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APA STUDIES ON

Hispanic/Latino Issues in Philosophy

LORI GALLEGOS, EDITOR

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FROM THE GUEST EDITOR

Alexander V. Stehn
UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS RIO GRANDE VALLEY

This special issue of *APA Studies on Hispanic/Latino Issues in Philosophy* includes eight articles about how the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley (UTRGV) has undertaken historic work to become a place where students can take philosophy courses that are bilingual, bicultural, and biliterate. From 2023 to 2024, our work was accelerated by the "Pluralizing Philosophical Languages and Cultures in the South Texas Borderlands" project sponsored by the APA's Diversity and Inclusiveness Grant Program, the Society for the Advancement of American Philosophy (SAAP), and six organizational units at UTRGV: Philosophy Department, College of Liberal Arts, Faculty Success, Office for Bilingual Integration, Center for Bilingual Studies, and College of Engineering & Computer Science. Our localized aim was to integrate Spanish-English bilingualism and Mexican American biculturalism into a regular rotation of a dozen philosophy courses designed and taught by a team of eight UTRGV faculty. We also thought that our project could demonstrate "proof of concept" for PB3: Philosophy (P) courses designed to cultivate bilingualism, biculturalism, and biliteracy (B3) may be feasible wherever there is at least one B3 philosopher and enough B3 students. Given the twenty-five-year history of *APA Studies on Hispanic/Latino Issues in Philosophy* and at least 631 Hispanic-Serving Institutions in the US (21 percent of all colleges and universities), we hope to inspire other philosophical imaginations and experiments by sharing what we have learned and done in the borderlands of South Texas.

Five articles were authored by the UTRGV faculty who wrote the APA grant proposal and report: Alex Stehn, Danny Marrero, Cynthia Paccacerqua, Christopher Gómez, and Dahlia Guzman. One article was written by Mariana Alessandri, another UTRGV faculty who, along with Melisa Vivanco and Bradley Warfield, joined the grant's authors to participate in its core activities. Carlos Sánchez, Professor of Philosophy at San José State University and former editor of this journal (2010–2020), contributed a written version of his keynote address that publicly kicked off our project in 2024. Sara Azúa, who has taken multiple PB3 courses as an undergraduate majoring in both Philosophy and English while minoring in Mexican American Studies, contributed an article exploring the life-changing impacts of B3 courses.

The articles appear in the following conceptual order, but each is self-contained if readers prefer to skip around: 1) An article that Cynthia Paccacerqua and I co-authored—"*Una historia oficial*: Pluralizing Philosophical Languages and Cultures in the South Texas Borderlands"—provides an institutional and departmental history of what happened before and leading up to the grant; 2) Carlos Sánchez's "*Vivir, pensar y filosofar en español*: Philosophy, Interpretation, and the Failures of Translation" reflects on the value of thinking and philosophizing in Spanish by considering English translations, why we need them, and what is lost through them; 3) Mariana Alessandri's "Introduction to Latin American Philosophy in 2011 and 2026: Notes from a Bilingual Ungrading Neophyte" compares the mostly monolingual and graded course she taught in 2011 with the bilingual and more "ungraded" 2026 version; 4) Danny Marrero's "Teaching Feminist Jurisprudence in the US-Mexico Borderlands" foregrounds place-based and culturally relevant considerations for teaching in conversation with Latin American and Latina Critical Feminisms; 5) Dahlia Guzman's "Bilingual *Bildung* on the Border: Teaching Philosophy in Spanish and English" links the philosophical relevance of Spanish-English bilingualism and Mexican American biculturalism to ancient Greek education and modern German ideals of ethical self-formation; 6) Christopher Gómez's "Teaching Philosophy Bilingually through *Ser y Estar*" demonstrates how Spanish-speaking students have certain affordances built into their everyday language that can be drawn out to teach them to philosophize; 7) Sara Azúa's "*Mi lengua es mi hogar*: A Chicana's Reflections on Language, Identity, History, and the Self" is a powerful *autohistoria-teoría* that reveals what is at stake in a bilingual, bicultural, and biliterate (B3) education, especially for Hispanic, Mexican American, or Latinx students; and 8) my article "Practicing Philosophical Bilingualism, Biculturalism, and Biliteracy (PB3): A Collective Transformation" further narrates and explores the transformations I have witnessed in my colleagues and experienced myself through our PB3 project.

On behalf of the UTRGV philosophy faculty and students participating in the "Pluralizing Philosophical Languages and Cultures in the South Texas Borderlands" project, I wish to thank Lori Gallegos for her support in putting this special issue together and invite our readers to join us in the work of pluralizing philosophical languages and cultures.

CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS

APA Studies on Hispanic/Latino Issues in Philosophy is accepting contributions for the spring 2027 issue. Our readers are encouraged to submit original work on that topic

or on any topic related to Hispanic/Latinx thought, broadly construed. We publish original, scholarly treatments, as well as syllabi, conference reports, book reviews, and interviews. Please prepare articles for anonymous review.

ARTICLES
All submissions should be accompanied by a short biographical summary of the author. Electronic submissions are preferred. All essay submissions should be limited to 5,000 words (twenty double-spaced pages) and must follow the APA guidelines for gender-neutral language and *Chicago Manual of Style* formatting. All articles undergo anonymous review.

BOOK REVIEWS
Book reviews in any area of Hispanic/Latino philosophy, broadly construed, are welcome. Submissions should be accompanied by a short biographical summary of the author. Book reviews may be short (500 words) or long (1,500 words). Electronic submissions are preferred.

DEADLINES
The deadline for the spring issue is November 15. Authors should expect a decision by January 15. The deadline for the fall issue is May 1. Authors should expect a decision by June 15. Please send all articles, book reviews, queries, comments, or suggestions electronically to the editor, Lori Gallegos, at LoriGallegos@txstate.edu, Department of Philosophy, Comal Building 102, Texas State University, 601 University Drive, San Marcos, TX 78666.

FORMATTING GUIDELINES
The *APA Studies* adhere to *The Chicago Manual of Style*. Use as little formatting as possible. Details like page numbers, headers, footers, and columns will be added later. Use tabs instead of multiple spaces for indenting. Use italics instead of underlining. Use an "em dash" (—) instead of a double hyphen (--). Use endnotes instead of footnotes. Examples of proper endnote style: John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Harvard University Press, 1971), 90. See Sally Haslanger, "Gender and Race: (What) Are They? (What) Do We Want Them to Be?" *Noûs* 34 (2000): 31–55.

ARTICLES

Una historia oficial: Pluralizing Philosophical Languages and Cultures in the South Texas Borderlands

Cynthia M. Paccacerqua
UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS RIO GRANDE VALLEY

Alexander V. Stehn
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La historia oficial nunca acaba de revelarse. Pero hay que empezar desde un momento y un lugar para poder contarla como una historia viviente. En esta ocasión contamos una historia oficial juntos.[1] *Somos colegas desde hace dieciséis años, y aunque con experiencias muy distintas, se puede decir que vivimos estos años en tándem. Nos une un momento histórico del antes y después en una misma capacidad de* Assistant Professor *en la facultad de filosofía. No nos conocíamos de antes y nos sorprendió que habíamos escrito sobre las obras de Enrique Dussel.* There was no longer the need to imagine that two tenure-track philosophers with expertise in Latin American Philosophy could be hired in 2010 by the same US university.

In what follows, we take our hires as a historical reference point to develop a story that shows how the broader initiative to apply for the APA's Diversity and Inclusiveness Grant came about. The funded proposal—"Pluralizing Philosophical Languages and Cultures in the South Texas Borderlands" (2023–2024)—and report on its immediate curricular, pedagogical, scholarly, and community outcomes are available on the APA website.[2] But there were institutional and departmental steps that laid the groundwork for the project's possibility. And from the moment we arrived, we began to assemble other accidental coincidences with intentional, strategic acts born out of thoughtful deliberation and collaboration with not just other philosophers but also an interdisciplinary group building a vibrant Mexican American Studies program on campus.

Cynthia: "The original intent of this argument, which I presented at our grant's public launch on February 9, 2024,[3] was to establish how our Philosophy Department had long been doing the type of work that The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley (UTRGV) later recognized and supported under its B3 (Bilingual, Bicultural, Biliterate) Institute. I wanted our efforts to be recorded in our institution's history and dispel the myth that philosophy is inherently uninterested in pluralizing its languages and cultures. In this co-authored iteration, however, the significance of this past changed in ways that we are still processing."

Alex: "We are now reaching much further back, but also forward and wider, toward communities that are further from us in both time and space."

Cynthia: "Deleuze's *immemorial* comes to mind. It names the form in which past events constituting our present are accessible, that which can only be remembered and yet we have no first-person memories."[4]

Our article is divided into two major sections. In the first, we focus our story on the ongoing (re)founding of our institution—its students, faculty, and curriculum—using both local archives and available scholarship to fill in details chronologically. In the second, we also draw upon our own memories to tell the story of our more direct and intentional efforts at "Pluralizing Philosophical Languages and Cultures in the South Texas Borderlands" from 2010 to present.

I. AN IMMEMORIAL PAST

A. EDINBURG COLLEGE (1927–1952)
In 1927, when Edinburg College was founded near UTRGV's present-day Edinburg campus, the Spanish-speaking and increasingly bilingual ethnic Mexicans of the Rio Grande Valley (RGV) had been here much longer than the English-

speaking and mostly monolingual Anglo newcomers. Yet despite the further fact that ethnic Mexicans also constituted a numerical majority, the Anglo founders of this regional junior college would have almost certainly considered the RGV's Mexicans to be "foreigners" who spoke Spanish as a "foreign language,"[5] since Texas Anglos frequently racialized and othered Texas Mexicans in ways that severely restricted their educational opportunities.[6] The 1927 "Announcement of Plans, Objectives, Faculty and Courses" said that Edinburg College was dedicated to "Bringing Higher Educational Advantages to Every Young Man, and Every Young Woman of the Valley," but less than 10 percent of students enrolled during its first decade were Mexican American, and ethnic Mexicans comprised an average of 14 percent of each graduating class for the first twenty-five years despite consistently outnumbering Anglos more generally across the region.

As the first period of segregated education for ethnic Mexicans (1900–1950) ended,[7] the US government instituted inter-American and intercultural educational programs that moderated but did not radically change the dominant Anglocentric ideology. In 1950, Edinburg Regional College announced plans for expansion to our much larger present-day campus a few blocks west from the original four-acre site based on the tremendous enrollment increase following WWII.[8] President Roger Ward asked students for their help in establishing what he called a "Pan-American Regional College" that would "extend good-neighbor policies and blend the cultural, artistic, and helpful elements of our two great cultures and civilizations."[9] At least rhetorically, this is the first reference to what might be feasibly called "bicultural" education at one of UTRGV's legacy institutions. Black students were also admitted for the first time, although they were segregated from "Latin" and Anglo students.[10]

B. PAN AMERICAN COLLEGE (1952–1970)

In 1952, Edinburg Regional College became Pan American College (PAC), a four-year college that published its inaugural course catalog (1952–1953) in both English and Spanish, an institutional feat that has never been repeated.[11] Although Mexican Americans constituted 70.7 percent of Hidalgo County's overall population in the 1950 census, Mexican American enrollment at PAC in 1952 was still only 38 percent of the student body.[12] And, since this occurred during the second period of Chicano education in the era of segregation (1950–1965),[13] the educational opportunities offered to Mexican Americans were less progressive than they might appear at first glance. The recent admission of Black students and increasing ethnic Mexican enrollment coincided historically with the creation of two separate tracks, "one in vocational education or 'Industrial Arts' and the other in traditional academics becoming almost two colleges."[14]

Most students enrolled in the vocational track that included trades like carpentry and auto mechanics were Mexican, whereas Anglos predominated in the traditional academic track. The further fact that Spanish was presented as a "second language" in the traditional academic track—even though it was undoubtedly the first language of most people in the RGV, i.e., Mexican Americans—further indicates the Anglocentrism of the curriculum. Twelve years of PAC Bulletins (1953–1954 to 1964–1965) contained this statement: "In the second language of this region 'where two cultures blend,' we say 'Bienvenido.'"

By 1968, the year that Gloria E. Anzaldúa graduated from PAC, Mexican Americans finally constituted a numerical majority, 59.6 percent of the student body,[15] but it would take the Chicano movement, not just PAC's geographical location and majority Mexican American student enrollment, to change the curriculum during "the militant and reformist era" (1965–1975) of Chicano education.[16] Below, we draw upon local archives to provide chronological glimpses of these shifts.

1960 – From 1960 through 1977, Theodore Clark (BA, Mississippi College; BD, ThM, ThD, New Orleans Baptist Seminary) served as PAC's sole faculty member in Philosophy.

1966 – From 1966 through 1977, PAC's annual catalogs featured a full-page mission statement under the heading PHILOSOPHY: "Pan American College is a democratic institution which is dedicated to the preservation and extension of responsible human freedom and to the enlightenment of the Rio Grande Valley community." It named PAC's obligation "to help perpetuate the best American cultural heritage and to blend with it the outstanding features of Latin-American culture, and to propagate the best that is known and thought in the world." But it also placed more emphasis on the belief "that every student should be stimulated to know and cherish his American heritage." As with Spanish being positioned as a "second language," it also appears that the "outstanding features of Latin-American culture" were desirable provided that students, the majority of whom were Mexican Americans, understood their culture's (second) place.[17]

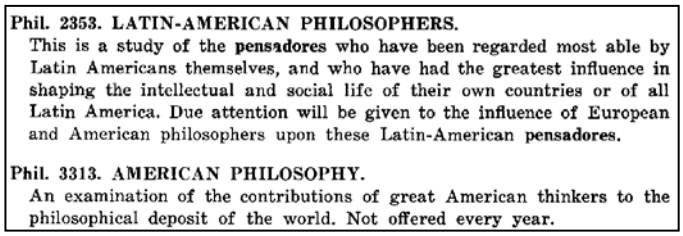
1966 – PAC establishes the Inter-American Institute to coordinate and promote "all activities and programs in the Inter-American field" and establish PAC as one of its outstanding centers.

1967 – PAC begins offering an interdisciplinary BA in Inter-American Studies whereby students develop "a wide general background in the history, geography, economics, languages, and literature of Hispanic America, and of Mexico in particular."[18] However, the degree is still framed in Anglocentric terms, especially with regard to Spanish: "Special emphasis will be placed upon achievement of sufficient knowledge of the Spanish language [. . .] to open the doors of cultural understanding and appreciation of Latin America to non-native speakers."

1968 – PHIL 2353 Latin-American Philosophers appears for the first time, right above PHIL 3313 American Philosophy.[19] Inter-American Studies students must choose between PHIL 2353 and GEOG 3333 Latin-American Geography.

Note how the Inter-American Studies approach still ignores or covers up PAC's majority Mexican American student body insofar as the Anglocentric geography of reason is extended to Latin American countries and their

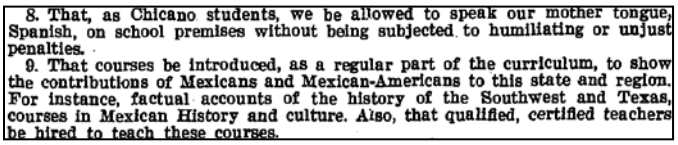
pensadores, especially as they are influenced by "European and American philosophers," leaving Mexican Americans outside the philosophical project by implicitly positioning them as neither Latin American nor American.



Phil. 2353. LATIN-AMERICAN PHILOSOPHERS.
This is a study of the **pensadores** who have been regarded most able by Latin Americans themselves, and who have had the greatest influence in shaping the intellectual and social life of their own countries or of all Latin America. Due attention will be given to the influence of European and American philosophers upon these Latin-American **pensadores.**

Phil. 3313. AMERICAN PHILOSOPHY.
An examination of the contributions of great American thinkers to the philosophical deposit of the world. Not offered every year.

1968 – In Edcouch-Elsa, roughly fourteen miles east of PAC, approximately two hundred high school students walk out of their classes after the superintendent refused to meet with them. Among their fifteen demands, the eighth and ninth are particularly relevant:[20]



8. That, as Chicano students, we be allowed to speak our mother tongue, Spanish, on school premises without being subjected to humiliating or unjust penalties.
9. That courses be introduced, as a regular part of the curriculum, to show the contributions of Mexicans and Mexican-Americans to this state and region. For instance, factual accounts of the history of the Southwest and Texas, courses in Mexican History and culture. Also, that qualified, certified teachers be hired to teach these courses.

1969 – The 1969–1970 PAC Bulletin lists a new eighteen-hour Minor in Philosophy.

That same year, issues of *The Pan American*—the official student newspaper of UTRGV's legacy institutions in Edinburg from 1954 to 2015—report early attempts to bring together the Inter-American Studies [Area Studies] and Mexican-American Studies [Ethnic Studies] approaches. For example, PAC's Inter-American Institute hosted its annual conference on "The Role of the Mexican American in the History of the Southwest."[21]

At this conference, three University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP) students presented on how they had worked with faculty to start a Mexican American Studies program at UTEP. Under the headline "'Chicano' Studies?'" in *The Pan American*,22 Richard Codina reported on the UTEP students' post-presentation meeting with Tony Balderas, PAC's senior class president, which resulted in "the creation of the Texas Board on Mexican-American Studies, made up for the time being by Pan American College and University of Texas El Paso." A second column by Codina covered the "newly-formed Pan American Student Committee for Mexican-American Studies" led by Balderas, which was working "to assemble a practical [MAS] program suitable for Pan American."

Two weeks later, this newly formed committee spoke with Dr. Severo Gómez, Assistant Commissioner of Education with the Texas Education Agency (TEA).[23] Dr. Gómez's presentation on bilingual education posited that, without a corresponding bicultural component, many Mexican Americans will still feel "different and inferior." He thus argued for college-level courses that "deal with the Mexican-American from the historical, social, psychological, political, educational, and cultural perspectives" to encourage "Mexican-Americans to take a pride in themselves and their way of life." Courses that help all students "to be comfortable in both the [A]nglo and Mexican-American cultures" and recognize "the dynamic and always changing [. . .] exchange of cultures," made PAC "the ideal institution to launch a bicultural and bilingual program."[24]

1970 – A MECHA (Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán) chapter is officially established at PAC. In "MECHA Hopes to Promote Culture," Richard Codina explained that the fledgling student organization hoped "to establish a cultural centre, a multi-purpose facility which would house art, music, and literature which have contributed to the Mexican-American culture."[25]

PAC's Board of Regents approves a Mexican American Studies program. As with most ethnic studies programs nationwide, PAC's program was the direct result of local student activism.

C. PAN AMERICAN UNIVERSITY (1971–1989)

1971 – PAC is renamed Pan American University (PAU) upon achieving university status. After forty-four years, the catalog finally offers one academic program pitched directly at "the Mexican-American student." An interdisciplinary Mexican American Studies minor promised to give "the Mexican-American student a more appreciable understanding of the heritage of his ancestry and its contribution to his present environment."[26] Three new courses "which deal specifically and directly with the Mexican-American" appear: HIST 3373 Mexican-American Heritage, ENG 3316 The Mexican-American in American Fiction, and SOC 4323 The Mexican-American People. These new "Impact Courses" supplement the pre-existing "Support Courses," which are "concerned with Mexico, aspects of its culture, and Spanish."

1976 – *El Sol*, an independent PAU student newspaper, publishes its first edition. Readers can feel the weight of the existing cultural conditions and the self-awareness of the extraordinary collective power and will involved when the editors write: "we are willing to go to the extreme of creating our own newspaper" for the purpose of meeting Mexican American needs both inside and beyond the boundaries of the university in the community at large. *El Sol* is somewhat English-dominant, but unlike *The Pan American*, *El Sol* seamlessly integrates Spanish articles from the very first issue without positioning Spanish as a "second" or "foreign" language.

1979 – Sociology faculty Dr. Chad Richardson starts the "Borderland Research Project" whereby PAU students conduct bilingual and bicultural research on local social and cultural groups. Twenty years later, Richardson integrated this student-conducted research in *Batos, Bolillos, Pochos, and Pelados: Class and Culture in the South Texas Border*.[27]

1983 – The newly founded Latin American Studies Center reforms the old Inter-American Studies BA, replacing it with a Latin American Studies major "to permit students to combine Humanities and Social Sciences" with "professional areas" like Business and Health.[28]

1985 – *El Sol's* September 16th editorial addresses the US's "internal cultural imperialism" with this poignant example: "Chicanos have for years challenged the school system in the Southwest, to allow Spanish to be spoken alongside English in the classroom. Also, that the dominant society also learn the Spanish language so that Anglos and Chicanos can better understand each other. But no, the dominant people have a complex of superiority that is an obstacle in creating a truly bilingual and bicultural society in the Southwest U.S.A. Cual es la onda? porque nosotros tenemos que aprender Ingles, y ellos no quieren aprender el Español, cual es la diferencia? Si vamos a coexistir necesitamos que entendernos."[29]

1987 – The History Department submits a "Proposal for a Major in Philosophy" with the only full-time Philosophy faculty, David K. Carter, listed as the primary contact.[30] As part-time faculty "borrowed" from other academic areas, the proposal identifies Raymond Welch from History as well as Mark Glazer, an anthropologist and folklorist whose research and teaching are locally grounded and aimed at serving the South Texas borderlands.[31] The proposal notes a growing demand for "philosophers in the United States who are Mexican American" and suggests meeting "the educational and cultural needs of both the local and wider community" through "development of its activities in the area of Latin American Thought."[32]

1988 – A BA program in philosophy appears for the first time with two full-time faculty: 1) David K. Carter (Yale PhD, 1982) and 2) Robert L. Frodeman (Penn State PhD, 1988).[33] Sixteen PHIL courses are listed, half offered only "on demand."

D. UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS PAN AMERICAN (1990–2010)

1990 – By joining the University of Texas System, PAU became the University of Texas-Pan American (UTPA). Its initial Mission Statement echoes PAC's liberal arts tradition by linking an educated citizenry to a free democratic society and calling for "full awareness and appreciation of the multi-lingual, multi-cultural, and multi-faceted world in which we live."[34]

Philosophy is now named in the "History and Philosophy Department." The major requires Intro, Logic, Metaphysics, Ethics or Social Philosophy, Theories of Knowledge or Advanced Logic, and a three-course History of Philosophy. For the next fifteen years, the number of full-time philosophy faculty (three) and courses (sixteen) remains roughly the same. Noteworthy faculty hired in the 1990s include Kenneth L. Buckmann (1992–2015) and Thomas Pearson (1994–present).

2004 to 2006 – To meet steadily increasing demand for philosophy courses as a result of changes made to General Education Requirements, UTPA begins a streak of tenure-stream hiring that includes Gregory Gilson (2004–present), Cynthia Jones (2004–present), Stephen Leach (2004–2025), Susana Nuccetelli (2005–2007), Gary Seay (2005–2007), Julian Cole (2006–2008), and Cory Wimberly (2006–present).[35]

2006 – Cory Wimberly began hosting philosophers to give talks that reflected Anzaldúa's legacy. The idea of doing something to honor her had been under discussion among junior faculty across the College of Arts and Humanities for some time.[36]

2006 to 2007 – Susana Nuccetelli and Gary Seay host an NEH Workshop: "Humanities Perspectives on Latin American Thought and Philosophy." Nine full-day sessions featuring outside scholars including Jorge Gracia, Ofelia Schutte, and Ilan Stavans are held at UTPA.[37]

Gregory Gilson, who participated in this NEH Workshop, becomes Interim Editor of the *APA Newsletter on Hispanic/Latino Issues in Philosophy* (Spring 2007 to Spring 2008) and calls for a special issue on teaching Latin American Philosophy. The Fall 2007 issue contains ten brief articles and/or syllabi for teaching Latin American Philosophy.[38]

2007 – These curriculum changes and continuities appear in the 2007–2009 UTPA Catalog:

Cory Wimberly creates PHIL 3376 Feminist Theories cross-listed with Women's Studies, which offers a minor. This is the first time "feminism" appears in Philosophy's catalog, the curricular threshold across which feminist philosophy enters UTPA's philosophy program by name, but without explicitly including Chicanas or any other ethnic identity.

The cross-listed HIST/WMST 3375 Women and History specifically lists "Mexican American-Chicana History and Latina History" as suggested topics in "the growing and diverse field of women's and gender history."

"Latin American Studies" continues to be offered as an interdisciplinary BA in the College of Arts and Humanities, with optional concentrations in "Culture, Society and Health," "International Relations," or "Mexican and Border Studies." PHIL 3380 Latin American Thought is an elective, and two courses (six hours) are required in "Intermediate Spanish for Native Speakers" above and beyond the single language course (three hours) that meets UTPA's language requirement.

"Mexican-American Heritage," also sometimes identified as "Mexican-American Studies,"[39] continues to be offered as an interdisciplinary BA with required courses in History (twenty-four hours), Sociology and Anthropology (twenty-four hours), and Spanish (eighteen hours)—making it unusually credit-intensive (fifty-six hours) compared to traditional humanities majors like Philosophy, which required thirty-six hours of philosophy courses. However, no PHIL courses are included in the Mexican-American Heritage major.

2008 – Adriel Trott is hired as Assistant Professor (2008–2013) and creates the "Gloria E. Anzaldúa Speaker Series in Philosophy" after obtaining the formal legal rights to name the series after Anzaldúa.[40]

2009 – PHIL 2380 Latin American Philosophy, PHIL 3379 Chicana and Latin American Feminisms, and PHIL 3381 Latin American Positivism appear in UTPA's 2009–2011 catalog.

PHIL 2380 Latin American Philosophy replaced PHIL 3380 Latin American Thought, listed since 1979. Susana Nuccetelli, who was born in Argentina, bilingual in English and Spanish, and a specialist in Latin America Philosophy, successfully advocated to change the course name. The department renumbered it as a lower-division course and successfully added it to UTPA's core curriculum. Nuccetelli's 2007 departure left the department without anyone qualified to teach it.

PHIL 3379 Chicana and Latin American Feminisms was created by Cory Wimberly. The department requests an additional tenure-track line to teach the course going forward.

PHIL 3381 Latin American Positivism was created by Greg Gilson to focus on "the main philosophic movement in Latin America from the early 1800s to the 1900s," although he never taught the course.

2009 – UTPA begins searches for two tenure-track faculty to begin in Fall 2010:

Alex Stehn is hired for the position listing "AOS: American Philosophy (Pragmatism and/or Latin American)" and begins teaching the American and Latin American Philosophy courses that had been on the books in one form or another since 1968, as well as Latin American Positivism.

Cynthia Paccacerqua is hired for the position "in the fields of Feminism and/or Kant," with a preference for candidates whose work also "reflects an interest in Chicano or Latin American studies." In Spring 2011, she teaches PHIL 3379 Chicana and Latin American Feminisms.

To summarize conditions during the academic year of our arrival, there was a Philosophy program with: 1) one lower-division and two upper-division courses centered on Latin American Philosophy, one of which explicitly brought out the intellectual contributions of Chicanas from under the Latin American umbrella; 2) one Feminist Theories course whose description made no reference to other intersectional identities; and 3) the "Gloria E. Anzaldúa Speaker Series in Philosophy." Beyond the Philosophy program, UTPA also offered: 1) a Latin American Studies BA that included PHIL 3380 Latin American Thought; 2) a Mexican American Studies BA that included PHIL 3379 Chicana and Latin American Feminisms; and 3) an interdisciplinary approach to Mexican American anthropology and folklore embodied by the work of Mark Glazer.

However, as far as we know, none of these courses were taught bilingually and biculturally.

II. OUR MEMORIAL PAST (2010–PRESENT)

We hit the ground running and began taking intentional steps to earn tenure through our research, teaching, and service. The APA grant is neither possible nor legible without this period. The team of eight bilingual philosophy faculty, who integrated Spanish-English bilingualism/biliteracy and Mexican American biculturalism into a regular rotation of a dozen PHIL courses with APA grant support,[41] grew in part through our direct and intentional efforts from 2010 to present.

Cynthia: "Necesito retomar el tema anterior. Mis credenciales correspondían perfectamente al anuncio: Feminism and/or Kant, with preference for 'an interest in Chicano or Latin American studies.' Pero lo que yo traía no era solo un interés, sino también una formación vivida como hija de argentinos que emigraron a este país para trabajar, primera generación como muchos de mis estudiantes. I had found Anzaldúa and Chicana/o thought through Latino Studies with Renato Rosaldo at Stanford while writing on Enrique Dussel. My Latina identity was both transnational and bicultural. I carried these borderlands tensions into a curriculum with only one course to receive them. My 'qualifications' to teach Chicana and Latin American Feminisms bilingually were questioned despite my bilingual background, graduate coursework in both Latino and Latin American Studies, and published academic translations. My rewrite of the course description was lost to confusion over differences between Chicana, Latina, and Latin American feminisms. Though grateful for the opportunity to teach Feminist Theories, I was tracked into feminism, reframing my philosophical identity. Un sentido común bilingüe y bicultural no existía en filosofía, pero lo creamos con mis estudiantes—dentro del aula, en los *movie nights*, grupos de lectura, estudios independientes. Nos fuimos dando coraje."

