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Improving Spanish-language teacher retention and success among  
black Spanish-language learners: An HSI-HBCU collaboration

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## **Improving Spanish-language teacher retention and success among black Spanish-language learners: An HSI-HBCU collaboration**

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### **Introduction**

The purpose of this paper is to describe a collaboration between Florida International University (FIU; a Hispanic-Serving Institution) and Florida Memorial University (FMU; a Historically Black College or University) to research how to best support language teachers as well as minority language learners in Spanish foreign language teaching and learning. In 2019, Dr. Melissa Baralt was awarded a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) to support this collaboration to improve modern language curricula and teacher-training, with an aim of improving Spanish language courses for African American and Black diaspora students, who remain significantly underrepresented in foreign language programs.

This paper is co-written by our team: Dr. Uju Anya, expert in the raciolinguistic affinities and needs of black language learners and expert consultant on this project; Dr. Déborah Gómez, director of the Spanish-language program at FMU; Dr. William Hobbs, chair of Humanities Program at FMU; Habey Echeverría, Ph.D. student of Spanish and Afro-Caribbean studies at FIU; Amber Robinson, undergraduate student (formerly at Howard University, and now a student at FIU), and Dr. Melissa Baralt, PI on the project.

In this paper, we describe the problem that led to the current project and grant. We then discuss the theoretical background and evidence demonstrating why higher institutions must address this issue on a larger scale. Next, we describe how we are working together to raise awareness and to address the problem, explaining our grant activities and key deliverables. We include sample pedagogic tasks and teacher-training materials. We conclude with a brief description of current challenges, and then make specific recommendations that have come out of our project. It is our hope that this project may serve as an example of how collaborations between HSI's and HBCU's can be powerful catalysts for what we hope is systemic change to best serve our students and better prepare the nation's bilingual work force.

### **The problem**

Florida International University (FIU) is the largest Hispanic-serving institution in the nation and is located in the mostly Hispanic metropolis of Miami, Florida. FIU's Department of Modern Languages is responsible for training future Spanish language teachers. Since 2010, the department has placed 296 teachers, 98% of whom are Hispanic, in teaching positions in our community at the K-12, community college, and university levels. Dr. Melissa Baralt is an applied linguist at FIU and is responsible for the Department of Modern Languages' teacher-training program. She has developed a strong relationship with Miami's Florida Memorial University (FMU), a historically black university, given that the last *ten* Spanish language teachers trained at FIU were hired as instructors at FMU. Each year, Dr. Baralt and Dr. Déborah Gómez, the Spanish director at FMU, conduct joint professional development workshops for student teachers, instructors, and faculty at FIU and FMU.

In their work together, Dr. Baralt and colleagues at both institutions noted four serious problems in their teaching contexts:

1. 80% of the Spanish language teachers trained at FIU and hired at FMU quit before their contracts were up. Overall, they reported feeling unprepared to teach in a historically black university setting. They cited culture shock, distress, and also, lack of student preparation or institutional support. This teacher attrition and lack of continuity has negatively impacted FMU's Spanish program and students.
2. From 2010-2018, enrollment in Spanish language study by black learners has decreased significantly at both FIU and FMU, more so than any other ethnicity. At both institutions, black enrollment reduced to zero by the time students reached the intermediate-level course. In 2017, Dr. Baralt, Dr. Gómez and colleagues conducted a year-long ethnographic study on why, interviewing 50 students and 10 teachers. They found that black learners reported negative classroom experiences due to poor instructional environments and a lack of ethno-racial affinity and integrativeness opportunities in the curricula (defined as positive identification with both classroom communities of learners and Spanish-language speaker communities, and a desire to maintain ties within them; Anya, 2011).
3. Dr. Baralt also found that teachers did not know how to manage the discomfort provoked by discussing race or racism in class. For example, teachers were unable or unwilling to discuss U.S.- or Miami-based current events specific to the discrimination of blacks, and never suggested black populations as important social and cultural agents in the study of Spanish. This negatively impacted black students' sense of relevance and ability to identify with the subject material.
4. Dr. Baralt also found black *heritage* learners (students who grew up with Spanish as their home language but may or may not have speaking proficiency) reported difficulty in accessing Spanish-speaking communities in Miami, feeling they did not fit into Miami's definition of "Hispanic/Latin@," even though Spanish language is ubiquitous in their community.

These are critical problems, and unfortunately, as identified in previous work by Dr. Uju Anya (2011, 2017) and Dr. Anya and Dr. LJ Randolph, Jr. (2019), they are not unique to FIU and FMU. Nationwide, studies identify a troubling phenomenon of low rates of participation and advancement of black students in foreign language programs compared to Caucasians or other students of color (Brigman & Jacobs, 1981; Charle Poza, 2013; Davis, 1992; Davis & Markham, 1991; Moore, 2005). Blacks hold only 4% of bachelor's degrees conferred in the field of foreign languages. However, in comparison, they earn 10% of all bachelor's degrees and represent about 12% of the U.S. population (U.S. Department of Education, 2016; 2010 Census). Without considering the history of systemic and institutional exclusion of black students and older generations of black scholars and teachers from postsecondary language learning, some scholars explained the underrepresentation using deficit theories of inherent linguistic and cultural disadvantage, such as the discredited idea that being a speaker of African American English (AAE) prevents one's success in language-based academic subjects. Assumptions of black students' negative attitudes toward language learning are also unfounded, because African Americans hold favorable opinions and strong desires for language learning; however, they often encounter negative classroom experiences, poor instructional environments, unfavorable (and

racist) teacher and classmate attitudes, low expectations, and curriculum and learning materials they find unappealing, inappropriate, and irrelevant (Davis, 1992; Davis & Markham, 1991; Moore, 2005).

