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**Philosophizing in Tongues: Cultivating Bilingualism, Biculturalism, and Biliteracy in an
Introduction to Latin American Philosophy Course**

**Dr. Alex V. Stehn, Associate Professor and Associate Director for Center for Bilingual
Studies at UTRGV**

Abstract

This article describes my ongoing attempts to more successfully engage the full linguistic repertoires and cultural identities of undergraduate students at a “Hispanic Serving Institution” (HSI) in South Texas by teaching a bilingual Introduction to Latin American Philosophy course in the “Language, Philosophy, and Culture” area of Texas’ General Education Core Curriculum. By uncovering the diverse identities, worldviews, and languages of those who were historically excluded from the Eurocentric discipline of philosophy through the conquest and colonization of the Americas, Latin American philosophers offer us new ways of thinking and living by challenging Anglocentric language, philosophy, and culture. As part of the new B3 (Bilingual, Bicultural, and Biliterate) vision of the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley, the course is designed to draw upon the richly varied bilingualisms and biliteracies of predominantly Latinx students in order to help them honor, theorize, and cultivate their bicultural identities by “philosophizing in tongues” rather than being forced to assimilate to the monolingual ideology that prevails across both mainstream Anglophone philosophy and the system of higher education in the United States of America.

Keywords: Flexible bilingual pedagogy, translanguaging, culturally sustaining pedagogy, Latin American philosophy, Hispanic-serving institution (HSI), dual language bilingual education, bicultural students, biliteracy

“La universidad europea ha de ceder a la universidad americana. La historia de América, de los incas acá, ha de enseñarse al dedillo, aunque no se enseñe la de los arcontes de Grecia. Nuestra Grecia es preferible a la Grecia que no es nuestra. Nos es más necesaria.”

—José Martí, “Nuestra América”²

“The European university must bow to the American university. The history of America, from the Incas to the present, must be taught in clear detail and to the letter, even if the archons of Greece are overlooked. Our Greece must take priority over the Greece which is not ours. We need it more.”

—José Martí, “Our America”³

² Originalmente publicado en *La Revista Ilustrada de Nueva York*, Estados Unidos, el 10 de enero de 1891, y en *El Partido Liberal*, México, el 30 de enero de 1891.

³ English translation by Elinor Randall (Gracia & Millán-Zaibert, 2004).

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Introduction and Overview

Imagine yourself teaching the English translation of the Cuban philosopher José Martí's "Nuestra América" to a classroom full of undergraduates in a general education course. Imagine further that the *majority* of your students spoke Spanish before they spoke English and still speak Spanish much of the time, but that the existing system of "bilingual" education in Texas schools "successfully" transitioned them to English-only classes early in their academic careers. Would teaching Martí's essay to them monolingually in English further their academic success? Or would it effectively fail to communicate Martí's famous identification of "Nuestra América" with what we now call "Latin America," fail to engage the Spanish-speaking reality of your students, fail to explore the Americanness of their "Hispanic" or "Latinx" identities,⁴ and fail to challenge the widespread assumption among English speakers that "America" is a country rather than a whole continent? When I was hired in 2010 as an Assistant Professor of Philosophy at the University of Texas-Pan American, which became part of the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley in 2015, I began teaching philosophy courses monolingually in English to bilingual students like the ones I just asked you to imagine teaching. It took me a few years to realize how bilingual my students were, in part because I am not from the Rio Grande Valley, but also because I was simply doing what was expected of me.

This article describes why I used to teach Introduction to Latin American Philosophy monolingually in English, why I stopped, and how I am now teaching it using a flexible bilingual pedagogy (Creese & Blackledge, 2010), also sometimes called a translanguaging pedagogy (García & Lin, 2017), that has been transformative for my students and for me. By drawing upon the *ventajas/assets y conocimientos/knowledge* (Rendón, Nora, & Kanagala, 2014) of our richly varied bilingualisms and biliteracies, the revised course contributes to the B3 (bilingual, bicultural, and biliterate) vision of the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley (UTRGV). Students have the opportunity to honor, theorize, and cultivate their bicultural identities by "philosophizing in tongues"⁵ rather than being forced to assimilate to the monolingual ideology that prevails across both mainstream Anglophone philosophy and the system of higher education in the United States of America.