Alex: "Hasta aquí hemos hablado como si fuéramos dos, Cynthia y Alex, pero en realidad éramos tres porque yo llegué con Mariana Alessandri, mi esposa y colega. Nos conocimos en Penn State en 2004, nos casamos en Nueva York en 2007, y nos mudamos a Coyoacán, México (2007–2008), a Salamanca, España (2008–2009), y de regreso a Penn State (2009–2010). Cuando me ofrecieron el puesto en UTPA, Mariana se estaba entrevistando para otro puesto de Assistant Professor a más de 2,000 millas de distancia. Yo tenía que responderle a la universidad antes de que Mariana recibiera una oferta, así que decidimos mudarnos juntos a Texas. Thanks to luck, careful strategizing, hard work, Mariana's tenure-track job offer elsewhere, and supportive colleagues, she went from Part-time Lecturer (2010–2012) at UTPA to Visiting Assistant Professor (2012–2013) to Assistant Professor through a job ad seeking expertise in 'Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Philosophy, Mexican-American Studies and/or Religious Studies.' As early as Spring 2011, Mariana taught PHIL 2380 Introduction to Latin American Philosophy."[42]

Beyond the philosophy program, Mexican American Studies (MAS) was where we—Cynthia, Alex, and Mariana—encountered the most faculty and student energy for culturally relevant curricula, teaching, and learning. Technically, the Mexican American Studies program was housed in the Department of History and Philosophy, but with approximately twenty-five full-time faculty in History compared to ten full-time faculty in Philosophy,[43] Philosophy was overshadowed by History, and Mexican American Studies received even less departmental support with zero full-time faculty lines and a budget of $2,000 contingent upon majority faculty approval. In 2008, a self-appointed committee of untenured Latina faculty including Stephanie Alvarez (Spanish), Emmy Pérez (English), and

Sonia Hernandez (History) began working to overhaul and revive the BA program in MAS, which had only graduated three students between 1980 and 2009. The faculty would have called the revitalized program "Chicano/a Studies," but UTPA students expressed a clear preference for "Mexican American Studies" when they unofficially approved the new degree plan at UTPA's 2009 Festival of International Books and Arts.[44]

By 2011, the new MAS Minor, BA, and Graduate Certificate programs were just getting started, and student enrollment had already increased substantially to more than twenty majors. As a unique and evolving area of academic inquiry with its own body of scholarship, epistemologies, and pedagogies, the reinstitutionalization of MAS took place through the creation of: 1) a MAS course prefix; 2) three foundational courses: MAS 2301 Introduction to Mexican American Studies, MAS 4300 Learning through Reflective Service, and MAS 4392 Special Topics; and 3) greater curricular flexibility since any course with "a minimum of 50% MAS content" could now count as a MAS elective.[45]

Unfortunately, just as MAS was becoming a more autonomous and successful degree program locally, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) threatened to eliminate the BA in MAS due to its low graduation numbers. This led UTPA's Mexican American Studies Club to create the Tejan@ Movement for Education, which protested the elimination by organizing student walkouts, faculty teach-ins, and a campus event featuring local poets and activists on March 31, 2011. In response, UTPA President Robert Nelsen committed to establishing and modestly funding a Mexican American Studies Center, forty-one years after students had first requested a program on campus. By 2013, the Center for Mexican American Studies (CMAS) was open; the THECB had decided not to eliminate the MAS BA, which now had over fifty majors; and a new Master of Arts in Interdisciplinary Studies (MAIS) degree with a concentration in MAS became available.

From our 2010 arrival through the transition to UTRGV in 2015, Cynthia, Mariana, and Alex became increasingly involved in the institutional advancement of MAS, each in varying capacities: yearly retreats to draft the program's mission and build community among faculty and students; drafting strategic plans and degree proposals; hosting external reviewers and job candidates; mentoring the student research assistants who digitized *El Sol* and revived the *Rio Bravo* journal; assisting with the coordination of *Trae tu Lonchera and El Retorno*. What matters most here is not what each of us did individually, but the collective energy generated, and the way that energy flowed back into Philosophy. We intentionally designed and cross-listed our courses to meet the 50 percent MAS-content minimum, contributing curriculum for MAS students to take. In 2013, Cynthia also became coordinator of the Anzaldúa Speaker Series. With support from CMAS, we began shaping it into more of a public forum where people could philosophize about and/or from the social, economic, linguistic, and cultural circumstances of Mexican Americans and others who live in transnational and transcultural borderlands.

On August 31, 2015, the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley (UTRGV) began offering courses as the result of a merger between UT–Pan American, UT–Brownsville, and a new medical school. From the outset, UTRGV publicly committed to becoming a *Bilingual, Bicultural, and Biliterate* (B3) university, institutional language that slowly renamed and reshaped the work some of us were already doing while opening new possibilities. For UTRGV's Philosophy Department, this was decisive in two ways: 1) it provided new resources, recognition, and professional development opportunities for B3 courses; and 2) it reactivated the cyclical pattern we have observed throughout this article, as formal institutional recognition and limitation of local bilingual and bicultural practices and aspirations repeatedly appear, are partially withdrawn, and reemerge in a new form: *border setting–shifting–resetting*.

2015 – UTPA's Philosophy program gains new autonomy as UTRGV's Philosophy Department. Since every single course that existed in UTPA's catalog had to be recreated and reapproved for UTRGV's catalog, the department undertook many acts of curricular housekeeping like creating, deleting, renumbering, and/or renaming courses. These included: PHIL 1305 Introduction to Latin American Philosophy, PHIL 3365 Chicana and Latin American Feminisms, and PHIL 4305 Special Topics in Latin American Philosophy, which replaced the narrower upper-division course on Latin American Positivism.

The department also began growing on the Brownsville campus, where institutional commitments to bilingualism and Spanish were historically stronger. Whereas the University of Texas at Brownsville (UTB) did not offer a Philosophy minor or major and only had one philosopher (Angelika Potempa, 1999–2015), UTRGV committed to offering the minor/major in Brownsville, which led to four faculty lines in Brownsville, all later participants in the work funded through the APA grant.

2016 – UTRGV's B3 Institute that "facilitates the process through which the university becomes a bilingual, bicultural, and biliterate institution" begins offering faculty development and pilot programing in bilingual or "translanguaging" course sections labeled with an "E" to indicate that e*spañol* is welcomed and encouraged.[46]

2017 – For the first time, Cynthia teaches PHIL 3365 Chicana and Latin American Feminisms with the "E" prefix designating it as a bilingual course. At the graduate level, Alex offers an unofficially bilingual PHIL 6399 Independent Study: Philosophies of Liberation and Education.

That same year, UTRGV's Philosophy Department co-hosted a conference—*Philosophy Across the Americas: Thinking La Frontera* in partnership with South Texas College. As conference co-organizers with new faculty member Ian Werkheiser (2015–present), Alex, Cynthia, and Mariana intentionally placed sessions "in the community" (downtown McAllen) and "on the border" (Old Hidalgo Pumphouse with a view of the border wall), drawing in speakers and audiences who, in many cases, were encountering for the first time a philosophy program whose linguistic and cultural pluralism and localism were not a

polite gesture but a structural commitment. Conference co-organizing and co-sponsoring with philosophers Andrés Molina-Ochoa and Aaron Wilson at South Texas College also modeled a form of philosophical work attuned to the RGV's institutional ecology, not just the discipline as imagined from elsewhere.[47]

UTRGV's Philosophy Department also continued to expand and revise its curriculum, cross-listing many courses with Mexican American Studies (MAS) to better reflect our intellectual genealogies and pedagogical orientations. For example, we created PHIL 4345 Mexican/Mexican-American Philosophy as well as a graduate version (PHIL 6345) for the MAIS degree. Annual PHIL retreats, annual MAS retreats, and interdisciplinary working groups organized through CMAS provided key contexts for curricular planning and strategizing alongside faculty from MAS, History, English, Spanish, Creative Writing, Bilingual Education, etc.—much as the curricular turns at PAC had relied on cross-departmental coalitions and student energy a half-century earlier.

2018 – The most consequential shift was in hiring. The department crafted job advertisements and shaped search processes to attract applicants who could serve a bilingual, bicultural, biliterate philosophical community. The language varied according to evolving department needs and institutional rules, but the first such ad stated: "We are especially interested in candidates with experience in or who can demonstrate potential for program building in philosophy and/or religious studies, community engagement, outreach, and/or contributing to the bilingual, bicultural, biliterate mission of UTRGV, which is a Hispanic-Serving Institution with a 90% Hispanic student body."

Through this ad, Dahlia Guzman was hired as a full-time lecturer. She grew up in the Rio Grande Valley and graduated with a BA in Philosophy from UTPA in 2007, returning as faculty on UTRGV's Edinburg campus with a Kent State MA (2010) and a University of South Florida PhD (2018).

Alex also began serving as the Associate Director of UTRGV's Center for Bilingual Studies, which operated under the B3 Institute. This part-time administrative position provided him a broader way to understand and institutionalize B3 programs from pre-K to UTRGV.[48]

2019 – A tenure-track search was conducted with an open AOS/AOC, but with a commitment to philosophical pluralism and bilingual teaching as non-negotiable expectations in the job ad: "Our department is pluralistic in terms of philosophical approach [. . .] The faculty hired for this position will be expected to teach philosophy courses in two languages; some courses are to be taught in English and others in Spanish [. . .] to further cultivate and enhance the diverse cultural and linguistic assets of our university and the Rio Grande Valley."

The successful candidate, Remei Capdevila Werning, arrived in 2019 with a BA, multiple MA degrees, and a PhD in Philosophy from the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona. Fluently quadrilingual in Catalan, Spanish, German, and English, she taught UTRGV's first all-Spanish philosophy course in Spring 2020: PHIL 1301E Introducción a la Filosofía.

2020 – UTRGV took approximately five years to develop a consistent framework for listing B3 courses across the undergraduate curriculum. By 2020, clear criteria and processes were in place for faculty to designate their course sections as bilingual (X), Spanish (E), and/or taught using Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy (CSP).

2021 – Christopher Gómez, originally from Mexico City, joined the department as a full-time lecturer with a PhD from the Universidad Veracruzana (2017) after teaching for three years at South Texas College, where he asked his department chair about the possibility of teaching bilingually and was met with a negative reply.

2022 – Danny Marrero, originally from Bogotá, Colombia, was hired to develop and lead Philosophy's new Pre-Law concentration with a PhD from the University of Arkansas (2014). The PhilJobs ad sought candidates with an AOS in Philosophy of Law (broadly construed) whose work "might engage with the Rio Grande Valley and the U.S./Mexico border" or "with linguistically diverse communities."

2023 – Melisa Vivanco, originally from Mexico City, with dual PhDs from the Universidad Autónoma de Mexico (2017) and the University of Miami (2022), joined the department in a tenure-track position between the Philosophy of Technology and Applied Ethics. The ad asked candidates to discuss how their work might support both UTRGV's research-institution ambitions and its B3 mission.

None of the areas of specializations or concentration sought in these searches necessarily overlapped with philosophical traditions or areas of inquiry that would assume bilingualism or biculturalism. And not all the hires made by UTRGV's Philosophy Department have been bilingual or bicultural. Nevertheless, the department's preexisting commitments to cultural, linguistic, and philosophical pluralism in conjunction with UTRGV's new B3 mission enabled us to assemble a critical mass of faculty whose intellectual and pedagogical orientations were capable of cultivating philosophical bilingualism, biculturalism, and bilingualism (PB3).

A reader might reasonably ask why a grant was needed at all, given that we already had eight PB3 faculty who could teach PHIL courses in an institutional B3 framework. Above all, what we needed to develop was a bilingual culture in our department: a setting in which speaking Spanish was normalized and habitually woven into the practice of philosophizing together. The infrastructure existed, but the *sentido común* did not. The grant's central labor was therefore not designing new E/X/CSP courses to create a PB3 course rotation (although those were the "deliverables") *sino más bien el fomento de un sentido común—a new common sense* about what philosophy can sound like, what languages it can think in, and what publics it can address.

This new *sentido común* began to germinate in the *grupo de lectura* and *noches de cine* well before the PB3 summer seminar and course-development workshop. Each was structured to practice the PB3 culture we sought to deminoritize: most sessions were conducted

primarily in Spanish, with Spanglish and English also welcome; bilingual discussions about Spanish-language or indigenous-language films opened bilingual philosophical conversation to students who might never have entered a philosophy department lecture hall in any language; faculty designed bilingual syllabi together rather than alone.

It is worth reiterating that none of the transformations we have described would have been possible without a substantial Mexican American student body that was and is ready for a philosophy program that recognized, theorized, and developed its own languages (Spanish, English, and Tex-Mex), its own histories (from precolonial pasts to decolonial futures), its own place (the Rio Grande Valley as a borderlands connecting the Americas), and its own forms of philosophical thought.

III. FUTURE

At this stage our story is still writing itself, but we wanted to share *una historia oficial* to help readers better understand what we have built and will continue building. We also hope to entice you to consider new possibilities for philosophical bilingualism, biculturalism, and/or biliteracy in your own communities and institutional contexts.

NOTES

1. Each of us contributed equally to conceptualizing, researching, and writing this article. When one of us speaks as an individual, our first name appears in italics, followed by a colon and our words in quotation marks.

2. Alex Stehn et al., "APA Grant Proposal for *Pluralizing Philosophical Languages and Cultures in the South Texas Borderlands*," American Philosophical Association, 2023, https://www.apaonline.org/resource/resmgr/grantproposals/diversity_grant_proposals/2023/pluralizing_philosophical_la.pdf; Alex Stehn et al., "APA Grant Report for *Pluralizing Philosophical Languages and Cultures in the South Texas Borderlands*," American Philosophical Association, 2024, https://www.apaonline.org/resource/resmgr/grantreports/diversity_grant_reports/2023-2024/pluralizing_languages_and_cu.pdf.

3. A revised version of Carlos Sánchez's keynote address from this event—"*Vivir, pensar y filosofar en español*: Philosophy, Interpretation, and the Failures of Translation"—appears as the next article in this special issue.

4. Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (Columbia University Press, 1994).

5. The inaugural course catalog of Edinburg College provides direct evidence for these Anglocentric views. For example, the three-year sequence of Spanish courses was clearly aimed at non-Spanish speakers, since the first course was "SPAN 113 Beginner's Spanish" followed by "Second Year" and "Third Year" courses, all taught by two Anglo faculty members, Mary Lucy Marberry and Carrie E. Wright. Below the course descriptions for the Spanish Department, a Spanish Club is described as having been "organized for the purpose of extending the student's acquaintance with the language, customs, and traditions of the Spanish-speaking people." Edinburg School District, "EC Announcement of Plans, Objectives, Faculty and Courses 1927–1928," 1927, University Course Catalogs (Edinburg), UTRGV Digital Library, University of Texas Rio Grande Valley, https://scholarworks.utrgv.edu/edinburglegacycatalogs/. Subsequent references to this same collection of catalogs from UTRGV's legacy institutions will provide only the document names.

6. The 1930 US Census—incidentally, the only one in which "Mexican" was a possible response for the question of "race" assigned by census enumerators—estimated the RGV's Mexican population at 54 percent, a percentage that only increased in subsequent decades when "Mexican American" was more commonly viewed as an ethnicity. See Brian Duncan and Stephen J. Trejo, "Which Mexicans Are White? Enumerator-Assigned Race in the 1930 Census and the Socioeconomic Integration of Mexican Americans," *ILR Review* 78, no. 1 (2025): 62–85.

7. Our periodization comes from Gilbert G. Gonzalez, *Chicano Education in the Era of Segregation* (University of North Texas Press, 2013).

8. See Raymond P. Welch, *Struggle and Progress in the History of Pan American University: 1927–1987* (Division of Institutional Advancement, University of Texas–Pan American, 1987), https://scholarworks.utrgv.edu/digitalbooks/15. Welch writes, "By 1952–53 . . . enrollment had soared to 1537, including day, night and summer classes; the registrar reported an ethnic breakdown of enrollment for the first time: 953 Anglo and 584 Latin" (20).

9. Rolando Avila, *University of Texas–Pan American: The First 75 Years, 1927–2002* (CreateSpace, 2020).

10. Alberto Rodriguez, "The Making of the Modern Lower Rio Grande Valley: Situating and Reframing Race, Class, and Ethnicity in Urbanizing South Texas, 1930–1960" (PhD diss., University of Houston, 2011), https://www.proquest.com/docview/887100391.

11. See Pan American College, "Boletín de información general Colegio Panamericano, parte I, 1952–1953"; Pan American College, "Pan American College Curricula and Course Catalog, Part II, 1952–1953."

12. Avila, *University of Texas–Pan American*, 67.

13. Gonzalez, *Chicano Education*.

14. Rodriguez, "Making of the Modern Lower Rio Grande Valley," 141.

15. Avila, *University of Texas–Pan American*, 67.

16. Gonzalez, *Chicano Education*.

17. Pan American College, "PAC Bulletin 1966–1967."

18. Pan American College, "PAC Bulletin 1967–1968."

19. Pan American College, "PAC Bulletin 1968–1969."

20. Reproduction of demands clipped from *Equal Educational Opportunity: Hearings Before the Select Committee on Equal Educational Opportunity of the United States Senate, Ninety-First Congress, Second Session on Equal Educational Opportunity, Part 4—Mexican American Education* (Superintendent of Documents, US Government Printing Office, 1971), 2485.

21. Isabel Flores, "Latin Conference Opens Nov. 17," *The Pan American* (ELIBR-0072), November 6, 1969, UTRGV Digital Library, https://scholarworks.utrgv.edu/panamerican/660.

22. *The Pan American* (ELIBR-0072), December 4, 1969, UTRGV Digital Library, https://scholarworks.utrgv.edu/panamerican/659/.

23. Dr. Severo Gómez also "traveled extensively through Latin America as a member of the Committee on Latin American affairs of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools conducting programs in bilingual/bi-national schools in Brazil, Ecuador, Chile, Mexico, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Colombia and Guatemala. As an advocate for bilingual education in the United States, Dr. Gómez is also known for his involvement in planning, organizing, and serving as Chairperson for the very first National Conference on Bilingual Education held in Austin in 1972." "Severo Gomez," Texas State Cemetery, accessed May 11, 2026, https://cemetery.texas.gov/locate-a-plot/plotholder/severo-gomez.

24. Richard Codina, "Gomez Leads Discussion," *The Pan American* (ELIBR-0072, December 4, 1969, UTRGV Digital Library, https://scholarworks.utrgv.edu/panamerican/659/.

25. Richard Codina, "MECHA Hopes to Promote Culture," *The Pan American* (ELIBR-0072), May 7, 1970, UTRGV Digital Library, https://scholarworks.utrgv.edu/panamerican/661/.

26. Pan American University, "PAU Bulletin 1971–1972."

27. Chad Richardson, *Batos, Bolillos, Pochos, and Pelados: Class and Culture on the South Texas Border* (University of Texas Press, 1999).

28. Pan American University, "PAU 1986–88 Catalog."

29. *El Sol*, September 16, 1985, https://scholarworks.utrgv.edu/el_sol/27/.

30. "Proposal for Major in Philosophy to Be Presented to the Coordinating Board, Texas College and University System," 1987, University Archives—Academic Affairs, ELIBR-0073, University of Texas Rio Grande Valley, Special Collections and Archives, Edinburg Campus.

31. UTPA catalogs list Mark Glazer as faculty in anthropology/philosophy (1977–1984), faculty in anthropology (1984–2009), director of Latin American Studies (1986–1990), and associate dean

for University College (1986–1996). He also established the bilingual Mexican American Folklore Collection that contains over 100,000 folk beliefs, proverbs, folktales, recipes, jokes, riddles, etc., collected by his students through fieldwork. See "Mark Glazer's Mexican American Folklore Collection," Border Studies Archive, UTRGV Digital Library, https://scholarworks.utrgv.edu/tmafglazer/.

32. "Proposal for Major in Philosophy."

33. Pan American University, "PAU Catalog 1988–1990." David Carter joined PAU's philosophy faculty in 1980 and retired from UTPA in 2005. Robert Frodeman left UTPA in 1990.

34. University of Texas–Pan American, "UTPA Catalog 1990–1992."

35. Faculty names are from University of Texas–Pan American, "UTPA Catalog 2007–2009," with years of service drawn from online CVs.

36. See Cynthia M. Paccacerqua, "The Story of a Vision," *Anzaldúa Speaker Series in Philosophy*, https://anzalduaspeakerseriesphilosophy.org/history-of-the-series/.

37. Susana Nuccetelli discusses this workshop and the prevailing North American interest in Latin American philosophy in "Report from the Chair," *APA Newsletter on Hispanic/Latino Issues in Philosophy* 6, no. 2 (2007): 1.

38. See Gregory Gilson, ed., *APA Newsletter on Hispanic/Latino Issues in Philosophy* 7, no. 1 (2007).

39. University of Texas–Pan American, "UTPA Undergraduate Catalog 2007–2009."

40. See Paccacerqua, "Story of a Vision."

41. For a more detailed discussion of the grant's core faculty and activities, see Alexander V. Stehn, "Practicing Philosophical Bilingualism, Biculturalism, and Biliteracy (PB3): A Collective Transformation," the final article in this special issue.

42. For a comparison of this course before and after the APA grant, see Mariana Alessandri, "Introduction to Latin American Philosophy in 2011 and 2026: Notes from a Bilingual Ungrading Neophyte," in this special issue.

43. These are the full-time faculty numbers according to UTPA's 2009–2011 catalog.

44. Our history of MAS here and further below draws upon Stephanie Alvarez and Mario Garza, "History of MAS at UTRGV: 55 Years of Resistance & Epistemic Justice" (presentation, University of Texas Rio Grande Valley, April 27, 2026).

45. These changes went live in 2011 but first appeared in University of Texas–Pan American, "UTPA Undergraduate Catalog 2013–2015."

46. The criteria and labels for UTRGV's bilingual, Spanish, and culturally sustaining course designations continue to evolve, but for an early discussion of a translanguaging or bilingual version of UNIV 1301 Learning Framework taught in 2016, see Dagoberto Eli Ramirez and José L. Saldívar, "Untaming the Wild Tongue: Reconocimiento and a History of Linguistic Terrorism on the U.S.-Mexico Border," in *Teaching Gloria E. Anzaldúa: Pedagogy and Practice for Our Classrooms and Communities*, ed. Candace de León-Zepeda and Norma E. Cantú (University of Arizona Press, 2020).

47. The CFP and keynote flyer for *Philosophy Across the Americas: Thinking La Frontera* are available at https://anzalduaspeakerseriesphilosophy.org/philosophy-across-the-americas-conference/.

48. See J. Joy Esquierdo and Alexander V. Stehn, "Strengthening Partnerships Entre Las Familias, Las Escuelas, y La Universidad for Dual Language Bilingual, Bicultural, Biliterate Education (DLB^{3}E)," *Journal of Latinos and Education* 24, no. 5 (2025): 1283–300.

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Vivir, pensar y filosofar en español: Philosophy, Interpretation, and the Failures of Translation

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Revised from an invited keynote address delivered at UTRGV on February 9, 2024.

In his "Letter on Humanism," Martin Heidegger famously proclaimed that "language is the house of being." One understanding of this statement has it that if we're looking for the meaning of being—or, we may even say, the meaning of life—we must look at our language. However, Heidegger also suggested that *not all languages* could serve as an ontological home in this way. Only certain languages could house being: especially Greek and, of course, German. If we pay attention to the German (and Greek) words he said, we could find being hiding there, lurking in the phrases of poets and the articulations of philosophers.

Asked by the Chilean philosopher Victor Farías about the capacity of Spanish to house being, Heidegger supposedly rejected the notion, suggesting that Spanish is not a proper philosophical language.[1] In other words, the language we know as Spanish is incapable of revealing being or truth; it is a superficial language, limited to, perhaps, the practical business of life but without depth or philosophical profundity.

Now, for those of us who speak Spanish or for whom Spanish is a *first* language, this is clearly a ridiculous position. When Juan Gabriel sings that "la costumbre es más fuerte que el amor," we are faced with a truth that some of us would rather not face: *habit is more powerful than love*. But notice the translation: *habit is more powerful than love*. It *feels* different; it doesn't translate properly. There is a prima facie truth that jumps out of "la costumbre es más fuerte que el amor" that simply does not in "habit is more powerful than love." The lyric's emotional effect diminishes in translation, but it's there in Spanish, hitting you in the face, gut-punching you. Or, take a philosophically loaded term, one from Mexican philosophy: "zozobra." Zozobra, from the Latin *sub* and *supra*, over and under, reveals a truth about existence as profound anxiety; our lives are zozobra when we struggle to make sense of things, when we feel like we're drowning, or struggle to catch our emotional breath. Neither angst nor anxiety do this feeling justice. There's no proper equivalent in Greek or German for zozobra. My point is that Heidegger was wrong when he said that Spanish was not a philosophical language.

In what follows, I will talk about Spanish as a philosophical language in a somewhat roundabout way. I'll first talk about translation, why we need it and why it turns out that we don't. I'll discuss translation as a thankless task, precisely because scholars who are serious about the texts I translate almost always turn to the Spanish original, leaving my translations unread—a cruelty that, nonetheless, points to the very fact that Spanish is always already a philosophical language! Next, I'll talk about the significance of thinking in Spanish—*pensar en español*—especially if what we want to think about has a certain profundity. Third, I'll talk about what *we lose* in translation, when we are discouraged from thinking in Spanish, which happens quite a bit; a discouragement that, ironically, makes the *business* of translation possible. Finally, I'll reflect on the significance of UTRGV's project of offering students the chance to think and philosophize in Spanish.

1. WHY WE NEED THEN DON'T NEED TRANSLATIONS

I have been translating filosofía mexicana into English for many years. My focus has been on the work of the mid-century philosophical group Hyperion (1947–1952). Translating this work has never been an enjoyable experience. It has actually been pretty terrifying. On this front, Heidegger is right: *there's a lot riding on language*. Not only must I get the sense right, but also the context in which the sense makes sense, and also the tone, and the feeling, and especially the philosophical punchline, whatever that may be. The entire process scares me and fills me with dread and zozobra. But I keep doing it. I began doing it for professional reasons; now my reasons are more existential than professional.

I'm almost ashamed to admit that I think translation work has existential value. There are certainly more important things to worry about than translating words like "relajo" or "accidentalidad" into comprehensible English. But, for me, translation is tied to existence, and death. What I mean is that without translation work, Mexican philosophy *outside* of Mexico cannot survive; translation work sustains Mexican philosophy *outside* Mexico—and to a certain extent, *inside* Mexico, as well. If I don't keep going in spite of the terror, then what I have been working for all these years will cease to exist. (Now, this is not just my anxiety talking. This is an idea that has been hammered into me by the US philosophical establishment itself. I've been told time and again that the reason why more folks are not studying Leopoldo Zea and Jorge Portilla and Rosario Castellanos is not because they don't deserve to be studied, but because they are relatively unknown, and they are relatively unknown because their works have not been translated into English.)

The cruel irony, however, is that most people who are interested in Latin American philosophy or Mexican philosophy, when they really get into it, do not read in translation. For instance, the past six or seven years have seen a surge of papers on the work of Jorge Portilla. However, those working on Jorge Portilla avoid citing my 2012 translation and instead go straight to the Spanish source! I call this phenomenon the "nostalgia for origins"

(I've appropriated this phrase from Uranga, who uses it to describe the Mexican attitude toward death). A version of the hermeneutics of suspicion, it happens when, in an effort to project seriousness and rigor, scholars mistrust translations and cite from the original texts, translating relevant passages along the way. Of course, there's nothing wrong with that; we need more seriousness and rigor. But this phenomenon relocates translations to the margins of a tradition. They are seen as secondary and peripheral, rather than as *founding* or *co-founding* these traditions. Nostalgia for origins is quite prevalent in philosophy. If you want to be a serious scholar of Greek philosophy, you will read it in the original Greek, regardless of how good the existing translations may be. While writing my dissertation on Hussurl for my PhD, I had to learn German. Husserl is widely translated, and the translations are very good. But my advisors wanted me to read the German original and quote it in the dissertation, all the while doing my own translations that were not as good.

We see then that translations are signposts that something truly profound is taking place. Ultimately, the Nostalgia for Origins Phenomenon is both centering and marginalizing: it centers a subject matter (Mexican philosophy) while undermining the efforts of translation (because once interested, scholars will look at the original). The irony is that without translation, no one would notice that something is there in the first place.

What does the displacement of translations tell us? It tells us that Spanish is already a philosophical language, that it is already revelatory and profound, and that translations are ultimately inessential, even though they may establish a particular tradition by leading us to the well to drink (by serving as "signposts"). If we think of Mexican philosophy in the US as a tradition, for example, the appearance of translations points to the existence and value of *filosofía mexicana*. But once the tradition is found and attended to, the existence of translations seems unimportant; they appear more like a provisional ladder that can be kicked off. In other words, scholars of Mexican philosophy inevitably realize that the Spanish original is richer in meaning than its translation could ever be.

So why do I persist in my own translation efforts? A lot of my motivation to translate comes from my experiences as an undergraduate student. I had no idea that Mexican philosophy existed until I finished my PhD. Never in my undergraduate career at San José State University did I encounter a book on Mexican philosophy or anything written by a Mexican philosopher—not in the library, not on a table somewhere. I couldn't even go to the library and check out a book on it, not my libraries, anyway. Why? Because of a lack of translations. So, I know that there is a need. There are currently students, both undergraduates and graduate students, who very much appreciate my work and read it. It makes it easier for them to get into the subject, and this thought keeps me going, even if I also know that once they start publishing in academic journals, they'll go straight to the Spanish.

