive abilities. Once I was admitted to the bilingual certification program, I began taking part of my undergraduate education classes in Spanish. I quickly realized that I needed to develop my Spanish abilities to be able to pass the state exam to be bilingual certified and be able to teach my future students. I decided I needed to begin immersing myself in the Spanish language.

Through self-study, by teaching in dual language programs, and by completing my master's degree in bilingual education through a program that taught part of its course work in Spanish, I continued to develop my Spanish over the course of 15 years. Over time, I have become proficient enough in the Spanish language to deliver content instruction to my students, all studying to be future bilingual teachers, as I once did. Knowing the hard work it takes to study and develop a language, I strive to create environments where my students, the vast majority also heritage language learners, can feel supported as they learn to teach students in Spanish. I seek for ways to help them prepare and feel confident in their language abilities so that they can make positive impacts on the students they teach.

**Zulmaris's linguistic background.** I was born and raised in Puerto Rico in a Spanish-speaking household. My PK–12 education was in a private Catholic school where all courses were taught in Spanish, except for English. From 6th to 12th grades, all oral instruction was delivered in Spanish; however, all textbooks were in English—except for Spanish, religion, and Puerto Rican history. It could be argued that this type of curriculum served as a tool to further affirm the dominating status of the English language. Maybe this type of education influenced my desire to move to the United States to obtain a higher education. Once in college, I decided to pursue bilingual education. This was when I experienced firsthand the different language registers of bilinguals—not that in Puerto Rico I had not been exposed to different language varieties and registers. I was fascinated by the fluidity of language mixing and honestly, at times, horrified because it was used everywhere—even in places that I thought the "standard" language should be spoken.

As I learned more about sociolinguistics, immersed myself in both languages, and became the mother of two bilingual children, I have come to validate the different language varieties of bilinguals. Now, at times, I even find myself mixing both languages. Since I started teaching bilingual children at the elementary level and now prepare future bilingual teachers, I have made it my cause to provide bilingual

students the linguistic tools to appropriate "high-level registers" of Spanish (Valdés & Geoffrion-Vinci, 1998) in a positive and self-empowering manner.

While our linguistic backgrounds are different, each plays a role in how we teach the preservice teachers in our charge. One thing we do share in common is the fact that we both have backgrounds in bilingual education and more than 10 years of experience preparing bilingual teachers for the field. Although we work at different universities, we serve similar populations: students who have communicative competence but need development in the Spanish language at an academic level. We also work in a region in which bilingual certified teachers are highly sought to meet the needs of the EL/BLs enrolled across the districts.

Our programs also share commonalities. Both programs provide instruction in a hybrid format. Students take portions of their course work online and the other portion face-to-face. The requirements to receive the degree and the language used for instruction are a bit different across institutions. The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley (UTRGV) has a bilingual degree plan that requires 126 credit hours, of which 60 are teacher preparation courses. Of the 60 education hours, 18 hours focus on bilingual education, all taught in Spanish or bilingually. Texas A&M Kingsville (TAMU-Kingsville) also has a hybrid program. The degree plan at TAMU-Kingsville has 123 hours; 54 hours are taken through the College of Education. Students at this university take a total of 15 hours on theory and best practices for ELs; two of the bilingual education specialization courses are taught in Spanish.

### Data Sources

The data for this study came from various sources, as suggested by Wall (2008). Traditionally, sources can be field notes, documents, artifacts, diaries, and interviews, which often complement self-data (i.e., written reflections/memory data, self-analysis, self-observation, and self-reflection), in addition to conversations and interactive data (Chang et al., 2012; Rose & Montakantiwong, 2018; Wall, 2008). Per the recommendation of Rose and Montakantiwong (2018), we chose varying sources to aid us as we explored our research question (See Table 1). Data for this study were concurrently gathered (Chang et al., 2012) and grouped into two broad categories: (a) data sources from students and (b) data sources from professors (see Table 1). It was important for us not to use only self-data but also to incorporate data sources from our students to add variety to the data, thus enriching it (Chang, 2008).