Historical Framework: Whose University? Whose Philosophy, Language, and Culture?

⁴ I place the federally-recognized term "Hispanic" and the neologism "Latinx" in quotes because their appropriateness is frequently contested by people who prefer other ethnic labels (e.g., Latino/a, Mexican American, Mexican, Chicano/a, Chicanx, etc.) or reject ethnic labels altogether. Throughout the remainder of the article, I typically use "Latinx" for the reasons outlined by (Sanchez, 2019).

⁵ The phrase "philosophizing in tongues" honors the philosophical legacy of Gloria Anzaldúa, especially her "Speaking In Tongues: A Letter To 3rd World Women Writers" (Anzaldúa & Moraga, 1983).

José Martí argued for the need to create a university that would truly serve the diverse peoples of “Nuestra América” by teaching the indigenous histories and philosophies of the Incas, Maya, and Aztecs (to name only the most well-known “archons” of what we now call “Latin America”), even if that meant displacing the Greeks or what we now call “the Western canon”. Martí’s philosophy of education is deeply relevant to contemporary scholarly debates about what it means for today’s institutions of higher education to become true *Hispanic-serving* institutions rather than mere *Hispanic-enrolling* institutions (Garcia, 2019). Any institution of higher education in the United States that has at least 25% Hispanic undergraduate enrollment will be designated by the federal government as an HSI, but this is not enough. A designation comes from the outside; an identity must be assumed from within. Administrators, faculty, staff, and students must work together to build a Latinx-serving organizational culture and institutional identity that: 1) helps Latinx students experience a sense of belonging on campus, 2) develops and reinforces a positive ethnic identity among Latinx students, 3) connects Latinx students with faculty and staff on campus who speak Spanish; 4) offers ethnic studies curricula and other courses with culturally-sustaining pedagogies, and 5) supports faculty, staff, and administrators who both serve as role models and agents of change who “disrupt barriers to success for Latinx students” (Garcia, 2017, pp. 113S-114S).

As a faculty member at UTRGV, where our vision is to become an authentic HSI by becoming a bilingual, bicultural, and biliterate (B3) university, I am deeply committed to this work. The question I have asked myself repeatedly while redesigning “PHIL 1305: Introduction to Latin American Philosophy” as a bilingual course is: *Que es nuestra América?*, especially as it appears from the perspective of the Rio Grande Valley, where more people speak Spanish than English. But before we get to the Rio Grande Valley, we must consider the system of higher education across Texas, where Introduction to Latin American Philosophy is rarely or never offered.⁶ In contrast, “Introduction to Philosophy” is listed as PHIL 1301 in the Texas Common Course Numbering System and offered across Texas as part of the “Language, Philosophy, and Culture” area of the General Education Core Curriculum—i.e., the 42 Semester Credit Hours in “liberal arts, humanities, and sciences and political, social, and cultural history that all undergraduate students of an institution of higher education are required to complete before receiving an academic undergraduate degree” (Texas Education Code 61.821-822). In our pluralistic world of languages, philosophies, and cultures, the singular nouns that name the Foundational Component Area “Language, Philosophy, and Culture” hint at the Anglocentric ideology pervading the history of higher education in Texas: the Language is English, the Philosophy is European, and the culture is Anglo. Rarely is the point put so flatly today, but it would have certainly been clear to the authors of the Texas Constitution of 1876 who called for the establishment of “a university of the first class” to serve “the people of Texas” (“History of The University of Texas System”).

But what would “a university of the first class” look like today if it was deliberately built to serve “the [Hispanic] people of Texas”? When UTRGV was founded in 2015 it became the largest HSI university in Texas and the second largest nationwide, with 29,370 Hispanic or Latinx students constituting 90.5% of the student body enrolled in Fall 2020 (“Fall 2020 Fast Facts”).