Another reason as to why I persist in the act of translation is that given the richness of the Spanish original, my translations will only be interpretations, and I find a great deal of joy in interpretation. This is related to my idea that translation as we commonly understand it is not possible. And I say this because while we can perform literal translations of philosophical terms easily, it is almost impossible to translate a philosophical idea from one language to another without losing something. I can't precisely point to what that "something" is, but I suspect it is a historical, circumstantial, or cultural surplus that we are forced (by language itself) to *pass over in silence*. So when I "translate" I'm usually interpreting. Unlike simply saying what a word in Spanish is in English, I am telling you what I think this word means in the context in which I find it.

Take a word that long ago caused me so much stress: *relajo*. There's no equivalent English word, and Portilla didn't mean anything like what the word prima facie tells us it is: *relaxation*. *Relajo* meant something else. Portilla defines it as a "suspension of seriousness," among other things. But if this is what it means, how do I translate it? I couldn't figure it out. At one point I tried "fucking around." But would any academic publisher publish that? I'm not Henry Frankfurt, so no. Ultimately, I decided not to translate it and leave it as an occasion for interpretation—for thinking. I do the same with *zozobra*, *nepantla*, *corazonada*, and so on. The hard-earned lesson here is that, at the end of the day, if you really want to get to the true sense of a Spanish term, you just have to read it and *think* it in Spanish.

So that's why I persist with the work. My unspeakable truth, however, is that I would rather not do that sort of work and just read and think in Spanish. When I think in Spanish, I am able to immerse myself not only in the language, but in the history, culture, and spirit of its context. Luis Villoro calls this *pensar en español*.

2. PENSAR EN ESPAÑOL

My parents have been living in the US since the early 1970s—first "illegally" and now with a questionable degree of "legality." That's more than half a century. In all those years, they've never learned English. They've never seen the need. While English may be the "lingua franca" of philosophy, Spanish is the "lingua franca" of everyday life in central California. Having spent most of my childhood in Michoacán, Mexico, I didn't learn how to read or speak English until well into my teens, a few years after moving back to the US. In the eighth grade I was still considered an ESL (English as a Second Language) student. I didn't write a paper in English until high school, a paper on the Champagne region of France. I remember my first proper English class—we read Steinbeck and Shakespeare, and I remember thinking that the English language was beautiful and profound. I dreamt of being a writer and saying deeply existential things like Hamlet and writing long, tragic, novels like Steinbeck. There was just one problem: I couldn't stop thinking in Spanish. This meant that I would think about something beautiful but by the time I translated it in my head and then translated it again into written signs, it had lost its beauty. My thoughts in Spanish never materialized into English sentences. What I saw in my head and what I would end up writing were two different things.

The disconnect convinced me that I needed to *stop thinking in Spanish*. And this conviction was reinforced by curricular and academic demands in high school and again in college. As a result, I did, for the most part, stop thinking in Spanish. To this day, however, I still *count* and do simple arithmetic in Spanish—*veinte menos tres*, *dies y siete* . . .

Looking back, however, I wonder why it was so easy for me to *agree* with societal and academic expectations that I needed to stop thinking in Spanish. I think it has to do with how I associated Spanish with my improvised circumstances, with desperation, with who I was not—Spanish, I thought, was not going to improve me. Of course, when I agreed that I needed to quit thinking in Spanish, I had not yet come across Cervantes, Juan Rulfo, or Gabriel García Marquez. This would come later, encounters that would fill me with self-loathing and regret at having doubted the profundity of my *first* tongue. And I was filled with self-loathing and regret because I came to realize that Spanish has a depth that rivals German and Greek and every other language in which beautiful or profound things have been said and continue to be said. More importantly, although it is a language with a violent colonial history, as the language of conquest and colonization, it is now the language that speaks my being, that houses my being, in ways that Heidegger's Eurocentrism could not allow him to see.

The Mexican philosopher Luis Villoro says that *español* is, ironically, the *lingua franca*, not of philosophy but of conflict.[2] We know that in the history of Latin America, Spanish has been the language of displacement, of erasure and extermination. However, as it displaced, it also replaced, over time becoming the language of the voiceless, the oppressed, and the terrorized; as such, historical processes eventually transformed Spanish into a language of reform, revolution and resistance—or, the language of "conflict." Villoro also refers to Spanish fittingly as the language of *nepantla*, a Nahuatl-turned-Spanish word that is now the language of the "other" who is always in-between the center and the outside, the past and the future, the living and the dead, inside and out. Spanish, in other words, is the language of existence, a living language that communicates a multitude of experiences, lives, and worldviews *in conflict*.

We are not merely talking about speaking in Spanish, however, but *thinking* in Spanish, which comes before the speaking and accompanies us even in silence. Villoro calls it *pensar en español*, a thinking that refuses its own erasure by appropriating the power that originally summoned it for other purposes. Villoro says,

> We can welcome a thinking in a language that, although it was at one time the language of the oppressor (Spanish), can now express the demands of all the cultures and languages that were once oppressed, but which today also speak Spanish.[3]

We could read this as a case of the oppressed turning the weapons of the oppressor against him. But it is far more than that, according to Villoro:

> This would no longer be the language of the Spanish oppressor; it would be the languages of the oppressed—but in a manner that would express the conflict between the oppressor and the oppressed. Are these not the languages with which—with multiple accents and nuances—Spanish is practiced as it is spoken in Latin America? It is no longer Spanish as it is expressed in Spain. These are the languages that have their origin in conflict.[4]

The point is this: Spanish is no longer the language of the conqueror and oppressor, but the language of the survivor who nonetheless still exists in a zone of conflict and *nepantla*. Spanish is itself multifaceted. Its accents and its inflections evidence a multiplicity and a community that thrives in difference. So *pensar en español* is also *pensar* in and through difference and overcoming. Every accent represents a historical clash; but, at the same time, it also represents survival, victory, and historical resilience. And every time we speak and think in that accent—or dialect or language—we validate that story and that history. So, there's not just one Spanish, but many, each one a window into conflict and its overcoming.

The idea of different Spanishes being connected to different worlds became personal for me not long ago. I was at a conference on Mexican philosophy hosted by the UNAM's *Instituto de Investigaciones Filosóficas* in Mexico City. I was part of a small delegation of US-based scholars that work on this tradition, so we're all familiar with each other and well-known, liked, (or tolerated) by our Mexican counterparts. Within our group, there are several noticeable accents—most are varieties of *pocho* or US-born Spanish-speaker Spanish. Now, although my Spanish has suffered some deterioration over the past forty years due mostly to my geographical and professional entrapments, I can still speak it well enough to speak it with a regional Mexican accent. Nonetheless, it came as a surprise one evening when a colleague based in Mexico asked:

> "Carlos, can I say something about your Spanish?" (they said in English).
>
> "Claro que sí," I said, "aunque me ofendas," I said jokingly (as we Mexicans do).
>
> "No, no . . . es que, es muy lindo cómo lo hablas." This caught me off guard. *What does that mean?* "Es que hablas un español de rancho, muy curioso." As she said this, several of my Mexican colleagues nodded their heads in agreement, saying "sí, sí!"

Un español de rancho. As opposed to what? To *un español de cuidad* or *un español de . . . qué*? I wasn't offended. Although I should say that my subsequent retellings of this story have offended other people, who find the observation regarding my *rancho Spanish* somewhat demeaning. The offense is based on the fact that "español de rancho" suggests that the Spanish I speak is an uneducated, unsophisticated Spanish, which in turn implies that their Spanish is sophisticated and educated. But worse, it implies

that there's a *right* kind of Spanish, *un español correcto*, that no one associates with ranches.

But, again, I wasn't personally offended. For one simple reason: the Spanish I speak is my parents' Spanish. It is a Michoacán Spanish. My Spanish has the accent of immigrants with a third-grade education. It carries the inflection of people who survived and thrived in the worst of conflicts. It is the dialect of victory. And now I go to the metropolis, and I speak it to those who would not expect that accent *there*, in their halls of learning, as an authoritative voice. I wasn't offended, I was proud.

This episode happened before I came across Villoro's reflections on *pensar en español*. But I can say with Villoro that every accent and inflection of the language is a point of pride, evidence of resistance, a marker of conflict and overcoming. Translated into English, Villoro writes:

> "Thinking in Spanish" would then mean expressing the plurality of cultures in conflict throughout our history—between indigenous cultures and Western culture, and between Western culture and the resistance against its imposition. Only then would "thinking in Spanish" no longer express the Spanish of Castile, but rather that of all Latin America. And only then would it express our reality.[5]

This is what thinking, living, and philosophizing in Spanish is all about: *expresar nuestra realidad*—something that living, thinking, and philosophizing in a language not our own can actually obscure, sterilize, or deny. But even if English doesn't obscure, sterilize, or deny *nuestra realidad*, even if it is faithful to it, being forced to think in English when our natural inclination is to think in Spanish is still an act of violence, what Jorge Portilla once called "the terrorism of the social" (*el terrorismo de lo social*).

3. LOST IN TRANSLATION

Ultimately, Heidegger's suggestion that Spanish is not a philosophical language is political. It's no different than what I hear these days about English being the "lingua franca" of philosophy. In nominating English in this way, what is meant is that English is the way philosophical truth is disseminated, which means, in turn, that it is the language of power, of the center, of validity, and rightness. And so, those of us who find value in *pensar en español* are ultimately forced to center our philosophy, to translate it into the language of power. These efforts, however, only get us so far.

I said before that I don't think that translation, as we commonly think about it, is possible. The American philosopher W.V.O. Quine already pointed this out in the 1960s. According to his "indeterminacy of translation thesis," all translation will always be, that's right, indeterminate, incomplete, unsatisfactory. A translated text will always lack that *umph* that lends it mood or heart and even truth.

What I mean is that there are Spanish texts that upon reading them hit you in ways that are, at least for me, emotional and humbling—and indescribable. Emilio Uranga called these confrontations between texts and hearts "corazonadas," and described them as the experience of reading a text in "its pure form." The Spanish transterrado, Juan David García Bacca, referred to corazonada as a "sentimental shock," a non-rational experience of bare existence. So besides indeterminacy, another casualty of translation is the possibility of losing the opportunity to be sentimentally shocked, touched in the heart by reality, truth, or bare existence in *its pure form*.

I'm reminded of my own experiences reading Juan Rulfo. Reading Rulfo in Spanish always involves, for me, an experience of profound, indescribable nostalgia. It's a nostalgia that I can't place. But it refers me to a truth about existence—not only my own, but existence in general. Consider Rulfo's short story, "¡Diles que no me maten!" from 1951. I really don't think you need context for this, but it is a story about the brutality of regret and the omnipresence of death. What always gets me is the beginning:

> —¡Diles que no me maten, Justino! Anda, vete a decirles eso. Que por caridad. Así diles. Diles que lo hagan por caridad.
>
> —No puedo. Hay allí un sargento que no quiere oír hablar nada de ti.
>
> —Haz que te oigan. Date tus mañas y dile que para sustos ya ha estado bueno. Dile que lo haga por caridad de Dios.
>
> —No se trata de sustos. Parece que te van a matar de a de veras. Y yo ya no quiero volver allá.
>
> —Anda otra vez. Solamente otra vez, a ver qué consigues.
>
> —No. No tengo ganas de ir. Según eso, yo soy tu hijo. Y, si voy mucho con ellos, acabarán por saber quién soy y les dará por afusilarme a mí también. Es mejor dejar las cosas de este tamaño.
>
> —Anda, Justino. Diles que tengan tantita lástima de mí. Nomás eso diles.[6]

Now, George Schade's published English translation is great. But there's just something about it that does not do justice to the speaker's words, to his emotions, to his accent, and to his life; we know, just based on this short passage, where he is *not* from, we know he is in pain and we know what he has lived without—namely, privilege and hope. His Spanish is *un español de rancho*, and that says a lot. Here's the English:

> "Tell them not to kill me, Justino! Go on and tell them that. For God's sake! Tell them. Tell them please for God's sake."
>
> "I can't. There's a sergeant there who doesn't want to hear anything about you."

> "Make him listen to you. Use your wits and tell him that scaring me has been enough. Tell him please for God's sake."
>
> "But it's not just to scare you. It seems they really mean to kill you. And I don't want to go back there."
>
> "Go on once more. Just once, to see what you can do."
>
> "No. I don't feel like going. Because if I do they'll know I'm your son. If I keep bothering them they'll end up knowing who I am and will decide to shoot me too. Better leave things the way they are now."
>
> "Go on, Justino. Tell them to take a little pity on me. Just tell them that."[7]

What do we lose in this translation if not an entire context, a history, and a pathos? The sentimental shock is muted, dulled, and it is no longer shock but understanding—we understand what's happening, *but we don't feel it*. Moreover, in losing the sentimentality, the corazonada, that the Spanish gives us, we lose contact with a hidden truth, perhaps the opportunity to think in Spanish with Juvencio—the condemned man's name. In my own very particular case, every time I read a translation of Rulfo, I lose an opportunity to think with my grandfather, whose Spanish I *hear* in Rulfo's writing. Rulfo's is *un español de rancho* that communicates more than words possibly can.

4. FILOSOFAR EN ESPAÑOL AT UTRGV

All of this to say that what you are attempting to do here at UTRGV is truly a threat to the Anglocentric paradigm. Teaching philosophy in Spanish, or bilingually, in a US university is not what you're *supposed* to be doing. But here you are, doing it. And there's so much to gain—including new ways of thinking, of living, and of philosophizing.

What excites me most is the idea that students will be allowed to *pensar en español*, and in some cases to have these thoughts as they're reading philosophical texts originally written in Spanish. And that's the right word here, "allow." We have not been allowed to *pensar* in Spanish because, besides scaring nativists and xenophobes, besides the political noise, Spanish has been deemed as incapable of housing being, it has been deemed unable to reveal truth, especially in the schools and universities of the US. But we know this to be false, as Rulfo demonstrates. It is our duty, then, to defang this myth, and allow our students to look under the floorboards of this house and uncover truths that live only under this house. Truths with an *s*, because *pensar en español* will reveal a multiplicity of experiences that can only enrich our own, as Villoro tells us. We may finally come to a place where we do not have to go through the leveling process of translation, where meaning is lost and truth takes a hit, where corazonadas are forever lost. We can go straight to the source and find truth in a reality motivated by the tone and inflection of the words on the page—even if it marginalizes translations, humbling prideful translators in the process!

Moreover, while I think translations will always be valuable in and of themselves, I look forward to a future when "a lack of translations" no longer excuses people from *not knowing* the work of Villoro, Portilla, Rulfo, Castellanos, and so on. And I'm hopeful this future will come, if the model that you've outlined here is replicated more widely, a future that can't come soon enough.

The famed Chicano intellectual, José Antonio Burciaga, concludes his amazing bilingual book *Drink Cultura*, with the following lamentation: "no learning experience was more painful or damaging [for me] than the silence imposed on our Mexican culture, history and our beautiful Spanish language."[8] I can say the same, and add that the time has come to reverse the damage done by this silence. And that reversal begins here, today.

NOTES

1. Víctor Farías, *Heidegger et le nazisme* (Éditions Verdier, 1987).

2. Luis Villoro, "Pensar en español," *Arbor: Ciencia, pensamiento y cultura* 184, no. 734 (2008): 977–78.

3. "Podemos invitar a pensar en una lengua que, aunque haya sido, en un tiempo, la del dominador (el castellano), pueda expresar ahora las demandas de *todas* las culturas y lenguajes que fueron dominados, pero que también hablan ahora castellano." Villoro, "Pensar en español," 977.

4. "Ésta no sería ya la lengua del dominador español, serían las lenguas de los dominados, pero de manera que expresara el conflicto entre los dominadores y los dominados. ¿No son ésas las lenguas con que, con múltiples acentos y matices, se practica el español tal como se habla en América Latina? Ya no es el español tal como se expresa en España. Son las lenguas que tienen su origen en el conflicto." Villoro, "Pensar en español," 977.

5. "'Pensar en español' sería entonces, expresar la pluralidad de culturas en conflicto en nuestra historia, entre culturas indígenas y la cultura occidental, entre la cultura occidental y la resistencia frente a su imposición. Sólo entonces, 'pensar en español' ya no expresaría el español de Castilla sino el de toda América Latina. Y sólo entonces expresaría nuestra realidad." Villoro, "Pensar en español," 978.

6. Juan Rulfo, "¡Diles que no me maten!," in *Pedro Páramo* y *El llano en llamas* (Editorial Planeta, 2002), 165.

7. Juan Rulfo, "Tell Them Not to Kill Me!," in *The Burning Plain and Other Stories*, trans. George D. Schade (University of Texas Press, 1967), 99–100.

8. José Antonio Burciaga, *Drink Cultura: Chicanismo* (Joshua Odell Editions, 1992), 40.

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Introduction to Latin American Philosophy in 2011 and 2026: Notes from a Bilingual Ungrading Neophyte

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I taught my first Introduction to Latin American Philosophy in spring 2011 as a part-time lecturer in philosophy at The University of Texas–Pan American. That fall, I published "Phil 2380: Introduction to Latin American Philosophy" in the *APA Newsletter on Hispanic/Latino Issues in Philosophy*.[1] It was a short piece on what it was like to teach that class, including the readings on my syllabus. Fifteen years later, I taught the course again with two pedagogical innovations: 1) ungrading and 2) flexible bilingual pedagogy. This essay reflects a "then" and "now" comparison, a portrait of growth and struggle in equal measure. It can serve as a model for 1) tentative "ungraders," that is, people who want to get away from the punitive and demotivating traditional grading system, but who fear that the beautiful lake they see in the distance might look like a dirty marsh up close; and 2) tentative "bilinguals," that is, people who want to stop teaching monolingually but fear that they (or their students) may not have what it takes.

SPRING 2011

In the spring of 2011, I taught two sections of Phil 2380: Introduction to Latin American Philosophy. Then and now, my university's student body is over 90 percent Hispanic or Latino (nearly all Mexican and/or Mexican American), and roughly 73 percent of all students are the first in their families to go to college. The vast majority of students commute, and they often live in multigenerational homes. Almost all work part time or full time while taking five or even six courses (fifteen to eighteen credit hours) each semester, a courseload that my university incentivizes by capping tuition at four courses (twelve credit hours).

In my 2011 article, I wrote about the twenty-nine class sessions we had, beginning with Julio Cortázar and ending with the Zapatistas. "My goal was to choose readings that would resonate with the students in order to have productive discussions," I wrote, noting also that 50 percent of their final grade came from weekly two-page papers, 25 percent from "attendance and attention," and 25 percent from "reading comprehension."[2]

What I like about my 2011 syllabus is that we took our time. We spent two weeks on Octavio Paz and Rigoberta Menchú, and one week each on Leopoldo Zea and Carlos Vaz Ferreira (their favorite), Gustavo Gutiérrez, José Vasconcelos, José Carlos Mariátegui, and the Zapatistas. We watched a film and had one-off class sessions on Juan Bautista Alberdi, Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, Simón Bolívar, and Bartolomé de las Casas. I ran the course as a discussion, with occasional groupwork. For my first time teaching this class and with very little teaching experience, it was a success.

For my 2011 APA essay, I thought about what could be improved for next time. My brain stretched far enough to notice that some countries were overrepresented and that others were underrepresented. What I did not see, and would not see clearly for some time, was that I had squandered my students' unique language abilities as well as my own. So, my essay didn't mention Spanish, English, or language even once. I, a bilingual teacher who had recently lived for a year each in Mexico City (2008) and Salamanca (2009), taught an entire Introduction to Latin American Philosophy to a population of bilingual students in the South Texas Borderlands, all while somehow overlooking the fact that we could have read and discussed the Spanish texts in their original language. After some fits and starts in the intervening years, deliberate and sustained attempts to exercise our collective bilingualism would not happen until 2024, when the APA awarded our department a grant to bilinguify our courses. Looking back on the last fifteen years, it's clear that we (Cynthia Paccacerqua, Alex Stehn, and I) had been planting the bilingual seeds since our arrival in 2010, but the fruit on my bilingual tree did not ripen until 2026.

SPRING 2026

In the spring of 2026, I taught roughly forty students across two sections of Introduction to Latin American Philosophy, which we had renumbered as PHIL 1305 and added to the general education core curriculum when UTPA became UTRGV in 2015. Through the PB3 Summer Workshop, I had officially designated my course sections with an "X" for "bilingual," so we spoke English, Spanish, and Spanglish in class.

In 2026, like in 2011, we began with Julio Cortázar's "Axolotl." But this time around, some students read in English, some in Spanish, and some in both languages. I was less certain that I understood the meaning of the story, so I let the students do much more imaginative work in groups that spoke English, Spanish, and Spanglish. We then spent two weeks on Nahua philosophy, and since the entire course pack was bilingual, we could challenge the translation from Spanish to English. Why was Miguel León-Portilla's *La filosofía nahuatl estudia en sus fuentes* translated as *Aztec Thought and Culture*? Did the English-speaking editor refuse to believe that the Aztecs or Nahuas did philosophy? In 2026, I kept Las Casas, Bolívar, Sarmiento, Alberdi, Martí, Mariátegui, Gutiérrez, Menchú, and the Zapatistas. I dropped Rodó, Vasconcelos, Zea, and Paz. Most importantly, I added Gloria Anzaldúa, who graduated from our campus in 1968, became famous after the publication of *Borderlands/La Frontera*, and was never invited back to give a lecture.

In 2011, my students completed weekly writing assignments in English. In 2026, they completed four PB3 projects: 1) a presentation of their family's Language-Culture Story, 2) a *Plática*, or recorded philosophical conversation, 3) a Community-Learning Project, and 4) a final Digital *Testimonio* or *Autohistoria-teoría*.

A Language-Culture Story is an audiovisual representation of a person's linguistic and cultural heritage. Students investigated where they, their parents, and their

grandparents came from, their language(s), and how they identified, culturally speaking. Each student created a PowerPoint with photos and maps, and they narrated their slides in English, Spanish, and/or Spanglish. We began each class period by listening to one student's Language-Culture story and asking them follow-up questions. Some students identified as Mexican, and others Mexican American, and more than one student said they felt "in between" cultures. Sometimes these presentations elicited tears, in one case because I had "allowed" students to present in the language that felt closest to their heart, Spanish, and in another case because they felt they were finally embracing their indigenous roots.

For the *Plática*, students chose a class reading to discuss with a family member or close friend. They recorded at least ten minutes of conversation and wrote a reflection on the experience of talking about philosophy with someone outside of class. I enjoyed listening to these conversations, and most students said they would do it again.

The third project was based on Sor Juana Inés de La Cruz's *filosofías de la cocina*. When church authorities took away her books, Sor Juana found herself observing, studying, and philosophizing while cooking and doing other household chores. I asked my students to do the same: learn something about Latin America in the RGV by looking and listening and touching and tasting. They had to learn something that a student in Michigan could not learn using the internet. Students wrote proposals, met with me as a group, and set off to do their experiential investigating on topics like the influence of Latin America on Catholic churches around the RGV, native plants and the wisdom of the women who use them, local perceptions of mental illness, local music's Latin American roots, historic sites threatened by the border wall, Latin American food, and the use of Spanglish in the region. They showcased their work in the Student Union, where passersby asked questions about their posters or, in one case, video. One week later, students turned in a reflection paper on the project and what they learned through the Sor Juana-inspired process.

For the final assignment, students could choose between making a Digital *Testimonio*, which is a philosophical video about an important life event that includes narration, music, and photos, or an *Autohistoria-teoría*, a Gloria Anzaldúa-inspired "personal essay that theorizes" that draws upon their personal experiences in conjunction with either *Borderlands/La Frontera* or "Speaking in Tongues."[3] In one student's *Autohistoria-teoría*, titled "Who am I?" he reflected:

> When I was younger I was always told to follow this American side of me as it would make me prosper and lead to success. But with all of this all I felt was a missing piece. I felt uneven and was leaning and never walking straight where I needed to be. So, I wondered what it meant to be Hispanic.

This student recounted his journey through reading Anzaldúa and coming to realize that having two languages and cultures is not wrong or shameful, but beautiful. He continued, now writing directly about languages:

> Even though I use slang, or even use the "no sabo" language even though I try to speak proper Spanish I know that it is our Tex-Mex language that many adopt yet look down upon because of it being "Improper" but for me it shows one clear and vital thing. That it is me, I live, speak, and breathe this language.

Finally, this same student, who had been shy about using Spanish in class for four months, wrote:

> ***Yo soy una persona que vive con dos vidas, uno en las fronteras de México donde vive mi familia de mi padre y mi mama.*** I also have one in the United States, where I live now and have my family here, where we go and celebrate the culture here and from Mexico [. . .] I live in the borderlands, where all my culture is set into one. One that not many get to experience but luckily for me it is not a burden, but a power that is given to me that allows me to admire so much more of both cultures that not many can in theirs.

This is just one example of a student reflecting on how language is tied to identity; many students wrote similar things about embracing what Anzaldúa called a third language from a third culture.

UNGRADING AND BILINGUIFYING THE CLASSROOM

My dabbling with "ungrading" came unexpectedly, but in hindsight it grew out of my commitment to teach the course bilingually. By making my syllabus, course pack, assignments, and classroom bilingual, bicultural, and biliterate, I was saying to the students, "I see your full linguistic repertoire and your full self, not just half of you." I had students shuffle their chairs around daily. I told them to face each other and be loud in all their languages. I brought them tea and told them to get up anytime to help themselves. I wanted to create a community out of strangers across languages, so we spent most of our time in groups or partners or a big circle. One of the practices I liked best was writing six concepts on the board in English and Spanish and then asking students to stand by the one that they wanted to think more about. They formed groups with whoever else was interested in the same topic, and they re-read the pertinent passages to talk it through. After fifteen minutes, we would discuss the concepts one by one in a big group. Midway through the semester, I stopped giving written quizzes and instead started walking around the room to see if students had annotated their texts. I was surprised at how many of them did the reading faithfully, whether in Spanish, English, or both, but I wished that even more had.

The semester went well overall, but there were bumps along the way of ungrading and bilingualizing, which I offer to you in the form of journal entries I wrote throughout the semester.

JANUARY 13, 2026

I don't feel good about this class. I have no narrative arc. I don't have a story that I am trying to teach them about Latin American philosophy, and that's what I believe you are supposed to have. There are mini-stories about conquest and discovery, about language and rebellion and keeping the *velita* burning, about not knowing which side of the glass you are on. Will my students turn into *ajolotes*, or realize that they always already were? *Me convierto en estudiante. Y ellos se convierten en profesores.*

FEBRUARY 5, 2026

I have read or skimmed a lot of pedagogy books lately, including Daniel Coyle's *Flourish: The Art of Building Meaning, Joy, and Fulfillment* and Susan Blum's edited volume *Ungrading: Why Rating Students Undermines Learning (and What to Do Instead)*.[4] I am trying to put into action Coyle's "rule of the beautiful mess," activating cues, rule of surprise, panned-out attention span, ceding control, icebreaker-as-psychological-disbarment, jig-sawing, practicing reading with them, low-stakes grading, quizzes, high standard/high support, human-ing, and disequilibrating. I am alive and full of ideas about the classroom and how to improve the uptake in my class. More focus on *what* we are doing (learning), less on *how* they are doing (grades).

Good things so far:

- Everyone brings the text. We all have it and refer to it regularly across languages.
- I call on people during circle or groups. Not directly yet but it's fair game.
- We have done different groupings; in pairs I practice their names.
- I have learned that groups of three are better than six.
- The material is really interesting. I am not forcing myself to do history or to overcomplicate it. I always refer to *el ajolote*.
- Spanish comes easily and I feel the depth of the class expand. All you need are a couple of Spanish speakers who are willing to hold the line. I will ask them if they will do it more. It's not about my Spanish but about theirs. I don't want to teach a class here that ignores Spanish ever again.
- I gave a bilingual quiz and asked them to tell me if they are using their nondominant language.

FEBRUARY 10, 2026

Yesterday all the Language-Culture Stories were due, even though people will only present them one by one. This is a good idea, because the late people can still catch up. The first student presented and did not read from a script. I like it this way. Maybe I will grade them one by one, instead of all at once.

FEBRUARY 23, 2026

We are speaking a lot of Spanish in both sections. They had to think like Sor Juana, who did philosophy in the kitchen. I had them identify a subject they would like to study for the LA-RGV project and find people who were also interested. One group is going to eat their way through the Valley. Others are still looking for their people. I need to give it more time in class another day. We collaborated on a due date for the proposal: March 10. I put it in their hands. *What do you want to understand more? I can guide you. I have examples in my office. Find Latin America in the RGV. Not just book learning. Learn from experience.*

They seem relaxed and understand that I want them to enjoy learning. We really don't talk about grades. I keep realizing that my job is to create the structure for learning to take place. I need to put my foot down and organize the chairs, etc., not just ask them. Think: architect, design. *Pero en español también.*

FEBRUARY 27, 2026

Tears have been shed during the Language-Culture Stories, with students saying how happy they feel to present in Spanish, or wanting to learn Spanish, or feeling moved to be able to celebrate their roots publicly. Jacinto[5] is not from the Valley, but he is Mexican American. He said that although he has lived in many other places, none are so welcoming as the RGV. When a student presents in Spanish, he asks questions in Spanish; when they present in English, he asks in English. It is clear that his Spanish is not "perfect," which is a dream for me because it should make others more daring.