### Data Analyses

Our data went through a series of team and individual data analyses, following a repetitive and nonlinear pattern, as recommended by Chang et al. (2012). This allowed data analyses to happen in a spiral format, receiving multiple views, each time more in depth. A series of self-writing, reflecting, and analyses was followed

up with a team discussion, each time looking at the data through a different lens and driving question (see Figure 1; Chang et al., 2012). By reviewing the data individually, prior to convening as a team, we were able to delve more deeply into the data. This allowed each of us the opportunity to come to the table with our understanding, in addition to any lingering questions we wished to discuss with each other. We audio recorded our preliminary data review session and subsequent

**Table 1**
*Overview: Data Sources*

| Source | Authorship | Analysis | Description |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | *Sources from students* | |
| 1. Language-learning narratives | Other | Documents | This narrative focuses on promoting student self-reflection. Through the narrative, students share their stories, describing how they learned both languages, and reflect on personal experiences, pinpointing important events or persons that shaped their opinions of language and culture. |
| 2. Student reflections on lesson delivery | Other | Documents | This reflective piece provides the student the opportunity to reflect on the delivery of a Spanish language arts lesson *and* a class presentation on a reading strategy that was video recorded. |
| 3. Reflective narrative on language proficiency | Other | Documents | In this reflective narrative, students share their feelings on their academic preparedness and their abilities to deliver instruction in Spanish. |
| | | *Sources from professors* | |
| 4. Professors' reflections on in-class discussions and lesson delivery | Self | Self-reflection, self-analysis | Professors wrote weekly reflections on their week with the students, focusing on lesson delivery, interactions with students, and assignments turned in (memory data). |
| 5. Video recording of professors teaching | Self | Self-reflection, self-analysis, self-observation | Professors recorded their class sessions for later review. The focus of the recordings was to analyze practices/methods and student interactions, which informed the reflections. |

meetings. According to Cann and DeMeulenaere (2010), recording dialogue during data analysis results in a unique and supplemental data source—one that helps take note of conversational points that, once stated, can help guide later data analyses. Our open discussions provided us the opportunity to question and make comments, allowing us to "engage ourselves" with the data at a deeper level (Bahr, Monroe, & Mantilla, 2018; Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011; Rose & Montakantiwong, 2018).

An excerpt of the data for each driving question is shown in Figure 2 to provide you, the reader, a deeper understanding of how data were organized as well as how they were analyzed. To answer our research question—how are our practices impacting the students we teach?—we formulated two driving questions: (a) How do our students feel about the Spanish language as we expose them to it? and (b) How do we expose our students to the (Spanish) language valued by academic institutions, while building off their strengths? By analyzing our individual reflections, collaborative videos and reflections, student data, and conversational data (Cann &

**Figure 1**
*Data Analysis Process*
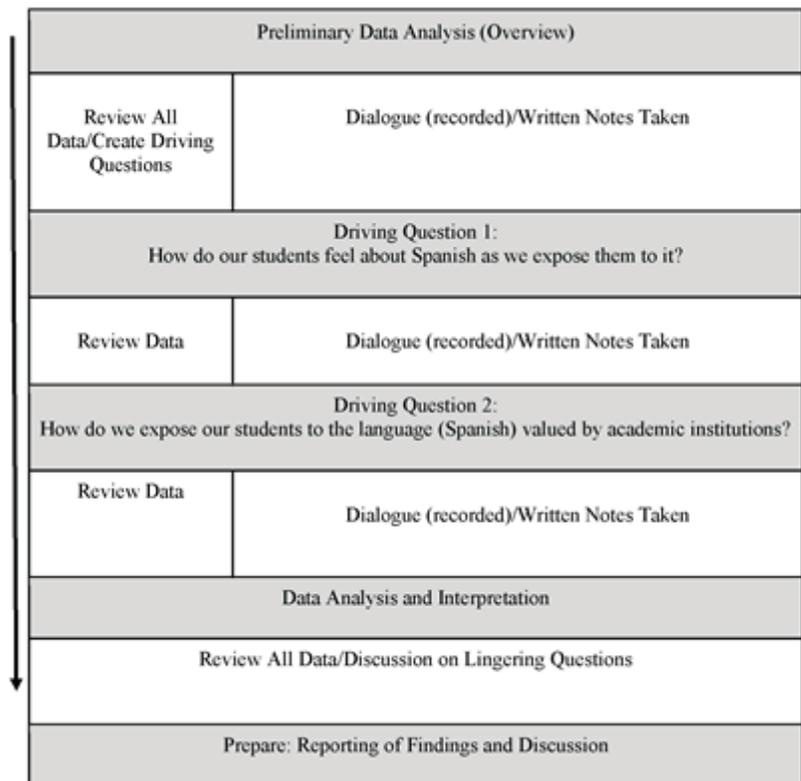
DeMeulenaere, 2010; Chang et al., 2012; Ngunjiri, Hernandez, & Chang, 2010), we answered our two driving questions, resulting in the two major themes we will