Additionally, there is a dearth of research on blacks in language study. In the fields of education and second language acquisition (SLA), studies on white students learning world languages and Hispanic and Asian English language learners abound. However, until Dr. Anya's book on blacks in study abroad was published in 2017, there was no single-author volume focused on African American second language learners. There are very few large-scale examinations, and Davis and Markham's (1991) survey of 770 students—the most comprehensive project on this topic—was conducted nearly three decades ago. The underrepresentation of blacks in foreign language programs contributes to this scarcity of research on African Americans, because students from such programs are the ones who typically become language educators and scholars, serving as models and advocates for others coming through the pipeline. We struggle to keep black students in language classrooms, and we need a better understanding of what promotes equitable inclusion and success for this population.

The Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) Valid Assessment of Learning in Undergraduate Education (VALUE) rubrics to evaluate student achievement in postsecondary education identify effective written and oral communication, critical thinking, problem solving, intercultural knowledge and competence, and global learning among the 16 “Essential Learning Outcomes” that best position graduates for success in work, citizenship, and life (Rhodes, 2010). Employers surveyed by the AAC&U (2013; 2018) confirm that, indeed, most seek out and give hiring preferences to college graduates who show effectiveness in communication, critical thinking, and problem solving, the ability to work in intercultural groups, global knowledge, multilingualism, and familiarity with different cultures within and outside the United States. Such knowledge and skills are readily demonstrated by students of foreign language programs, who go on to excel in a diverse range of careers including education, journalism, civil service, international development, tourism, marketing, publishing, translation/voiceover/subtitle services, diplomacy, and more. In the case of Miami and south Florida, research and everyday experience show that advanced proficiency in Spanish is a key factor in determining the educational and economic life chances of people in this geographic area (Carter & Callesano, 2018). Plus, speaking another language is a key need for U.S. national security to foster global competencies and to be able to engage internationally. Therefore, language learning must be accessible to all. The results of Dr. Baralt's ethnolinguistic study, however, contribute to the body of literature that shows that it is not. It confirms that African Americans have not equitably gained as much as language education has to offer due to their underrepresentation in the field and other systemic, longstanding problems.

The aim of the project, therefore, was to address these critical problems. Thanks to the NEH, Dr. Baralt received a grant in the area of Humanities Initiatives at Hispanic-Serving Institutions. With this funding, we are working towards the following goals:

1. Improve FIU's capacity to train Spanish language teachers to teach in culturally diverse settings and to better connect their Spanish curricula with black learners; and
2. Redesign the first-year Spanish language curriculum at our sister, historically black institution, FMU, so that it A) achieves ethno-racial affinity and linguistic

integrativeness with learners, and B) has an improved focus on writing, reading, and speaking.

### **What we are doing**

The first key component of this project was a detailed needs analysis study. In the field of applied linguistics, a needs analysis is a rigorous type of study in second language teaching that employs different methods and sources to design language-teaching tasks that are based on learners' real-life needs (Long, 2005). During the summer of 2019, Dr. Baralt used multiple research methods (interviews, class observations, questionnaires, journals, ethnography, language use audit) and diverse sources (learners, program graduates, learner family members, teachers, administrators, community members, business owners, literature, job descriptions in Miami) to learn about the real-world target tasks that FMU students want to be able to do in the Spanish language. These target tasks are specific to their lives, contexts, and actual needs. "Target tasks" in second language teaching require students to do meaningful, needs-based tasks such as filling out a job application, taking a patient's vital signs in a clinic setting, or doing a presentation for a class or a job while using the target language (Long, 2005, 2015). From a target task, applied linguists organize these into target task types and then sequence them according to cognitive complexity theory (Baralt, Gilabert & Robinson, 2015) in a syllabus. The research then designs the pedagogic task and plans the task-based methodology around each task. Twenty tasks are being designed for the FMU Spanish 1 course, and 20 tasks will be designed for the FMU Spanish 2 course in the spring of 2020. The entire curriculum, to include the tasks we are designing as well as all of the adaptable teacher lesson plans, will be made available on the LACC-hosted website, which we have titled MI-BRIDGE: Minority Institutions Building Resources to Ignite Development and Growth in Education (see Figure 1 below).



Figure 1. *MI-BRIDGE logo for the FIU-FMU project*

Examples of tasks that FMU students need and want to be able to do with the Spanish-language are: order food in Spanish, conduct an interview, post on social media to support a business, help someone in need, help a child, talk with and help a patient, be able to join conversations in the work space in Miami, read a book, and sing along to Trap music, among many others. One key theme that came out of our needs analysis data was a desire to understand raciolinguistic ideologies and to learn more about the black diaspora in Latin America. Below, we provide two example tasks that we have designed for the new curriculum as well as the methodological plans for their classroom implementation. We also provide a sample teacher-training module that we

have created to enhance their professional development and to facilitate critical reflections on what Rosa calls raciolinguistic chronotypes (Rosa, 2016). (See Baralt, 2018, for an example of critical reflections as part of professional development in language teacher-training).