The students met in class to form groups. I gave them one whole class period and twenty minutes the next day. I told them we were following Sor Juana's example. When they took away her books, she started philosophizing by observation and curiosity. They ought not to begin by Googling "Latin America in the RGV" but, like Sor Juana, with an egg, or a toy, or a game. They are interested in food, music, religion, nature, driving culture, and psychology, so far. I will have them consult with their groups again to write their proposal, which must revolve around a question, like:

- Why is there a piña in my taco?
- Why is this punk band playing Tejano beats?
- Why do so many people get Our Lady of Guadalupe tattoos?

MARCH 3, 2026

I feel like I am on the cusp of assigning purpose-driven projects. I am not there yet and can't get there fast enough. I am reading both *Ungrading* and David Yeager's *10 to 25*,[6] and I know that I can get these students to do something in the community, but I cannot see it yet. I am so slow, but this passage from Yeager seems right:

> Our purpose experiment showed that if you encourage a meaningful purpose for learning—one that involves both contribution to others and the status and respect one can gain from having

> stronger skills—then you can motivate young people to show the discipline and hard work that adults usually fail to see when they follow a conventional approach.[7]

It's not just "What interests you?" but "What can you teach people about Latin America in the RGV that they might not know?" I am trying it now. Deep breath. Baby steps in ungrading and purpose-driven classes.

Observations:

- Section 2 speaks so much Spanish! About half the class reads in Spanish.
- Section 1: We're down to one student speaking consistent Spanish. How to get this back up? I need to work harder to put the text in Spanish for them on the board.

MARCH 11, 2026

Today's class was really good. I told them to imagine that they were the US and wanted to colonize Mars and the Martians who already live there. I gave Mars a flag and a language (Martian) and a currency (Martinicos). I put them in groups of 3–4 and had them make a list of things they would do to colonize the place and its people. Both classes were animated and interested in the project. They were thinking for themselves and with each other, not trying to get "inside teacher's head." When we came back together, I asked for one idea from each group. They talked across groups about how their strategies were related. We called "Plan A" coming in peace and tempting the Martians into submitting to us. But if that fails, they wanted to go with "Plan B": use force. In one section they agreed that although the first generation of colonized individuals might not like their colonized state, their grandchildren and great grandchildren would love being American. Then we talked about Pedro Albizu Campos, how he was jailed for twenty-six years, how he called the annexation "The US Invasion of Puerto Rico," and how he thought that a moral argument to get the US out of Puerto Rico would not work.

I should tell them at the beginning that they will grade themselves. Maybe. I don't know about this—would that make them not work hard enough? It's an experiment. I don't know how to handle these things without grades: a) attendance, b) lateness, c) quality group work/LA-RGV. I don't worry about going gradeless with: a) Language-Culture Story, b) *Plática*, c) Proposal, d) Digital Testimonio.

I like focusing on feedback for the proposals. I told them not to do the project until they come talk to me in my office. How will I grade the poster board? When will I grade it? Will it just be: Did you do it? How do I stop people from slacking? Is this the wrong question?

My worries:

- People won't come to class if you don't compel them.
- People will slack if you let them.
- I want to incentivize them to do a good job. What does this even mean?
- What makes people come to class if not attendance?
- How to convince people that the class is the content, that they can't "make it up?"
- Should I have individual conferences with students?
- *Pláticas* are due on the last day of Spring Break. I hope this is a good idea. I will give them feedback. How can I tell them about ungrading without them feeling like it's a blow-off class?

I am afraid to cede authority. How can I genuinely motivate someone? Why should they show up on time? Why shouldn't they? After reading their mid-semester evaluations, I made this list. My goals/hopes/dreams for my students in this class are that they will:

a) Feel comfortable speaking in Spanish
b) Dare to speak/write the language out of their comfort zone
c) Appreciate the languages used in the classroom
d) Know their family/culture better through their language-culture story
e) Enjoy hearing each other's language-culture stories
f) Enjoy the work they do for the class
g) Get better at philosophical reading
h) Get better at philosophical thinking
i) Value their abuelas' filosofía de la cocina
j) Learn more about themselves/family
k) Feel their history/knowledge and backgrounds/languages belong in college classrooms
l) Feel respected/treated as equals
m) Connect the RGV to Latin America
n) Learn from each other
o) Connect with each other
p) Look forward to coming to class
q) Feel belonging at UTRGV
r) Think critically about many subjects

s) Feel competent to take more philosophy courses

t) Become more curious

u) Think about taking a(nother) Mexican American Studies course

v) Think about getting the B3 Scholar Seal

w) Make good memories in college

x) Make a friend in this class

y) Feel pride in their cultures and languages

z) Feel that this is more than just a class

MARCH 14, 2026

For the second half of the semester, I will write and speak more in Spanish. They got scared? Convinced that I was kidding? Too complacent? I can't put my finger on it. I seem to be devoting more mental energy to ungrading than to teaching bilingually, but they are related. I want to bring Spanish back up.

I am giving feedback on their project proposals. Since this is an experiment, I am trying not to grade too harshly but see what they come up with and take notes about how to fix the instructions for next time. Multiple deadlines help, like when to *entregar* the proposal, the meeting with me, the reflection, etc.

MARCH 27, 2026

I love this class. I am listening to the *Pláticas* and I love them. The reflections are great too. I am not as frustrated as I usually am with assignments, papers, etc. I feel like I am ungrading.

APRIL 16, 2026

I am feeling so-so about the class. It's "that time" in the semester, so students are not showing up like they used to. I had two students crying in my office today about things that were going on in their lives, apologizing for not being present but wanting me to know that they respect me and felt bad for underdelivering. Neither wanted more points—they always impress me with this. Spanish is a struggle in the first section.

APRIL 28, 2026

I am caught between grading and ungrading, authoritarianism and collaboration. I'm an infant in a suit. I find myself embarrassed, asking myself what standards even are, or when we were supposed to have set them and explained them to students. I am ashamed to admit that I don't know what mastery looks like. I am disoriented and daily conclude that I have no business in a classroom. I set out to teach them cool things and make sure they did some creative, less AI-vulnerable assignments to learn about Latin American philosophy from experience rather than a computer. I wish I had known these things fifteen years ago. Besides the mandatory SLOs, I don't know what I am trying to teach these people. Maybe it's my list of twenty-six things I want for them, in which case any talk of measuring is out. I am convinced by almost everything Alfie Kohn says in his books and podcast,[8] and yet I am caught between worlds: theory and practice, faith and action.

I have been told that I am too hard on myself. My class evaluations tend to be high, but I always want to make classes better, more connected to student life. I see colleagues do this, and I want in. So, although I might label this class a "success" as a sweeping assessment, I see the cracks and the places to improve: more design, more autonomy, more reflection. *Más español*.

NEXT TIME: FALL 2026

In my 2011 article, I wrote that I was thinking about including Che Guevara on my syllabus "in order to be able to systematically compare three (very different) sites of Latin American revolution." I haven't done this, and it no longer strikes me as necessary. What I needed, which I did not know then, was to get closer to home, not further away. I needed to include Anzaldúa and the Rio Grande Valley, to show them that Latin America is not foreign, that Spanish and Tex-Mex are also American languages.

Some of the changes I want to make:

- Make my expectations clearer. High standards, high support.
- Speak more Spanish.
- Let them decide what they want to read—give them more options than fit the syllabus. In general, more collaboration, more choice, more autonomy.
- Try pass/fail daily quizzes and more in Spanish. I can also have a minimum standard for annotations. Or get rid of quizzes and mandatory reading. This would feel like jumping off a cliff.
- Projects can be feedback-only and self-assessed. This, too, feels scary.
- Make them do reflections and self-evals for each project.

Despite my best efforts at design, I don't think that I alone have the means to combat their other demands: work, their more authoritarian classes, life, sleep, and yes (but only finally) social media. If reading and attendance were voluntary, and I were to use all my muscle to make the class worth their while to come and want to learn; if it were up to me and class design to flip on their internal motivation switch—even were I to do all this, I still do not believe they'd read or show up. I am not made of magnets; I cannot draw them to class by sheer personality. I am no match for cars that break down, grandparents whose wounds open in the middle of the night and need to be taken to the ER, younger siblings who need my students to work full time because one parent is incarcerated and the other is gone, nor for less overtly dramatic reasons like sleep deprivation, senioritis, and burnout. Students have been raised on external motivation; I have watched them triage classes and assignments based on what's "mandatory."

I will need years to connect the dots of what I have been doing for my fifteen years of teaching. I find myself returning to quite fundamental questions: What is philosophy for? What is it good at? What do I want my students to be able to know or do that they couldn't when they started? Who are they and what do I want them to become? How will I/we measure these things? Finally, what does language have to do with it? I am sure it's the way in, but I am not sure to where. Teaching bilingually feels way bigger than language.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Although I would say that the 2026 version of the course is more student-centered, place-based, and linguistically/culturally reparative than it was in 2011, I want it to be even more transformative for more of my students. Teaching bilingually is not a parlor trick; it comes from deep respect for our students' languages and cultures and a willingness to go out of my comfort zone, to take the role of student to them, make them my *profes*. Philosophizing bilingually is transformative for many of them, even the ones who think their Spanish is poor. One student who hinted at linguistic trauma told me that the class helped fuel her desire to speak Spanish without shame. Using two languages in the classroom is a powerful leveler, especially when I get a word wrong. This semester I confused "calificación" [grade] with "calefacción" [heater] to our collective delight. Ungrading and teaching bilingually both signal to the student: we are equals; we are co-creating knowledge as we go. In a bilingual and ungrading classroom, there is room for error, growth, and care.

NOTES

1. Mariana Alessandri, "Phil 2380: Introduction to Latin American Philosophy," *APA Newsletter on Hispanic/Latino Issues in Philosophy* 11, no. 1 (2011): 15–17.

2. Alessandri, "Phil 2380," 15.

3. See Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, 4th ed. (Aunt Lute Books, 2012); and Gloria Anzaldúa, "Speaking in Tongues: A Letter to 3rd World Women Writers," in *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, ed. Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa (Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press, 1983), 165–74.

4. Daniel Coyle, *Flourish: The Art of Building Meaning, Joy, and Fulfillment* (Bantam, 2026); Susan D. Blum, ed., *Ungrading: Why Rating Students Undermines Learning (and What to Do Instead)* (West Virginia University Press, 2020).

5. Student names have been changed to protect their privacy.

6. David Yeager, *10 to 25: The Science of Motivating Young People: A Groundbreaking Approach to Leading the Next Generation—and Making Your Own Life Easier* (Avid Reader Press, 2024).

7. Yeager, *10 to 25*, 225.

8. Alfie Kohn, *Punished by Rewards: The Trouble with Gold Stars, Incentive Plans, A's, Praise, and Other Bribes* (Houghton Mifflin, 1999). Kohn's podcast is called *Kohn's Zone*.

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Teaching Feminist Jurisprudence in the US-Mexico Borderlands

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> A significant part of the feminist project is to educate the non-feminist, so to speak, to make clear the significance of patriarchal influences where they commonly go unrecognized.
>
> —Patricia Smith[1]

On May 23, 2012, while I was pursuing my doctoral studies in the United States and experiencing what felt like the promise of the American dream, a brutal act of gender-based violence unfolded in Colombia, my country of origin. Rosa Elvira Cely, a thirty-five-year-old street vendor, was raped, tortured, and murdered in a secluded area of Bogotá's National Park.[2] As a middle-class male citizen, I remained largely unaware of the depth and systematic nature of such violence until, after completing my doctoral studies, I worked at the Office of the Attorney General of Colombia. There, through collaboration with prosecutors and forensic teams, I encountered multiple criminal investigations involving *feminicides*, a term used by Latin American feminists to describe extreme violence against feminized individuals, including girls and cisgender and transgender women.[3] The epistemic lucidity of the grieved and the still alive was a transformative experience that helped me to understand the perverse ubiquity of the continuum of sexual violence.[4] Today, as an assistant professor and director of the Philosophy Pre-law Concentration at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley (UTRGV), I understand feminist pedagogy as the deliberate cultivation of this epistemic lucidity. So, when I teach Philosophy of Law or my Special Topics Course on Femicide/*Feminicidio*, I try to embody and model a bicultural commitment to learning from the situated knowledge of those women who grieve, survive, and resist, rather than from abstract legal ideals alone. Since I understand feminist pedagogy more broadly as a commitment to learning from students, especially students who identify as women, I will provide anonymous testimonies from my students throughout my paper as evidence of my claims.

Student testimonies on the philosophy of law and domestic violence

> *When I signed up for this philosophy and law class the last thing I expected to learn was about domestic violence and the survivors/victims' stories. I was enlightened and surprised by how much I did not know about domestic violence.*
>
> *One in four women will encounter domestic violence by their significant other in their lifetime. With a statistic as powerful as this, it is extremely hard to ignore the topic of domestic/sexual violence once enlightened. Unfortunately, like many others, I went very long before I had the chance to properly educate myself on this subject.*

My goal in this paper is to advance feminist and culturally relevant approaches to teaching jurisprudence in the borderlands.[5] As I recognized when creating a Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy (CSP) version of my Philosophy of Law course as part our APA grant "Pluralizing Philosophical Languages and Cultures in the South Texas Borderlands,"[6] the difficulty of this task is twofold. On one hand, feminist jurisprudence, like all jurisprudence, is devoted to the analysis of fundamental legal relations, concepts, and principles.[7] On the other hand, the "borderlands" is not only a geographical region that, in this case, refers to the border between the United States and Mexico, but also a cultural and existential reality shaping the languages and identities of both me and my students.[8] Given jurisprudence's alleged level of necessary abstraction, teaching can easily reproduce a hierarchical structure in which a well-versed specialist claims epistemic authority over fundamental legal relations, concepts, and principles, positioning students in a passive role marked by depersonalization, decontextualization, and distance from lived experiences. In a borderlands context like UTRGV where most students are bilingual, bicultural, and identify themselves as women, monolingual and monocultural instruction focused exclusively on male Anglophone jurisprudence—the hegemonic "standard" across the US—would only increase this depersonalization, decontextualization, and distance.

I adopted three major strategies to prioritize bilingual and bicultural women's perspectives in my course. First, I reorganized and improved the curriculum of a traditional philosophy of law course by including readings on feminist jurisprudence and Latina Critical Feminism. Second, I used an experiential learning activity designed by the Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence called *Caminando en sus Zapatos: Living with Domestic Violence*.[9] Finally, since I am convinced that theoretical knowledge should follow practical action, and that practical action should produce theory for further action, I asked my students to undertake service-learning projects with Friendship of Women, Inc., a local nonprofit organization in Brownsville, TX that seeks to empower individuals and families affected by family and sexual violence by providing comprehensive, survivor-centered services that promote safety, health, and well-being.[10]

The feminist critique of the classroom challenges both what is taught and how the selected materials are taught.[11] Convinced that decisions about course content profoundly shape the conditions under which teaching takes place, the first section of my paper shows how I revised the philosophy of law curriculum to better reflect and include a wider range of voices and experiences. The second and final section explores some pedagogical strategies that emerge from a substantive reconfiguration of the canon in dialogue with Latin American and Latina feminist scholarship. Recognizing that each classroom is situated within its own institutional and social contexts,[12] my aim is not to impose a particular way of teaching, but to share my experience with the hope that some of the principles of feminist and culturally sustaining pedagogy discussed here will be useful to a broader community.

1. CHANGING THE CURRICULUM

Most textbooks and readers in philosophy of law marginalize feminist jurisprudence, either by excluding it entirely[13] or by confining it to a few pages,[14] in contrast to the extensive treatment given to mainstream approaches such as legal naturalism or legal positivism.[15] However, when women's perspectives only appear in the periphery, if at all, the canon could potentially maintain structures of oppression.[16] These editorial choices are not neutral. They operate as a hidden curriculum by signaling whose experiences count as jurisprudentially relevant and what kinds of questions qualify as "real" legal theory. When women's perspectives appear only at the margins, students are trained, implicitly but nevertheless effectively, to regard gendered power as an optional topic rather than a structuring feature of legal concepts, institutions, and practices. This would be particularly pernicious in institutions like UTRGV, where women constitute 58.2 percent of the student body.[17]

A similar problem arises in Hispanic-Serving Institutions, where Hispanic or Latinx students constitute a substantial portion of the student population.[18] Although these students are demographically central to the university—e.g., they comprise over 90 percent of UTRGV's student body—the canon through which philosophy of law is taught remains distant from their legal realities and experiences. Dominant approaches to jurisprudence present themselves as universal and context-neutral, yet this universalism frequently abstracts away the experiences that structure my students' everyday notions of the law.[19] As a result, Hispanic students may encounter a form of marginalization analogous to the one experienced by women in traditional legal education: not necessarily exclusion from the classroom, but exclusion from the sources of philosophical meaning that are treated as theoretically relevant and authoritative.

Addressing these forms of marginalization requires expanding the canon to include feminist jurisprudence and Latina Critical Feminism as relevant and even central sources of jurisprudential analysis.[20] In my Philosophy of Law course, feminist theories receive the same sustained attention and rigorous analysis as more traditional frameworks, including legal naturalism, legal positivism, legal realism, and critical legal studies. Students examine liberal feminist jurisprudence's struggles for equality through authors such

as Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg,[21] dominance feminism's account of sexualized subordination through authors such as Catherine MacKinnon,[22] and relational jurisprudence's analysis of the qualitative features of women's suffering and its implications for law through authors such as Robin West.[23] Equally important, students learn with Angela Harris that feminist legal theory can become "essentialist" when it speaks in the name of a unitary category of woman, thereby treating the experiences of white, middle-class women as universal.[24] Following these essentialist critiques, and recognizing the borderlands context in which my course is taught, I devote some class sessions to Latina Critical Feminism. Texts such as Berta Esperanza Hernandez-Truyol's "Las Olvidadas—Gendered in Justice/Gendered Injustice: Latinas, Fronteras and the Law"[25] or Margaret Montoya's "*Mascaras, Trenzas, y Greñas*: Un/Masking the Self While Un/Braiding Latina Stories with Legal Discourse"[26] are engaged with the aim of helping my students find themselves within the canon of jurisprudence. Although this course is not officially designated as bilingual, the Spanish at the beginning of these titles speaks directly to my students' bilingualism and biculturalism, flagging them as relevant to the philosophy of law.

Student testimonies on feminist jurisprudence and Latino/as

> *Feminist jurisprudence provided a valuable framework for understanding the issues we addressed in this project. Catharine MacKinnon's concept of "difference and dominance" helped me see how power dynamics play out in abusive relationships.*
>
> *The reason why I relate essentialism to my experience during Service Learning is that we live in the Valley, an area whose population is basically non-white (particularly Latino), and the population that we were addressing during the presentation was Latino in its entirety. . . . [T]here is inevitably a feeling of underrepresentation, not only by the mere fact that the law underrepresents women's issues in itself but also due to the generalization of their issues.*
>
> *Hernández-Truyol's discussion of Latinas as "Las Olvidadas," or the forgotten ones, deeply resonated with me as I contemplated the myriad economic and social challenges many women in our community face. . . . According to Hernández-Truyol, Latinas suffer compounded discrimination due to the intersections of their gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status, leading to alarmingly high rates of poverty, limited access to education, and disproportionate vulnerability to domestic violence. These realities are particularly significant in Brownsville, where a substantial portion of the population lives below the poverty line, grappling with insufficient access to essential resources.*

2. CHANGING THE WAY OF TEACHING

From a feminist perspective, teaching philosophy of law should not only be about an abstract analysis of fundamental legal relations, concepts, and principles, but also "a specific sociopolitical and human story that affects real women."[27] This pedagogical claim has critical implications for course design: it calls for a component that moves students from conceptual analysis to situated engagement. It is in this spirit that I built a service-learning project into my course with four increasingly engaged objectives:

1. Explain how adopting a gender perspective reshapes legal doctrine and the operation of legal institutions.

2. Evaluate legal rules and practices from the standpoint of women and girls, including those who may not conform to cisgender norms.

3. Integrate analyses of gender inequality into concrete legal and social contexts (e.g., institutions, policies, case narratives, and community practices).

4. Implement a community-engaged and culturally relevant intervention that works toward feminist social change.

To achieve these goals, we partner with Friendship of Women, Inc. (FOW), an organization whose mission is "to provide leadership and comprehensive services to empower and promote safety, health, and the overall well-being of adults and children impacted by family and sexual violence."[28] In the service-learning project, students support FOW's vision of "ending violence against battered women, men, and their children." In teams, students propose, plan, organize, and carry out a community-engaged activity aligned with FOW's priorities. With FOW's guidance, students use the Close to Home framework, which moves them through four phases that build on one another: 1) Assess, 2) Talk, 3) Build, and 4) Act.[29]

In the Assess phase, students become curious and take time to learn about and better understand domestic and sexual violence, which fits with Menkel-Meadow's characterization of the feminist critique, which should start "from the experiential point of view of the oppressed, dominated and devaluated."[30] Students are introduced to this perspective through our partnership with FOW and through the experiential learning activity, *Caminando en sus Zapatos: Living with Domestic Violence* that helps give students the time and space they need to gather, learn, and understand local knowledge about domestic violence with help from FOW. For instance, students learn that nearly 50,000 women and girls were killed by their intimate partners or other family members during 2025, which means that 60 percent of the 83,000 women killed in 2025 were murdered by their intimate partners or other family members. In other words, an average of 137 women and girls worldwide lost their lives every day at the hands of their partner or a close relative.[31] In the United States alone, between 2020 and 2024, law enforcement reported more than 11,000 domestic violence homicide victims and an additional 1.1 million victims of domestic violence, nearly 75 percent of whom were female.[32] At the same time, to avoid giving the false impression that nothing can be done about these statistics, students learn about FOW's survivor-

centered services, which include emergency shelter, crisis intervention, and legal advocacy, as well as community-facing prevention work that expands public knowledge about family and sexual violence through awareness presentations and trainings.

Since studying legal relations, concepts, and principles from a feminist perspective "includes a real, concretized, contextualized, and experiential dimension,"[33] I bring the experiential dimension into the classroom using the learning activity developed by the Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence: *In Her Shoes®*. Designed as a simulation grounded in the narratives of real survivors, this activity invites participants to follow the trajectories of individuals living within abusive and controlling relationships as they navigate legal, medical, economic, and social institutions. Rather than presenting domestic violence as an object of abstract analysis, this activity situates learning in an encounter with the structural constraints, limited choices, and institutional barriers that shape survivors' lives.

To make the activity more culturally relevant for our students while engaging the broad spectrum of their bilingual abilities, I use an adapted version of *In Her Shoes®* called *Caminando en sus Zapatos: Living with Domestic Violence*. Rather than being a mere translation, this adaptation was written in Spanish and centers on the experiences of Latina and Latin American women, especially immigrant and refugee survivors. For instance, an activity prompts students to examine the aftermath of domestic violence through the experiences of women such as Cristina Rivas, a thirty-two-year-old Salvadoran single mother who met her husband before immigrating to the United States as a refugee; Guadalupe Correa, who moved to the United States after her mother died to live with her oldest brother; and Sandra Puente, a college student from Mexico who came to the United States to study. After adopting the first-person perspective of a survivor, students are put in situations where abuse happens to their characters. Then, they choose among options such as visiting a doctor, talking with family members, contacting their religious communities, or calling the police. Depending on the suboptimal yet realistic reactions of supporting institutions like these as well as the subsequent decisions students make, their character's story develops in ways that demonstrate the dangers, challenges, and misunderstandings that survivors of domestic violence face as they exercise their agency.

Precisely because the simulation requires students to make choices and then live with their consequences, it becomes a setting in which they can begin to ask not only what the law is, but what it should do for survivors—and where, in practice, it falls short. As Bridget Crawford and her coauthors suggest, "Feminist judgments in the classroom can help students in a myriad of ways, but especially in developing their own roles in addressing what they perceive to be the gaps between law and justice."[34] In *Caminando en sus Zapatos*, students begin to develop feminist judgments through role-play by testing their assumptions about safety, agency, and institutional responsibility against a sequence of constrained, often no-win decisions. The exercise pushes them to notice how survivors' options are structured by coercive control, economic precarity, immigration and language barriers, and the uneven responsiveness of medical, familial, religious, and legal systems. The learning is visible in students' reactions, especially their frustration, when the simulated survivor cannot act as they expect, or when institutions fail to provide the help students presumed would be available, thereby making the distance between law's promises and survivors' lived realities harder to ignore and more obviously important to the philosophy of law and jurisprudence.

Student testimonies on experiential learning and domestic violence

> *Caminando en sus Zapatos holds a very special place in my heart because I feel as if no college courses offer much hands-on learning anymore, especially with online-heavy assignments and resources. Thanks to this activity, I was able to get insight into what typical domestic abuse cases look like, which can make all the difference.*
>
> *The simulation, based on real-life stories brought by the survivors or friends and family of victims, made me feel the fear, frustration, and helplessness that many victims of domestic violence endure daily.*
>
> *When I started the activity, I narrow-mindedly thought finding safety from domestic violence meant finding physical safety, but I quickly learned it wasn't just about finding physical safety—it was about rebuilding a life amidst fear, stigma, and systemic barriers.*

After experiencing the simulated aftermath of domestic violence using *Caminando en sus Zapatos*, students transition to the second phase of the Close to Home framework: Talk. As Abrams notes, "Feminist action begins with building community and experience sharing,"[35] which is why students in this phase form groups to expand and deepen their conversations about domestic violence. To resist hierarchical, top-down structures of knowledge, I invite students to choose the collaborators they feel comfortable working with and to practice participatory, inquiry-based learning rather than passive note-taking. Everyone is expected to engage in critical and creative thinking about how their work can support FOW's mission locally. In doing so, I am following feminist teaching methods that "foster a more open and flexible understanding of the many ways problems can be solved. Building trust, collaboration, engagement, and empowerment [are] the pedagogical goals, rather than reinforcing the competition [and] individual achievement."[36] The group discussions culminate in a proposal aligned with FOW's mission, which students present to FOW and then refine based on the organization's feedback to ensure the project is viable, appropriate, and genuinely useful. Students clarify what the activity will accomplish, who it is for, what resources it requires, and how it aligns with FOW's survivor-centered priorities.

After FOW's approval, students assemble the practical pieces during the Build phase. Team roles and

responsibilities, a workback timeline with milestones and check-ins, materials and scripts, and a communication plan are clarified and executed. This helps students ensure that their project can be carried out consistently and responsibly. Because the work addresses domestic and sexual violence, this phase also includes basic harm-reduction practices: clear boundaries about confidentiality, guidance on responding to disclosures, referral pathways to services, and attention to language and format. Students exchange skills and ideas with FOW staff, revise the scope and outreach strategy to fit community realities, and ensure their intervention supports prevention, safety, and empowerment rather than reproducing stigma or risk. Finally, in the Act phase, students implement the project in partnership with FOW and engage in a guided debrief that asks them to name what they learned from the organization's situated expertise and from the constraints of community work. Some of these narratives were reproduced here in this paper as student testimonies.

Returning to the service-learning objectives of the course, the sequence of phases described above—Assess, Talk, Build, Act—clearly demonstrate how feminist jurisprudence can be taught as both conceptual critique and situated practice. By immersing students in simulations of the barriers many Latina survivors face—including linguistic obstacles, economic precarity, and the institutional gatekeeping that shapes access to safety and legal remedies—students learn to see how gendered power operates through the everyday routines of legal and social institutions. In turn, they are better able to 1) explain how adopting a gender perspective reshapes doctrine and institutional practice; 2) evaluate legal rules and responses from the standpoint of women and girls, including those outside cisgender norms; 3) connect analyses of gender inequality to concrete contexts and constraints; and 4) work with FOW to implement a community-engaged intervention oriented toward feminist social change.

Student testimonies on service-learning and feminist praxis

> *The Voices for Justice project has been one of the most transformative, educational, and eye-opening experiences of my life. Partnering with FOW, our goal was to create a presentation that raised awareness about domestic violence and informed the community about resources available to survivors. This process not only helped me better understand domestic violence as a multifaceted issue but also allowed me to develop valuable skills such as teamwork, adaptability, and public speaking.*
>
> *Embarking on the service-learning project for this course was an experience that taught me much more than I anticipated. At first, it was about finding the path of least resistance and going with our first option. But as we moved forward with our project, we were met with challenges and realizations. It wasn't just about checking a box for a class assignment or volunteering a few hours anymore—it was about connecting with my community, reflecting on societal issues, and learning how I, even as a student, could make an impact.*
>
> *This experience also allowed me to connect what I was learning in class with real-world applications. I was able to apply feminist theories we discussed, like the importance of empowering women and challenging patriarchal structures, to my service work. It showed me how feminist ideas can be used to make a big difference in the lives of individuals and communities, particularly when it comes to providing support for those facing violence or oppression. It also encouraged me to think critically about the role of law and advocacy in addressing social issues, helping me see how my work in this area could contribute to broader efforts for justice and equality.*

CONCLUSION

Returning to the case of Rosa Elvira Cely clarifies why feminist jurisprudence should not be taught as if gender-based violence were peripheral to legal life or as if abstraction were an innocent methodological choice. My own recognition of the continuum of sexual violence, made possible by learning from the epistemic lucidity of those who grieve, survive, and resist, has become the pedagogical task I now set for students. This paper has argued that teaching feminist jurisprudence in the borderlands requires treating students' cultures, locations, histories, languages, and community infrastructures as central to what counts as jurisprudential inquiry and designing classroom practices that move from conceptual critique to situated engagement.