**Figure 2**
*Data Excerpt*

| *Driving question* | *Gina's weekly reflection excerpts* | *Zulmaris's weekly reflection excerpts* | *Data derived from students' documents* | *Conversational data* | *Lingering question(s)* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| How do we expose our students to the language (Spanish) valued by academic institutions, while building off their strengths? | "I am concerned with some of the students' Spanish language abilities. Two of them told me they rely so heavily on English that they find themselves writing assignments in English to get their thoughts in order and then writing it again in Spanish." | "I noticed students are mixing the languages. It is known that as a bilingual person, both languages mix in our brain. What is interesting for me is to see that, for the most part, during the presentations, most of the students mix the language during transition times, to give commands, or to talk to each other. However, they did not mix the language when defining and explaining the assigned concept." | The vast majority of the students noted a weakness in their Spanish grammar. This is funny, considering the students have taken Spanish II and I for Native Speakers prior to taking this class. (Source: student reflections on language abilities) | Students get a different type of exposure in our classes to the Spanish language because of our linguistic backgrounds. There is an unarguable point that those with Zulmaris, who had her formal education in Spanish, get a level of exposure that is higher than those who are taught by Gina. However, we also acknowledge that the professor serves as a guide and that students continue to develop/ refine their language abilities as the years progress. | Where do we find balance between "pushing" the use of Spanish on the students, but without silencing them? |

elaborate in the "Findings and Discussion" section: (a) leveraging Spanish through curricular activities and (b) banking on students' language resources. For each of these themes, a subsequent data analysis occurred, focused on each topic. After visiting the data in rounds and reviewing the conversational data, we conducted one final review to address lingering questions we still had on the themes explored before moving into reporting our findings.

## Findings and Discussion

In this study, we explored how our pedagogical practices impact the students we teach. More specifically, what we do to help promote our preservice teachers' language and literacy development in Spanish? Through the data analyses, we discovered that as we both engage our students in different learning activities, these tasks support the advancement of the Spanish language and are relevant to their future profession in the context of K–12 bilingual schooling. In this section, we present and discuss our findings in two themes: (a) leveraging Spanish through curricular activities and (b) banking on students' language resources.

### *Leveraging Spanish Through Curricular Activities*

In our initial round of inquiry and in the attempt to answer the big question—How do we give our students access to the level of Spanish needed for teaching?—we quickly noted that although we work for different university systems, we prepare our students in similar fashions. We ensure that our courses provide a variety of pedagogical and sociocultural activities in which our students take an active role in their preparation as future teachers. We both believe that for our preservice teachers to develop and expand their Spanish language proficiency, they need to use language in authentic ways. As a result, most of our planned activities follow Aquino-Sterling's (2016) suggestion for providing preservice bilingual teachers ample opportunities to continue to develop Spanish competencies for the specific task of teaching content-area knowledge and for communicating professionally within the bilingual school context. As such, pedagogical language competencies (i.e., *pedagogical Spanish*) focus on developing "two interrelated aspects of [Spanish] discourse performance: *the academic–pedagogical* (teaching content-area knowledge . . .) and *the professional* (communicating with students, parents, colleagues, administrators, and the greater bilingual school community)" (p. 51). Aquino-Sterling further explained that the *academic–pedagogical* aspect of "pedagogical language [Spanish] competencies" comprises discourse and literacy competencies necessary to prepare, teach, and assess students in Spanish, while the *professional* aspect of his proposed approach refers to the teacher's ability to communicate in Spanish with all stakeholders at a professional level of performance.