Sample language teaching task 1 designed for the curriculum:

### *Tarea acerca de Juneteenth*

En los Estados Unidos es muy común celebrar el día de la independencia el 4 de julio. Sin embargo, hay otra fecha de gran trascendencia histórica que muchas personas también celebran como el día de la independencia. Se trata del 19 de junio —*Juneteenth* o *Freedom Day* como se conoce en inglés—.



—Foto de Davian Chester que se volvió viral en 2019—

¿Qué se conmemora en *Juneteenth*?

Lo que se conmemora en esta fecha es el fin de la Guerra Civil de los Estados Unidos y la abolición de la esclavitud en los estados confederados. El 19 de junio de 1865, bajo la presidencia de Abraham Lincoln, se anunció formalmente en el estado de Texas el fin de la guerra y la liberación de todos los esclavos. Actualmente, muchas comunidades afroamericanas celebran el 19 de junio o *Juneteenth* debido a la gran significación de esta fecha tanto para ellos como para sus antepasados.

<p>General Orders No.3 (1865)</p> <p>Fuente: Dolph Briscoe Center for American History</p>	<p>Celebración de <i>Juneteenth</i> en Harlem en 2018</p> <p>Fuente: <i>New York Amsterdam News</i></p>	<p>Celebración de <i>Juneteenth</i> en 1900 en Eastwoods Park</p> <p>Fuente: Dolph Briscoe Center for American History</p>	<p>Celebración de <i>Juneteenth</i> en Detroit</p> <p>Fuente: <i>Detroit Metro Times</i></p>

A pesar de la importancia de esta fecha, *Juneteenth* no es una festividad conocida o reconocida por todos —véase en la página anterior el diseño que creó Davian Chester, a quien Google le ofreció un trabajo—. Muchos argumentan, sin embargo, que se debería celebrar en todo el país; porque reconocer esta fecha es reconocer la historia del colonialismo, de la esclavitud y del racismo en los Estados Unidos. Su reconocimiento también serviría para fomentar diálogos acerca de temas tan difíciles como la desigualdad de derechos y los maltratos que todavía sufren algunos ciudadanos en este país, especialmente las minorías. Celebrar *Juneteenth* y promover estos diálogos pudiera ser una extensión de la lucha por los derechos civiles en los Estados Unidos. Es importante reconocer que "la independencia" puede interpretarse de distintas maneras según el grupo social.

En grupos de cuatro, su tarea es justificar por qué su universidad o colegio debe celebrar el *Juneteenth*. (Nota: aunque no estés de acuerdo con esta idea, es bueno aprender a justificar una posición con la que no concordamos, para de esa manera tomar la perspectiva de otros). Tienen que estar listos para presentar su argumentación a toda la clase. Dentro del grupo, una persona tiene que ser el portavoz, otra el escritor, otra el investigador y por último una será el verificador de la coherencia de todos los puntos del argumento.

### **Las funciones de los miembros del grupo serán las siguientes:**

- El/la portavoz - presentar la argumentación del grupo en frente de toda la clase.
- El/la escritor/a - escribir los apuntes del grupo y el párrafo final.
- El/la investigador/a - buscar información y/o hechos en el internet (pueden usar sus teléfonos) y anotar las fuentes.
- El/la verificador/a de la coherencia – chequear la gramática (la concordancia del género, los sujetos y verbos, etc.), la competencia discursiva (palabras/frases como *primero, segundo, tercero, como último, es más, además, entonces, para que, debería, es importante que*, etc.) y el formato de la argumentación.

### **Formato de la argumentación:**

- Introducción  
Breve resumen
- La tesis
- Evidencia  
Idea de apoyo 1  
Idea de apoyo 2 ...
- Conclusión  
Resumen de las ideas centrales  
Últimas perspectivas

En el espacio a continuación, el/la escritor/a puede tomar notas y finalizar su argumentación. Su profesor/a estará caminando por el aula y le pueden hacer preguntas si tienen dudas.

¡Tienen 15 minutos para preparar su argumentación!

Teacher's task implementation plan:

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*Tarea acerca de Juneteenth*

**Fase previa a la tarea (pre-task phase):**

*Objetivo: preparar a los estudiantes para que puedan realizar la tarea, dándoles todas las herramientas que necesiten para su ejecución.*

- El instructor debe haber investigado previamente los orígenes históricos de este acontecimiento y el gran impacto que tuvo en la comunidad afroamericana; así como el papel que jugó dicha comunidad dentro de este evento.
- Uno de los elementos que los estudiantes tienen que explorar para argumentar su propuesta es la importancia del Día de la abolición de la esclavitud o *Juneteenth*, y su influencia en los Estados Unidos.



