

Selling in Spanish and/or English: A study of Hispanic direct sellers

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Abstract:

Exploring differences within a U.S. sample of Hispanic direct sellers provides insights into the impact of acculturation on satisfaction survey responses. The scope of the study is constrained to sellers who self-identified ethnically as Latino/Hispanic on a U.S. national survey of direct sellers. Findings show evidence of cultural heterogeneity within this sample of Hispanic direct sellers that corresponds to their uses of English and Spanish in selling activities. Practical implications suggest that Spanish Dominant Sellers claim higher satisfaction ratings and higher performance estimates than do English Dominant Sellers. English Dominant Sellers indicate greater use of Web 2.0 technologies for selling. Implications and future studies are discussed.

Keywords: direct selling | entrepreneur | Hispanic | language | sales | Spanish

Article:

1 INTRODUCTION

This article examines survey responses to a national satisfaction survey of Hispanic independent contractors in the field of direct selling. The main premise is to scrutinize variations within the Hispanic ethnic group; these are important data that often go unobserved due to researchers' emphasis on interethnic differences. Leading direct selling organizations (e.g., the Direct Selling Association [DSA] and its member companies) regularly query their sellers to gain insights into seller demographics and how these data may be relevant for organizing industry strategies over the long run (DSA, 2017b). Even though respondents readily tick off the "yes" box on the Hispanic/Latino identity question, survey analysts cannot assume they know what that designator is really telling them. Identifiers such as Latino and Hispanic are socially constructed classification devices and do not represent a homogenous social group (Ramos-Pellicia, 2014). For example, Hispanic identification can reflect distant ethnic origins through ancestors or more recent personal immigrant status. According to Morse (2018), only a third of Latinos were born

outside of the United States, a number that has decreased from a record 40% in 2000. Lacking accurate measurement, decision-makers will not be able to grasp what their Hispanic constituents need or want.

Acculturation theories support the thesis that Hispanic sellers are a diverse group within themselves. Acculturation is the process of adopting the cultural traits or social patterns of another group. Within the Hispanic subsector of the American population, individual members will differ in their levels of adaptation to the host U.S. culture as well as in their retention of native cultural elements, including Spanish use (Alvarez, Dickson, & Hunter, 2014). Building upon theories of acculturation and methodological articles on survey response styles, this article proposes that language dominance (i.e., use of Spanish or English) aligns with unique cultural perspectives and may influence sellers' responses to national surveys of their self-reported perspectives and performance in the field of direct selling. Hispanics who sell mostly in Spanish are projected to exhibit consistently higher ratings regarding their direct selling experiences than will Hispanics who sell mostly in English, due to cultural values of agreeableness and fervency.

The business language used correlates with language predominantly used in the home, but is a more relevant measure of acculturation in the work setting given that individual sellers would normally only use a language with which they feel comfortable and reasonably sure of attracting and satisfying customers. Such research is warranted because sales transactions in either or both English and Spanish are prevalent language contact situations in the United States given the dual dominance of these two languages in the country (Lipski, 2008). More than 60 million Americans over the age of 5 (or 21% of the population) speak a language other than English at home, with most of those speaking Spanish (Ryan, 2013). Researchers have found that 80% of Latino entrepreneurs sell to a mixture of both Latino and non-Latino customers (Stanford Latino Entrepreneurship Initiative, 2015), suggesting that Hispanic direct sellers can display some degree of choice over the language they use for business.

The field of direct selling is a worthy testing ground for this study because it is a growing industry of importance worldwide and relies largely on speaking abilities and interactions with customers. Direct selling grossed more than \$183.7 billion in worldwide revenue in 2015 and generated \$35.54 billion in retail sales by 20.5 million individuals in the United States alone in 2016 (Peterson, 2017; World Federation of Direct Selling Association, 2016). Direct selling does not follow a typical job routine or a fixed location. Products sold in this distribution channel range from home products (i.e., cleaning goods and equipment or cookware, cutlery, and dishes) to discretionary items such as cosmetics and skin care, jewelry, lingerie, and wine. Health and wellness supplies are increasingly dominant products as well.

Direct selling companies have increasingly recruited and deployed contractors from widely diverse populations. Crittenden and Crittenden (2004) found that “[executives]...looked for individuals whose socioeconomic background would provide links to likely customers” (p. 41). DSA research figures indicated that of the 20.5 million people involved in direct selling in 2016 as buyers, sellers, or both, about 22% were of Hispanic ethnicity (Direct Selling Association, 2017a). For example, a longstanding direct selling company, Princess House, has been in the spotlight for having a sales force and customer base that are 80% Hispanic (Direct Selling Association, 2017a). Importantly, more than half of the U.S. Hispanic population is currently

under the age of 29, inferring continued potential for this group to enter the U.S. workforce (and direct selling) in large numbers (Morse, 2018).

It has been argued that actively strengthening Latino entrepreneurship through strategic planning and supportive systems will close an existing opportunity gap that currently is visible when their performance is compared to the sales achievement of non-Latino entrepreneurs. The authors of this study argue that merely comparing Hispanic to non-Hispanic demographic groups during satisfaction survey analysis is not enough to bolster corporate support systems or know how well the Hispanic population is being served by direct selling organizations. Hispanics in the United States vary in their level of acculturation into mainstream society, with the most noticeable signal of acculturation being the use of English. Thus, to grasp opportunity gaps and differences more clearly, it is necessary to investigate how language use impacts Hispanic seller perceptions and performance on evaluative surveys. This article has four primary exploratory research objectives:

RO1. *To explore associations between the primary selling language and Hispanic seller ratings of the direct selling field as a business opportunity.*

RO2. *To explore associations between the primary selling language and Hispanic seller ratings of support they receive from direct selling organizations they represent.*

RO3. *To explore associations between the primary selling language and Hispanic seller sales tactics.*

RO4. *To explore associations between the primary selling language and self-reported Hispanic seller performance measures.*

2 BACKGROUND

To clarify the direction taken by the authors, the article will first address theories of acculturation that serve as a basis for dividing Hispanic respondents into language use subgroups. Second, a short literature summary is provided on survey response styles exhibited in prior studies of Hispanic survey respondents.