To that end, I presented a sequence of culturally sustaining course features and pedagogical interventions that belong together. Re-centering feminist jurisprudence and Latina Critical Feminism in the syllabus challenges the hidden curriculum of the canon by making women's and Latinas' experiences sources of theoretical authority. The simulation *Caminando en sus Zapatos* then confronts students with the constrained, often no-win choices through which surviving domestic violence is lived and through which institutions reveal their limits. Finally, the service-learning partnership with Friendship of Women, Inc. transforms students' newly acquired philosophical insights into accountable practice as students plan and implement community-facing work under the guidance of those who respond to violence every day. Although no single course can resolve the structural conditions that sustain sexual and domestic violence, we can cultivate forms of feminist judgment that help students recognize these conditions, critique law's role in reproducing them, and undertake theoretically informed and community-accountable responses in partnership with local organizations.

NOTES

1. Patricia Smith, "Feminist Jurisprudence," in *A Companion to Philosophy of Law and Legal Theory*, ed. Dennis Patterson (Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 296.

2. Julián Ortega Martínez, "Colombia: The Brutal Rape and Murder of Rosa Elvira Cely," *Global Voices*, June 5, 2012, https://globalvoices.org/2012/06/05/colombia-the-brutal-rape-and-murder-of-rosa-elvira-cely/.

3. See Danny Marrero, "Safeguarding Bodies That Matter: Inequal Grievability and Sexual Terror in Butler's Analysis of Feminicidio," *Acorn: Philosophical Studies in Pacifism and Nonviolence* 24, no. 1 (2024): 46–50.

4. For the concept of the continuum of sexual violence, see Liz Kelly, *Surviving Sexual Violence* (Polity Press, 1988), 74–96.

5. I take seriously the claim that the feminist pedagogical agenda remains unfinished and adapts to new manifestations of century-old challenges. Jamie R. Abrams, "Feminism's Transformation of Legal Education and Unfinished Agenda," in *The Oxford Handbook of Feminism and Law in the United States*, ed. Deborah Brake, Martha Chamallas, and Verna L. Williams (Oxford University Press, 2021), 497.

6. Our grant report to the APA includes my revised syllabus for PHIL 3307: Philosophy of Law. See Alex Stehn et al., "APA Grant Report for *Pluralizing Philosophical Languages and Cultures in the South Texas Borderlands*," American Philosophical Association, 2024, https://www.apaonline.org/resource/resmgr/grantreports/diversity_grant_reports/2023-2024/pluralizing_languages_and_cu.pdf.

7. Smith, "Feminist Jurisprudence," 290.

8. Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (Aunt Lute Books, 1987), 3; Chad Richardson and Michael J. Pisani, *Batos, Bolillos, Pochos, and Pelados: Class and Culture on the South Texas Border*, rev. ed. (University of Texas Press, 2017), 223–58.

9. The webpage of this experiential learning activity is https://wscadv.org/training-kits/in-her-shoes/.

10. The homepage of Friendship of Women, Inc., is http://www.fowinc.com/.

11. See, for example, Carrie Menkel-Meadow, "Feminist Legal Theory" *Journal of Legal Education* 38, nos. 1–2 (1988): 77; Abrams, "Feminism's Transformation," 499.

12. Ruth Colker, "Teaching from a Feminist Perspective: An Occupational Hazard?," *Virginia Journal of Social Policy and the Law* 1 (1993): 174.

13. See Jules L. Coleman, ed., *Readings in the Philosophy of Law* (Routledge, 2013); Andrei Marmor, ed., *The Routledge Companion to Philosophy of Law* (Routledge, 2012); Mark C. Murphy, *Philosophy of Law: The Fundamentals* (Blackwell Publishing, 2007); Raymond Wacks, *Philosophy of Law: A Very Short Introduction*, 2nd ed. (Oxford University Press, 2014).

14. See John Arthur and William Shaw, eds., *Readings in the Philosophy of Law*, 5th ed. (Routledge, 2009); Brian H. Bix, *Jurisprudence: Theory and Context*, 9th ed. (Carolina Academic Press, 2023); George C. Christie, Patrick H. Martin, and Adam MacLeod, *Jurisprudence: Text and Readings on the Philosophy of Law*, 4th ed. (West Academic Publishing, 2020); Keith C. Culver and Michael Giudice, eds., *Readings in the Philosophy of Law*, 4th ed. (Broadview Press, 2026); Laurence Houlgate, *Philosophy, Law and the Family: A New Introduction to the Philosophy of Law* (Springer International Publishing, 2017); Jeffrie Murphy and Jules Coleman, *Philosophy of Law: An Introduction to Jurisprudence* (Routledge, 2018); Mark Tebbit, *Philosophy of Law: An Introduction*, 3rd ed. (Routledge, 2017).

15. Some exceptions are Susan Dimock, *Classic Readings and Cases in Philosophy of Law* (Routledge, 2016); Robert L. Hayman Jr. et al., *Jurisprudence, Classical and Contemporary: From Natural Law to Postmodernism*, 3rd ed. (West Academic Publishing, 2021); Raymond Wacks, *Understanding Jurisprudence: An Introduction to Legal Theory*, 6th ed. (Oxford University Press, 2021).

16. Paula A. Monopoli, "Feminist Legal History and Legal Pedagogy," *Virginia Law Review Online* 108 (2022): 94, https://virginialawreview.org/articles/feminist-legal-history-and-legal-pedagogy/.

17. Across the US, 47 percent of women ages twenty-five to thirty-four have a bachelor's degree, compared with 37 percent of men. Kiley Hurst, "U.S. Women Are Outpacing Men in College Completion, Including in Every Major Racial and Ethnic Group," Pew Research Center, November 18, 2024, https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2024/11/18/us-women-are-outpacing-men-in-college-completion-including-in-every-major-racial-and-ethnic-group/.

18. A Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI) is a college or university where at least 25 percent of the full-time undergraduate enrollment is Hispanic. During the 2024–25 academic year, there were 631 HSIs in the United States. Most of them are in Arizona, California, Florida, and Texas. *Excelencia* in Education, *Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs) Factsheet: 2024–25* (*Excelencia* in Education, 2026), https://www.edexcelencia.org/research/publications/hispanic-serving-institutions-hsis-fact-sheet.

19. For Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, this "perspectiveless" approach to education nullifies the values, experiences, and worldviews of minoritized students. See "Toward a Race-Conscious Pedagogy in Legal Education," *National Black Law Journal* 11, no. 1 (1988): 2.

20. According to Catharine A. MacKinnon, there is feminism in education when "women and women's point of view is represented and respected in texts and in class." "Feminism in Legal Education," *Legal Education Review* 1, no. 1 (1989).

21. Ruth Bader Ginsburg and Barbara Flagg, "Some Reflections on the Feminist Legal Thought of the 1970's," *University of Chicago Legal Forum* 1989, no. 1 (1989).

22. Catharine A. MacKinnon, "Difference and Dominance: On Sex Discrimination," in *Feminism Unmodified: Discourses on Life and Law* (Harvard University Press, 1987).

23. Robin West, "The Difference in Women's Hedonic Lives: A Phenomenological Critique of Feminist Legal Theory," *Wisconsin Women's Law Journal* 15 (2000).

24. Angela P. Harris, "Race and Essentialism in Feminist Legal Theory," *Stanford Law Review* 42, no. 3 (1990).

25. Berta Esperanza Hernández-Truyol, "Las Olvidadas—Gendered in Justice/Gendered Injustice: Latinas, Fronteras and the Law," *Journal of Gender, Race & Justice* 1 (1998).

26. Margaret E. Montoya, "*Mascaras, Trenzas, y Greñas*: Un/Masking the Self While Un/Braiding Latina Stories and Legal Discourse," *Harvard Women's Law Journal* 17 (1994).

27. Menkel-Meadow, "Feminist Legal Theory," 81.

28. "Friendship of Women, Inc.," accessed March 11, 2026, http://www.fowinc.com/.

29. "The Close to Home Approach," Close to Home, accessed March 11, 2026, https://www.c2-home.org/overview.

30. Menkel-Meadow, "Feminist Legal Theory," 61.

31. United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and UN Women, *Femicides in 2024: Global Estimates of Intimate Partner/Family Member Femicides* (United Nations Publications, 2025), 4.

32. Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Domestic Relationships and Violent Crimes, 2020–2024* (US Department of Justice, 2026), 2, https://cde.ucr.cjis.gov/LATEST/resources/reports/Domestic%20Relationships%20and%20Violent%20Crimes%202020-2024.pdf.

33. Menkel-Meadow, "Feminist Legal Theory," 80.

34. Bridget J. Crawford et al., "Teaching with Feminist Judgments: A Global Conversation," *Law & Inequality: A Journal of Theory and Practice* 38, no. 1 (2020): 3.

35. Abrams, "Feminism's Transformation," 500.

36. Menkel-Meadow, "Feminist Legal Theory," 81.

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Bilingual Bildung *on the Border: Teaching Philosophy in Spanish and English*

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In this paper, I take up the philosophical concept of *Bildung* broadly defined as ethical self-formation in order to show its ongoing philosophical relevance. With some revision, I believe it is a solid way to foster a mutually beneficial relationship between a community and its youth, thus making it meaningful and productive for students and instructors. From my perspective, an especially interesting and productive version of *Bildung* that I call bilingual *Bildung* is embodied in the work that my colleagues and I are doing as philosophers and instructors at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley (UTRGV) through what we like to call the PB3 Project—Philosophy (P) in a Bilingual, Bicultural, and Biliterate (B3) institution.

Viewed historically, the concept of *Bildung* has contributed to the rise of the humanities and the goals of higher education, which not only teaches students the skills necessary to work towards their own goals and define their own happiness as authentically as they can but also helps them form themselves as ethical persons. In this way, we all benefit from this seemingly individual work. This articulation of *Bildung* is optimistic despite the fact that, at times, it has also been used to bind teachers and their pedagogical strategies to false and limiting images of the American student that have effectively excluded various populations or attempted to erase and/or devalue certain identity-defining features of minoritized cultures

and languages. At the same time, *Bildung* has been a mainstay of our educational system as a pedagogical aim and approach that necessarily responds to changes in US society and its expectations. Rather than seeing *Bildung's* historical contingency as a negative, it opens a space to revisit the concept and define it anew.

In the case of UTRGV, we are a public university that serves the southernmost tip of Texas where a majority of our students are bicultural, bilingual, and biliterate to varying degrees. The PB3 Project is our attempt to create a version of *Bildung* that recognizes and valorizes the self-formation of students who speak, consume culture, experience, and think about the world in more than one language and culture. Our "typical" student is not a nineteenth-century German, but a Mexican American like me. I will therefore explore how teaching philosophy bilingually or in Spanish in the South Texas Borderlands contributes to two positive outcomes: 1) the department can analyze and reinvent institutional assumptions and philosophical values, and more importantly, 2) students can experience educational opportunities to see and value both the plurality and the uniqueness of their experiences, cultures, and languages to aid them in their ethical self-formation. Defining and applying *Bildung* bilingually helps our institution and our department see the communities we serve in a different light and develop a more pluralistic vision of what it means to be educated.

In the first section, I will discuss the historical origins and development of *Bildung* to frame the goals of our PB3 Project. In the second section, I discuss both a renewed philosophical interest in *Bildung* and the academic study of heritage language learners to show how these ideas fit into the broader goals of a liberal arts education. In the third section, I provide some examples of PB3 course design, assignments, and expectations regarding languages and cultures in the classroom.

HISTORY AND DEVELOPMENT OF *BILDUNG*

In her book, *Forming Humanity: Redeeming the German Bildung Tradition*, Jennifer Herdt asserts that *Bildung* should be understood as an orientation rather than a concept,[1] and I draw heavily from her work in what follows. The concept of *Bildung* grew out of Pietist theology, which posits that each individual has an ethical responsibility to cultivate one's own skills and talents since humans are made in the image of God, and those skills and talents are God-given. While *Bildung* has a theological foundation, the trajectory of its development was radically shaped by the Enlightenment, which tied the concept of *Bildung* to the more secular rationalism of that time. This process repeats itself historically, each time adding and subtracting different aspects of *Bildung's* definition depending on the changes in a society, and the goals that constitute "the common good." These changes, in turn, bring about changes in the institutional goals of universities as well as our pedagogical aims in the classroom,[2] which is why it makes sense to speak of *Bildung* as an educational orientation.

The viability of the *Bildung* tradition is tested by how institutions respond to big and small changes within society. Hans-Georg Gadamer described *Bildung* as a founding principle to explain "the rise of the humanities" and the evolution of "new aesthetic and moral standards and ideals, [that] also challenged the orientation towards a narrow Enlightenment in the name of the rounded *Bildung* of the individual."[3] I find this brief description of the changes in the concept of *Bildung*—its Pietist beginnings, the pull toward Enlightenment rationalism, and the evolution of that rationalism through industrialization—to be a useful way to illustrate the historical persistence and variability of *Bildung*. While the idea of *Bildung* has persisted, its meaning has changed in light of the changes in a given society's values, standards, and ideals. The fluidity expressed here is a pivotal point about *Bildung* and, I assert, the most beneficial way to understand it. Herdt's work successfully captures the viability of this tradition by underscoring the resources it affords us as inheritors of not only the German *Bildung* tradition but also the Greek *paideia* tradition. In other words, long before we arrive at "bilingual *Bildung* on the border," *Bildung* must be understood as always already bilingual and bicultural.

BILDUNG AND *PAIDEIA*

Although the concept of *Bildung* comes out of an eighteenth-century theological idea, Herdt rightly ties it to the ethical task of becoming a good human being, which has an even older history. With philosophical roots in Ancient Greece, *paideia* expresses the two-sided responsibility the Greeks saw as imperative. On one side, there is the responsibility a person has to become "fully human." On the other side, there is the responsibility of a society to help the individual in that process because becoming human is not a singular task but a collective or communal one. Why? Because the impacts of individual formation extend far beyond the individual. Herdt offers three assumptions that frame *paideia*: one, we are not born fully human. This is supported straightforwardly by the fact that we begin as infants and mature into adults. Two, the process of becoming human is not automatic; becoming human requires time and practice with the influence and guidance of role models. Finally, while we do need help and guidance, each of us is ultimately responsible for making ourselves human.[4]

Drawing *Bildung* and *paideia* together provides a basis for looking at the concept of *Bildung* anew from the South Texas borderlands. Understood historically and contextually, *Bildung* can be bilingual, bicultural, and biliterate because its German pietist inception was already rooted in other languages and cultures, including the Attic Greek of Plato and the Koine Greek of the Christian New Testament. To see the possibilities of bilingual *Bildung* on the border demands that we see the educational and ethical responsibilities we are facing from both sides of the US-Mexico border using both languages (Spanish and English) that are widely spoken in our community. As educators at UTRGV, we continue to justify our department's foundational role and place in the general education core curriculum using Herdt's second and third assumption. Becoming human is not automatic, and philosophy can help. Some of the major goals of our discipline are to introduce students to philosophy and give them opportunities to grapple with philosophical ideas when what's at stake is the very meaning of their lives.

BILDUNG, HERITAGE LANGUAGES, AND THE GOALS OF A LIBERAL ARTS EDUCATION

While framing *Bildung* in an optimistic manner, I acknowledge that history reminds us of the many ways it has gone wrong. For example, as a Mexican American woman, I recognize that when Edinburg College was founded in 1927, people like me were systemically excluded from receiving the very sort of education I am offering my students today. Nevertheless, I reiterate here the well-trodden understanding of a liberal arts education as an education that helps a free person learn and practice the skills necessary to participate in a democracy: critical thinking and rational judgment. The problem with such as education is not the education itself, but the societal attempts to limit which sorts of people have access to it. "The common good" is another term I use to think through the connection between my responsibilities as a philosophy teacher and citizen of the Rio Grande Valley. The common good is about fostering and maintaining the ethos of a people, community, or society so that it may flourish. Herdt asserts that *Bildung* provides a common and coherent identity for a group of people that nevertheless respects individuality.[5] Such an ethos encompasses values, ideas, and standards that inform and are informed by the cultural, religious, and economic conditions of a group. Changes in an ethos can be terribly slow—as in the case of women and other minoritized groups gaining access to higher education. At other times, an ethos quickly evolves or develops new facets in response to something significant, like the bilingualism and biculturalism of students that were highlighted in new ways when UTRGV was founded in 2015.

The point of this broad understanding of the common good is that it affords us a view of how the ethos of the United States changes and shapes how education contributes to the common good. Through general education core curriculums, the variety of disciplinary course offerings, and differences in pedagogical practices, institutions of higher education define and measure ethical self-formation and educative growth. The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, for instance, requires that courses in "Language, Philosophy and Culture" section of the core teach not only Critical Thinking and Communication Skills but also Personal Responsibility and Social Responsibility, traces of the longstanding *Bildung* tradition. Essentially, there is no one, singular common good; but whatever the conception of that common good is projected to be by the people in power, it is eventually expressed in our educational system.

The PB3 Project gives students a chance to learn philosophy in English, Spanish, and Spanglish in order to help them intellectualize their particular place here in the South Texas borderlands as generative and meaningful to their sense of self. As a vision of ethical self-formation and philosophizing that is bilingual, biliterate and bicultural, bilingual *Bildung* on the border reflects some of the unique characteristics of our students.

Bildung and *paideia* also dovetail in the mission of the PB3 Project: we want to help our students incorporate their bilingual and bicultural selves and languages as they learn how to live an engaged life whereby they contribute positively to a pluralistic society where multiple languages and cultures have value. At the same time, the PB3 Project continues to maintain our institution's core education objectives referred to as Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs). At UTRGV, and other public universities across Texas, they include the four learning objectives mentioned above, along with Empirical and Quantitative Analysis, and Teamwork. There has been much institutional success with students achieving these SLOs, but as noted previously, there has also been marginalization and minoritization of large numbers of students. The SLOs can be limited by a set of monolingual, monocultural, and monoliterate assumptions about how these skills should be taught, how they should be measured, and how they are best achieved. Most of our students are capable of thinking critically in two languages, English and Spanish, but schools have historically taught and measured them in only one: English. This fact itself calls for critical thinking. Similarly, it makes very little sense to teach and measure the development of Communication, Personal Responsibility, Social Responsibility, Empirical and Qualitative Analysis, and Teamwork in only one language when the vast majority of students operate *outside* the classroom in two (or three): English, Spanish (and Spanglish).

Ideological assumptions like English-only education can effectively brush away or diminish the distinctive aspects of any given student population. In contrast, the PB3 Project wants to highlight and further develop these distinctive aspects of our students' identities and skills. Ideally, SLOs are pedagogical goals meant to teach concepts and skills in a way that students can learn new ideas for themselves, identify and pursue their own interests and strengths, and choose from a cache of activities and opportunities that help them grow as individuals and contribute to society through forms of active learning like mentoring, shadowing, and internship programs that help students develop practical knowledge and skills. This process points to the overall aim of helping individuals become flourishing members of a community that can prosper in the world and be active contributors to society. The drawback has been that, at times, the pursuit of these SLOs in narrow ways has made all students fungible in the process. This can be mitigated by recognizing the linguistic and cultural richness of the UTRGV's student population, which is 90 percent Hispanic or Latinx and comes from an incredibly bilingual region where 80 percent of households speak Spanish at home.

REINTRODUCING STUDENTS INTO THE CURRICULUM

The renewed scholarly interest in *Bildung* has revealed some interesting possibilities that emerge from its multiple conceptual, cultural, and linguistic origins and trajectories. Contemporary discussions address the conceptual language from Humboldt's era in educational psychology, the way *Bildung* continues to connect education to political and economic requirements, and the scholars who continue to explore its viability as a pedagogy that can benefit students.[6] My aim here is to highlight some scholars who focus on the value of communication in its various forms, since they provide conceptual support for our PB3 efforts.

In the article, "Is *Bildung* possible in the Classroom?" authors Kim, Morrison, and Ramzinski describe *Bildung* as construction of self and an "inner life," but also as a way to "cultivate [oneself] into a balanced whole through active engagement with the world around [oneself]."[7] The authors pursue a "*Bildung*-centered" pedagogy for both students and themselves. Their focus has been to create active engagement with students, each understood as an "organic whole," by experimenting with an autobiographical assignment that includes the individual's environment as the backdrop for personal reflection. Autobiographical writing is a straightforward way to reintroduce students into the curriculum while practicing the ancient Socratic maxim to know and care for oneself. Autobiography effectively fosters and nurtures a movement through and beyond knowledge and skill to self-formation. There is multi-level interaction through memory (a recognition of who one is or a specific impactful experience), meditation (writing as a conduit for reconnecting to said memory) and lastly, a reflexive thinking on and writing about the first two stages of the exercise that ideally leads to transformation.[8]

The approach taken in autobiographical writing further underscores the importance of seeing students in a particular linguistic and cultural context. In "*Bildung* and Educational Language: Talking of the Self in Anglo-American Education," Friesen reiterates the concern for selfhood and its continued development in the classroom. Friesen asserts that there has been a move to exclude selfhood in the definition and practice of *Bildung* that should be reinstituted. The initial, practical aim of *Bildung* was to uphold "a particular quality of selfhood" that manifests as a concern for freedom and agency.[9] This is born out in the work of Wilhelm von Humbolt who, in creating university curriculums, spoke of how much more an education should promise beyond knowledge and skills. In a letter to the King of Prussia, Humbolt describes an approach to education that echoes the discussion of both *Bildung* and *paideia* that should at once encourage individuality and benefit all citizens:

> There are undeniably certain kinds of knowledge that must be of a general nature and, more importantly, a certain cultivation of the mind and character that nobody can afford to be without. People obviously cannot be good craftworkers, merchants, soldiers or businessmen unless, regardless of their occupation, they are good, upstanding and—according to their condition—well-informed human beings and citizens.[10]

While forming selves, "Bildung-centered" education has also always aimed at external realities. Friesen suggests that a recovery of cultural and historical connections found in early twentieth-century educational psychology would be useful, for example, on John Dewey's conception of self as a consciousness that is an "active unity" that makes connections between the individual and others, the world, and its objects, achieving unity through both cognition and choice.[11] In the words of Gert Biesta:

> The concept of *Bildung* brings together the aspirations of all those who acknowledge—or hope—that education is more than the simple acquisition of knowledge and skills, that it is more than simply getting things "right," but that it also has to do with nurturing the human person, that it has to do with individuality, subjectivity, in short, with "becoming and being somebody."[12]

Since most students at UTRGV are bicultural and bilingual, it is fitting that our concern with their "becoming and being somebody" take place through B3 courses.

BILINGUAL/BICULTURAL LEARNERS

In this final section, I will describe my own B3 course design, and describe a sample assignment used in my bilingual Intro to Philosophy course that represents my initial attempt to create a space for both students and myself that exemplifies bilingual *Bildung*. The aforementioned core SLOs, when presented and practiced bilingually, give our students the opportunity to make more connections between their languages, cultural traditions, and the concepts that define our discipline. Through immersive assignments and culturally sustaining texts provided in English and/or Spanish, students come to see their bilingual abilities as well as their Mexican American experiences and cultural traditions through a philosophical lens. Students are encouraged to achieve their own insights about these things and themselves in English, Spanish, or both (Spanglish or Tex-Mex).

One way to conceptualize this is to see some of our students as heritage language learners. In *Spanish as a Heritage Language in the United States*, editors Beaudrie and Fairclough introduce the significance of teaching Spanish as a heritage language. Here, I aim to explicitly make the connection to bilingual *Bildung* or *paideia*. In a US context, a heritage language learner is someone raised in a home where a non-English language is spoken. Students are considered bilingual if they can speak or at least understand the heritage language.[13] This describes the vast majority of our student population at UTRGV perfectly. However, many heritage language learners fear judgment about their language competency and may experience anxiety, which I have found to be evident in the classroom and experienced myself.

In "SHL Learners' Attitudes and Motivations: Reconciling Opposing Forces," Cynthia Ducar describes the motivation to learn and/or become more fluent in a non-English language. There is an intrinsic motivation—e.g., learning a language is fun—and extrinsic motivation, which includes an individual's "desire to become a part of the target language community."[14] Many of my students express this extrinsic motivation because they feel like outsiders in relation to the Spanish language, even though for many of them, it was their first language. Much of the time, the negative judgments of others become a part of what prompts them to discontinue their studies. Ducar asserts that what research needs to grapple with are "how individual, social and cognitive factors interplay to create motivation." In her discussion of research on anxiety, attitude, and motivation in Spanish Heritage Language learners,[15] I see more clearly the opposing forces at work in our students' experiences with Spanish and education. In the Rio Grande Valley,

Spanish is the most common language spoken by children when they first start school. But there is also the stigma associated with the language from both the dominant English-speaking community, the overwhelmingly English (if not English-only) curriculum, and the "internal stigmas" that come from speaking varieties of Spanish that have arisen in the US rather than Spain or Latin America. A major goal of the RGV's educational system, like most of the US, is to transition Spanish-speaking children into English-only classrooms as soon as possible.

Social stigmas related to language are evident in many of the journal entries my students wrote in response to the prompts related to Anzaldúa's chapter "How to Tame a Wild Tongue" in *Borderlands/La Frontera*. One student wrote:

> I feel like Anzaldua's experience is similar to my own because I feel embarrassed or made to feel less because I do not speak Spanish very well. When we were little, my cousins called me a "No Sabo" kid. It was the same with the kids at school . . . especially the ones who speak Spanish well. It all made me self-conscious. Unless I am talking with my grandparents, I don't speak Spanish.

Our version of bilingual *Bildung* must take these stigmatized aspects of language into account and develop specific strategies to deal with them. Ducar makes it clear that assigning journal prompts and writing assignments about language provides a space where student attitudes about language can change and develop. She cites research showing that as students learn about the different varieties of Spanish, they develop more positive attitudes towards the variations of Spanish spoken, which encourages them to see the value of speaking Spanish, including its local varieties, and its continued role in their self-formation. Outcomes like this, which linguists often characterize as "critical language awareness"[16] are related not only to *Bildung* and *paideia* but also to the SLOs discussed above, especially Critical Thinking, Communication Skills, Personal Responsibility, and Social Responsibility.

PB3 COURSE DESIGN AND ASSIGNMENTS

During the summer of 2024, my colleagues and I organized and participated in a PB3 seminar and course development workshop that resulted in the creation of new philosophy courses that would be taught in Spanish or bilingually or using culturally sustaining pedagogies. We spent time sharing our cultural and linguistic heritages and experiences, then worked together to discuss, develop, and design our courses. In addition to including course materials in both Spanish and English, we talked about designing activities and assignments that give students the chance to think about philosophical concepts in relation to their cultural and linguistic histories.

In my case, I created a bilingual and culturally sustaining Introduction to Philosophy course. My goal was to design assignments around texts that gave students opportunities to explore and create spaces within the study and practice of philosophy that drew on their Spanish-English bilingualism and Mexican American biculturalism. The Introduction to Philosophy course I created had an overall trajectory of learning about different conceptions of self—what it is, how it is shaped, and its impact on other important facets of human experience, including ethics, friendship, love, and death. For a substantial part of the semester, we studied philosophers who argued for different conceptions of self. While talking about the heritage of the Western philosophical canon, I aimed to orient the course and our class discussions around Walter Kaufmann's idea that one could see the history of philosophy as a history of heresy.[17]

I created a variety of in-class writing tasks, half of which specifically asked about the role of language(s) in philosophical reflection and conceptions of self. In the very first writing task, students were asked to give their own cultural and linguistic histories and to describe how much (or how little) these histories shaped their identities and/or sense of self. Initially, most students saw language matter-of-factly, as a means of communication. Similarly, more than half the students did not seem to think language had any bearing on their sense of self.

Each of the philosophies we studied were introduced in terms of the heretical nature of their ideas. By the middle of the semester, although six or seven students (20 percent of the class) were comfortable enough to submit assignments in Spanish, most of our class discussion was in English. In the penultimate writing task, I brought copies of a chapter from *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987) by Rio Grande Valley native, Gloria Anzaldúa, entitled "How to Tame a Wild Tongue." Anzaldúa draws a tight connection between language and identity: "So, if you want to really hurt me, talk badly about my language. Ethnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity—I am my language."[18] For the in-class writing assignment, students responded to the following questions:

1) Which of Anzaldúa's languages do you speak and/or understand? Do you have strong feelings (negative or positive) about any of these?

2) How does Anzaldua's cultural and linguistic history shape her sense of self?

3) What parallels do you find between Anzaldua's story and your sense of self or your cultural and linguistic history?

I put students into groups to discuss their own responses. As they reported their answers, it became clear how strongly their identity was shaped by a self-perceived lack of skill in their heritage language or the shame and/or embarrassment they had experienced due to that lack. During our discussion, we thought together about why language was not included in the previous and more canonical discussions of self. The discussion itself was hushed, people speaking softly and, in a sense, treading lightly, since it was clear this was very personal and often very painful.