- Durante esta fase de la tarea el instructor debe tener en cuenta que se está lidiando con un tema delicado. No se trata de restarle importancia a El cuatro de julio, día en que Estados Unidos se independizó formalmente del Imperio Británico. Más bien se trata de (1) hacerles pensar que “la independencia” puede interpretarse de distintas maneras según el grupo social (aprendizaje global) y (2) hacerles pensar que el cuatro de julio no tiene la misma connotación para todos los grupos sociales, sobre todo, si se tiene en cuenta que la esclavitud no fue abolida en esta fecha. Hacerle justicia a *Juneteenth* es reconocer esa perspectiva de la comunidad afroamericana, y reconocer la historia del colonialismo, de la esclavitud y del racismo en los Estados Unidos. Es muy importante que el instructor explique y discuta estos puntos con los estudiantes antes de que se comience a ejecutar la tarea.
- El instructor revisa las instrucciones de la tarea, ofrece ejemplos concretos y provee a los estudiantes con los recursos necesarios.
- Ayuda a los estudiantes a asignar los roles dentro de cada grupo.
- Estipula cuánto tiempo se puede dedicar a esta fase de la tarea y explica cuál es el resultado (*task outcome*) que se espera al terminarla.
- Opcional: enfoque en la forma (*focus on form*): El instructor puede repasar una lista de conectores con los estudiantes: por lo tanto, por lo cual, debido a, sin embargo, no obstante, entonces, además, resumiendo, etc.

### **Fase de realización de la tarea (during-task phase):**

*Objetivo: los estudiantes realizan la tarea.*

- El instructor monitorea a los grupos (y el/la portavoz, el/la escritor/a, el/la investigador/a, y el/la verificador/a de la coherencia de cada grupo).
- Se asegura de que todos los estudiantes estén involucrados, de que estén buscando argumentos sólidos y de que sean creativos.
- Escucha los argumentos de los estudiantes y les ofrece apoyo lingüístico según lo necesiten. Se encarga de esclarecer cualquier tipo de duda o confusión que se presente, de esta manera no sólo facilita la realización de la tarea, sino que también ayuda a sosegar la ansiedad que la ejecución de la tarea les pueda producir a los estudiantes.
- Opcional: enfoque en la forma (*focus on form*): si fuera necesario, el instructor puede ayudar a los estudiantes con retroalimentación implícita con formas gramaticales que necesiten (no se recomienda explicación explícita todavía).

### **Fase posterior a la tarea (post-task phase):**

*Objetivo: ofrecer la oportunidad para que los diferentes grupos expongan sus argumentos al resto de la clase, promover el debate, reflexionar acerca de cómo se realizó la tarea y enfocarse en las formas o aspectos gramaticales.*

- El instructor le pide a los grupos que expongan sus argumentos.
- El instructor se asegura de que se mantenga un ambiente respetuoso y colaborativo, al tiempo de que reconoce los aportes de cada grupo.
- Cada vez que un grupo exponga sus argumentos el instructor preguntará la opinión del resto de los estudiantes sobre dichos argumentos. La prioridad en esta fase es que se logre comunicar acertadamente el contenido.
- Si lo considera apropiado, el instructor tomará de modelo a uno de los trabajos teniendo en cuenta la riqueza lingüística, la organización y la profundidad de ideas que promueven

de una manera convincente —y humana— la inclusión y la validación de la historia de las minorías, así como también las dificultades y retos a los que se enfrentan en el presente.

- Enfoque en la forma: el instructor puede corregir los errores gramaticales que impidan la comunicación o distorsionen el mensaje, especialmente aquellos que fueron señalados durante la orientación de la actividad. Es importante permitir el translenguaje teniendo en cuenta la diversidad lingüística del estudiantado, *especialmente* para los estudiantes que dominan varios idiomas y variedades lingüísticas (les ayuda).
- El instructor debe guiar la clase hacia los objetivos docentes, aprovechando incluso las polémicas, los conflictos y las reacciones que puedan haber surgido durante esta fase de la tarea.

Sample language teaching task 2 designed for the curriculum:

*Task: Reflexionar sobre el cuarto episodio del documental Black in Latin America, titulado "Mexico & Peru: The Black Grandma in the Closet"*

For this task, please watch the 3rd episode of the documentary *Black in Latin America*. The episode is called: *Mexico and Peru: The Black Grandma in the Closet*. You can access it here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JlzHIRCBtdE>.

After you watch the episode, please answer the following comprehension questions. You can write your answers in English. Be prepared to share your answers with the class tomorrow.

1. According to ethnomusicologist Rafael Figueroa, what is fandango?
2. Why does Dr. Gates argue that *La Bamba* is representative of Mexico's complex African origins?
2. What is the "fingerprint of black history" in Mexico? Why does Dr. Gates call it Mexico's "missing black population"?
3. Why do you think the episode is called "The Black Grandma in the closet?"
4. Who was Gaspar Yanga? Why is he significant in Mexican history?
5. How is Father Glyn Jemmott helping to raise black consciousness in the town of Costa Chica?
6. Explain what happened during the racial controversy of 2005 in Mexico. Why do you think Mexican and international responses to the incident were so different? Do you think that one perspective is more correct than the other? Why or why not?
7. Why is eliminating racial categories a form of racism itself, according to Dr. Gates?