2.1 Acculturation orientation of Hispanic direct sellers

Acculturation theories help to better understand member differences within ethnic groups and offer a clear rationalization for the study's focus on within-group differences among Hispanic sellers. Theories concerning acculturation are divided between unidimensional models and bidimensional models. The first suggests that people experiencing two cultures simultaneously (e.g., immigrants) travel a linear path from native to host culture, over time dropping aspects of their native culture and adopting aspects of the host culture with the endpoint being full assimilation into the host culture (Laroche, Kim, Hui, & Tomiuk, 1998). The present study adopts the second model which does not assume the loss of native cultural elements when choosing to add elements of a new culture to one's repertoire of beliefs and skills. In the bidimensional model, people can both retain and adopt cultural aspects from both cultures

without these being mutually exclusive. Berry's (1980) bidimensional model articulates four cultural orientations, integrating peoples' adoption (maintenance)/rejection of host and native cultures: marginalization from both cultures, separation from the host culture, assimilation to the host culture, and integration of both cultures. Acculturation orientation is highly dependent on situational context and personal factors, such as demographics (age, education, income, occupation, and native language); English language ability; as well as neighborhood and family environments and linkages to native versus host communities in general (Palumbo & Teich, 2005; Perry, 2008).

Acculturation orientation is reflected in primary languages used at home and in business. For this reason, we operationalize language use as a measure of acculturation. Davis (2011, p. 1231) states that “[Language] usage, of and in itself, may predispose a respondent... to draw upon other ...[cultural] communication norms, such as the expression of respect, sincerity, and personalism.” Following this thinking, the authors assert that language use is a valuable factor in differentiating among members of the Hispanic direct seller population. It was decided that reported use of Spanish in sales activity was an additional indicator that could be valuable in establishing seller perspectives on direct selling. “Language used in selling” complements other commonly studied cultural variables such as ethnicity identifiers (Hispanic), frequency of Spanish spoken at home, and “taking the survey in Spanish.” The authors expect that the predominant language used in the work context will impact a seller's ratings of direct selling activities and support systems due to underlying acculturation orientations that draw upon specific cultural beliefs and tendencies of the host (United States) or native (Hispanic) culture.

Figure 1 proposes the relationship between language used in direct selling and acculturation orientations. Marginalization does not appear since individuals possessing an orientation of rejecting both cultures are not readily distinguished in this study through language habits. While language spoken in the home is commonly observed in surveys, this study focuses on an understudied variable, language used in business, to inspect more closely the work situation of Hispanic direct sellers. Selling requires greater language skill level compared to employment in jobs that comprise mostly physical labor, thus knowing more about how language relates to one's direct selling business is warranted.

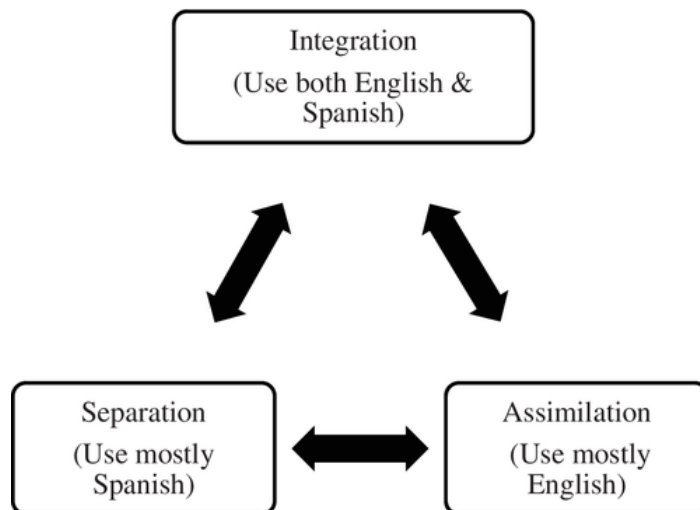


Figure 1. Relationship between acculturation orientations and dominant language

A *separation* orientation is associated with using only/mostly Spanish for business; separation can indicate a Spanish-speaking customer base and/or limited English skills on the part of the seller. In contrast, the use of only/mostly English in business presumably reflects an *assimilation* orientation in the work context, implying enough language ability to exercise successful sales transactions in that language and accrue benefits from speaking English. Finally, the use of both English and Spanish on a regular basis in direct selling would point to one's orientation being *integration* (with the maximal manifestation of this being bicultural flexibility and bilingualism). Each of these orientations holds advantages and disadvantages for Hispanic direct sellers.

2.1.1 Separation (selling in Spanish)

On the downside, using mostly Spanish in U.S.-based business transactions reflects some degree of separation from mainstream corporate support systems and the English-speaking marketplace. Ethnic language also cues quality expectations drawing attention to the possibility that selling in Spanish leads to an assumption of inferior quality (Alvarez, Uribe, & León De-La-Torre, 2017; Bishop & Peterson, 2010). For example, Hispanics rate Spanish/English packaged products lower than they do English-only labeled products (Gopinath, Glassman, & Nyer, 2013).

On a positive note, Spanish can be a preferred language for selling to Hispanic consumers. In one case, Spanish advertisements were three times more persuasive among bilingual Latinos and six times more persuasive among Spanish dominant segments than English ones (Gordon, 2003). Spanish has also been preferred in the context of sales transactions and relationships. “Immigrant Hispanics interpret store visits to be especially favorable when a sales associate communicates with them in Spanish” (Fowler, Wesley, & Vazquez, 2007). Using Spanish to sell and service customers helps Hispanic clients to assert their identities and belonging when both English and Spanish-speaking groups share commercial spaces (Allen & Busse, 2016). Similarity between direct sellers and their customers through language choice may be even more necessary than in other sales situations (i.e., department stores or mall shops) (Lan, 2002).

2.1.2 Assimilation (selling in English)

Using only English may indicate assimilation but reduces access to Spanish-speaking markets available to Hispanic direct sellers where normally a shared heritage between sellers and customers would give sellers an advantage. Depending on language ability and accents, selling in English creates personal stress for the sellers when it is required to deal with a dominant culture (i.e., obliging them to use English constantly, reduce accents, alter one's name, or downplay cultural habits) (Comer, Nicholls, & Vermillion, 1998). DeShields, De los Santos, and Berumen (1997) infer that a salesperson having a Standard English accent has an advantage over a spokesperson speaking with a Spanish-English accent no matter who the customer is. English also may be more positively perceived by buyers wanting to “consume” American culture (Zolfagharian, Hasan, & Iyer, 2018). Forty-four percent of Hispanics say they only consume online content in English, affecting sellers' internet behaviors and use of mobile apps.