⁶ There is no master catalog of courses across institutions of higher education in Texas, but UTRGV is certainly the only institution to offer an Introduction to Latin American Philosophy as part of the general education core curriculum. A few other Texas institutions—e.g., University of Texas at El Paso, Texas A&M University, and Texas State University—offer advanced courses in Latin American philosophy.

HSIs do not collect data on the linguistic abilities of students, but consider the bilingual language profiles that I gathered from my students just before the COVID-19 pandemic.⁷ On average, my students started learning Spanish 1.3 years before they started learning English and thus reported that they felt comfortable speaking Spanish before they felt comfortable speaking English. Yet they reported very little instruction (less than 4 years) in Spanish from elementary school to college, whereas they reported an average of 12 years of schooling in English. In a normal week with friends, students reported speaking Spanish roughly 30% of the time and English roughly 70% of the time. This also matches the level at which they reported thinking in Spanish (30% of the time) and English (70% of the time). However, in an average week with their families, they reported speaking more Spanish (60% of the time) than English (40% of the time). On average, students rated their ability to understand English as 10% higher than their ability to understand Spanish, rated their English-speaking ability as 20% higher than their Spanish-speaking ability, and rated their ability to write in English an average of 35% higher than their ability to write in Spanish. Most students also reported that they felt more like themselves when speaking English. But they nevertheless identified more with Spanish-speaking culture, and they were slightly more desirous of being perceived as native Spanish-speakers than as native English-speakers. Although a more extensive university-wide survey is still needed, my smaller survey clearly represents the bilingualism, biculturalism, and biliteracy of students that my original English monolingual course was failing to recognize, honor, and engage.

Tragically, it took higher education in the Rio Grande Valley almost a full century to stop denigrating Spanish—the predominant local language as well as the dominant language of Latin American philosophy—and begin treating it as a valuable academic language. Edinburg College was founded in 1927, became Pan American College in 1952, Pan American University in 1971, University of Texas-Pan American in 1989, and merged with The University of Texas-Brownsville to form the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley in 2015. Part of UTRGV’s new vision was to become a bilingual, bicultural, and biliterate (B3) university by offering courses across the entire university curriculum in English, in Spanish, and bilingually (Dávila-Montes, González Núñez, & Guajardo, 2019). This represented a major attempt to institutionally reverse course from what the philosopher and Pan American University alumna Gloria Anzaldúa analyzed in her groundbreaking “How to Tame a Wild Tongue” (Anzaldúa, 2012). Anzaldúa and other Mexican American students were forced to take a “speech test” and “speech classes” at Pan American College/University from the 1950s to the 1970s to get rid of their Mexican accents and underscore Anglo-accented English as the only acceptable academic language (Cole & Johnson, 2015). Anzaldúa powerfully summarized these attempts to academically enshrine an Anglocentric monolingualism as follows: “*El Anglo con cara de inocente nos arrancó la lengua*” (Anzaldúa, 2012, p. 76; italics in original).

This is precisely what was and still is happening across Texas and nationwide insofar as we fail to academically respect and engage the varieties of Spanish spoken by so many students and their families. When I first offered Introduction to Latin American Philosophy at the University of Texas-Pan American in 2011, I did what was expected of me by teaching it exclusively in English. So even though I was doing something rare and good by introducing

⁷ In Fall 2019, I administered a Spanish-English Bilingual Language Profile to 62 students enrolled in PHIL 1305: Introduction to Latin American Philosophy across two course sections with a response rate of 92% (57 responses). I adapted the original instrument from (Birdsong, Gertken, & Amengual, 2012) by simplifying it for teaching rather than research purposes.