8. In the second half of the documentary, Dr. Gates goes to Perú. How is the history of Afro-Peruvians different from that of Afro-Mexicans?
9. Why was the capital, Lima, considered a black city?
10. Who was Simon Bolivar? Do you think he was a true *liberador*?
11. In 2009, the Peruvian government made a historical apology to Afro-Peruvian people for the racial discrimination perpetrated against them since the colonial era. Perú is the only Latin American country to apologize for such historical racial discrimination. Do you think this apology has made an impact in Peruvian society? What do activist groups in Perú think of the apology?
12. Describe the double identity of Afro-Latinos, as purported by Dr. Gates.
13. How do you think Mexico and Peru are embracing their African history? What else could be done to celebrate this history?

Teacher's task implementation plan:

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*Task: Reflexionar sobre el cuarto episodio del documental Black in Latin America, titulado "Mexico & Peru: The Black Grandma in the Closet"*

**Fase previa a la tarea (pre-task phase):**

*Objetivo: preparar a los estudiantes para que puedan realizar la tarea, dándoles todas las herramientas que necesiten para su ejecución.*

- Esta tarea tiene dos partes. La primera es una serie de preguntas que los estudiantes tienen que contestar. Esta parte la hacen *antes* de venir a clase. Como el documental está en inglés, queremos que contesten las preguntas y que reflexionen en inglés. Tienen que traer sus respuestas escritas a la clase.
- La segunda parte se hace en la clase y en la lengua meta, aunque se debe utilizar translenguaje como herramienta de apoyo. El instructor confirma que todos los estudiantes tienen sus respuestas listas y divide la clase en parejas.
- Como tarea los estudiantes tienen que 1) comparar sus respuestas con las de su pareja y 2) escribir una lista en español de las diferencias entre las respuestas de ambos. Tienen que mostrar su lista al final y estar listos para compartir con la clase sus respuestas y un resumen de las diferencias que tienen.

**Fase de realización de la tarea (during-task phase):**

*Objetivo: los estudiantes realizan la tarea.*

- El instructor monitorea a todos los grupos, caminando por el aula y contestando preguntas.
- Se recomiendan alrededor de 20 minutos para hacer esta tarea.

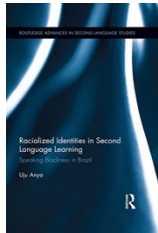
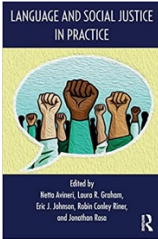

- El enfoque está 100% en el contenido versus en la forma.

**Fase posterior a la tarea (post-task phase):**

*Objetivo: ofrecer la oportunidad para que las parejas expongan sus resultados al resto de la clase, reflexionar acerca de cómo se realizó la tarea y enfocarse en las formas o aspectos gramaticales.*

- El instructor confirma que todos los estudiantes hayan terminado, verificando que hayan escrito la lista de las diferencias.
  - El instructor invita a los estudiantes a que compartan sus respuestas en español. Si los estudiantes tienen alguna dificultad con la lengua meta, pudieran utilizar el translenguaje como herramienta de apoyo y el instructor los puede ayudar escribiendo en la pizarra la palabra, la forma, o la frase en español. A pesar de que durante esta parte hay un enfoque en la escritura, es importante tener en cuenta que el enfoque primordial es en el contenido.
  - Para finalizar, el instructor invita a las parejas a que expongan cuales respuestas fueron diferentes a las suyas. Si así lo desean, los estudiantes pueden leer el resumen que escribieron. Durante esta fase el instructor exhorta y guía a los estudiantes a debatir acerca de la historia de los afro-mexicanos y de los afro-peruvianos, sus similitudes y sus diferencias, además de la importancia de estos grupos en la actualidad.
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## Sample teacher-training module on the MI-BRIDGE website:

<p>Play videos “Yo soy Black” by student TruLe’sia, who shares her experience in learning and speaking Spanish<sup>1</sup>.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Critical reflection notes for the teacher: in the video clips, TruLe’sia shares about an experience in which she was excluded from engaging in conversation in Spanish with a Hispanic person because she is black. She experienced racism, and this prevented her from being able to use in the target language. These types of experiences significantly and negatively impact our black students’ language learning opportunities. As teachers, it is our responsibility to be aware of this reality.</li> <li>○ It is also critical that we as teachers have awareness about <u>ideological racialized othering, which has its roots in colonialism and US history, and which results in racialized experiences that our black students have because of their black skin.</u></li> <li>○ Unfortunately, black students’ opportunities to practice Spanish and to improve their proficiency can often be mediated by race. And the only way we can begin to instantiate change is through awareness-raising, through explicitly acknowledging it, by talking with our students and acknowledging their experiences, and by making non-black students and community members aware of racialized othering.</li> <li>○ The final video is of TruLe’sia sharing her awareness of why the woman she was trying to help dismissed her, how she overcame this (thanks to her awareness), and how not giving up and continuing to study Spanish ended up opened many doors for her. It also gave her access to even more spaces in her life, including spaces to help others, which is meaningful to her.</li> <li>○ It is ok to be uncomfortable with this conversation. Race is not historically addressed in SLA, but you are changing this! As teachers, let’s be willing to lean into the discomfort.</li> <li>○ We would like to encourage you to watch these clips and to think about <u>racialized</u> experiences, and also, <u>racist</u> experiences, in second language learning and teaching. These experiences happen, and we need to ensure our black students feel seen and validated in their SLA journeys.</li> <li>○ Below are some critical reflection activities that you can submit to the MI-BRIDGE website. These could also be projects that you do with your colleagues or schools as part of your professional development. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Read Anya chapter 1, Oluo chapters 1-2, and Avineri et al. chapter 1; write a one-page reflection.</li> <li>▪ Brainstorm ways that you might raise awareness of unconscious racialized othering and how/why to stop it at your own school.</li> <li>▪ Discuss /write about /make a video on how to promote social justice by addressing this problem. For example, how could you</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p><b>Key readers for this week’s unit:</b></p> <p><i>Racialized identities in second language learning</i> by <b>Uju Anya</b></p>  <p><i>Language and social justice in practice</i> chapter 5: “Language of liberation: Digital discourses of emphatic blackness” by <b>Krystal Smalls</b></p>  <p><i>So you want to talk about race</i> by <b>Ijeoma Oluo</b> chapters 1-3: Is it really about race? What is racism? What if I talk about race wrong?</p> 
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<sup>1</sup> This is a sample teacher-training module that we have created for the MI-BRIDGE website. “Yo soy Black” is a video that we have created for teachers to watch, reflect on, and then do professional development activities. Teachers may submit their activities to the MI-BRIDGE website to get feedback.