2.1.3 Integration (selling in both English and Spanish)

Using both Spanish and English implies at least minimal integration of the Hispanic and U.S. cultures and yields increased social capital in a wider marketplace of English- and Spanish-speaking buyers. Speakers of multiple languages generally apply the language that seems to better fit the situation or that they perceive gives them the most prestige in a social encounter. Researchers have investigated the impact of language switching on consumers of services (Holmqvist, Van, & Grönroos, 2017). Experimental results using fast-food and post office scenarios have demonstrated that when servers' language use (English or Spanish) met customer expectations, perceptions of interaction quality were higher, leading to reported satisfaction and lower brand switching intentions (Zolfagharian et al., 2018).

2.2 Survey response styles of Hispanic direct sellers

Systematic response styles have been noted by the research community (Clarke III, 2001; Couch & Keniston, 1960; Dolnicas & Grun, 2007). Two major response behaviors relevant to Hispanic raters are (a) consistently marking extreme values on item scales (Arce-Ferrer, 2006; Culpepper & Zimmerman, 2006; Hui & Triandis, 1989), and (b) excessive affinities for answering *yes* or *no* in socially desirable ways to express agreeableness or *simpatia* (Davis et al., 2011; Schwartz, 2009; Triandis, Marín, Lisansky, & Betancourt, 1984). Respondents displaying an extreme response style will choose upper or lower values on survey items (e.g., Likert-type scales), without necessarily focusing on the actual message or content of the question (Cronbach, 1946). This also applies to extended survey rating scales, according to Weech-Maldonado, Elliott, Oluwole, Schiller, and Hays (2008). Hispanic respondents were significantly more likely to choose “0–4” and “10” on a scale ranging from 0 to 10 compared to other American ethnic groups. Agreement bias is where respondents agree with questions regardless of question content in order to maintain collective goodwill or connections.

2.2.1 Tying acculturation orientation and language use to survey response style

It is anticipated that response style behaviors will associate with intraethnic acculturation orientations in the same way different cultures display different rating tendencies (Hui & Triandis, 1989; Marín et al., 1992). Davis et al. (2011) determined that “associations between Spanish use and survey response styles support a more generalizable theory that language use determines use of culturally associated communication norms” (p. 1230).

The overall combined impact on Hispanic language subgroups of these acculturation orientation effects is that different language use groups are expected to have consistent yet distinctive rating levels across satisfaction or similar evaluative survey items, whereby Hispanic sellers using primarily English typically will have lower scores than sellers using primarily Spanish. Extreme ratings in Spanish Dominant Sellers might be influenced by larger power distance, greater certainty about present and future conditions, machismo, and extroversion (Elliott, Haviland, Kanouse, Hambarsoomian, & Hays, 2009; Harzing, 2006; Hofstede, 2001; Johnson, Kulesa, Cho, & Shavitt, 2005). Examination of sellers integrating Spanish and English is at best exploratory because there are no prior findings to suggest outcomes. In addition, previously indicated research objectives will be explored related to language subgroups' responses on direct seller sales tactics and self-reported performance levels.

3 METHODS

The scope of the study is constrained to sellers within the field of direct selling who self-identified ethnically as Hispanic (single question) on a national survey of direct sellers conducted by the Direct Sellers Association (Direct Selling News Staff, 2014). Primary techniques involved the acquisition and subsequent analysis of privately held secondary data. This resource comprised 2013 data for the U.S. direct selling industry and was provided by the Direct Selling Educational Foundation; their methodology is described as follows:

The 61 companies and over twenty thousand independent sales representatives who participated in the study are good cross-sections of the Direct Seller Association (DSA) member companies. All DSA member companies were given the opportunity to participate and those that did participate either by providing a sample of independent sales representatives or e-mailing the invitation directly to their independent sales representatives. The number of responses varies widely from different companies due to the size of the individual companies, methods of distribution, and participation rates. Survey data was collected between March 13 and October 11, 2013. (DSA, 2013)

3.1 Data refinement

Most of the analysis in this article explores the perceptions of direct sellers who identified as Latino or Hispanic on the survey. This question was separate from a question on race/ethnicity and resulted in 1,315 cases used in further exploration. To provide context in some areas, results are provided for non-Latino/non-Hispanic respondents, who totaled 19,599 respondents. In this article, however, the focus is on discerning subgroup differences by breaking down the sample of Hispanic respondents by the selling language they use, rather than concerning ourselves with differences between Hispanic and non-Latino/non-Hispanic subgroups.

3.2 Data analysis

Because this article was exploratory, the study used straightforward approaches to make sense of the available data. Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software was employed. The first step was to establish a respondent profile. This was achieved by conducting descriptive analysis of basic demographics and available worker characteristics. The second step in analysis was to pinpoint a desirable grouping variable to use to explore nuances of cultural influence on the perceptions of Hispanic direct sellers. A variety of variables were inspected related to the use of Spanish versus English in this study (i.e., survey language version was taken, degree of Spanish vs. English spoken in the home, and degree of Spanish vs. English used in their direct selling businesses). Subsequent comparative analysis (cross-tabulations, *t* tests, and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA)) employed a variable “selling language used by a Hispanic direct seller” as a grouping variable for comparison of means. This comparative analysis explored perspectives of subgroups within the sample of Hispanic respondents.

4 RESULTS

Frequency analysis showed that the sample of 1,315 self-reported Hispanic or Latino direct sellers was predominantly female (78.7%). Over half also identified selves as White or Caucasian (51.6%). Other group identifications were much lower, that is, American Indian or Alaska Native (2.3%), Asian (1.2%), Black or African American (2.1%), and Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander (1.1%). The primary language spoken in the home was generally either English (66.8%) or Spanish (31.9%). The degree of Spanish spoken in the home was further verified (Table 1).