Latinx students to Latin American philosophy, I was still unintentionally contributing to the ongoing minoritization of bilingual students in the RGV. Far from being a neutral language of instruction, English is effectively weaponized when it functions as the *only* acceptable academic language, an act of “linguistic terrorism” that Anzaldúa illustrates by quoting Ray Gwyn Smith: “Who is to say that robbing a people of its language is less violent than war?” (Anzaldúa, 2012, p. 75). Inspired by the discursive shift toward the term *emergent bilinguals* and away from deficit-model terms like *Limited English Proficient*, Kip Austin Hinton proposed the more accurate label of *monolingual education* to describe non-bilingual programs and classrooms and highlight their subtractive nature in bilingual contexts (2016). From the perspective of the dominant raciolinguistic ideology of Anglocentric monolingualism that structures most educational institutions in the USA, the Rio Grande Valley is full of *minorities*. But from a more critical, historical, and place-based perspective, the Mexican and/or Mexican American people in the RGV who speak Spanish are the overwhelming *majority*, even though they have been *minoritized* for over a century, making them a “historically minoritized population” (Dávila-Montes, González Núñez, & Guajardo, 2019). Data from the American Community Survey across the RGV for the 2014-2018 period shows that a *minority* (21.1%) of the 5 years and over population speaks only English at home, whereas the vast *majority* (80.7%) speaks Spanish at home. Since 92.6% of UTRGV’s student body in 2020-2021 enrolled from the RGV—where, again, 80% of households regularly speak Spanish—our bilingual students do not constitute anything close to a numerical minority, but they have been unfairly *minoritized* by monolingual educational programs and schools.

96% of the 438,396 students enrolled in the Region One Education Service Center area that contains the Rio Grande Valley are classified by the state of Texas as Hispanic (“Region One Demographic Profile 2020”), which means that 96% of students and their families can reasonably claim a right to a B3 heritage and future. And yet only 7.5% of students in Region One are enrolled in a dual language bilingual program that can be said to serve B3 goals. Even if we focus exclusively on the 38% of students in Region One who are formally classified as English Learners (ELs) and thus entitled by law to a bilingual program, a mere 16.5% of them are enrolled in a dual language program. The overwhelming majority of English Learners are thus in “bilingual” and ESL programs with “transitional” (read: *monolingual*) academic goals. And even reporting that 16.5% of all English Learners in Region One participate in a dual language program is potentially misleading for three reasons: 1) two-thirds of these dual language students are from just two of the thirty-eight independent school districts in Region One;⁸ 2) IDEA, the major charter that serves over 50,000 students in Region One does not offer dual language; and 3) only one district (Pharr-San Juan-Alamo ISD) currently has a dual language program that adequately prepares students for a B3 college experience by going all the way from Pre-K to 12th.

If we include former English Learners and students reclassified from English Learner status, then well over 85% of Region One students who have entered the school system from a Spanish-dominant position are being systematically placed in transitional “bilingual” programs with monolingual English aims. It has been more than twenty years since Angela Valenzuela incisively criticized the process of “subtractive schooling” by which US-Mexican youth progress through schools designed to make them less rather than more bilingual (1999), but it is still the

⁸ Approximately 35% of all dual language students in Region One are enrolled in Pharr-San Juan-Alamo ISD. Roughly 32% are enrolled in La Joya ISD (“IDRA School Finance Dashboard”). The two largest districts in Region One, Brownsville ISD and Edinburg CISD, do not offer any dual language programs.

dominant paradigm in the Rio Grande Valley today. As a result of the Chicano/a or Mexican American Civil Rights movement, experimental additive bilingual education programs were demanded by the local community and began to receive some support in a handful of local schools and at our university in the early 1970s. But the overall legacy of the Bilingual Education Act of 1968 and its subsequent development was subtractive and assimilationist so that “thousands of teachers and school leaders have been trained to implement bilingual education not as a means to raise bilingual or biliterate children, but rather to create English-speaking and English-literate children” (Dávila-Montes, González Núñez, & Guajardo, 2019, p. 45). Contrast this with the exciting B3 alternative envisioned by UTRGV:

After decades of submitting to the assimilationist impulses of the Bilingual Education Act, the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley has committed itself to a sustained analysis of the history of bilingualism in this region. During the past decade, faculty and administrators have gradually built a Center for Bilingual Studies, a Center for Mexican American Studies, and an Office of Translation and Interpreting, all of which are overseen by a B3 (Bilingual, Bicultural, Biliterate) Institute. The B3 Institute’s broad goal is to create a bilingual, bicultural, and biliterate institution (see De La Trinidad et al., 2017). This falls in line with UTRGV’s inaugural strategic plan, which calls for the development of a bilingual university that also values biculturalism and biliteracy. From a historical standpoint, the explicit call for bilingualism directly counters the spirit and purpose s of the speech test and the intentional work to “tame the wild tongue” of Mexican-American students (Dávila-Montes, González Núñez, & Guajardo, 2019).

From a historical standpoint, UTRGV’s B3 vision should be understood as organically related to some of the most important demands made by local high school and college students participating in the Chicano/a movement. For example, the Edcouch-Elsa High School Walkout of 1968 took place less than 15 miles east of UTRGV’s Edinburg campus. Some of the estimated 192 students who participated in the walkouts had been in conversation with members of Pan American College’s chapter of the Mexican American Youth Organization (MAYO). Two of the fifteen demands they shared with the Edcouch-Elsa school board on November 7, 1968 are especially resonant with UTRGV’s B3 vision:

8. That, as Chicano students, we be allowed to speak our mother tongue, Spanish, on school premises without being subjected to humiliating or unjust penalties,
9. That courses be introduced, as a regular part of the curriculum, to show the contributions of Mexicans and Mexican Americans to this state and region. For instance, factual accounts of the history of the Southwest and Texas, courses in Mexican history and culture. Also, that qualified, certified teachers be hired to teach these courses (Senate, 1971, p. 2485).

For our purposes, it is important to note that these two demands are practically and conceptually separate. The right to speak Spanish without being punished is presented alongside the demand for courses in Mexican and Mexican American history and culture, but there does not seem to be any explicit demand that these courses be taught in Spanish or bilingually. In an educational context where students were routinely humiliated and punished for merely *speaking* Spanish, it would have certainly been difficult to even imagine much less demand that these courses be *taught* in Spanish or bilingually.

This same lack of imagination, which I suffered from the first time that I taught Introduction to Latin American Philosophy, pervades the subdiscipline of Latin American philosophy in the United States. Consider, for instance, the American Philosophical Association's *Newsletter on Hispanic/Latino Issues in Philosophy*, which has been published twice a year since 2001. Many issues feature articles on how to teach Latin American philosophy at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. There are outstanding discussions of course design, including possibilities for course content (books, articles, films, artworks, etc.), innovative assignments, alternative grading structures, high-impact pedagogies, and more. There is also a consistent stream of laments that more materials are not available in English translation, but never once has the possibility been explicitly raised that Latin American philosophy courses in the USA could be taught bilingually or in Spanish. Only two articles, one by Cynthia Paccacerqua and the other by Mariana Alessandri—both of whom are also Associate Professors of Philosophy at UTRGV—explicitly characterize some of the college students being taught Latin American philosophy as bilingual.⁹ Consider Paccacerqua's description:

This syllabus was designed with a particular student population in mind; as a professor of philosophy at UTPA, my students are predominantly Mexican-American and are mostly from the Río Grande Valley. This means, among other things, that my students are to a large extent bilingual (in varying degrees); have a good understanding of the history of U.S.-Mexico relations; are aware of the nature of generational differences among members of the Mexican-American community (i.e., among the Mexican people who have always resided in Texas and the subsequent arrival of Mexican peoples by crossing the later established border); have the lived experience of the political, cultural, and social dynamics of border life; live in what is perceived as a relatively culturally homogeneous Mexican-American community; have a rather strong identity attachment to the idea of *mestizaje* (Paccacerqua, 2011, p. 18).

