

More Latinos stop speaking only Spanish at home, study finds

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Owner Lourdes Perez (center) teaches a dance move during practice at the Spotlight Dance Studio in Cudahy, California, April 14, 2016. She speaks almost entirely in Spanish, while most of her students, though Latino, speak English. Photo:

LOS ANGELES, Calif. — Like many Mexican immigrants, Juan Rivera's family spoke only Spanish.

So when he had his own children, he wanted them to speak both English and Spanish. He covered his home with sticky notes with words in both languages.

But soon the children went back to speaking just English, and the notes vanished.

The Rivera family's experience shows a big change in Latino communities across the country. More Latinos are growing up in households where only English is spoken.

A new Pew Research study was released last week. It found that in 2014, a little more than one out of three Latinos ages 5 to 17 grew up in households where only English was spoken. That is up from 2000.

Overall, English is on the rise, and a lower proportion of Latinos are speaking only Spanish at home, the study found.

In recent years, the number of people coming to the United States from Latin American countries has declined sharply. Like other groups, Latinos are adopting American culture and language, the study shows.

The first generation prefers to speak Spanish, said Jody Agius Vallejo. She teaches at the University of Southern California and studies immigrants. The second generation speaks both languages. The third generation usually speaks only English.

In the last few decades, there has been a huge wave of immigration into the United States from Latin America. In 1998, California voted to stop most programs in public schools that taught children in both English and Spanish. Critics of immigration claimed that the immigrants would prefer to keep speaking Spanish.

It is not that simple, though.

Spanish, English And The Generation Gap

Outside a dance studio in the mainly Latino immigrant town of Cudahy, mothers waited for their daughters. Most of the children spoke English, but the teacher speaks almost entirely in Spanish.

As the mothers waited, they joked about speaking to their children in Spanish only when they punish their children. But they also said they are sad that their children cannot speak with their grandparents.

When Maria del Rosario Peralta speaks to her daughter in Spanish, her daughter responds in English.

This summer, the family plans to visit the grandparents in Mexico, and Peralta worries that her daughter will not be able to talk with them.

"I tell her, 'What's going to happen when we go to visit your grandparents?'" Peralta said. "Vas a hablar o te vas a quedar muda?" which means "Are you going to talk, or are you going to stay silent?"

Nearly half of Latinos are younger than 18. Nearly 9 out of 10 speak only English at home or speak English very well, according to information gathered in 2014 by the U.S. Census Bureau. Almost 3 out of 4 said that in 2000.

In 2000, among Latinos, 18 to 33 years old, about 6 out of 10 said they speak only English at home or said they speak English very well. In 2014, 3 out of 4 Latinos said that.

The number of immigrants from Latin America has been going down for years.

Speaking Spanish And Keeping Your Identity

Erika Aparicio, 24, of San Diego, arrived in the United States when she was 6. She is fluent in both English and Spanish. But Aparicio prefers to speak to her parents in Spanish.

Aparicio makes an effort to speak only Spanish to her 3-year-old daughter, too.

"I'm not going to let the Spanish die with me," she said. "I see the value in knowing two languages."

Many people have a love-hate relationship with Spanish. On the one hand, many whites have enrolled their children in schools to learn Spanish, believing it could help them find work later on. But in a video that went viral, a woman yells at a mother for speaking Spanish to her son and demands that she speak English.

There are also English-only laws across the country, like California's, Vallejo said.

It is an old story in many ways, Lopez said. A hundred years ago, some states, like Nebraska and Iowa, outlawed German in public schools.

"The United States truly is a graveyard of languages," Vallejo said.

For many families, language is about more than just the words you speak, Vallejo said.

"It is about your identity," she said. It is about "the relationships that you build and deepen with family and friends" and about the memories you share with them.