Table 1. Degree of Spanish spoken in the home

	Frequency	Percent
Only Spanish	123	10.3
Mostly Spanish	317	26.6
Some Spanish	403	33.8
No Spanish	349	29.3
Total	1,192	100.0

Median level of education was “some college, trade school or two-year college degree,” with 44.2% of the respondents graduating with a bachelor's degree or higher. Seventy percent were married, 17 % were single, and 11 % were divorced, separated, or widowed. Median household income was US \$50,000– \$74,999. Responses indicated a mean of three children; of the latter, a mean of two under the age of 18 was residing in the home at the time of the survey. The U.S. states with highest representations in the sample were Texas (23.2%), California (21.9%), Florida (9.2%), New York (4.7%), and Illinois (4.4%). Most respondents lived in either a large city (41.0%) or smaller city (27.8%), with only 4.9% living in a rural area.

In terms of direct seller worker characteristics, 91% represented a single direct selling company. Median length of time with the current company was between 1 and 2 years. Figure 2 depicts the existing relationship with sponsor or recruiter at the time the respondent was recruited into the direct selling job. Both recruitments by nonclose company representatives and close friends and neighbors were common ways to get this group of respondents involved in direct selling. The median number of representatives in the respondents' downlines was eight individuals. Downline is defined as those people they have personally recruited and those who have been recruited by their recruits for which the respondent receives compensation or group bonuses based on sales performed by the downline.

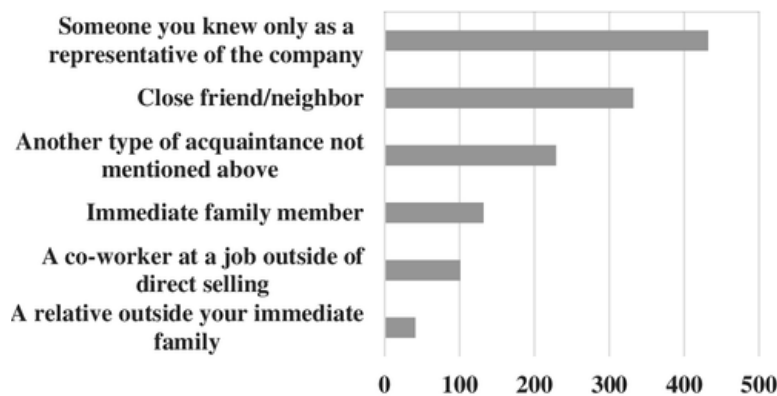


Figure 2. Relationship between the recruiter and respondent at time of joining

A majority of sellers (61.9%) earned less than \$5,999 in annual gross income from direct selling activities and 50.9% netted less than \$2,000 after all expenses. Mean hours per week in the last year spent on direct selling was 18.26. Figure 3 portrays the average breakdown of direct seller work hours in various activities.

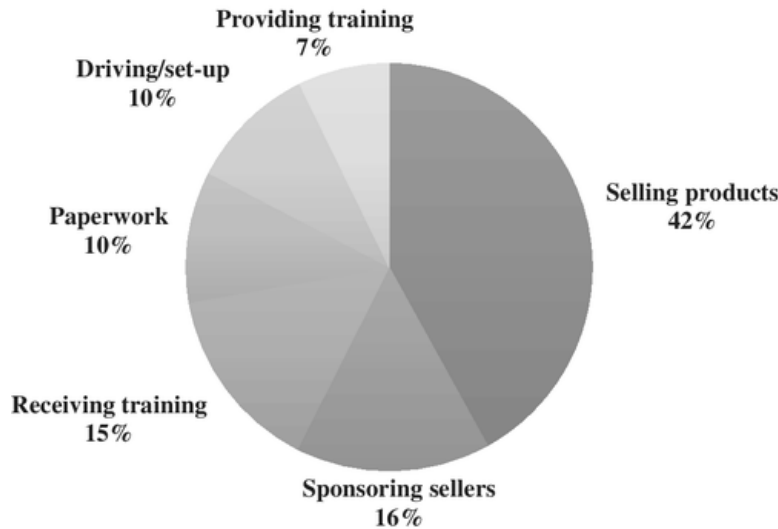


Figure 3. Task breakdown (percent of direct seller work hours)

4.1 Constructing the language subgroups

The direct sellers were asked to estimate the percentage from 0 to 100 of their business interactions that were conducted in Spanish. Analysis of the relationship between personal uses of Spanish and business uses of Spanish was conducted. ANOVA output in Table 2 demonstrated a significant positive association between frequency of using Spanish versus English in the home and use of Spanish versus English in direct selling activity. The fact that business use of Spanish in this study was largely consistent with home use of Spanish denotes personal and heritage connections to the language which substantiates the conceptualized linkage between acculturation orientations and language use. Based on this premise, a new variable was created to represent three subgroups: English Dominant Sellers (Hispanic direct sellers using only English in their work; $n = 462$; 39.8%), Dual Language Sellers (Hispanic direct sellers using Spanish less than 75% of the time; $n = 378$; 31.7%), and Spanish Dominant Sellers (Hispanic direct sellers using Spanish 75% or more of the time; $n = 352$; 29.5%). The breakdown was based on observation of natural break points across the scale from 0 (only English) to 100% (Spanish only) with substantial clusters marking three subgroups.

Table 2. Relationship between using Spanish at home and in direct selling activity

	Frequency of Spanish used in the home				Overall mean	
	Only Spanish	Mostly Spanish	Some Spanish	No Spanish		
	$n = 123$	$n = 317$	$n = 403$	$n = 349$	$(n = 1,192)$	ANOVA results*
Percent of direct selling conducted in Spanish language	90.4	74.0	16.6	2.81	35.5	$F(3, 1,188) = 840.023, p = .000$

Abbreviation: ANOVA, Analysis of Variance.

* Significant at $p < .01$.

Additional demographic comparisons were conducted on the three language subgroups, with primary focus on the Spanish Dominant versus English Dominant Sellers. There were no significant differences between Spanish Dominant Sellers and English Dominant Sellers with respect to marital status, number of children, and educational level. English Dominant Sellers were disproportionately white/Caucasian (63.2 vs. 37.5%) and had fewer males (9.7 vs. 39.2%) compared to Spanish Dominant Sellers. More Spanish Dominant Sellers resided in large cities on average (63.22 vs. 37.5%) than did English Dominant Sellers. Spanish Dominant Sellers also reported higher household incomes (\$75,000–\$99,999) compared to \$25,000–\$34,999 for English Dominant Sellers. In terms of direct selling, Spanish Dominant Sellers indicated longer company tenure (3–5 years) versus 1–2 years for English Dominant Sellers. Additionally, Spanish Dominant Sellers showed a slightly greater instance of being recruited by family members into the direct selling field (16.4 vs. 6.9%). Spanish Dominant Sellers claimed to have larger downlines (107 individuals vs. 25 on average) and greater number of hours worked per week on direct selling (25 vs. 14 hr).