<p>help to empower younger language learners who are POC? How might you encourage your language learners to do this?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ How could you raise awareness about this in your <i>community</i>? What spaces (grocery store? Online?) could you go to to do so?</li> <li>▪ With your students, visit a local elementary, middle, and/or high school and give presentations to young language learners in your community about the role of race in second language acquisition.</li> </ul>	
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At present, we are interviewing students, teachers, administrators and community members iteratively to seek their feedback on the curriculum being developed. This is another critical aspect of the project. Their feedback is essential to ensure that the curriculum meets students' needs, and also to ensure that teachers feel supported in teaching the new material. Dr. Gómez is leading the way soliciting feedback from community members and providing insight from the teachers. From this, we have also learned about the challenges that they experience. We would now like to share some of the data coming out of these interviews to provide the readers with insight on what we are learning.

### **Voices from HBCU and HSI students and teachers**

In one of the student interviews conducted for this project, a black learner shared that:

*“My Spanish language class was the only class I didn’t like [in college]. It was the only thing I felt I couldn’t belong to.”*

This is a problem in higher education in the U.S., one that is historically entrenched in colonialism, racism, and raciolinguistic ideologies that continue to put up barriers for language learning opportunities. As a team, we continue to reflect on how to best address this. How do we encourage Spanish language teachers to raise their race-consciousness? How do we encourage language program stakeholders to think about their own racial identities, and internalized racism, and to actually re-think what the history of racism is? (Singh, 2019.). How do we empower black students to be successful Spanish language learners, achieving proficiency to give them economic, social, and even health benefits? How do we get society to recognize the harmful raciolinguistic tropes that occur daily? And, at the local level, how can we prepare Spanish language teachers to teach in culturally and linguistically diverse settings, such as that of an HBCU? To quote one HBCU teacher who has participated in our project:

*“African Americans... who have been stripped of the mother tongue of their African ancestry and yet have had their linguistic imprint in English exploited and bastardized by the dominant society ... African American Vernacular English (AAVE) as it is known today in linguists’ circles, remains forever on the fringes of respectability. The attack on its legitimacy is felt in the marrow of every African American to some degree. Even when policy has been mandated to recognize its legitimacy and efficacy, contention arises, as it does in every facet of progress African Americans attain...”*

*...my point is: negrophobia is real in Latin America. So then, knowing what they know inherently, what are possible methods to use to inspire a group of oppressed people [our black students] to delve into yet another language and culture where they remain oppressed?"*

Under the leadership of Dr. Hobbs, we are working on specific recommendations for teachers who teach a foreign language in an HBCU setting. They are:

1. Start off by highlighting the fact that Spanish-speaking communities here in the U.S. have a Latinx and *black foundation* to them, and that African Americans can become part of these speech communities.
2. Learn and embrace black students' names. Cultural names are given to African American children to instill a sense of self. Creative spellings are used deliberately so that U.S. society is forced to acknowledge the child's individuality.
3. Embrace translanguaging in the HBCU Spanish-language classroom (Anya, 2017). Translanguaging refers to the use of one's full linguistic repertoire to engage in multilingual discourse practices for the purpose of optimize communication and understanding. In the classroom, this might be realized as students' use of School English, black English, Spanish, and Caribbean Englishes all in the same space. Teachers need to know that black learners learning Spanish have been told their whole life that their home language, black English, has been put down, stigmatized, criticized, and forbidden. Teachers need to know the history, systematicity, and importance of black English (Blake & Buchstaller, 2020; Wolfram, Kohn, Farrington, Renn, & Van Hofwegen, 2020). Teachers also need to know that the economic and social benefits of learning Spanish will not override the cultural psychological trauma experienced by black-English speakers. Translanguaging is a way to help black learners be comfortable with risk taking in the second language acquisition process.
4. Teachers need to see teaching as teaching for the students, not at them. Teachers need to understand the history of linguistic colonialism and how this has devastatingly impacted people's language and heritage. This is especially the case for black learners.