Table 2 describes the various pedagogical Spanish activities in which our stu-

**Table 2**
*Curricular Activities*

| Curricular activity and description | Target skill | Academic–pedagogical/professional performance[a] |
|---|---|---|
| *Language arts lesson*: Preservice teachers are required to teach a language arts lesson to school-age children when field experience is required; if no field is required, they present to classmates. | • Become familiar with state standards and the language arts textbook<br>• Gain an understanding of the lesson cycle<br>• Practice the Spanish language orally | Academic–pedagogical |
| *Teaching reflections*: Preservice teachers watch a recording of their teaching and write a reflection. | • Practice reflective thinking<br>• Practice Spanish writing | Academic–pedagogical and professional |
| *Timed oral, reading, and writing responses*: Students complete various tasks in a given amount of time focused on (a) Spanish oral language development (preservice teachers answer K–5 scenario-based questions): (b) Spanish reading development (narrative and expository text excerpts); (c) Spanish writing development (write lesson plans, letters, or essays where they have to take a stance on a topic related to the context of K–5). | • Develop the four language domains (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) in Spanish<br>• Refine knowledge on topics related to bilingual education | Academic–pedagogical and professional |
| *Coteaching*: Preservice teachers coteach with their professor on one of the class topics. | • Develop oral presentation skills in Spanish<br>• Refine knowledge on topics related to bilingual education<br>• Develop the four language domains in Spanish | Academic–pedagogical |
| *Fiction and nonfiction literature*: Preservice teachers are required to write an authentic children's book (narrative or expository). | • Developing writing skills in Spanish<br>• Opportunities to develop academic vocabulary in Spanish | Academic–pedagogical and professional |
| *Language-learning narratives*: Preservice teachers share their stories, describing how they learned both languages. | • Develop writing skills | Professional |
| *Journals*: Throughout the semester, preservice teachers keep a journal in which they reflect on readings, complete in-class assignments, and take class notes. | • Develop writing skills<br>• Use of academic vocabulary in context<br>• Refine knowledge on topics related to bilingual education | Academic–pedagogical |

[a]Aquino-Sterling (2016).

dents engaged throughout the semester as well as the skills and types of discourse required for each activity.

Through the data sources from students we have learned that, though for many their first language is Spanish, they "don't feel comfortable teaching in Spanish." Zulmaris wrote in her weekly reflection, "because they [the preservice teachers] learn Spanish at home they thought they could teach in Spanish; but they have realized that teaching in Spanish requires much more than knowing 'conversational' Spanish." However, this does not discourage them; on the contrary, many share their desire to learn more Spanish because they yearn to become more fluent. Likewise, Gina shares in one of her writings that for most of her students, "it comes as a shock to realize their language isn't developed to the level they initially thought. Nonetheless, as time passes students reinforced in their language reflections that the content they are learning, or reviewing, in class is helping them develop their Spanish language. Students who disclosed they felt weaker in Spanish shared the positive effect the class was having on their linguistic development."

This situation, found with both groups of preservice teachers, correlates with Boon and Polinsky's (2015) explanation of the language abilities of heritage Spanish speakers who might appear to have higher language competence because they can communicate orally. Other researchers might argue that this sentiment could stem from the students' own negative opinions of their heritage language proficiency fueled by outside sources (Alfaro & Bartolomé, 2017; Briceño et al., 2018; Ek et al., 2013). For preservice teachers who feel their language proficiency is not adequate for teaching, researchers Boon and Polinsky (2015) and Pascual y Cabo and Prada (2018) suggested instruction that requires them to identify areas of application within their future profession and to participate in autoassessments of their language abilities to help further them along linguistically and academically.