Table 3. Mean satisfaction scores by dominant language

	Dominant language			Overall mean	
	Spanish Dominant Sellers	Dual Language Sellers	English Dominant Sellers		
Satisfaction with field					
(High = 5 to low = 1)	<i>N</i> = 451	<i>N</i> = 279	<i>N</i> = 462	<i>N</i> = 1,192	ANOVA results
Satisfaction with my actual experience with direct selling	4.01 ^a	3.78	3.53	3.83	$F(2, 1,189) = 22.601, p = .000$
Satisfaction with the money I make for time invested	4.07 ^a	3.80	3.55	3.87	$F(2, 1,189) = 22.549, p = .000$
My willingness to recommend the direct selling field to others	4.60 ^b	4.53	4.24	4.45	$F(2, 1,189) = 18.144, p = .000$
(High = 3 to low = 1)					
My experiences met my initial expectations for direct selling	2.37 ^b	2.38	2.21	2.28	$F(2, 1,189) = 6.591, p = .001$
Satisfaction with support					
(High = 5 to low = 1)	<i>N</i> = 451	<i>N</i> = 279	<i>N</i> = 462	<i>N</i> = 1,192	ANOVA results
Satisfaction with company training and support	4.71 ^b	4.70	4.58	4.66	$F(2, 1,189) = 4.465, p = .012$
Satisfaction with sponsor training and support	4.31	4.41	4.13	4.27	$F(2, 1,189) = 4.906, p = .008$

Abbreviation: ANOVA, Analysis of Variance.

^a Per Games-Howell post hoc, significantly different from Dual Language and English Dominant Sellers.

^b Per Games-Howell post hoc, significantly different from English Dominant Sellers.

4.2 Comparison of language groups on ratings of satisfaction with direct selling

Generally, all groups were above the midpoint on four discrete dependent variables used to assess seller evaluations of the direct selling field (Table 3). Hypothesis 1 which inferred that Spanish Dominant Sellers would rate satisfaction with the field of direct selling higher than would English Dominant Sellers was supported by ANOVA on these four items. Spanish Dominant Sellers were significantly higher than both other language groups on two items directly addressing satisfaction: (a) with their actual experience, and (b) with the amount of

money earned in relation to time spent on selling. Spanish Dominant Sellers were higher than English Dominant Sellers on (c) actual experience meeting start-up expectations, and (d) likelihood of recommending the field to others.

4.3 Comparison of language groups on ratings of organizational support

Table 3 provides further insights. Two dependent variables were analyzed with ANOVA to investigate Hypothesis 2, which suggested that Spanish Dominant Sellers would rate organizational support higher than would English Dominant Sellers. Only partial support was noted. While means of all groups were relatively high for company and sponsor/upline support, Spanish Dominant Sellers rated company-level training and support higher than did English Dominant Sellers. However, there was no difference between ratings of Spanish Dominant Sellers and the other two groups on training and support offered by the seller's initial sponsor/upline contact. Cross-tabulations were conducted on two additional questions about Spanish-based training and sales collateral provided by their direct selling company. Regarding training, proportionally more Spanish Dominant Sellers (85.4%) found the Spanish-based training to be sufficient than did Dual Language Sellers (81.0%) or English Dominant Sellers (71.6%). There was no significant difference among the three groups on their response to the usefulness of Spanish language collateral for use with prospective clients and recruits.

4.4 Comparison of language groups on selling tactics

Further exploration consisted of looking at the connections between language group and sourcing of clients. Table 4 shows that there are some significant differences in sourcing new customers. Spanish Dominant Sellers had higher instances of using business or customer referrals as well as cold calling and people met by chance in public settings (e.g., in shopping queues or on airplanes). English Dominant Sellers had a higher instance of selling to friends and neighbors. There was no difference in selling to family or relatives between these language user groups.

Table 5 offers a look at sellers' perceptions of the effectiveness of various points of contact locations to attract customers. For the total sample of Hispanic respondents, ratings were mostly above 3 on a 5-point effectiveness scale, with only two tactics (selling via face-to-face and home parties) rating above 4. The five most effective sales tactics were face-to-face sales, home parties, workplace/office, mobile device, and social group events.

Looking at the effects of language use on preferred points of contact, Spanish Dominant Sellers rated face-to-face sales tactics higher than did the other two groups; it was their top-rated item. They also rated higher the use of store fronts, cafes, and the telephone. Negative differences for Spanish Dominant Sellers were related to using email, websites, or social media channels. No differences existed for home parties, workplace sales, social group events, or use of mobile devices. Next, Table 6 examines language use against favored strategies for maintaining client relationships and promoting continued purchasing.