We continue to work on creating teacher development materials to foster these needs in both HBCU and HSI settings. One result that has come out of this joint project is the needs of Caribbean students who are Latinx. Their experiences are not reflected in typical publisher-created materials that most US Spanish language programs purchase. Many of our students at both FIU and FMU are Caribbean and are bi-cultural (e.g., Haitian Dominican). Another result that has come out of the project is the fact that teachers need more support. In our research together, we have learned how much of a cultural shock it can be for a Hispanic teacher to go teach in an HBCU. This may be related to fear regarding the institution's survival. HBCUs exist because of our nation's history of racism and legally-mandated segregation. Most were established after the U.S. civil war with the goal of creating education opportunities for African Americans. However, since desegregation in higher education took place, many HBCUs struggle financially and do not enjoy the same level of financial support as other institutions. Several

people have called for HBCUs to rethink their business model just so that they can stay afloat (Schexnider, 2017). Perhaps the greatest struggle of HBCUs is with enrollment, which can put significant stress on administrations and faculty. This affects the morale of teachers in the HBCU context. To quote some of the Spanish language teachers in our project:

*“Some are concerned about the future of FMU. But I think the fear and worry about its future has always been present.”*

*“... It is a very lonely experience for me here. I feel that no one really talks to me. I feel that everyone assumes I’m going to leave.”*

These quotes have many layers that are difficult to unpack. But we feel that teacher-training spaces, as well as language-learning spaces, can be the first place to have these difficult conversations. Acknowledging the history of, the importance of, and the need to support the HBCU experience is all part of this. We believe firmly that HBCUs are iconic in US culture and serve a critical need: inoculating black learners to prepare them for the realities that they will face as they move onward in society. Thanks to singer Beyonce’s Coachella performance in honor of HBCUs, the recent revival of discussions on HBCUs in U.S. pop culture will hopefully help to promulgate this view (Degregory, 2019).

We continue to learn about Spanish teachers’ needs in the HSI setting as well. Several of the Spanish teachers at FIU have said that they need more support in facilitating difficult conversations about race in the second language acquisition classroom. They feel ready to teach with diversity-promoting tasks, but want examples and training opportunities. Under the guidance of Dr. Anya, expert consultant on the project, Dr. Baralt is working to redesign her suite of teacher-training courses to do precisely this. As with the student curriculum, all of the new language teacher-training materials that we create will be available on the MI-BRIDGE site. In tandem with this goal, Dr. Anya visited both FMU and FIU in May of 2019 to evaluate the programs and make recommendations on how they could improve and best implement the key activities and adapt perspectives of equity-mindedness and inclusivity in order to address inequities in student learning outcomes. Dr. Anya met with key stake-holders, observed Spanish classes, met with and observed language teachers who had been /are currently being trained at FIU and who are serving mostly African American and other black students, observed Dr. Baralt’s teaching, and conducted a teacher-training. Some of the key outcomes and recommendations that came out of Dr. Anya’s visit are:

1. Better connect the education programs at both schools for teacher-training more broadly.
2. Position FMU’s language program as an international one and establish international partnerships.
3. Connect with other HBCUs who have had successful study abroad programs, such as Spelman College in Atlanta and Howard University in Washington, DC. Create more explicit opportunities for black students to study abroad for Spanish-language immersion and in a way that they are supported (Anya, 2017).



4. The Spanish-language textbooks are publisher-written and not affordable. The cost and financial accessibility of courses and programs is cited by the research as a major reason for the inequitable participation of black students. The curriculum that is being created will help make Spanish-language study more accessible.
5. Have more explicit writing assignments about Afro-Latinx cultures.
6. FIU's advanced-level Spanish should add intermediate and advanced-level major courses and electives on Afro-Latinx culture, media/film, and literature, and more African diaspora studies. At present it is white-male centric and canonical.
7. In the teacher-training courses at FIU, include more explicit conversations on translanguaging for effective pedagogy and successful second language acquisition.
8. Recruit and hire black faculty. They serve as role models, academic mentors, and overall support for black students, and their research interests and course. Their support is critical.
9. Actively recruit black graduate students and create infrastructure to support them and their specific needs and concerns while they're participating in the program. When race is not acknowledged in an affirmative sense, and it is assumed that no mention or explicit consideration of race means that racism is not a problem, language programs lose a valuable opportunity to address the systemic exclusion and inequity that keep black students from advancing in the field.

We believe that these recommendations can be applied to all language programs in US higher education, and we look forward to continue to reflect on these recommendations and come up with their practical implementations to share with the community.

### Next steps

The key deliverables of this collaborative project will be the nation's first introductory-level Spanish-language curriculum designed specifically for black learners in an HBCU context. It is our hope too that the tasks and teacher-training materials will be used by teachers in other contexts as well. We will also create curriculum for language teachers that specifically focuses on teaching teachers how to critically think about, talk about, and embrace race in language teaching (see Flores and Rosa, 2015, 2019 on why this is a significant need in the field of second language acquisition). Everything that we create, including all teacher-training materials, will be made available on our MI-BRIDGE website, a free website for teachers. The second component of this collaboration will be a scalable teacher-training space that can inform how other institutions think about race in second language teaching, and how and why it is necessary for effective connections with Latin America. For this, the team will be creating teacher-training workshops and webinars, all of which will be disseminated on the MI-BRIDGE website upon conclusion of the project. The materials that we create, in line with Dr. Hobbs', Dr. Anya's and Dr. Gómez's reflections on how to create more inclusive spaces—from the classroom all the way up to systematic programs—will be part of this goal.