As we continued to conduct an in-depth analysis of our practices, we discovered that all of our activities required the use of all of the language domains—listening, speaking, reading, and writing—and were in line with the *academic–pedagogical* and *professional* discourse Aquino-Sterling (2016) strongly suggested. Supporting his suggestion, and that of other researchers, we expose our preservice teachers to high-level register Spanish (Alfaro & Bartolomé, 2017; Arroyo-Romano, 2016). We do this to facilitate the development of skills necessary to become effective and linguistically competent bilingual teachers.

Moreover, our students' reactions to our assignments validate the activities we do in class. During one of our dialogues, Zulmaris shared that students often commented that they were learning a lot with the activities, which were making them think on their feet and preparing them for the student teaching experiences they would have the following semester, as this was the first time they had to present a concept in Spanish to their fellow classmates. They mentioned that while previous classes focused on writing lesson plans, their current class with Zulmaris proved beneficial because it allowed them to get a feel for teaching in Spanish with scenarios

and topics that will be present in the K–12 setting. Gina had positive feedback from students also. She wrote in an entry for her weekly reflections,

> Students commented to me on the type of work and how it helped them grow. The cooperative assignments seem to have the best reviews, as students share they can rely on one another and help each other through the work . . . [and they] force[] them to talk in the Spanish language and use the vocabulary that we are using in the classroom during lessons and assignments again and again and again, thus helping them retain it. Students also commented on how the assignments that were authentic or hands-on helped them also learn more than traditional work (i.e., chapter summaries).

As professors, we teach with the focus of helping our students grow profession-ally so that they are prepared to help the BLs they will teach, but we also make sure they have the knowledge and language proficiency for the state exams. It is natural and ethically binding for us to question how efficient our instructional practices are in preparing them as future bilingual teacher professionals. Though it would be difficult to state the degree to which our courses help our students pass the state exam, there is evidence based on their responses that the courses have helped them further develop the language needed to teach in K–5 contexts.

### Banking on Students' Language Resources

While our students respond positively to our classroom practices, yet another area that warrants discussion is how we use the Spanish language in our classrooms while building each student from his or her individual language level. We acknowl-edge that, because of the area in which we live and work, we are both on a journey that maybe not many bilingual teacher educators have traveled. We live and teach in a community robbed of its mother tongue (Spanish). This same community is now is asking these preservice teachers to speak the "correct and standard" form of Spanish, the one valued by academic institutions (Valdés & Geoffrion-Vinci, 1998). To respond to this reality, we take a nondeficit approach, acknowledging and respecting our students' knowledge and language varieties while finding ways of building from their strengths. Moreover, Zulmaris allows preservice teachers, at times, to use their full linguistic repertoire in English, Spanish, or both (Kleyn, 2016; Musanti & Rodríguez, 2017; Palmer & Martínez, 2013), especially during discussions and hands-on activities.

Though, when our heritage language–speaking students are asked to communi-cate only in Spanish, it is common to observe that their sentence syntax is different from that of a Spanish native speaker. They often borrow from English, through (a) *loans*, or transfer of form and meaning (e.g., *pushar* = "push" → *empujar*); (b) *calques*, or transfer of meaning (e.g., *grado* = "letter grade" → *calificación o nota*); and (c) *code-switching*, or alternating the use of two languages in a conversation (Dumitrescu, 2015; Fairclough & Belpoliti, 2016).

Similar to what the aforementioned authors reported, our students too reported in their language-learning narratives and teaching reflections the use of code-switching. Unfortunately, though, many of them view their code-switching as a weakness rather than a common linguistic feature among bilinguals, as supported by Grosjean (1997) and Valdés (2005). In reviewing the preservice teachers' reflections on their lesson delivery, many commented on how they mixed both languages. This was also supported during our interactions with them in our classes. For both of us, the topic of code-switching emerged during oral discussion. We found that our students often mixed languages during transitional times, to give commands or to talk to each other. However, they did not mix the languages when defining and explaining the concept they were assigned to present on or when giving a formal presentation to the class. Through this behavior, we conclude that our students do know and use high-level register Spanish when required in presentations or major assignments; however, they revert to English in activities they feel are less formal. As professors responsible for helping these students prepare for the classroom, although they may code-switch, as bilingual individuals do, it is reassuring to us to see that in situations where they are expected to use Spanish at a higher level, they do so with confidence.