Table 4. Cross-tabulations between dominant language and client sources

Client sources used				
	<i>Referrals from customers</i>		<i>Does not use</i>	
	<i>Uses source</i>			
	<i>n</i>	<i>(%)</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>(%)</i>
Spanish Dominant Sellers	309	(87.8)	43	(12.2)
Dual Language Sellers	294	(77.8)	84	(22.2)
English Dominant Sellers	355	(76.8)	107	(23.2)
	$\chi^2 (2, N = 1,192) = 17.523, p = .000^*$			
Hispanic	958	(80.4)	234	(19.6)
Non-Latino/non-Hispanic	15,816	(80.7)	3,783	(19.3)
	<i>Referrals from other sources</i>			
	<i>Uses source</i>		<i>Does not use</i>	
Spanish Dominant Sellers	281	(79.8)	71	(20.2)
Dual Language Sellers	245	(64.8)	133	(35.2)
English Dominant Sellers	267	(57.8)	195	(42.2)
	$\chi^2 (2, N = 1,192) = 44.298, p = .000^*$			
Hispanic	793	(66.5)	399	(33.5)
Non-Latino/non-Hispanic	12,566	(64.1)	7,033	(35.9)
	<i>People met by chance</i>			
	<i>Uses source</i>		<i>Does not use</i>	
Spanish Dominant Sellers	269	(76.4)	83	(23.6)
Dual Language Sellers	273	(72.2)	105	(27.8)
English Dominant Sellers	284	(61.5)	178	(38.5)
	$\chi^2 (2, N = 1,192) = 23.211, p = .000^*$			
Hispanic	826	(69.3)	366	(30.7)
Non-Latino/non-Hispanic	12,906	(65.9)	6,693	(34.1)
	<i>Cold contact (calls and door to door)</i>			
	<i>Uses source</i>		<i>Does not use</i>	
Spanish Dominant Sellers	199	(56.5)	153	(43.5)
Dual Language Sellers	112	(29.6)	266	(70.4)
English Dominant Sellers	86	(18.6)	376	(81.4)
	$\chi^2 (2, N = 1,192) = 132.690, p = .000^*$			
Hispanic	397	(33.3)	795	(66.7)
Non-Latino/non-Hispanic**	3,818	(19.5)	15,781	(80.5)
	<i>Friends and neighbors</i>			
	<i>Uses source</i>		<i>Does not use</i>	
Spanish Dominant Sellers	282	(80.1)	78	(19.9)
Dual Language Sellers	333	(88.1)	45	(11.9)
English Dominant Sellers	410	(88.7)	52	(11.3)
	$\chi^2 (2, N = 1,192) = 14.390, p = .000^*$			
Hispanic	1,025	(86.0)	167	(14.0)
Non-Latino/non-Hispanic	17,520	(89.4)	2,079	(10.6)
	<i>Family and relatives</i>			
	<i>Uses source</i>		<i>Does not use</i>	
Spanish Dominant Sellers	270	(76.7)	82	(23.3)
Dual Language Sellers	308	(81.5)	70	(18.5)
English Dominant Sellers	373	(80.7)	89	(19.3)
	$\chi^2 (2, N = 1,192) = 3.004, p = .223$			
Hispanic	951	(79.8)	241	(20.2)
Non-Latino/non-Hispanic	16,269	(83.0)	3,330	(17.0)

* Mean differences of language groups tested by χ^2 is significant at $p < .001$.

** Hispanic versus non-Latino/non-Hispanic is significant at $p < .001$ based on Chi-square test [$\chi^2 (1, N = 20,914) = 112.750, p = .000$].

Table 5. Mean effectiveness of points of contact by dominant language

	Dominant language			Overall mean	ANOVA results
	Spanish Dominant Sellers <i>N</i> = 441	Dual Language Sellers <i>N</i> = 276	English Dominant Sellers <i>N</i> = 442		
In person, for example, face to face	4.65 ^a	4.50	4.35	4.50	$F(2, 1,156) = 14.353, p = .000$
Home parties	4.16	4.36	4.22	4.23	$F(2, 1,156) = 2.414, p = .090$
Unrelated workplace/office	4.00	4.02	3.87	3.96	$F(2, 1,156) = 1.403, p = .246$
Mobile device, cell or tablet	3.80	3.94	3.83	3.84	$F(2, 1,156) = .887, p = .412$
Social group events	3.60	3.83	3.73	3.71	$F(2, 1,156) = 2.335, p = .097$
Social media	3.43 ^a	3.82	3.84	3.69	$F(2, 1,156) = 9.724, p = .000$
On the telephone	3.72 ^b	3.70	3.48	3.63	$F(2, 1,156) = 3.325, p = .030$
Website	3.32 ^a	3.69	3.71	3.57	$F(2, 1,156) = 8.541, p = .000$
Email	3.31 ^b	3.56	3.57	3.48	$F(2, 1,156) = 4.478, p = .012$
Preferred customer clubs	3.46	3.14	3.15	3.30	$F(2, 1,156) = 2.672, p = .070$
Cafes, restaurants, etc.	3.39 ^b	3.17	3.07	3.23	$F(2, 1,156) = 4.107, p = .017$
State fairs or flea markets	3.19	3.18	3.04	3.14	$F(2, 1,156) = .733, p = .481$
Company branded kiosk/store	3.39 ^a	2.73	2.65	3.06	$F(2, 1,156) = 12.966, p = .000$

Abbreviation: ANOVA, Analysis of Variance.

^a Per Games-Howell post hoc, significantly different from other groups at $p < .05$.

^b Per Games-Howell post hoc, significantly different from English Dominant Sellers at $p < .05$.

Table 6. Mean effectiveness of client retention tactics by dominant language

	Dominant language			Overall mean	ANOVA results
	Spanish Dominant Sellers <i>n</i> = 384	Dual Language Sellers <i>n</i> = 319	English Dominant Sellers <i>n</i> = 309		
Deepen seller/buyer connection	4.58 ^a	4.56	4.43	4.52	$F(2, 1,009) = 3.200, p = .041$
Regular personal contact	4.56 ^a	4.42	4.22	4.39	$F(2, 1,009) = 12.793, p = .000$
Ongoing consultation/coaching	4.52 ^b	4.33	4.11	4.31	$F(2, 1,009) = 14.483, p = .000$
Discounts	4.28	4.31	4.27	4.29	$F(2, 1,009) = .103, p = .902$
Samples	4.39 ^b	4.25	4.13	4.24	$F(2, 1,009) = 4.593, p = .008$
Loyalty rewards	4.33	4.26	4.08	4.22	$F(2, 1,009) = 4.306, p = .014$
Sales aids, for example, regular catalogs	4.08	4.11	4.17	4.13	$F(2, 1,009) = .538, p = .584$
Automatic delivery program	3.75	4.07	3.82	3.88	$F(2, 1,009) = 3.430, p = .033$
Social media	3.59 ^a	4.00	3.97	3.88	$F(2, 1,009) = 8.684, p = .000$

Abbreviation: ANOVA, Analysis of Variance.

^a Per Games-Howell post hoc, significantly different from English Dominant Sellers at $p < .01$.

^b Per Games-Howell post hoc, significantly different from other groups $p < .01$.

There are three distinct client retention strategies: continuous personal outreach to customers, extrinsic material incentives, and reminders. Overall, Hispanic direct sellers rated highest those items involving continuous relationship-building outreach to clients, with extrinsic material incentives (i.e., discounts and loyalty awards) second, and lastly, memory joggers (i.e., catalogs and social media follow-up campaigns). Findings for Spanish Dominant Sellers were distinctive in that the demarcation of preferences regarding these strategies was more visible than for the

other two groups. Spanish Dominant Sellers rated the outreach items higher and the reminder tactics lower than their counterpart groups.