In fact, my experiences of growing up in the Rio Grande Valley—including my own experience of language anxiety and shame—are remarkably similar despite the generational gap (my students position me somewhere between their

moms and their *abuelas*). Being part of the PB3 Project has opened up many different feelings for me, including the return to my language anxiety that has accompanied me while teaching a philosophy course bilingually. I suspect that one of the reasons why my students are so kind to me about this is because they have their own experience of that anxiety. The students who are Spanish-dominant were also very helpful and overall, by the end of the semester, roughly one-third of the students were regularly turning in some assignments written either entirely in Spanish or in both English and Spanish. I suspect that the issue of language anxiety and shame will always be present, but every time we do this kind of assignment, we pave a way for students to see their language and cultural heritage as fundamental to their concept of self and to their self-formation through the process of bilingual *Bildung* on the border.

SAMPLE STUDENT RESPONSES

I include here just a handful of student responses from the in-class writing assignment described above, especially the third question about the parallels students saw between Anzaldúa's experiences/sense of self and their own.

> My experience with language is similar to Anzaldua's because I also know a few different versions of English and Spanish. The importance of knowing both languages is always stressed. We're different because I was embarrassed speaking Spanish as child while Anzaldua seems prideful.
>
> Language isn't considered a trait for a concept of self because not everyone feels a connection with the languages they speak. Maybe . . . it holds no emotional connection.
>
> Unlike Anzaldua, I was encouraged to speak Spanish because it meant more opportunities. My experience was also kind of similar because I grew up hearing "Don't speak Spanish outside, only English." "Go back to your country" I don't hear it in person too much, but I still see comments like that online in different outlets but it's the same ignorant people. I think it's a fine line, even though language makes us who we are, many people don't see it as a special thing that makes them unique.
>
> For me, I don't see how it matters—I love my grandparents, no matter what language I speak. But it has made me try harder to connect with them and ask them to correct me.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, I describe a discussion with my colleague, Alex Stehn, who conducted a peer observation of teaching focused on this particular class session. As he rightly pointed out, when my students and I philosophize in English, Spanish, and Spanglish from the perspective of our Mexican American heritage, and as we explore the possibilities that PB3 education might offer us, we are being heretical. The pedagogical practice of bilingual *Bildung* demands that we empower our students to see the value in their personal, familial, and community histories while assuming their rightful place in the heretical practice of philosophizing in languages other than English.

In a 2002 anthology that Anzaldúa co-edited, *This Bridge We Call Home: Radical Visions for Transformation*, the heretical nature of her philosophy shines throughout her chapter "now let us shift . . . the path of *conocimiento* . . . inner work, public acts." She begins with the concept and experience of the *arrebato* or earthquake. Anzaldúa defines it as a "rupture" that shakes the foundations of her philosophizing, giving value to her marginalized place as well as her multilingualism.[19] In essence, she ruptures the usual business of philosophy—that is, a practice that non-neutral people told us requires neutrality in order to find the underlying truths in things. She speaks in tongues from a specific cultural and linguistic place, the borderlands of South Texas and Northern Mexico, unwilling to relinquish her/our richness and contradictions for the sake of neutrality. My hope is that our students, who have so much in common with Anzaldúa, will follow her lead and see how much our history and context bring to the practice of philosophy understood as bilingual *Bildung* on the border.

NOTES

1. Jennifer A. Herdt, *Forming Humanity: Redeeming the German Bildung Tradition* (University of Chicago Press, 2019), 1.

2. Herdt, *Forming Humanity*, 2.

3. Josef Bleicher, "Bildung," *Theory, Culture & Society* 23, nos. 2–3 (2006): 364.

4. Herdt, *Forming Humanity*, 27.

5. Herdt, *Forming Humanity*, 112–13.

6. I cite and discuss three such articles below. See also Yuichi Miyamoto, "Wilhelm von Humboldt's *Bildung* Theory and Educational Reform: Reconstructing *Bildung* as a Pedagogical Concept," *Journal of Curriculum Studies* 54, no. 1 (2022): 1–17; Carol A. Taylor, "Is a Posthumanist *Bildung* Possible? Reclaiming the Promise of *Bildung* for Contemporary Higher Education," *Higher Education* 74 (2017): 419–35; and Ninni Wahlström, "Do We Need to Talk to Each Other? How the Concept of *Experience* Can Contribute to an Understanding of *Bildung* and Democracy," *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 42, no. 3 (2010): 293–309.

7. Jeong-Hee Kim et al., "Is *Bildung* Possible in the Classroom? Autobiographical Writing as Philosophical Exercise (*askēsis*) for Developing One's *Bildung*," *Journal of Curriculum and Pedagogy* 16, no. 3 (2019): 243.

8. Kim et al., "Is *Bildung* Possible in the Classroom?," 246–47.

9. Norm Friesen, "*Bildung* and Educational Language: Talking of 'the Self' in Anglo-American Education," in *Making a Difference in Theory: The Theory Question in Education and the Education Question in Theory*, ed. Gert Biesta, Julie Allan, and Richard Edwards (Routledge, 2013), 100.

10. Karl-Heinz Günther, "Profiles of Educators: Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767–1835)," *Prospects* 18, no. 1 (1988): 132.

11. Friesen, "*Bildung* and Educational Language," 102–3.

12. Gert Biesta, "*Bildung* and Modernity: The Future of *Bildung* in a World of Difference," *Studies in Philosophy and Education* 21 (2002): 343.

13. Sara M. Beaudrie and Marta Fairclough, eds., *Spanish as a Heritage Language in the United States: The State of the Field* (Georgetown University Press, 2012).

14. Cynthia M. Ducar, "SHL Learners' Attitudes and Motivations: Reconciling Opposing Forces," in Beaudrie and Fairclough, *Spanish as a Heritage Language*, 163.

15. Ducar, "SHL Learners' Attitudes and Motivations," 164.

16. Norman Fairclough, ed., *Critical Language Awareness* (Routledge, 1992).

17. See Walter Kaufmann, *The Faith of a Heretic*, updated ed. (Princeton University Press, 2015).

18. Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (Aunt Lute Books, 1987), 59.

19. Gloria Anzaldúa, "now let us shift . . . the path of *conocimiento* . . . inner work, public acts," in *This Bridge We Call Home: Radical Visions for Transformation*, ed. Gloria E. Anzaldúa and AnaLouise Keating (Routledge, 2002), 546.

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Teaching Philosophy Bilingually through Ser y Estar

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El ser se dice de muchas maneras.

–Aristóteles, *Metafísica*, Libro IV

This essay is a first attempt at seeding some ideas about the possibilities that the Spanish pair *ser/estar* offers to Spanish-English bilingual students of philosophy as "tools" for understanding both "Being" generally and human existence more specifically. Although partially premised on the philosophically revelatory dimensions of the Spanish language, this is not so much a linguistic analysis as it is a pedagogical essay about teaching philosophy bilingually with a focus on ontology, existentialism, and phenomenology.

By rooting my understanding of some concepts in their everyday or colloquial use, I am assuming that such use already implies the concepts. My "analysis" will thus analogize between common uses of *ser* y *estar*—sometimes triangulating with the English verb *to be*—to argue that as a predicative particle, *ser* tends towards *conditional*, *normative*, and/or *stipulate/definitional* statements, exhibiting a tendency to conceptualize. *Estar*, on the other hand, has several meanings (and hence instantiates several different concepts) both in its standalone and copulative grammatical uses. These concepts include presence, location, relative position, temporal state, health, price, etc.[1] Here, I will emphasize the *presence* meaning. I will also argue that as a predictive particle, *estar* tends towards *extensional*, *temporizing*, *existential*, and *instancing* statements. To sum up their general tendencies, Ser commonly *conditions or defines* while Estar commonly *extends*.

As a standalone concept, and perhaps even in most contexts, *Ser* can be fairly translated as *Being*, but I will argue that, ultimately, we should understand the *ser* y *estar* pair as good examples of what W.V.O. Quine calls inherent indeterminacy of translation.[2] In other words, both *ser* y *estar* are inherently indeterminate in English, and, as I will defend in this essay, neither *ser* nor *estar* are grammatical functions of the verb *to be*. The main upshot is that bilingual philosophers like me and my students should worry less about translating *ser* y *estar* into English and get more interested in cultivating philosophical bilingualism, biculturalism, and biliteracy (PB3). *En otras palabras, deberíamos aprovechar el hecho de que somos bilingües, biculturales y "biletrados" para filosofar*.[3]

In what follows, I will argue that considering three widespread use cases of *ser* y *estar* can quickly help a fluent Spanish-speaking philosophy student grasp the following philosophical concepts:

1) Philosophical distinctions between correlative opposites like substance-modality, necessary-contingent, substance-accident, type-token, essence-existence, concept-instance and similar pairs are implied and embedded in the distinctive everyday uses of *ser* y *estar*.

2) The philosophical distinctions of moral vs. non-moral objectivism and moral vs. non-moral relativism are implied and embedded in the common use of the adjective *bueno*, or good, depending on whether *bueno* is preceded by *ser* or *estar*.

3) *Estar* in its first-person form, *estoy*, has common uses that reflect phenomenological and existentialist categories that can be used as a tool to teach Descartes' *cogito* argument and undermine its mind-body dualistic consequences: the first by arguing how *estoy* functions as a "hidden" premise in the *cogito* argument, the second by adding the dimension of the *sui-generis* relation between self and her/his body.[4]

Ultimately, as a native Spanish speaker and fluent heritage speaker of English who regularly teaches philosophy courses in English, Spanish, and bilingually at UTRGV, I want to argue that the very existence of the problems of usage surrounding *ser* y *estar* that plague English-speakers learning Spanish as a second language suggests that the distinction has something to teach the world of mainstream Anglophone philosophy. This is not an entirely novel strategy. For example, Diana Perez has worked the distinction between *saber* and *conocer* in the context of analyzing Bertrand Russell's "knowledge by acquaintance."[5]

Moreover, the fact that learning certain philosophical concepts may be easier for native Spanish speakers suggests the philosophical value of bi- or multi-lingualism as opposed to the "insularity of Anglophone philosophy" that Eric Schwitzgebel and his coauthors have recently established empirically beyond any reasonable doubt.[6]

1. MAKING CONCEPTUAL DISTINCTIONS BETWEEN CORRELATIVES THROUGH *SER/ESTAR*

For non-native Spanish speakers and teachers of Spanish as a "foreign language," *ser* y *estar* are widely recognized as one of the most problematic pairs, i.e., closely related terms, usually with only one obvious English translation—in this case, "to be"—that Spanish learners struggle to distinguish and use properly.[7] Simply put, beginning and intermediate students of Spanish who are native English speakers experience great difficulty knowing when to use *ser* and when to use *estar*. To explain this difficulty, some scholars writing in English have decried "the apparent irrationality of the uses" and claimed that "no one underlying principle suffices to explain all the uses of *ser* and *estar*."[8] In contrast, I believe that this "problem" arises because *ser* y *estar* are not direct grammatical functions of the verb *to be*. As we are about to see through some examples, they do not neatly map onto the uses of the English verb *to be* because the concepts they imply are sometimes different. And although *ser* y *estar* are typically translated to and from the English verb *to be*, they instead seem to me like good examples of what W.V.O. Quine calls indeterminacy of translation.[9] Both *ser* y *estar* can be translated, but they are inherently indeterminate in English.

Ser y *estar* are both what linguists call autosemantic and copulative.[10] That is, they can have standalone meaning, or form part of a word compound when associated with other predicative particles like verbs, adverbs, or adjectives. I will borrow two uses outlined in the previously referenced article by Luque Nadal while homogenizing the examples she provides by using the same subject and adjective and adding my own bracketed English translations: 1) "Nexus of defining attribution": *María es feliz* [Maria is a happy person] and 2) "Nexus of statutory attributions": *María está feliz* [Maria is happy at the moment]. Although both can be translated as "Maria is happy," the meaning of the Spanish differs depending on whether *ser* or *estar* is used. *Ser* tells us that Maria is always or usually happy, while *estar* tells us that Maria is happy at the moment or in some moment if the tense of the verb changes, i.e., Maria's being happy is only for some limited time.

Ser can also emphasize the predicated object while *estar* can emphasize the predication. George DeMello showcases this difference with the following examples: "a) *¿Dónde es la fiesta* (the event)? b) *¿Dónde está la fiesta* (the partying group)?"[11] Both can be translated as "Where is the party?" Hence, the different senses are quite literally lost in a typical translation, but I will restore them here in a way that is somewhat forced. *¿Dónde es la fiesta*?: "Where is the *entity-event*, *party* located?" *¿Dónde está la fiesta*?: "Where is the *location* of the party?" The first emphasizes the *thing* (party), the second one emphasizes its *place*.

So, while an English speaker can colloquially ask about the location of the party, there is an affordance in colloquial Spanish to ask for the location of "the thing we call a party." In some contexts, "¿Dónde es la fiesta?" can even be translated as "Where is *a* party?" whereas "¿Dónde está la fiesta? is restricted to "Where is *the* party?" In English, the type-token distinction in this example is made using the articles *a/the*, whereas Spanish sometimes uses the verbs *ser*/*estar* to make the distinction. Hence, when teaching, examples like this make it easy for native Spanish speakers to grasp type-token and other related conceptual distinctions. Moreover, English-Spanish bilinguals can concretely grasp different ways that natural languages make such distinctions colloquially.

In sum, the type-token distinction is an example of a philosophical concept that is readily available to fluent Spanish speakers through the distinctive uses of *ser*/*estar*, which further reveals that type and token are "ways of being" that correspond to "ways of speaking" not just arbitrary linguistic stipulations. This example further demonstrates how *ser* can condition an individual with reference to its type, species, or group, i.e., using some concept. *Ser* can also sometimes portray personal (moral or behavioral) traits while *estar*, when preceding the same adverb or adjective, renders it extensional-physical. For example: *Vanesa es fría* [Vanesa is cold] would usually

mean that Vanesa is a cold-hearted person. In contrast, *Vanesa está fría* [Vanesa is cold] would mean that Vanesa feels cold or that her body has a low physical temperature. Also, in this example, *es* made the copulative particle *fría* function as an adjective, whereas *estar* made it an adverb—demonstrating the common "definitional" aspect of *ser* and common "way-of-being" or "extensional" aspect of *estar*. In section two below, we'll have more to say about the normative and subjective-objective distinctions *ser* and *estar* can naturally convey.

1.1 ESTAR *AND ITS IMPLICATION OF OPPOSITE/ CONTRADICTORY PAIRS AND CHANGE*

Contingency, accidentality, and change are basic philosophical concepts. To continue my pedagogical argument, I posit that these concepts can be taught to Spanish speakers through their colloquial use and understanding of *estar*. To establish the connection, I'll explain what I call the CB theory and its sophistication. Luis Crespo and William Bull posit theories on the use of *estar*.[12] According to Dwight Bolinger, Crespo, and Bull essentially posit the same theory.[13] In what follows, I abbreviate their combined theory as CB for convenience and focus on two of its basic principles: 1) *Estar* in its copulative use is limited by the contradiction or opposite of the modified word, usually an adjective or adverb, that the noun/subject can change about, for, or into; and I'll add: 2) often the change expressed by *estar* is from a more "normal" or permanent attribute to one that is temporary or impermanent. In other words, according to my interpretation of the CB theory, the use of *estar* implies the idea of possibility, and by extension, contingency, accidentality, and change. In its first-person use, *estoy* portrays a dynamic ontology of dialectics: being is change and change is being. Neither *ser* nor the English verb *to be* are capable of expressing this in their common uses. After all, in both dynamic ontology and in dialectics, contradictions are only apparent and a matter of being solved or synthesized in time. For example, Crespo exemplifies the theory with the correlative opposites: life/death.[14] When confronted with the supposed fact that death is permanent and that the seemingly temporal form *estar* is used to say someone is dead, Crespo argues for a premise of the CB theory, which I will paraphrase: *Está muerto* at minimum implies that the subject was previously alive. In other words, it implies its correlative pair (*vivo*) in a way that *ser muerto* would not.

Let's offer an example from the bilingual philosophy classroom. We might ask the students: What is the difference between *Miguel es muerto* and *Miguel está muerto*? Both of these would be translated as "Miguel is dead," so the distinction is once again lost to the English monolingual dependent on translations. Whereas the Spanish-speaking student might look quizzically at the instructor, since *es muerto* is not a common expression at all. It would need an article to "sound right"—*Miguel es un muerto*—and even then, when referencing a person like this, at least in Mexican Spanish, it would most likely be taken as slang for "Miguel is a deadbeat." However, this is one of the delights of teaching philosophy. Imagine that you keep asking your students: what seems to be implied more generally by *es un muerto*? A student is likely to reply that it means there is some dead person, as if answering the question, "What's out there?" *Es un muerto*, in this context, means that there is some discovery going on as if to say: "The thing out there that we didn't know the identity of is now revealed to us as a (human) corpse." Then ask them again: what does "*estar muerto*" mean? It means that something or someone that was alive is dead. In other words, the Spanish-speaking student can intuitively realize that *ser* is making a reference to the (usually previously unrevealed) entity: the corpse. And *estar* is making a reference to the body's present state: Miguel is in the state of being dead, but obviously, he wasn't always dead. Here, the philosophy instructor can walk students through the difference between an analytical and a contingent statement. And hence, students can also learn to associate definitional-truth with one type or mode of being and contingent truth with another. After all, the (necessary-conceptual) state of a corpse is to be dead. Otherwise, it's not a corpse and we instead have something else like a body in a contingent or non-definitional or accidental state. According to CB theory, *Miguel está muerto* is implying that "Miguel was alive and that's how we recognize his identity" even as it makes explicit that "Miguel is *now* dead." We can also consider the other term in the correlative pair: *Miguel está vivo* [Miguel is *now* alive] seems to point to mortality as an existential background condition in its native colloquial use.

This pedagogical strategy is also sound when teaching the so-called Argument from Opposites and the Argument from Forms in Plato's *Phaedo*.[15] The Forms argument concludes that since the concept "life" can never have "death" as a defining property, then whatever is alive (the soul) can never be dead. The Opposites argument concludes that since opposites beget each other (e.g., warmness begets coldness and vice versa), and since death obviously (empirically) comes from life, then life must come from death. Plato avoids the seeming contradiction by distinguishing between the concept Life—*lo que es la vida* [what life *is*]—and being contingently alive in the moment—*estar vivo* [some entity is currently alive]. Again, Plato's distinction is already implied in the colloquial use of *ser vivo* [an instance of the concept *life*, literally a living being] and *estar vivo* [being alive at the moment].

1.2 TRIANGULATING WITH THE ENGLISH VERB TO BE *USING THE AGE EXAMPLE*

To further exemplify why *ser* y *estar* are not functions of the grammatical uses of the verb *to be* while further highlighting their *conceptual* and *extensional* implications, you can ask your bilingual students, first in English: "What does it mean to *be* a particular age?" It's probable that lower-division philosophy students will immediately answer with some empirical associations, like being young means being free or being eighteen means that you can vote. Then ask "the same" question in Spanish: "¿Qué significa ser de tal edad?" The bilingual student who is paying careful attention might immediately pick up that there is no such thing as a "meaning" that is inherently associated with being a certain age, precisely because the association is contingent and context dependent. I'm young as a twenty-year-old if I'm a human, but I'm ancient if I'm a dog. Age is not ontologically grounding, but using *ser* strongly implies that it should be.

If you ask bilingual students to say how old they are, first in in English and then in Spanish, they will say, for example: "I *am* 20 years old. *Tengo* 20 años." Notice the difference? Neither *ser* nor *estar* are used to express someone's age in Spanish but rather the possessive verb *tener*. "*Tengo* 20 años" would thus literally be translated as "I have 20 years," but this is also a bad translation since it clearly means "I *am* 20 years old."

Keep going. Ask your bilingual students: "In Spanish, why don't we ever use *ser* or *estar* for a statement of age in numbers of years? Why do we use the possessive verb *tener* instead?" A clever student might reasonably point out that *estoy viejo* is used [I am old but I wasn't always old], and *soy viejo* [I'm old, full stop] is perfectly natural. But *soy 40 años* or *estoy 40 años* is like nails on the chalkboard of the native speaker's mind. Of course, we could simply say that Spanish speakers are not used to these expressions, but this seems to me like a lazy and fallacious explanation that begs the question and can end in an infinite regress. This is the beauty of having bilingual students. Even if their Spanish or their English is "limited," they can quickly puzzle over the question of why "I *am* 40" in English pero "*Tengo* 40 años" in Spanish. There's a red-flag categorical jump going on in the mind of a native Spanish speaker listening to *soy 40 años* or *estoy 40 años*. As mentioned above, I'm assuming the common linguistic use already implies certain philosophical concepts, even if only implicitly in the mind of the philosophically untrained speaker. So, what is this red-flag categorical jump?

To simplify, I'll stick with a first-person example. Let's say I'm 40 years old. *¿Estoy 40 años?* Not at all. I am not extended across 40 years, nor am I an extension of the number 40 nor of the concept "40 years." My age number will change because time passes, not because 40 has any opposite or contradictory number it can change into. (Recall the CB theory above and its Gumiel-Molina sophistication in note 14). For the Spanish speaker, my 40 years are included in me, for the time being. In Spanish, years are like passengers that accumulate in you, but they are not *you*. "Tengo 40 años" thus means something like "I have accumulated 40 years."

But what about "Soy 40 años"? This also clashes for the Spanish speaker, since "being" 40 years is neither necessarily nor sufficiently conditioning my identity nor is it totally determining my behavior, nor is it an ontological definitional trait. "I equal 40 years" is a patent absurdity. This is why I merely "have" 40 years in Spanish. Is there any specific ontological condition or set of ethical norms that applies only to 40-year-olds? Of course not. While "being" an age in English might be an important part of my identity, Spanish helps us reflect upon the fact that a given age never sufficiently or necessarily defines us.

2. *SER/ESTAR* IN RELATION TO NORMATIVITY, SUBJECTIVISM, AND OBJECTIVISM

A similar bilingual strategy can also be used to teach about moral vs. non-moral objectivism and moral vs. non-moral relativism. Start with the question "*Cual es la diferencia entre ser bueno y estar bueno?*" (But be careful to give a little warning beforehand since *estar bueno* is not appropriate in polite usage when referencing a person, and we are about to see why.) The answer you'll get from most native Spanish speakers, at least the Mexican-Spanish ones who I am most familiar with, would be *Soy bueno* means "I'm a good person" in a normative or ethical sense, whereas *estoy bueno* usually means "I'm hot" or "I'm sexually attractive." When learning the distinction between non-normative and normative standards, the usage of *ser* can be analyzed as a way of being that frequently implies some normative conditions. When the subject is a human being, *Es bueno* means that the subject is morally good and behaves normatively. *Estar bueno* however, objectifies and essentializes a human as sexually attractive, driving his or her agency, subjectivity, responsibility, freedom, and complex humanity away with the simple change from *ser* to *estar* in its copulate function with *bueno*.

So, *ser bueno* is normative and, in most cases, moral if referencing a subjectivity. It means that the person meets a behavioral, normative standard that is understood, at least in some sense, as objective. Alternatively, if *ser bueno* is said of a non-agential object, it similarly means that the object adequately meets an objective standard, i.e., it has some properties or meets some condition(s) that make it a good example of what it is. *Ella es buena* can thus be adequately understood as "She is a morally good human being." In turn, *Su carro es bueno* can be understood as claiming that her car is adequately meeting a standard: "Her car is good."

Let's now consider a non-agential object. For example, I might use the example of a movie and ask my students, "What's the difference between saying *la película está buena* and *la película es buena*?" Once again, this distinction is impossible to make without further context in English, since both questions could simply be translated as "Is the movie good?" *¿Está buena la película*? is asking for a merely personal opinion on the movie, usually in a relative (or subjective), uncritical way. So, the proper translation would have to provide the extra meaning built into the choice of *estar* over *ser*: "Is the movie good *for you*?" In contrast, the question *¿Es buena la película?* is asking if the movie is somehow absolutely (or objectively) good from a more critical perspective. *La película es buena* states that the movie is good according to certain standards or conditions, e.g., good according to X's critical methodology or Y's recognized expertise. In contrast, "It's a good movie" in English is underdetermined. Without further context or clarification, it's unclear if we mean that the movie is good in a conditional/measurable/objective sense, or if we mean that it is good in a nonconditional/taste-based/subjective sense. Again, this possible confusion is easily and elegantly avoided in everyday nontechnical yet philosophical Spanish using the affordances provided by *ser* y *estar* as they copulate with *bueno*.

3. DESCARTES'S *COGITO* AND THREE PHENOMENOLOGICAL DIMENSIONS OF *ESTOY*

When teaching Descartes's *cogito* argument in English, the student reads this conclusion that follows from Descartes's hyperbolic doubt about everything: "'I am, I

exist' is necessarily true every time I utter it or conceive it in my mind."[16] In our contemporary context, I then ask my students: "What if an AI wrote: 'I am, I exist'? Would it also be necessarily true that it exists?" Students are usually divided, but for the most part they seem to agree that a computerized voice uttering "I am, I exist" does not necessarily mean that there is some existing "being" or "subject" behind the utterance. So, what would make Descartes's *cogito* argument necessarily true then, besides the fact that he wrote, uttered, or conceived these statements/arguments in Latin and later in French? Some students immediately posit that the difference is Descartes's mind, his subjectivity, or his experience of self. In Thomas Nagel's terms, the "what it is like to be something."[17]

In Descartes's argument, the presence of being is revealed to itself. The I that is self-aware is the missing and implied premise in Descartes's "I think, I am" argument. "Thinking" leads to "existing" precisely because there is a presence that can be aware of itself through its thinking. I believe that this presence, which many philosophers of mind argue against, is necessary for the *cogito* argument to work. Without this added phenomenological premise, the argument does not seem formally sound. At best it would be an enthymeme, an argument with an implied hidden premise. I therefore propose the embedded concept of presence in the use of *estoy* as "I have, or there is, aware-presence here" as the missing premise. Without this added premise, thinking just magically jumps into existence in an enthymemic, incomplete argument. Descartes's statement/premise "I think" can only lead to the conclusion "I am" if thinking is at least potentially self-reflective, as the first-person dimension of *estoy* suggests. *Estoy* names a self-awareness that knows it is before it thinks it is, or else thinking would not be able to immediately make the Cartesian *cogito* move.

I suggest that the Spanish-speaking student can grasp the implied presence in *estoy* [*aquí*] in a way that is more difficult to grasp in the English translation of the *cogito* as "I am." The *witnessing* or *subjective experiencing* of the mental event is necessary for the argument that thinking necessarily implies a thinker. In other words, the *cogito* argument requires the premise of a potential self-recognizing presence to my thoughts for them to be recognized as my own. At least for the time being, it seems to me that AIs are lacking this, this awareness and presence of being, this *estoy*.

As the reader probably knows, Descartes's argument establishes a dualism between mind and body since, as Descartes seems to convince us, my *cogito* is essential to me and my body is not. This dualism has been extensively attacked and argued against for more than three centuries, but no airtight argument has fully refuted it. Some contemporary philosophers of mind still debate this dualism as the so-called "hard problem of consciousness."[18] Now, I don't mean to suggest that the added premise of *estar/estoy* to the *cogito* argument would outright refute the dualistic consequences, but I believe it can seriously undermine them. *Estoy* implies a self-aware presence, in the argument, by recognizing that it is thinking and hence existing. But the implication is not only one of being self-aware of my thoughts but also of myself through the self-perception of my body. In this way, I believe that *estoy* can further be used to establish the *sui-generis* relation that a self has with its body. When used colloquially, *estoy aquí* usually means, I'm in this geographical-physical location, or, in other words, my body is in some place. But *estoy* can also imply an *aquí*, a here, a way of being within my body. So, since *estoy* (*aquí*) means the *aquí*, the here, both explicitly as being in a location and implicitly as being a presence in a (my) body, the Spanish speaker can help themselves to argue the unique, *sui-generis* relation. I, as a conscious being, am both *in* my body, as a sort of passenger, but also, at the same time, I am *extended* and hence identified with my body. Wherever I am, *estoy* in my body. And wherever my body *está*, I'm there as well. *Estoy ahí también*.

4. COROLARIO Y UN MENSAJE FINAL

Un mensaje que quisiéramos comunicarle a nuestros alumnos, implicando la tercera dimensión del estoy que solo menciono en una nota al final, es que se vale pensar en español y en cualquier idioma en que la gente descanse su mundo de sentido. Estamos en el Rio Grande Valley y nuestra estancia aquí nos ofrece una posible dimensión para desarrollar nuestro ser o, para los hijos de esta zona entre quienes no me cuento, un sentido de identidad. Así mismo, con la tercera dimensión del estoy, creo se abre la posibilidad de argumentar una teoría de la identidad no esencialista.[19] Sin embargo, este no es el lugar para desarrollar tal teoría. Finalmente, este artículo es tan solo una mínima contribución para que hablantes nativos del español puedan ser guiados a su encuentro con la riqueza filosófica de su idioma, muchas veces desdeñado como primitivo e intelectualmente insuficiente, aunque nunca con algún argumento convincente.

NOTES

1. For a comprehensive list of the autosemantic and copulative uses of *ser* and *estar*, see Lucía Luque Nadal, "*Ser* y *Estar* as a Semantic Problem in Spanish: Polysemy and Polyfunctionality of *Ser* y *Estar* in Constructions with Adjectives and Participles," *Language Design* 24 (2022): 81–99.