As we analyzed the data, we discovered that we help our students be more reflective, highlighting differences in their own language use. As Zulmaris recorded in her weekly journal, "once students are aware of the rules, differences, dialect, etc., they turn on the monitor and speak differently according to the appropriate venue." Various scholars have supported this idea and advised that to help heritage language learners continue developing their language, they need to be aware of how the linguistic features they use correspond, or not, to the features of the "standard" language (Alfaro & Bartolomé, 2017; Boon & Polinsky, 2015). More important is making them aware that language variety is normal among bilingual individuals, including heritage language speakers (Boon & Polinsky, 2015; Pascual y Cabo & Prada, 2018; Valdés, 2005).

It became evident that we have an unwritten priority to create a safe space where preservice teachers have the opportunity to explore their language and build from their strengths and knowledge. We teach completely in Spanish and intentionally model an academic-register Spanish required to teach in a bilingual K–12 context. We also support the preservice teachers' linguistic development by explicitly highlighting those areas of the language where we observe they are having more difficulty. Furthermore, we expect them to use Spanish to the best of their ability and focus on the preservice teachers' linguistic gains rather than the language proficiency they have yet to accomplish. However, as stated in one of the lingering questions we formulated, we still struggle with finding a balance between imposing the use of an academic register of Spanish on our students and silencing them as a result.

## Implications and Conclusion

While over the last few decades many studies have been published on bilingual preservice teachers developing abilities in Spanish and linguistic ideologies, there is a nascent trend to focus on curricular activities that will help prepare them. However, little has been written about the challenges faced and the language strategies and pedagogical activities used by professors in the field of bilingual education. To respond to this need, and the call of other researchers (Aquino-Sterling, 2016; Guerrero & Lachance, 2018; Guerrero & Valadez, 2011), we looked at our own practices.

As professors preparing future bilingual teachers, this duoethnography has helped us not only analyze our practices and how they impact our preservice teachers but also grow professionally. We learned from one another to better prepare the preservice teacher and, by default, help the EL/BLs they will soon teach. Even now, as we write down our findings and prepare them for publication, we still discuss this project at great length. One discussion point that still lingers is our own Spanish language proficiencies. We ask ourselves if our individual levels of Spanish language proficiency really play a part in how well prepared the preservice teachers who come through our classrooms leave. As Calderón and Díaz (1993) remarked, faculty often lack the ability and proficiency to teach in Spanish. However, in reviewing the findings, we firmly believe that regardless of language proficiency, whether they are native or heritage Spanish speakers, we make strides with our preservice teachers by building from their linguistic strengths. We acknowledge that as bilingual professors, we continue learning and refining our language and pedagogical practices as we plan our lessons.

In analyzing our practices, we formulated our own recommendations to share with you, the reader, based on our findings. Because we work with Spanish heritage language speakers, we strongly recommend creating an environment where the preservice teachers feel free to experiment and use language in authentic ways (i.e., teach lessons, dialogue among each other, provide oral and written responses to teaching scenarios). We also found that looking at our students' language abilities, regardless of their level of Spanish proficiency, in a nondeficient way helps students grow linguistically *and* pedagogically. Furthermore, creating activities where preservice teachers are placed in scenarios where they teach, present, and explain concepts and content in Spanish, whether with their classmates or with students during field observations, helps them develop not only *pedagogical* Spanish but their confidence as well. In addition, finding ways to continue to grow professionally in the Spanish language (i.e., studying syntax and grammar) not only helps the bilingual education professor working with the preservice teacher develop as an instructor but also helps the student, because the instructor can share his or her refined knowledge in the classroom.

One final point we would like to discuss with you, the reader, involves the overall preparedness of the preservice teachers with whom we work. While they

complete our assignments in Spanish, we understand that acquiring Spanish at an academic register takes time. We acknowledge that the approaches we take in our classrooms may assist them in getting started on the right track, but ultimately, the responsibility to continue their journey to further develop their pedagogical Spanish for the benefit of their students is passed on to them once our classes end—just as we, as their professors, continue to seek ways to grow professionally.

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