4.5 Comparison of language groups on self-reported performance measures

Table 7 contrasted these three subgroups in terms of their self-reported performance on selected business performance indicators. Findings show that Spanish Dominant Sellers reported higher numbers than their counterparts for indicators including monthly customer orders, monthly auto-shipment credit, numbers of potential and actual clients, weekly hours spent on direct selling, and number of home parties held per month. Spanish Dominant Sellers also reported significantly higher average retail value per customer order; however, they reported significantly lower total dollars sold through the home party venue than did the other two language groups.

5 DISCUSSION

There was implied cultural heterogeneity within this sample of Hispanic direct sellers that could be inspected using differences in language practices. More specifically, respondents varied both in their home and business uses of Spanish and/or English, with some persons reportedly using only English in their home or business. The use of Spanish or English in direct selling was associated with its counterpart use in the home, signifying variations in the level of acculturation to the U.S. English-based host culture.

5.1 Dominant language and Hispanic seller satisfaction, sales tactics, and reported performance

The ratings on satisfaction with the direct selling field and with support from the respondents' organizations are both in the expected direction where Spanish Dominant Sellers exhibit higher ratings. Spanish Dominant Sellers also demonstrated behaviors that are representative of cultural habits such as extroversion and high-context communications that require greater displays and reading of nonverbal language during sales transactions (Hall, 1977). This included tendencies to use more referrals in customer recruitment and more face-to-face motivational tactics in customer retention.

Such findings are in line with retail studies reported that Hispanic consumers were highly sensitive to face-to-face information and to suggestions provided by sales associates in retail stores and other forms of personal word of mouth assistance (Seock & Bailey, 2009). Research on buyer-seller similarity regarding customers' salesperson preferences has suggested that Hispanics are influenced by shopping interaction and salesperson attentiveness, which hold the potential to demonstrate *simpatía* to the customer (Kwak & Sojka, 2011). The significantly higher use of product samples by Spanish-dominant sellers as a retention strategy is also explained by prior work since tangible store displays that consumers to examine closely were critically important as an impersonal information source preferred by Hispanic retail customers (Seock & Bailey, 2009).

Table 7. Performance estimates by dominant language

	Dominant language				Latino/Hispanic respondents in general (N = 1,192)	Non-Latino/ non-Hispanic respondents in general ANOVA results*
	Spanish Dominant Sellers (N = 352)	Dual Language Sellers (N=378)	English Dominant Sellers (N = 462)			
Responses are self-reports						
Average number of customer orders per month	10.4 ^a (n = 296)	8.7 (n = 337)	7.3 (n = 439)	8.2 (n = 1,072)	$F(2, 1,069) = 14.839, p = .000$	10.0 (n = 19,088)
Average retail dollar amount per order from customers	\$145.14 ^b (n = 36)	\$80.49 (n = 37)	\$99.70 (n = 56)	\$107.87 (n = 129)	$F(2, 126) = 4.444, p = .014$	\$76.43 (n = 2,236)
Number of auto shipments credited to you per month	3.0 ^a (n = 315)	2.2 (n = 338)	1.2 (n = 440)	2.0 (n = 1,093)	$F(2,1,090) = 29.654, p = .000$	0.9 (n = 16,955)
Number of potential clients contacted in a typical month	12.0 ^a (n = 295)	8.6 (n = 348)	6.9 (n = 424)	8.8 (n = 1,067)	$F(2, 1,064) = 41.180, p = .000$	9.9 (n = 19,050)
Number of potential clients that do buy from you	5.4 ^a (n = 279)	3.6 (n = 335)	2.9 (n = 378)	3.8 (n = 992)	$F(2,989) = 56.976, p = .000$	5.0 (n = 16,955)
Hours per week spent on direct selling activities	23.4 ^a (n = 331)	17.5 (n = 376)	13.3 (n = 457)	17.5 (n = 1,164)	$F(2, 1,161) = 58.724, p = .000$	11.8 (n = 18,719)
Number of parties held per month	2.7 ^a (n = 195)	2.0 (n = 258)	1.8 (n = 327)	2.1 (n = 780)	$F(2, 777) = 23.122, p = .000$	2.0 (n = 12,278)
Dollar sales per typical party	\$176.90 ^a (n = 196)	\$252.25 (n = 264)	\$302.77 (n = 322)	\$254.16 (n = 782)	$F(2, 779) = 29.289, p = .000$	\$333.99 (n = 12,127)
Number of people per month attempt to recruit on average	6.3 ^c (n = 252)	5.5 (n = 235)	4.1 (n = 205)	5.3 (n = 692)	$F(2, 689) = 12.895, p = .000$	3.5 (n = 9,420)
Number of recruited persons who become direct sellers	1.8 ^a (n = 259)	1.2 (n = 228)	0.7 (n = 198)	1.3 (n = 685)	$F(2, 682) = 46.566, p = .000$	0.6 (n = 9,400)

Abbreviation: ANOVA, Analysis of Variance.

^a Per Games-Howell post hoc, significantly different from other groups at $p < .05$.

^b Per Games-Howell post hoc, significantly different from Dual Language Sellers at $p < .05$.

^c Per Games-Howell post hoc, significantly different from English Dominant Sellers at $p < .05$.

* Comparison among the three Hispanic seller language groups.

A culture based on high-context communications and displays of *simpatía* (Guerrero & Posthuma, 2014) make the use of face-to-face selling tactics quite relevant to Spanish Dominant Sellers, and help to explain their preference for interpersonal-focused retention strategies (i.e., tactics such as deepening relationships, regular personal contact, and ongoing coaching). This corroborates with the findings of Peelen, Ekelmans, and Vijn (1989), in that interaction frequency and regularity impacted perceived closeness of the buyer–seller relationship and ameliorated some of the risk concerns held by consumers. Hispanics have been more likely to deepen conversations beyond the service request and enter relational talk (Félix-Brasdefer, 2015; Placencia & Mancera Rueda, 2011).