2. See W. V. O. Quine, *Word and Object* (MIT Press, 1960).

3. The distancing quotation marks around "*biletrados*" reflect an internal debate at UTRGV about whether the Bilingual, Bicultural, Biliterate (B3) initiative should be translated using three Bs in Spanish. *Bilingüe* y *bicultural* are well attested, but *biletrado* scarcely appears except in Spanish translations from English originals, and since "literate" in Spanish is *alfabetizado*, *bialfabetizado* might make more sense, but it is also exceptionally rare except as a translation from English. In short, both *biletrado* and *bialfabetizado* sound funny—perhaps even incorrect or "illiterate"—to Spanish speakers from places where Spanish is not just spoken but also regularly taught in school.

4. I believe there is also a third dimension to this philosophical fleshing-out of *estoy*: a geographical and social-linguistic one. Given length constraints, I do not work out this dimension in this paper, but it is worth mentioning that other philosophers have given a philosophical-social perspective on *estar/estoy*. See Rodolfo Kusch, "La emocionalidad y la lengua," in *Obras completas*, vol. 4 (Fundación Ross, 2003); and Sergio Holas, "Rodolfo Kusch's *Estar* as Seen from the Systemic Perspective of Humberto Maturana as a Way of *Corazonar* Coexistence," *Australian Journal of Indigenous Education* 47, no. 1 (2018): 64–72.

5. Diana I. Pérez, "Languages for the Analytic Tradition," *Philosophical Papers* 47, no. 1 (2018): 49–69.

6. Eric Schwitzgebel et al., "The Insularity of Anglophone Philosophy: Quantitative Analyses," *Philosophical Papers* 47, no. 1 (2018): 21–48.

7. See Theodore V. Higgs, "*Ser* or Not *Ser*: That Is the Question," *Hispania* 68, no. 2 (1985): 407–11.

8. William E. Bull, "New Principles for Some Spanish Equivalents of 'To Be,'" *Hispania* 25, no. 4 (1942): 433–43.

9. See Quine, *Word and Object*.

10. Luque Nadal, "*Ser* y *Estar*," 85.

11. George DeMello, "The Semantic Values of *Ser* and *Estar*," *Hispania* 62, no. 3 (1979): 338–41.

12. Luis Crespo, "Los verbos *ser* y *estar* explicados por un nativo," *Hispania* 29, no. 1 (1946): 45–55; Bull, "New Principles," 433–43.

13. Dwight L. Bolinger, "Still More on *Ser* and *Estar*," *Hispania* 30, no. 3 (1947): 361–67.

14. There is a sophistication of this theory in Silvia Gumiel-Molina, Norberto Moreno-Quibén, and Isabel Pérez-Jiménez, "Comparison Classes and the Relative/Absolute Distinction: A Degree-Based Compositional Account of the *Ser/Estar* Alternation in Spanish," *Natural Language & Linguistic Theory* 33, no. 3 (2015): 955–1001. On this account, *estar* implies not only a correlative pair but a comparison class flanked by opposite and often contradictory correlative pairs: a class containing degrees of opposing meaning, not only discrete pairs. However, the example we are about to see, life/death, does not seem to contain degrees of separation but counts as a genuine non-gradable discrete pair.

15. Plato, "Phaedo," in *Five Dialogues: Euthyphro, Apology, Crito, Meno, Phaedo*, trans. G. M. A. Grube, rev. John M. Cooper, 2nd ed. (Hackett, 2002).

16. René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, trans. Donald A. Cress, 3rd ed. (Hackett, 1993), 18.

17. Thomas Nagel, "What Is It Like to Be a Bat?," *Philosophical Review* 83, no. 4 (1974): 435–50.

18. See, for example, David J. Chalmers, *The Conscious Mind: In Search of a Fundamental Theory* (Oxford University Press, 1996). What is mainly debated in this hard-problem-of-consciousness version is the possible logical incompatibility between a fundamental psychological theory and a fundamental theory of consciousness.

19. For another example of a non-essentialist theory of identity that focuses on the case of Hispanic identity, see Jorge J. E. Gracia, "What Makes Hispanic/Latinos Who We Are? The Key to Our Unity in Diversity," in *Latin American Philosophy for the 21st Century: The Human Condition, Values, and the Search for Identity*, ed. Jorge J. E. Gracia and Elizabeth Millán-Zaibert (Prometheus Books, 2004), 289–310.

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Mi lengua es mi hogar: A Chicana's Reflections on Language, Identity, History, and the Self

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I remember the first time I walked into my Intro to Latin American Philosophy class in spring 2024. I was nervous. I knew the class was going to be taught bilingually (in English and Spanish), and I wasn't sure how well I'd do, nor how much I was going to understand. English is my first language, and my Spanish was limited. Before signing up, I was reassured by the instructor, Mariana Alessandri, that any level of Spanish was welcome. She told me that even complete beginners in Spanish could take this course, but the instructor changed to Alex Stehn a few weeks before classes started, so I still wasn't quite sure what to expect. Looking back, I'm so glad I did the brave thing and stuck with the class. I was intrigued by the course title, and I was itching to learn from more diverse perspectives in philosophy. Most philosophers I had studied up until that point were primarily European and Ancient Greek philosophers, and while many Latinos have European roots too, I knew the class was going to be very different from anything else I had been exposed to before. And it was!

Taking Intro to Latin American Philosophy, particularly a bilingual, bicultural, and biliterate (B3) section of it, was life-changing for me. What the course allowed me to discover about myself, my languages, my family histories, and my roots as a Chicana fundamentally redirected the course of my educational journey afterwards. On our first day, Dr. Stehn gave us the choice to get either an English or a Spanish course packet. These packets, which he printed and paid for out of pocket, had the syllabus and all of the course's readings, available either entirely in Spanish or entirely in English. However, in case we wanted to see the syllabus or try our hand at the course readings in the

language we didn't choose, we could do so. Everything was uploaded to Blackboard in both languages. I was very English-dominant at the time, but something that I still can't quite explain compelled me to pick up the Spanish packet. I was drawn to it.

Although I frequently had to look at our Blackboard's English versions of course readings to fully understand what was going on, I don't regret the choice I made to get the Spanish course packet. Now, it's a physical reminder of the very first bilingual class I ever took at UTRGV, something I will always treasure. On our first day of class, Dr. Stehn also polled us about our languages and identities. The survey included questions such as: *What was your first language? What language(s) do you predominantly speak at home? What language(s) do you feel more comfortable reading and writing in? Do you have Latin American roots? Do you consider yourself bicultural or multicultural?* I was intrigued by this survey; it was the first time anyone had ever directly asked about my language and identity stories. I also felt a little embarrassed to be one of the only people who put "English" as their first language. As a Chicana, it felt like I didn't have the same birthright as my peers did to the Spanish language; it wasn't passed down to me in the same way it was for my classmates who spoke it as their native tongue. This was a sad feeling, for sure.

So was the feeling of not always being able to understand my peers and Dr. Stehn when they spoke Spanish. Don't get me wrong, I understood more than I expected. Growing up in a region as bilingual as the Rio Grande Valley of South Texas, you're bound to pick up some Spanish, but there were countless moments where I felt the sharp sting of not knowing. As a Chicana, this pain felt even sharper—it took me back to when I was kid, sitting beside my Spanish-monolingual grandparents at the kitchen table, or in their home or at a restaurant, and my lack of Spanish would stump me, stop me in my tracks, because I could not respond to or even understand them. It's a kind of pain that never leaves you, a particular kind of sting to not be able to understand someone so physically and biologically close to you, someone you know in your heart that you love dearly yet simultaneously feel so far away from. It was quite literally a language barrier, a border between us.

As the class progressed, the shame and sadness of my lack of Spanish didn't quite leave, but something new was growing within me, too: my curiosity was becoming a drive. A curiosity about Latin American history (and the origins of just how exactly the US came to be such a Spanish-speaking place yet without a reputation as one) became a drive to learn not just Latin American philosophy or more Spanish, but more about my family history as a whole. For one of our first projects, Dr. Stehn asked us to interview a family member (or someone like family to us) and simply ask them, "What's your story? What languages did you grow up speaking? What was your education like? What kind of life did you live?" or any other questions we might have. The goal was to connect our family histories to the histories we were learning in class, to see ourselves as a part of Latin American and US history rather than disconnected from it. It worked. I interviewed my dad, and he confirmed something, which previously only felt like a vague whisper from our past. I hazily recalled him telling me when I was younger that, when he was in school, he saw kids who spoke Spanish get their mouths scrubbed out with soap. He wasn't one of them, but he saw it.

Yet it had been so long ago that I wasn't sure if I had just imagined him telling me this, or if it was indeed real. My interview with him confirmed that yes, it was real. This happened to my dad while he was going to school in Harlingen, TX, in the late 1960s and early '70s. Looking back on it, it's crazy to think that I would have lost that piece of my family history if I hadn't interviewed him. For one of the first times in my life, college was finally acting as a bridge between me and myself, me and my family history. I had never been in a class that felt so personal, at least not in the way this one did. Because of that, I felt more internally motivated to do our course's readings. Dr. Stehn also externally incentivized it with bonus points on our pop quizzes if he could see that we highlighted or annotated our course packs. At first, I annotated for the extra points on those quizzes, but it eventually became something I wanted to do for its own sake. I wanted to have clearer and more independent thoughts on the readings, better understand Dr. Stehn's lectures, and be more present for and engaged with what my classmates would share as well.

Towards the end of that semester, my family and I took a trip to New York City. We were visiting a cousin of mine who goes to college there, but mostly, we were just going because it was Easter, and we wanted to go. I remember being in New York on one of our first days there, and excitedly writing an email to Dr. Stehn, saying: "Look, I found statues of Simón Bolívar and José Martí!" They were philosophers we had read in class just a couple of weeks prior, and I casually ran across them as we were taking a walk in Manhattan. I understood their significance, knew a piece of their role in the history of Latin America and the world as a whole, and I couldn't help but light up because of it. On one of our last days in NYC, I remember I was scrambling to find a coffee shop where I could sit down for a few hours and read Rigoberta Menchú, who we were going to discuss in class once I got back. I woke up early in the morning to find this coffee shop, and on the plane ride back to Texas, I was still reading *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú y así me nació la conciencia*, taking detailed notes and highlighting the text in at least three different colors.

These memories stand out not only because I now somehow remarkably associate Rigoberta Menchú with New York City and consider Simón Bolívar and José Martí to be philosophers of "Nuestra America," but because this all happened near the end of the semester, the point where I usually check out, the point where it starts to feel like, "What's the point? I'm burnt out and tired." But not this time. This time, I found myself feeling driven and motivated; it had been a long time since I had been this excited about a class. The best way I can describe it is by saying that this class was the spark that ignited something within me, something deeply ancestral, profoundly rooted in the past, yet simultaneously forward-looking. It ignited a recognition and a revolution within me. The recognition was of the connections between my present and generations

past: our shared languages, cultures, histories, embodied memories, knowledge, and philosophies. The revolutionary power of these recognitions was rooted in how I could see these legacies of the past shaping my future, and not just that, but my autonomy in continuing or changing them.

Although my spark *was* this class, just as much learning happened outside of it. It started with me going out and doing my own informal interviews with people, mostly friends and coworkers who were kind enough to share their time with me for free. I also wanted to present at UTRGV's Engaged Scholar Symposium for the 2024 school year, but I initially had no idea what I wanted to present. At this symposium, undergraduate students can present their research, creative works, or service-learning projects. Intro to Latin American Philosophy became the catalyst for a research idea to present at the symposium: like the interview I had done with my dad for class, I went out and conducted more informal interviews with people, asking them about their linguistic, cultural, and educational experiences. I let them know ahead of time that I was going to use these interviews for my symposium presentation but clarified that I wouldn't mention anyone by name or give out any other personally identifiable information. In just under a month, I got ten people to do these informal interviews with me.

These interviews were also happening in the background while I was in New York. I was sending thank you letters to the people I had already interviewed, scheduling interview times for when I got back, or actively conducting "asynchronous interviews" where people typed out their answers to my questions or recorded voice notes with their answers and sent them to me. It was dynamic and fun, and I collected a mix of in-person, Zoom, and asynchronous interviews. I didn't plan to publish this research or do anything with it besides presenting it at the symposium. I mostly just wanted to learn more about the people in my community by gathering their linguistic, cultural, and family stories. To my surprise, I found a lot of people with stories like mine, people who felt disconnected from their roots as Mexicans and Mexican Americans because they didn't grow up speaking Spanish or because they lost it or felt alienated from it over time due to school and other factors. I learned from both the stories that were similar to mine and the ones that were very different, and I found more company and community than I had ever expected to. In a concrete and very real way, I genuinely started to feel less alone.

After I gave my presentation at the symposium, which Dr. Stehn attended, we had a conversation in his office. He said something like, "You know you could be getting paid for doing this type of research, right?" and proceeded to introduce me to UTRGV's Engaged Scholar and Artist Awards (ESAA) program, which funds student-driven undergraduate research projects among other things. Dr. Stehn and I spent fall 2024 working together on an ESAA application—"Language and Identity: Investigating the Impacts of B3 Courses on Students' Senses of Selves" — and a corresponding IRB application, since this time I would conduct, record, transcribe, and analyze formal semi-structured interviews with participants, and we wanted to be able to publish the results. Here's the "Methodology" paragraph from my approved ESAA award:

> The purpose of my project is to investigate the connection between language and identity by interviewing UTRGV students in B3-designated Intro to Latin American Philosophy (PHIL-1305X) courses. I will interview a total of 10 students enrolled across two sections of Dr. Alex Stehn's PHIL-1305X courses during the Spring 2025 semester. To investigate the impact of this B3 course on language and identity, I will conduct two interviews with each participant, one at the beginning of the semester and one at the end. These semi-structured qualitative interviews will consist of questions about the students' language use (their bilingualism and their use of language at home, at school, etc.), their cultures, their racial and ethnic identities, and whether they see these facets of their lives as interconnected and central to who they are. I am interviewing students at the beginning and the end of the semester to see if any noticeable change has occurred throughout the duration of the course (observing what effect these classes have, if any) on students' perceptions of these aspects of their lives.

Even after my Intro to Latin American Philosophy ended, I kept building on everything I learned there, not just through the spring 2025 ESAA award described above, but also through an additional fall 2025 ESAA award that paid me to finish transcribing the interviews and begin a more careful philosophical analysis of them for a co-authored publication with Dr. Stehn. I also immediately began to actively go out and search for more B3 classes. Two out of four of my fall 2024 classes were officially designated as bilingual by UTRGV's Office for Bilingual Integration: ASTR-1402X Intro to Astronomy II and MASC-2301X Intro to Mexican American Studies. A third class I took, ENGL-3370 Intro to Border Languages, was also taught using culturally sustaining pedagogy (its official designation) and was unofficially bilingual. In other words, it wasn't labeled as a bilingual course when I registered for it, but upon showing up for class, the professor told me and my classmates: "Puedes hablar o escribir en español para esta clase si quieres."

I subsequently learned that faculty can apply to have these "Spanish optional" courses officially recognized under UTRGV's "Flexible Bilingual Pedagogy Endorsement" without ever requiring Spanish. Even if these "undercover" bilingual classes like Intro to Border Languages tend to skew more towards English, there's nevertheless something deeply comforting about this freedom of language, this freedom to explore my Spanish si quería hacerlo.

At the same time, outside of university, I made an active effort to continue growing my Spanish. As I watched Netflix and other streaming platforms, I slowly started changing the language of my shows from English to Spanish, or I would watch them in a bilingual way as a bridge between the two languages: Spanish audio with English subtitles, or vice versa. I played video games, listened to music, and read poetry in Spanish, and little by little, I picked up more

and more. I also kept asking my family about their stories. I learned, for example, that my maternal grandfather was also punished (and saw other kids getting punished) for speaking Spanish when he was a child. My grandfather is Tejano. He and his family have lived in the Rio Grande Valley for generations, dating all the way back to the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, or so our family lore goes. Kids who spoke Spanish at school, from what my grandfather told me over the phone one day, would have to sit at the front of the class with a hat that said "Dunce" on it.

They'd submit to going through that, or else they'd be sent away to another classroom, segregated from their peers. Because my grandfather's first language was Spanish, he told me that he would hardly speak at school *at all*. He quickly learned English and became both biliterate and bilingual, but it came at a profound psychological cost, just like it did for my dad. You don't walk away from experiences like that unscathed. Although my mom, thankfully, doesn't have a story about getting punished for speaking Spanish (and/or seeing other kids get punished) like my grandfather and my dad do, my maternal grandmother recalled how she was bullied by her peers for not knowing English when she and her family moved to the US from Mexico when she was a teenager.

Despite being incredibly smart, she was also held back multiple grades. Instead of seeing her Spanish as something to maintain or as a valuable form of knowledge to build upon with the *addition* of English as a second language, the school instead framed her as unintelligent and held her back: punishing her for a *lack* of English rather than building upon an *abundance* of Spanish. But when intelligence is only measured through the English language, as it so often is within the United States, we all suffer. Language shaming carries political, historical, and cultural weight. Often, it masks thinly veiled prejudice, usually against marginalized groups (such as Mexican Americans, like my grandmother). The personal baggage we carry because we were *made* to feel ashamed of our languages is not limited to us but has multi-generational ripple effects that span far beyond ourselves, contributing to societal-wide losses of languages and cultures that have just as much right to be here and to be called *American*.

My paternal grandparents, who were both Spanish monolinguals, unfortunately did not live long enough to see me grow into my Spanish and finally feel confident enough to ask them for their stories in Spanish, but I'd like to hope that, wherever they are now, they'd be proud of me. And even though it's not quite the same, I'm still learning parts of their stories through my dad and my tíos. As the years passed and I finally started learning more about my family history, I also started to feel less shame about my languages. When I was growing up, I stayed away from Spanish because I was ashamed. I was ashamed that I couldn't talk to my grandparents on my father's side, ashamed that pieces of my family history might die because of me, ashamed that I couldn't understand my family or community members when they would suddenly flip their conversations from English to Spanish or tell a joke in Spanish and expect me to laugh. I always felt like, somehow, I wasn't enough.

But, as I went through classes like Intro to Latin American Philosophy, Intro to Border Languages, and lots of Mexican American Studies coursework, as I started hearing more of my family and friends' language stories, I also started realizing that the problem of intergenerational language loss is widely shared by both immigrants and indigenous folks. Among Chicanos, Latinos, and the many peoples who have called and still call Abya Yala home before it was ever called America, the United States of America, Nueva España, or México, the twin problems of racism and linguicism are systemic, shared, and communal. These problems of language, identity, and history are the embodiment of "the personal is political" because the linguistic and cultural realities of the home are reflections of larger political and social conditions. It is not a simple matter of personal failure to have lost a language within a family after a few generations. It a systemic issue when all people who speak non-English languages throughout the United States are systemically rewarded for becoming English-monolinguals or English-dominant speakers. Conversely, they are systemically punished and marginalized for speaking non-English languages, especially if they dare to do so in ways that are loud, proud, and public.

This realization is what truly liberated me. As the things I had learned from B3 classes, from family and friends, and from the peers who I interviewed took root within my mind, heart, and soul, my shame took the back rather than the driver's seat. No quiero mentir y decirles que mi vergüenza ha desaparecido por completo, pero ya no me controla como lo hacía antes. Ahora escribo y hablo español—y cometo muchos errores, por supuesto—pero eso no puede detenerme. Hablar español es mi forma de resistencia en un país que tiene un presidente que dijo que el inglés es el único idioma que deberíamos hablar aquí, a pesar de miles de años y millones de personas que hablan y han hablado diferentes idiomas, tales como el español y incontables lenguas indígenas. Ahora, voy a reclamar mi espacio aquí, el lugar que mi familia ha llamado hogar durante incontables generaciones, como persona y también como hablante de inglés, español, y spanglish.

I have also learned how to give myself grace when I find myself defaulting to English. I am still English-dominant, as you can see through this work, but at the same time, I'm fortunate enough to live in a community as bilingual as mine, lucky enough to have friends who continuously support my journey to grow my Spanish, lucky enough to have mentors who went out of their way to teach their classes in two languages or invited their students to speak in more than one language (at no added pay, just out of sheer determination and the kindness of their hearts). Admittedly, my experiences taking explicitly bilingual classes at a college campus in the United States—classes that are not labeled "foreign language classes" but general education classes like astronomy, philosophy, and Mexican American studies where we learn in Spanish just like we learn in English—are rare. El crecimiento de mi español es un esfuerzo tanto personal como comunitario, and it is my sincerest hope that other college students across the US eventually get to have experiences like mine—thoughtful and liberating experiences with their languages, cultures, and histories—that reconnect them with their roots, teach

them new things about themselves, and widen their sense of community.

Practicing Philosophical Bilingualism, Biculturalism, and Biliteracy (PB3): A Collective Transformation

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> The marginalization of persons and modes of thought within gatherings that stand in for the field of philosophy in the United States speaks to the politics of these acts. Their underlying vision delimits the fate of alterity in our discipline: the silencing of persons whose lives may necessitate or invite thinking ignored realities, inhabiting unrecognized traditions, and/or working with alternative methodologies, conceptual tools, and symbolic forms.
>
> —Cynthia Paccacerqua, "A Collective Vision, A Political Act"[1]

Si puedes leer esta frase en español, your bilingual abilities and identity are probably being ignored, dismissed, or underutilized by most of the philosophical spaces you inhabit. In the *Hypatia* article from which the epigraph is drawn, Cynthia Paccacerqua explored how the academic field of philosophy in the US simultaneously perpetuates itself and creates its others (*not*-philosophy and *not*-philosophers) through ritualized and normalized practices across classrooms, publications, and conferences. Paccacerqua did not explicitly name the exclusive use of English as responsible for the "marginalization of persons and modes of thought," but she did describe the Roundtable on Latina Feminism as a space that "critically fosters affective relations" to build an "alternative collective vision for philosophical thinking." The inaugural 2006 Roundtable founded by Mariana Ortega and keynoted by Maria Lugones also made a deep impression on me as the first Spanish-English bilingual and Latinx bicultural philosophical space that I ever encountered.[2] It thus became part of the story of how I came to participate in the collective transformation at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley (UTRGV) where we have begun to practice philosophy differently by living, thinking, teaching, learning, and philosophizing in Spanish, English, and Spanglish.

By "we" I mean the philosophy faculty and students participating in the "Pluralizing Philosophical Languages and Cultures in the South Texas Borderlands" project sponsored by the APA, UTRGV, and Society for the Advancement of American Philosophy (SAAP).[3] Our project's deliverables included Spanish, Bilingual, and Culturally Sustaining PHIL courses designed by a group of eight UTRGV faculty. Besides working together to conceptualize, design, teach, and improve these courses, we have also sustained *un grupo de lectura que se reúne para conversar sobre filosofía escrita en español*. In our institutional shorthand, we call this project of cultivating philosophical bilingualism, biculturalism, and bilingualism "PB3" as a way of mapping the project of philosophy (P) onto UTRGV's institutional framework for recognizing student achievement in Spanish, Bilingual, and/or Culturally Sustaining courses across the undergraduate curriculum with the Bilingual, Bicultural, Biliterate (B3) Scholar Seal.[4]

In the preface to *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Gloria Anzaldúa mapped the tensions of the borderlands or *nepantla* that we are navigating and reweaving:

> The actual physical borderland that I'm dealing with in this book is the Texas-U.S. Southwest/Mexican border. The psychological borderlands, the sexual borderlands and the spiritual borderlands are not particular to the Southwest. In fact, the Borderlands are physically present wherever two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory, where under, lower, middle and upper classes touch, where the space between two individuals shrinks with intimacy.[5]

Like Anzaldúa, I want to navigate these borderlands in ways that might produce spiritual transformations in myself, other people, and the world through philosophical storytelling.[6] Or, to put things in the more secular methodological terms of "qualitative research," what follows is a "narrative inquiry" into philosophical transformations conducted through "a dynamic process of living and telling stories, and reliving and retelling stories."[7] My overarching aim is to show how practicing PB3 can help people who exist on the spectrums of bilingualism, biculturalism, and biliteracy (or plurilingualism, pluriculturalism, and pluriliteracy) recognize their wholeness and experience new connections.

In the sections below, my essay explores 1) the coloniality of the English language as the background—global and local, disciplinary and institutional—that simultaneously haunts our efforts and gives them their extraordinary significance; 2) the transformations I have witnessed in my colleagues and experienced myself through our PB3 project; 3) the linguocultural stories of faculty that established the pre-PB3 background conditions for our transformations; and 4) an example of pluralizing philosophical languages and cultures that serves as an invitation to build a new sense of community.

1. CONTESTING THE GLOBAL AND LOCAL COLONIALITY OF ENGLISH

The coloniality of the English language in the contemporary discipline of philosophy is rarely recognized yet difficult to overstate. Eric Schwitzgebel et al. established "the insularity of Anglophone philosophy" through quantitative analyses that found that 97 percent of citations in articles from elite Anglophone philosophy journals are to works originally written in English, and ninety-nine out of the one hundred most-cited recent authors in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* wrote primarily in English.[8] In contrast, "philosophy articles published in elite Chinese-language and Spanish-language journals cite from a

range of linguistic traditions, as do non-English-language articles in a convenience sample of established European-journals."[9]

A handful of philosophers including Hans-Johann Glock have argued that the "Anglicisation of (analytic) philosophy" is actually desirable and "does not *per se* amount to an injustice" insofar as it establishes a *lingua franca* that can make philosophy more "global and cosmopolitan."[10] But it is worth reminding those who celebrate what Glock calls the "trend toward English monolingualism" in philosophy that roughly 80 percent of the world's population does not speak English. Moreover, the most powerful and influential Anglophone philosophers are disproportionately *native* English speakers, who comprise merely 5 percent of the world's population. Philosophers like Saray Ayala-López are right to highlight how the condition of being "a non-native speaker of English" interacts negatively with "the practice of philosophy" through an accent bias that creates "the same sorts of effects on perceptions of philosophers' competence as biases against gender or ethnicity."[11] A recent international survey of philosophers by Uwe Peters et. al ($N = 1{,}615$) also showed that 88 percent of non-native English speaker respondents reported that their extensive use of English had reduced their ability to discuss philosophy in their native language.[12] But in marked contrast to the important research and pedagogical reforms dedicated to analyzing and improving unequal power relations along the intersectional axes of race, gender, sexuality, and/or class, there has been comparatively little said or done about the coloniality of language[13] that underwrites the increasingly hegemonic practice of philosophy in an English-only mode.

The case of bilingual (or multilingual) faculty who are pressured to publish and/or teach philosophy monolingually in English parallels the fact that most students at UTRGV are bilingual, but almost none of them have received meaningful academic opportunities to develop their bilingualism/biliteracy or explore their bicultural identities. The US educational system has typically treated them as though they were half-persons rather than whole bilingual and bicultural persons. US schools have educated only their "American" *not* their "Mexican" half, only their English-speaking half *not* their Spanish-speaking half. But if these Mexican and Spanish-speaking dimensions of our students' identities and abilities have value—and they most certainly do!—then the "educational opportunities" they have received can also be counter-narrated as "miseducation" or "subtractive schooling."[14]

Here's how we put the point in our APA grant proposal:

> While much of our students' meaningful experiences (i.e., family life, friendship, recreational time, etc.) are lived in Spanish or Spanglish, their academic life takes place exclusively in English. In other words, there is a gap between some of their most meaningful experiences and their academic means of engagement and expression. This gap is not experienced by students whose existential experiences are only in English and whose only academic language is English because they can express themselves wholly in their only existential and academic language (English). In contrast, while our students are prima facie linguistically and culturally competent in two languages (English and Spanish), their formal education excludes much of their lived experiences, their abilities in Spanish and Spanglish, and their bicultural communities. For many, academic discourse does not function as a means of illuminating their daily lives but as a blade cutting their lives in two. Academic, English-only discourse serves as a formal, culturally valued, and authoritative body of knowledge that excludes Spanish and overlooks Mexican American and Latino/a/x cultures.[15]

Alongside our bilingual students who suffer a systematic narrowing of their academic potential, our bilingual faculty have been habituated to teach under the same institutionally-sanctioned form of academic apartheid that historically excluded the use of Spanish or the study of Mexican American history from the classroom, unless "safely" restricted to the Department of Spanish or Mexican American Studies. Against this backdrop, our PB3 project aimed to make UTRGV's Philosophy Department the first in the fifty U.S. states and D.C.[16] to integrate Spanish-English bilingualism/biliteracy and Mexican American biculturalism into a regular course rotation.