In summary, we are profoundly grateful for the support of both the National Endowment for the Humanities and the FIU Latin American and Caribbean Studies Center (LACC) to take on this project. It is not easy to have conversations about race or to set up others to have these conversations. But it is precisely our collaborative work together, learning from and with each other, that is creating the space for this critical work to happen. Once the MI-BRIDGE website is launched, we will continue to work together to disseminate our findings, our journey, and our outcomes. We hope that others will join us in creating more inclusive language-teaching materials, in better supporting black learners, and in supporting teachers to change historical paradigms of Spanish-language teaching approaches. This work is critical to any mission that aims to better connect U.S. students with the Caribbean and Latin America.

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## Biographies

Dr. Uju Anya is Assistant Professor of Second Language Learning in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction and research affiliate with the Center for the Study of Higher Education at Penn State University. She specializes in applied linguistics, sociolinguistics, and second language education with particular focus on race, gender, sexual, and social class identities in the language classroom. Notable research from Dr. Anya is published in her book *Racialized identities in second language learning: Speaking blackness in Brazil* (Routledge 2017), winner of the 2019 American Association for Applied Linguistics First Book Award recognizing a scholar whose first book represents outstanding work that makes an exceptional contribution to the field. Her current projects are in the areas of intercultural communication, applied linguistics as a practice of social justice, and strategic translanguageing in foreign language pedagogy.

Dr. Melissa Baralt is Associate Professor of Spanish and applied psycholinguistics in the Department of Modern Languages, as well as faculty fellow in the Center for Humanities in an Urban Environment at Florida International University. Dr. Baralt is an applied psycholinguist whose work cuts across the humanities, social sciences, and medical sciences. Specializing in first and second language acquisition, language development in children, and language teaching, her research seeks to shed light on the sociocultural, cognitive, and environmental factors that lead to successful language outcomes. Before coming to Florida International University, Dr. Baralt worked as a primary school teacher in Venezuela.

Dr. Déborah Gómez is Assistant Professor of Spanish at Florida Memorial University. She obtained a B.A in German from the University of Havana and then her M.A. and Ph.D. in Spanish at Florida International University. Dr. Gómez's research and teaching interests include Cuban Studies, women representation in Latin American and Peninsular literature and film, Spanish second and foreign language acquisition, and diversity in the foreign language classroom. Dr. Gómez's most recent book, "Bittersweet Cuba: Memory, Discourse and Sugar Landscapes in the Cuban Nation and Its Culture (1791 – 2017)" was published with Editorial Verbum in 2019. She is currently the Spanish program coordinator at Florida Memorial University, and loves teaching in an HBCU environment.

Habey Hechavarría is a Ph.D. student of Spanish literature at Florida International University, where he teaches Spanish language courses. Mr. Hechavarría obtained a degree in theater studies from the Higher Institute of Art or ISA-Universidad de las Artes, in Havana, Cuba, as well as a Master's Degree in Education Sciences for Spanish language teaching pedagogy from Nova Southeastern University. Mr. Hechavarría taught History of Theater and Theater Theory at ISA as well as at other schools in Cuba for 14 years. His essays, theatrical and audiovisual reviews have been published in different Cuban media, and in the United States his articles have appeared on Teatroenmiami.com and El Nuevo Herald. For community outreach, Mr. Hechavarría often lectures on theater in the city of Miami. He enjoys combining performing arts and second language acquisition pedagogies for his students at FIU.

Dr. William Hobbs (aka William Ashanti Hobbs, III) is from Fort Lauderdale, Florida by way of Atlanta, GA. He graduated from Florida A&M University in 1996 with BS degree in

management. His passion for writing won him a McKnight Fellowship, which allowed him to pursue a Master's and doctorate degree in creative writing from Florida State University (FSU). Dr. Hobbs graduated from FSU in 2004 and now serves as Department Chair of Humanities at Florida Memorial University. His self-published novel entitled "[North of the Grove](#)" focuses on the importance of mentorship and is now used in the Miami Dade County school curriculum. The 5000 Role Models of Excellence member participates in mentoring and literacy programs throughout south Florida and was featured in the local CBS show [Mentoring Matters](#). Dr. Hobbs has competed in the worldwide 48Hoursfilmproject film competition, co-writing the short film "[Love, Mary](#)" His mission: "Bringing visions and dreams to fruition through teaching, leading, writing, and film-making."

Amber Ree Robinson is an undergraduate student completing a double major in English and in Economics at Florida International University. A transfer student from Howard University, Ms. Robinson has experience as a student in both HBCU and HSI contexts. Ms. Robinson is a Miami native and credits her community for cultivating her regard for language and its complex usage. In 2014, she competed in the 87th Scripps National Spelling Bee. Her main research interests include the depiction of trauma and binaries in Black literature as well as the Spanish language. When not writing, Ms. Robinson enjoys reading current events, performing spoken word, and watching social justice films.