In addition, the fact that Spanish Dominant Sellers used chance public encounters and cold calling more often than English Dominant Sellers might be interpreted to mean that their social situations were more porous inside their natively collective culture. In the more collective Hispanic society where *simpatía* and *personalismo* are cultural norms (Schwartz, 2009), people tend to be relatively familiar to each other and more intimate in personal details. Generally, approaching unknown people in one's community is less risky than in individualistic societies where people are more isolated, and barriers are raised to ensure strangers are not allowed free access to one's personal premises or space. Social rules in collective groups focus on promoting the community needs ahead of individual needs (Schwartz, 2009). Assuming a tradition of supporting others, Spanish Dominant Sellers might frame the cold call in an entirely unique manner distinct from what English Dominant Sellers would perceive.

An examination of the estimated performance outcomes described by these three groups also communicates some unique perspectives. In almost all cases of reported performance, the Spanish Dominant Seller had higher estimated performance results. This parallels survey research that has evidenced a tendency for Hispanic respondents to apply social desirability biases to their answers on surveys (Ramirez & Ennis, 2010), possibly suggesting that these respondents inflated results to make themselves look good in the eyes of the company (even though the survey was anonymous). The interesting exception to the performance reports is that Spanish Dominant Sellers clearly estimated lower earnings per home party. This may indicate that this normally popular method either has cultural or practical deterrents keeping this group of direct sellers from maximizing recorded sales. These estimates may also reflect differences in fee collection procedures, because deferred payments are popular with this market.

Lastly, the Spanish Dominant cohort seemed to value more direct personal interaction as points of contact with customers (e.g., face to face, company-sponsored kiosks, cafes, and telephone). They also had lower scores on Web 2.0 tactics, such as email, website, and social media channels. This suggests that Spanish Dominant Sellers rely on the interpersonal connections and high context driven nonverbal communications more typical of Hispanic cultures. The differences related to the uses of technology applications in direct selling is an issue, given that Hispanic users spend nearly 10.5 hr per week using the internet on their smartphones, compared to the overall U.S. average of 8.4 hr. Hispanic millennials are more likely to interact with brands on social media (Morse, 2018).

5.2 Practical implications

Within Hispanic cultures, high-context communications reveal little, hiding one's thoughts within flowery or elaborate phrasing, until mutual trust is established between individuals. To achieve feedback from Hispanic sellers who use a high-context system of communication, future surveys should consider more open-ended questions to elicit specific suggestions for changes. Even better would be focus groups to foster trust and indicate a sincere willingness to listen to the opinions of Spanish Dominant Sellers. Open-ended questioning would be a way also to triangulate whether the language groups truly are distinct in their opinions in significant ways, or if the rating behavior is mostly indicated by suggested cultural differences in communication styles.

Another interesting finding from a practitioner perspective is that a preference for using Spanish in sales transactions seemed to associate with a direct seller's level of using personal interaction as a basis for selling, rather than technology. This relationship needs to be further investigated to understand what companies should be doing for non-English sellers. In the case of Spanish Dominant Sellers, it is important to assess whether English is the “lingua franca” of their technology support systems, and if so, what alternative arrangements may be constructed for sellers who do not possess sufficient English skill sets to enjoy the use of these corporate-driven selling options. Future research should dig deeper into the role of technology-assisted selling tactics and how or if they moderate language choice in selling or vice versa. A related issue is to better determine why English Dominant Sellers rated the sufficiency of Spanish-based training lower than did Spanish Dominant Sellers. It would be interesting to know if the English Dominant Sellers are comparing the Spanish-based training against the English-based training, with the former coming up short in important ways. The Spanish Dominant Sellers may only be basing their opinions on the one. If this is the case, then companies might want to make their own comparison to truly understand how well they are supporting diversity.

A second big issue is to understand why Spanish Dominant Sellers had lower estimates for dollars generated from home parties when most of their other performance estimates seemed inflated. This is also counterintuitive based on statements issued during a Capitol Hill Briefing on the importance of direct selling to the “very social” Latino population (DSA, 2017a). Given that this is a traditional bread and butter mode of direct selling, it would be important to inquire as to the rationale behind this finding. It could be a training gap or a result of lack of assimilation to the field's business practices, but it could also infer “hidden” issues that are not being addressed. For example, if home party sales mandate full payment at once rather than layaway, perhaps the method does not work as well with all customer bases.

Third, sellers can be mentored in terms of understanding the effects of language use on buyers as well as the continued need for service excellence. Sellers may underestimate buyers' needs for professionalism and quality of product and encounter and overestimate the utility of “simpatico” approaches and expanded social interactions that do not yield desired sales.

6 CONCLUSION, LIMITATIONS, AND FUTURE RESEARCH

While aspects of communication in sales have been studied extensively, the language used in direct selling has not been directly examined, particularly in terms of its relationship to ethnic independent contractors in the direct selling marketplace. It is imperative for marketers to

distinguish between ethnicity classification and language factors in selling, particularly since language can denote distinct acculturation orientations with associated communication strategies and cultural belief systems. There are limitations to be considered as well as future research goals. Sales messaging is complicated and no one element should be overemphasized to the exclusion of the others. First, issues of dialects and accents were not considered due to lack of survey information on these aspects of language use. Capturing responses to monolingual and bilingual sales conversations in experimental scenarios, controlling for dialectal variations of speech might be an effective way to push through some of these concerns. The database is limited to one professional organization consisting of direct sellers in the United States. Future studies should expand the study to include direct sellers around the globe.

Second, the focus of this study was on seller practices and estimated performance rather than on the direct sales transaction as a dyadic encounter. Consistent with the literature on adaptive selling (Franke & Park, 2006; Román & Iacobucci, 2010; Weitz, 1981), it would be interesting to observe buyer–seller exchanges and record additional ethnicity markers to ascertain how sellers opt in or out of specific language choices. This is particularly important where sellers and/or customers have the ability and desire to interact in both languages.

From a cultural insight point of view, the issue of assigned versus asserted identities reflected in sellers' language choice (Zolfagharian et al., 2018) is important but not readily interpretable via this study. Assigned identity is given to a person by an external power; asserted identity is one assumed voluntarily by an individual. Future studies should examine whether the use of Spanish or English was a free choice on the part of the seller or an obligation due to an external entity, be that the company expects of pursuing a Hispanic or Spanish-speaking customer base, or the pressures from customers themselves. Additionally, direct selling organizations are encouraged to survey Hispanic direct sellers and those that sell to direct selling communities with an in-depth open-ended survey process to better understand the Hispanic direct selling population in this expanding market.

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