2. TRANSFORMACIONES A TRAVÉS DE LA LECTURA Y LAS CONVERSACIONES EN ESPAÑOL Y ESPANGLISH

For seven years, Cynthia Paccacerqua, Mariana Alessandri, and I were the only philosophy faculty who could speak Spanish, but after strategic hires made in 2017, 2018, 2021, 2022, and 2023, the eight UTRGV faculty who now teach PHIL courses designated as B3 finally got to know each other better in Spanish through the biweekly gatherings of the *grupo de lectura* during the spring 2024 semester. A few of us were already teaching bilingually or in Spanish,[17] but most of our bilingual faculty were still teaching monolingually in English, and virtually none of our departmental existence was bilingual. To take a simple but vivid example, I did not have a complete conversation in Spanish with Cynthia Paccacerqua for the first fourteen years that we were faculty! But finally, at the first meeting of *nuestro grupo de lectura*—the first PB3 activity that we institutionalized under the APA grant—*hablamos por primera vez y me di cuenta de que había toda una dimensión de Cynthia que yo desconocía*. I appreciate the Spanish verb *desconocer* because it marks an epistemology of ignorance with a single word: a *not*-knowing that is ritually enacted and normalized even among people who might greatly benefit by daring to act otherwise, transforming themselves and each other in the process. *En nuestro grupo de lectura, nos conocimos en español* by discussing readings that focused on philosophical production or teaching in Spanish.[18] We also hosted five *noches de cine* for both students and faculty that featured Spanish-language films (with English subtitles) followed by bilingual philosophical discussions. These were philosophy reading group (or film) events, so they were cognitively demanding, but two further facts made them unusual and more potentially transformative: 1) the original language of philosophical (or cinematic)

production was Spanish and 2) the language of our philosophical discussion was Spanish (or bilingual).

Each participant's affective experience was shaped by the interpersonal setting and our collective aims. We were not just reading (or watching) Spanish books (or films) as individuals, but as part of a more intimate group meeting regularly in the homes of faculty members and on campus. These shared experiences were thus uniquely moving *porque dio lugar a una forma diferente de convivir, de pensar y hablar entre nosotros*. By calling these experiences "moving" and "shared" I do not mean to suggest that they affected participants in the same ways but rather that they were "liberating" in multiple ways.[19] For those of us who were more comfortable speaking Spanish in other settings, the liberating dimension involved the freedom to speak Spanish in a context where it was ordinarily forbidden, effectively even if not expressly. For those of us who felt more anxious speaking Spanish in other settings, this departmental setting was perhaps uniquely challenging or scary, but it was still liberating insofar as philosophizing with colleagues in Spanish required the exercise of a certain degree of bravery, or at least vulnerability. Whether speaking a "private" or "home" language—namely, Spanish—in an academic and public setting, or speaking a "second" or "heritage" language—namely, Spanish—in an academic and professional setting, participants in the *grupo de lectura* and the *noches de cine* began to experience and reimagine a world in which more of their worlds and words fit.

3. SOMOS UN EQUIPO: PERSONAL, AFFECTIVE, AND LINGUOCULTURAL BACKGROUND CONDITIONS

In summer 2024, eight faculty created or re-designed PHIL courses to be taught bilingually or in Spanish using culturally sustaining pedagogies. After being certified as B3 courses by UTRGV's Office for Bilingual Integration, our PB3 team began offering a rotation of twelve such PHIL courses on a three-year cycle in fall 2024. The courses and rotation were the institutional product, but the process was deeply personal for each and all of us. Before we explored UTRGV's requirements for B3 course designations, before we theorized the relationship between bilingual courses and culturally sustaining pedagogies, before we discussed how we would use Spanish in our classes, before we developed B3 course materials, before we shared B3 assignments, before we drafted B3 syllabi—we spent the first two full sessions of our PB3 Course Seminar and Workshop reflecting on our diverse positionalities and sharing our linguocultural stories. This was both liberating and spiritually transformative in Paccacerqua's Anzaldúan sense of "*volverse una*/becoming whole that is grounded in an active receptivity of sensibility and facilitated by affective technologies for transformation."[20] In an intimate setting of active listening and affective receptivity, we revealed intimate aspects of our identities, families, and histories that are typically excluded from the professional practice of philosophy. Drawing upon these sessions, I developed brief linguistic/cultural profiles of each PB3 faculty, which I share here with their permission.

MARIANA ALESSANDRI

Mariana spoke English as her first language and self-identified as "a Latina who grew up thinking I was white." As "the daughter of two upper-middle-class immigrants from Chile," she is "a first-generation US-American citizen." She also "grew up with a Guatemalan *niñera* who spoke only Spanish," but Mariana would respond to her in English. Nor did Mariana grow up speaking Spanish with her parents, since the teacher of an older sibling had advised them to stop speaking Spanish with their children. Spanish was simply presumed to be "getting in the way" of them learning English. As a result, Mariana and her siblings "grew up thinking we were white because we spoke English with no discernable accent; we were vaguely ethnic, like everyone in Queens with dark hair but not dark skin." Only when she arrived at Penn State to earn her PhD in philosophy was Mariana informed by the graduate director that she represented the department's "diversity." At UTPA, she went from part-time lecturer (2010–2012) to visiting assistant professor (2012–2013) to assistant professor and is now full professor at UTRGV. Mariana characterized her own commitment to creating a bilingual Intro to Latin American philosophy course in terms of justice for our students, who "deserve to learn in their language," but she also emphasized that "it's a challenge for me to teach a bilingual course. It does not come naturally, and I know it will be a lot of work. But I feel grateful that I am able to, and grateful to have help from this group in the construction of it."

CHRISTOPHER GÓMEZ

Chris's first language is Spanish, and he characterized English as his "heritage language." He shared that his "whole world was thrown upside down" when he moved to New York City from Mexico City at age four: "I was put in a sort of day-care kindergarten where the caretakers would verbally and morally punish me for trying to talk to them in Spanish." Before long, he returned to Mexico City where his mother taught him to read in English while school was teaching him to read in Spanish. Chris said: "I'm not exactly a Mexican American but more like a mestizo-hybrid Mexican with two passports, a Chilango who happens to have an American mother." Besides having older Mexican roots in Celaya, Guanajuato, Chris's family tree defies any simple story with ties to many languages—German, Yiddish, Dutch, French, Spanish, English—and many peoples crossing borders: Ashkenazi Jews who fled Germany, Scottish Methodists who moved to Argentina, a Spaniard who ended up in Mexico as a refugee from the Spanish Civil War, a mother from Brooklyn who has lived in Mexico for the last fifty years. All of Chris's formal degrees (*licenciatura*, *maestria*, *doctorado*) have been earned in Spanish, and he joined UTRGV as lecturer in 2021. Chris wants "our students to believe that they can contribute to humanity from where they stand, from who they are, and from their roots that have been largely hidden from them." Since Spanish has shaped Chris's philosophical and existential outlooks, he described his calling as "helping the ones that have been terrorized into believing that Spanish is a second-class language and Mexico a second class-culture to stop believing that, not only epistemically, but also, I would dare say, existentially." He sees this as "a way for them to reconnect with themselves."

DAHLIA GUZMAN

Dahlia grew up in Indiana eating Mexican food at home, speaking only English, attending a Black Baptist church, and only hearing Spanish from the TV shows that her parents watched in their bedroom with the door closed. Traveling to visit family in the RGV during the late 1960s and early 1970s, she remembers that "we slept and ate in the car because no one would rent us motel rooms or sell us food." In contrast, life back in Indiana was "comfortable [and] I neither had (nor have) any feeling of negativity or lack." This changed when Dahlia moved to the RGV at age ten: "The first three months of school were horrible. I was punished every day by students in my grade for speaking the way I did and for not knowing Spanish." Dahlia started learning Spanish to talk to her grandparents, aided by summer trips "with my *Tía Nena* and her family who had a *ranchito* just outside of Rio Bravo. My cousins helped me expand my vocabulary even as they teased me about my Spanish pronunciation. They were very loving and kind though." She found RGV schools to be segregated with "the white kids and the rich Mexican kids enrolled in AP courses," while "the rest of us poor Mexican kids were pushed to take 'practical' courses—typing, steno, Spanish, wood shop, home economics, etc." Dahlia "had to argue with that counselor every damn year to take the upper-level courses: English, Civics, Science, and NOT take Spanish." Like many other twenty-year-olds, Dahlia wanted to "move beyond the Valley—away from its provincialism, sexism, and homophobia." Then, after more than a decade working in banking, Dahlia earned three philosophy degrees—a BA (UTPA, 2007), an MA (Kent State, 2010), and a PhD (University of South Florida, 2018)—and accepted a lecturer position at UTRGV. Dahlia said that she is now "more bilingual than I've ever been" and wants to help her students think critically about how they "have been taught that their way of living and interacting (in Spanish or in a borderland) is not valuable to philosophical reflection when obviously, that's false."

DANNY MARRERO

Danny compartió su historia con nosotros en español, su lengua nativa. Creció en Bogotá, donde empezó a aprender el inglés después de cumplir veinte años. Después de terminar su maestría en derecho, fue honrado con una beca Fulbright para continuar sus estudios de postgrado en Estados Unidos, pero la Universidad de Arkansas solo le aceptó provisionalmente con la condición de estudiar inglés por seis meses intensivos en su International Language Center. In 2014, Danny earned his PhD in philosophy from the University of Arkansas, and he joined UTRGV as an assistant professor in 2022. Before the APA grant, he taught an all-Spanish version of Critical Thinking at UTRGV with the hope that his "estudiantes de pensamiento crítico en español tengan una experiencia enriquecedora como la mía." He still finds being able to teach philosophy classes in both English and Spanish astounding. Teaching in English was "unthinkable when I started my journey," whereas teaching philosophy in Spanish in the US was unthinkable given his previous cultural and linguistic stereotypes about the US. When Danny taught Pensamiento Crítico at UTRGV, he asked his students to share their stories of how they knew Spanish. When one student simply replied, "Es porque crecí en Texas," Danny se quedó muy confundido, hasta que se dio cuenta de que en algunas partes de Texas, incluso en el RGV, hablar español en casa es aún más común que hablar inglés. That said, very few of our students have had any formal academic opportunities to learn in Spanish. Por eso, Danny sigue entusiasmado no solo por impartir clases de pensamiento crítico y otras materias de filosofía, sino también por ayudar a nuestros alumnos "a explorar algunos de los tesoros culturales que el español nos brinda."

CYNTHIA PACCACERQUA

Cynthia was born in Baltimore, MD, to Argentine immigrants who had been welcomed by an Italian-born aunt. Whenever relatives gathered, Italian threaded through English and Spanish. Cynthia attended an English-language school from pre-K through first grade, then moved with her mother and sister to Rosario, Argentina. Having settled into English, she could no longer recall having spoken Spanish and "was just left to figure it all out with my cousins and then at school." At age twelve she began private British English lessons with a *vecina* and later took a TOEFL-prep course to apply to college in the US. As a first-generation student now reading and writing in English as a foreign language, she never thought to take a college Spanish course "under the false impression that those courses were to learn Spanish only, which I already knew." Her bilingual speaking took place in the Latino community outside the university. Disappointed with working in local politics, Cynthia applied to MA programs in Latin American Studies to learn Latin American philosophy and intellectual history. At Stanford, she wrote her first graduate-level essay in Spanish on Ernesto Sábato's existentialism and found her way into Chicano and Latino Studies where friendships, coursework, and Gloria Anzaldúa's writings echoed her split sense of self as both Argentine and Latina. Cynthia discovered Enrique Dussel's still untranslated works for her thesis through conversations with Manuel Vargas, who at the time was a PhD student teaching Latin American philosophy. When Cynthia began her doctoral program at Stony Brook in 2000, the requirement to translate a previously untranslated philosophy text could not be satisfied if the original language was Spanish, so she took summers to study French and then German, continuing at the Bergische Universität Wuppertal while a dissertation research fellow. In the end, Stony Brook accepted her Spanish-to-English translation of an article by Reyes Mate, after hiring Eduardo Mendieta. She also sustained her bilingual self with peers from other departments and NYC universities. In 2010, UTPA hired Cynthia as assistant professor and "a renewed period of border-setting-shifting began, this time finding echoes of my philosophical self and languages in classrooms where the compass for clarity and opaqueness is itself a discovery project."

ALEX STEHN

I am a bilingual, bicultural, and biliterate philosopher, not by heritage but by accident and choice. I grew up in Aransas Pass, TX, as a monolingual English speaker. My parents are both immigrants to Texas (from Wauwatosa, WI, and Port Jefferson, NY) born to immigrants from other places. In the racial terminology of Texas, I am Anglo, but both my own family lore and a DNA test show that I am roughly a quarter Jewish (Ashkenazi from Ukraine), Scotch-Irish, English, and German. Since my nearest kin were thousands

of miles away from South Texas, my parents depended on babysitters to take care of me and my younger brother after school, first an elderly woman and then her daughter. Both were Mexican American and bilingual, although they never spoke to me or my brother in Spanish, even though I grew up calling them *Nana* [Nanny]. I studied American Philosophy during my PhD program at Penn State, which was gender-conscious and race-conscious, but it was mostly organized around a black-white binary that did not fit my hometown where most people identify as white and/or brown. After marrying someone who thought she was white but who I saw as brown (Mariana Alessandri), we moved to Mexico City, where I learned to see the history of Latin American philosophy through the eyes of Enrique Dussel and his students. My dissertation put what I learned about Latin American liberation philosophy into dialogue with US-American pragmatism, so I was thrilled when I landed a job at UT Pan American. Later, by raising children with Spanish as their first language, I came to see how much "linguistic terrorism" there still is in the RGV. This is why Mariana and I founded our nonprofit, RGV PUEDE, whose mission is to advocate for dual-language bilingual education programs from pre-K to twelfth grade across the RGV, so that every child has the educational opportunity to become proudly bilingual, bicultural, and biliterate.[21]

MELISA VIVANCO

Melisa compartió su historia con nosotros en español, su lengua nativa: "Mi herencia lingüística y cultural está profundamente arraigada en México, con una historia familiar que abarca varias generaciones de mujeres trabajadoras. Hasta donde sé, mi familia siempre ha hablado español, y aunque no tengo información específica sobre nuestra herencia indígena o europea, el rico, colorido y un poco ruidoso tapiz de la cultura mexicana ha sido una influencia significativa a lo largo de mi vida." While earning her undergraduate degree in Mathematics at the UNAM, Melisa took a few English courses, but she emphasized that her "verdadera interacción con el idioma comenzó cuando fui estudiante visitante en el MIT durante mi doctorado." UTRGV hired her as assistant professor in 2023, after we had already submitted the APA grant, but we were able to fully incorporate her among the PB3 faculty thanks to extra funding from UTRGV's College of Engineering and Computer Science, which wanted to invest in a bilingual version of the course that Melisa regularly teaches: PHIL 2326 Ethics, Technology and Society. Although her primary areas are philosophy of mathematics, logic, and philosophy of technology, Melisa has found her bilingualism especially valuable for her work in philosophy of language "donde contrastar perspectivas de diferentes idiomas ofrece ideas perspicaces y análisis con más matices." In terms of biculturalism, she also emphasizes "el español y la cultura mexicana como formas legítimas y valiosas de expresión que tienen mucho que ofrecer en la construcción de una sociedad diversa e inclusiva." Although Melisa did not contribute an article to this special issue due to other publishing commitments, she has been working as a Service Fellow for UTRGV's Office for Bilingual Integration, helping to organize and emcee the annual B3 Scholar Seal Ceremony, which is conducted primarily in Spanish to celebrate the accomplishments of our B3 Scholars and their families.

BRADLEY WARFIELD

Brad studied philosophy because he wanted to follow in the footsteps of his father, who taught high school mathematics for thirty-two years, as well as his professors at Salisbury University who showed him "the profound impact that a transformative educational experience can have." Dr. Grace Clement's feminist philosophy course and Dr. Jerome Miller's African American philosophy courses "marked a radical departure from everything I had previously known and taken for granted." Outstanding Spanish professors also convinced him to declare Spanish as his second major, building upon the fact that Brad had begun studying Spanish in seventh grade and completed Spanish 5 during his senior year, one of very few students in Wicomico County, MD, to do so. As an undergraduate, Brad studied abroad for five weeks in Málaga, Spain, and became the first Salisbury student to complete a semester at El Centro de Estudios Interamericanos in Cuenca, Ecuador, where he took classes entirely in Spanish. Unfortunately, from that moment of peak fluency, Brad's Spanish deteriorated from lack of practice until he was hired by UTRGV in 2017 as lecturer and "began rejuvenating and improving my long-neglected Spanish." Among the eight PB3 faculty, he was the most apprehensive about his own linguistic ability in Spanish, but he shared that "teaching an Introduction to Philosophy course bilingually is important to me because of my commitment to exposing students to various perspectives, my sensitivity to the fact that most of my students are Mexican American, and my emphasis on the importance of helping my students name the world and take ownership of ideas."

4. PLURALIZING PHILOSOPHICAL LANGUAGES AND CULTURES AND A NEW SENSE OF COMMUNITY

Through the activities of the APA grant, the PB3 faculty theorized the more pluralistic world we wanted to create together with our students, *un mundo en que quepan muchos mundos*.[22] We began developing a new sense of community—*y también un nuevo sentido común*—through which we could experience and embody our roles as bilingual, bicultural, and biliterate philosophers in ways that were more whole by philosophizing together in Spanish, or more accurately, Spanishes, since group members acquired their Spanishes while living a variety of places including Bogotá, Cuenca, Cuidad de México, Rosario, New York City, Salamanca, Salisbury, Sherman, and the Rio Grande Valley.

Among the many things we read and discussed together, I will share one as a transformative example of pluralizing philosophical languages and cultures. I should also mention that UTRGV faculty member Kevin Jobe occasionally joined our *grupo de lectura*, which included two April 2024 meetings that were dedicated to discussions of Carlos Lenkersdorf's *Filosofar en clave tojolabal*.[23] Lenkersdorf's introduction begins: "Filosofar en clave tojolabal es un tema fuera de lo común, porque no se suele hablar del filosofar al referirse a los pueblos indígenas." Nor is it customary for professional philosophers in the US to think that the native language, Spanish, of most students in the South Texas borderlands can and should be used to philosophize. Karl Heinz Herman Lenkersdorf Schmidt grew up in Germany

but moved to Mexico where he earned his licenciatura (1964) and doctorado (1966) in philosophy at the UNAM and became better known as Carlos Lenkersdorf. In 1972, he had his first encounter with Mayan pueblos in southern Mexico and later accepted the Bishop of Chiapas's request to translate the New Testament into Tojolabal, a project that took five years working with a group of more than seventy *tojolabeles* representing twenty-five communities. They maintained ultimate authority over the translation: "si algún texto, según su juicio, no reflejaba el evangelio, no lo traducían. Es decir, no eran traductores autómatas sino conscientemente críticos, según el encargo de sus comunidades."[24] Working from the original Greek, Lenkersdorf would produce a version "en un español tojolabilizado o, si quieren, 'tojspañol'" that they would then translate into "el tojolabal que se hablaba en las comunidades," a process that helped Lenkersdorf deepen his understanding of their language while leading the *tojolabeles* to request that he teach them Spanish.[25]

This story illustrates the pluralization of philosophical languages and cultures through a pluricultural process that moves from Ancient Greek to Spanish to Tojspañol to Tojolabal, with the *tojolabeles* maintaining authority over what the gospel written in Ancient Greek should say. South Texas is admittedly a long way from Southern Mexico (Chiapas), just as Spanglish is a long way from *tojspañol*, pero al leer juntos a Lenkersdorf, nos parecieron poderosas y convencedoras sus reflexiones sobre "la vinculación íntima que existe entre lengua y cultura." After reading these words, "Un pueblo que ha desarrollado un idioma tiene, a la vez, su manera de filosfar incluida en su lengua,"[26] we began discussing what kind of philosophizing we might be able to do together or with our students in Spanish or Spanglish that we might not be able to do together in English. Lenkersdorf "philosophizes in the key of tojolabal" by exploring group identity and the importance of the *we*, *nosotros*, or *-tik* (a verb-ending in Mayan languages like Tzeltal and Tojolabal that indicates "we" or *nosotros*). Like the *tojolabales*, many UTRGV students and faculty "hablan su lengua aunque en la actualidad hay más y más personas bilingües" (20), something that both enriches and complicates what we mean when we say "we." Moreover, "La presencia de tojolabales que no hablan su idioma es una señal muy clara de que el modo tojolabal tiene raíces más profundas que el idioma"—a point that we thought could also be applied to Mexican Americans who speak only English.

Philosophizing in tongues—e.g., Greek, English, Español, Spanglish, Tojolabal, Tojspañol—widens and deepens our philosophical range, whether we are exploring our own native culture(s) and language(s) or learning the cultures and languages of others until "no describiremos aquello que sea ajeno o extraño para nosotros, sino aquello que nos ha transformado y llenado de ideas, vivencias e imaginaciones que desconocíamos antes."[27] This process, which Lenkersdorf calls the "*nosotrificación* de los hablantes" takes place in distinct but related ways across cases ranging from the indigenous Tzetzal girl who begins properly employing *-tik* at two years old,[28] to a German like Lenkersdorf who became a Mexican Spanish speaker then a German-Mexican Tojolabal speaker.

Del mismo modo, nuestro equipo PB3 empezó de nosotrificar a través de nuestro grupo de lectura. At the end of our first meeting discussing Lenkersdorf, Danny asked: "¿Como podemos ayudar a nuestros estudiantes pensar y expresar sus vivencias y experiencias en español o bilingüemente?" Danny no dijo, "How can I help my students . . . ?" sino más bien "Como podemos . . . ?" I had not yet read Carlos Sanchéz's assertation that the Mayan concept of *tik* "could serve as an aspirational ideal for both Mexican Philosophy and for ourselves," but in a passage where he translates Lenkersdorf into English, Sanchéz writes: "We do not negate the I, we do not erase it but the very I and the Thou only exist thanks to the existence of the *we* that gives these opportunities for them to develop."[29] In a way that resonates with our PB3 team, Sánchez further characterizes *tik* as indicating "a *plurality of minds*, one that is not the collection of each reduced or synthesized into one, but a plural mind that retains each individual contribution gathered and oriented toward a common Good."[30]

Sanchéz's Mexican American English translation of a German Mexican philosopher "in the key of Tojolabal" points to a kind of community that is difficult, beautiful, and rare—quite likely beyond our reach—but I hold onto it as a spiritual ideal. It also echoes Paccacerqua's rendering of φιλοσοφία as a "call to think differentially with others" animated by "the desire of the Just and the Good to infuse our relations with those persons who in one way or another stand beside us."[31] I was already teaching B3 PHIL classes before we formed a PB3 team with support from the APA grant, but our discussion of Tojolabal philosophy pointed me toward the incompleteness of "I" without community. In the context of such a community, our individual differences become complementary rather than contradictory. As Lenkersdorf writes, "plurality [. . .] not only implies subjective differences but leads philosophizing to demand the *diversity* by which it achieves success."[32] I therefore invite the readers of this special issue of *APA Studies on Hispanic/Latino Issues in Philosophy* to join us in the collective transformational work of pluralizing philosophical languages and cultures.

NOTES

1. Cynthia M. Paccacerqua, "A Collective Vision, a Political Act: Φιλοσοφία in the Roundtable on Latina Feminism," *Hypatia* 31, no. 2 (2016): 437–39.

2. Over the past twenty years, I have only sporadically participated in the annual Roundtable on Latina Feminism, which became the Latina/x Feminisms Roundtable in 2018, but I mention it here to acknowledge my philosophical debts.

3. See Alex Stehn et al., "APA Grant Proposal for *Pluralizing Philosophical Languages and Cultures in the South Texas Borderlands*," American Philosophical Association, 2023, https://www.apaonline.org/resource/resmgr/grantproposals/diversity_grant_proposals/2023/pluralizing_philosophical_la.pdf.

4. See Katherine Christoffersen and Dania López García, "The B3 Scholar Seal: Designing and Implementing an Alternative to the SoBL at a Hispanic-Serving Institution in South Texas," in *The Seal of Biliteracy in Higher Education: Harnessing Students' Cultural and Linguistic Strengths at Colleges and Universities*, ed. Kristin J. Davin and Amy J. Heineke (Routledge, 2024).

5. Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, ed. Ricardo F. Vivancos-Pérez and Norma Elia Cantú, critical ed. (Aunt Lute Books, 2021), 49.

6. If the word *spiritual* turns you off, you can substitute *linguistic, cultural, personal, social, communal, human, etc.*, but Anzaldúa

complained about those who de-spiritualized her work: "The 'safe' elements in *Borderlands* are appropriated and used, and the 'unsafe' elements are ignored. One of the things that doesn't get talked about is the connection between body, mind, and spirit." Kakie Urch et al., "Working the Borderlands, Becoming *Mestiza*: An Interview with Gloria Anzaldúa," *disClosure: A Journal of Social Theory* 4, no. 1 (1995): 85.

7. D. Jean Clandinin and F. Michael Connelly, *Narrative Inquiry: Experience and Story in Qualitative Research* (Jossey-Bass, 2000), xiv.

8. Eric Schwitzgebel et al., "The Insularity of Anglophone Philosophy: Quantitative Analyses," *Philosophical Papers* 47, no. 1 (2018): 21.

9. Schwitzgebel et al., "Insularity of Anglophone Philosophy," 21.

10. Hans-Johann Glock, "The Awful English Language," *Philosophical Papers* 47, no. 1 (2018): 123, 148.

11. Saray Ayala-López, "Philosophy and the Non-Native Speaker Condition," *APA Newsletter on Feminism and Philosophy* 14, no. 2 (2015): 2–9.

12. Uwe Peters et al., "Epistemic Challenges Faced by Non-Native English Speakers in Philosophy: Evidence from an International Survey," *Review of Philosophy and Psychology* 16, no. 4 (2025): 1197–233.

13. See Gabriela Veronelli, "The Coloniality of Language: Race, Expressivity, Power, and the Darker Side of Modernity," *Wagadu: A Journal of Transnational Women's & Gender Studies* 13 (2015): 108–34.

14. As early as the 1960s, scholars and activists denounced the "miseducation" of bilingual and bicultural children in the US Southwest and argued that "a new focus on the bilingual child could well serve to trigger an important revolution in American education." See Chester C. Christian, "The Acculturation of the Bilingual Child," *Modern Language Journal* 49, no. 3 (1965): 160. The term "subtractive schooling" names the ways that US schools subtract the Mexican identities and Spanish abilities of Mexican American students. See Angela Valenzuela, *Subtractive Schooling: U.S.-Mexican Youth and the Politics of Caring* (SUNY Press, 1999).

15. Stehn et al., "APA Grant Proposal," 3.

16. I do not claim that UTRGV's PB3 program was "the first in the U.S." because Puerto Rico is a US territory, and Puerto Rican universities generally support bilingualism, biculturalism, and biliteracy. See Catherine M. Mazak et al., "Professors Translanguaging in Practice: Three Cases from a Bilingual University," in *Translanguaging in Higher Education: Beyond Monolingual Ideologies*, ed. Catherine M. Mazak and Kevin S. Carroll (Multilingual Matters, 2017). I have also seen online syllabi from courses in *Filosofía* (FILO) across the University of Puerto Rico (UPR) system that assign both Spanish and English texts as readings and include Latin American, Caribbean, and Puerto Rican philosophical traditions.

17. See Alexander V. Stehn, "Philosophizing in Tongues: Cultivating Bilingualism, Biculturalism, and Biliteracy in an Introduction to Latin American Philosophy Course," *APA Studies on Hispanic/Latino Issues in Philosophy* 22, no. 1 (2022): 7–16.

18. A partial list of readings from our *grupo de lectura* is available in Alex Stehn et al., "APA Grant Report for *Pluralizing Philosophical Languages and Cultures in the South Texas Borderlands*," American Philosophical Association, 2024, https://www.apaonline.org/resource/resmgr/grantreports/diversity_grant_reports/2023-2024/pluralizing_languages_and_cu.pdf.

19. I think about "liberation" through an Inter-American philosophical lens. See Alexander V. Stehn, "Toward an Inter-American Philosophy: Pragmatism and the Philosophy of Liberation," *Inter-American Journal of Philosophy* 2, no. 2 (2011): 14–36.

20. Cynthia M. Paccacerqua, "Gloria Anzaldúa's Affective Logic of *Volverse Una*," *Hypatia* 31, no. 2 (2016): 334.

21. RGV PUEDE, "Padres Unidos para una Educación Dual de Excelencia | Parents United for Excellent Dual Language Education," accessed October 28, 2026, https://rgvpuede.org.

22. This expression is one of many distillations of the Zapatistas' famous articulation of a new and better order: "El mundo que queremos es uno donde quepan muchos mundos." See Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional, "Cuarta Declaración de la Selva Lacandona," 1996, https://enlacezapatista.ezln.org.mx/1996/01/01/cuarta-declaracion-de-la-selva-lacandona/. Although articulated in Spanish, the EZLN's declarations drew upon Mayan languages, concepts, stories, and philosophies. See Gustavo García Rojas, "Doble traducción y contagio de cosmologías: Marxismo y cultura indígena maya en el EZLN," *Península* 8, no. 1 (2013): 25–46.

23. Carlos Lenkersdorf, *Filosofar en clave tojolabal* (Miguel Ángel Porrúa, 2002).

24. Lenkersdorf, *Filosofar en clave tojolabal*, 8.

25. Lenkersdorf, *Filosofar en clave tojolabal*, 8.

26. Lenkersdorf, *Filosofar en clave tojolabal*, 9.

27. Lenkersdorf, *Filosofar en clave tojolabal*, 28.

28. Lenkersdorf, *Filosofar en clave tojolabal*, 66.

29. Carlos Alberto Sánchez, *Mexican Philosophy for the 21st Century: Relajo, Zozobra, and Other Frameworks for Understanding Our World* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2023), 127.

30. Sánchez, *Mexican Philosophy for the 21st Century*, 130.

31. Paccacerqua, "A Collective Vision, a Political Act," 438.

32. Lenkersdorf, *Filosofar en clave tojolabal*, 115; translation mine.

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