Paccacerqua's characterization of our students is refreshingly focused upon their experience, upon who they are and what they know rather than upon merely what they lack.¹⁰ But only very recently did our university begin the process of systematically building upon our students' bilingual experiences, identities, *conocimientos*, and *ventajas* (Rendón, Nora, & Kanagala, 2014). As a Río Grande Valley native, alumna of Pan American College, and participant in the Chicano/a movement, Anzaldúa beautifully expressed the linkage between bilingualism, biculturalism, and

⁹ One other article (Leyva & Reed-Sandoval, 2016) thoughtfully discusses the importance of teaching bilingual students bilingually, but it is focused upon a program designed for children. The article's conclusion would nevertheless apply equally well to college students:

"Importantly, engaging in philosophical dialogue with children and youth in *both* Spanish and English (that is, using both languages in a single session) not only responds to local historical resistance to anti-Mexican linguistic discrimination, it also expands kids' opportunities to engage philosophically" (21).

¹⁰ The more typical "deficit view" of Latinx students is explored by Jose Saldivar in the present volume and well-summarized here: "Low-income, first-generation students are typically presumed to have a very limited ability to engage in a collegiate experience and successfully complete college. Educators who work with Latin@ and other underserved students under the premise of incompetence are often guided by an unchallenged discourse fueled with deficit language such as: "incapable of learning," "not college material," "speaking with accents," "high risk," "high maintenance," "disadvantaged," "remedial," "underprepared," or "culturally deprived" (Rendón, Nora, & Kanagala, 2014, p. 4).

biliteracy and imagined a future in which she and other bilingual students could more fully and proudly participate in the educational system:

Ethnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity—I am my language. Until I can take pride in my language, I cannot take pride in myself. Until I can accept as legitimate Chicano Texas Spanish, Tex-Mex, and all the other languages I speak, I cannot accept the legitimacy of myself. Until I am free to write bilingually and to switch codes without having always to translate, while I still have to speak English or Spanish when I would rather speak Spanglish, and as long as I have to accommodate the English speakers rather than having them accommodate me, my tongue will be illegitimate (Anzaldúa, 2012, p. 81).

Anzaldúa pushed me to redesign my course to affirm Spanish as philosophically, linguistically, and culturally valuable in order to contribute to the “Language, Philosophy, and Culture” section of our undergraduate core curriculum in a way that decolonizes the Anglocentric ideology that frames higher education in the United States.¹¹ I am still wrestling with how best to do it, but I am at least prepared to give a preliminary report based on teaching increasingly B3 versions of PHIL 1305: Introduction to Latin American Philosophy over the last three academic years.

A Decolonizing Bilingual Introduction to Latin American Philosophy for UTRGV Students

When my children were born in 2012 and 2014, I began to experience the difficulty of raising them to be bilingual, bicultural, and biliterate in an Anglocentric educational context. Without this lived experience, which Anzaldúa theorized as *conocimiento*,¹² I probably would not have realized how wrongheaded it was to teach Introduction to Latin American as a monolingual English class to predominantly bilingual students. Fortunately, the birth of UTRGV and the first formulations of its B3 vision followed directly upon the early joys and problems of raising my children in Spanish along with my wife and colleague Mariana Alessandri. In her article thinking through what kind of world we should be building for our children and our students, she wrote:

Whether Anzaldúa meant her speaking Spanish in the classroom to be a political act, it was likely *taken* as one. Chicano Spanish, Spanglish, code-switching, bilingualism, diglossia—however one wants to refer to the multilingualism that is present here in the form of English and Spanish—is still considered dangerous today; Spanish and Spanglish are contentious in and outside of the classroom. I suggest that we can use this to our

¹¹ Perhaps there is a case to be made that *ethnic/racial* Anglocentrism is challenged by many college courses in the USA, but *linguistic* Anglocentrism remains almost entirely unquestioned.

¹² Anzaldúa ambitious philosophical attempt to present *conocimiento* as “an overarching theory of consciousness” that “tries to encompass all the dimensions of life” and to “connect the inner life of the mind and spirit to the outer worlds of action” is developed in many places, including (Anzaldúa & Keating, 2000, pp. 177-178). Her reflections on *conocimiento* as “suddenly just knowing” as “a consequence of specific experiences” is summarized here: “‘Conocimiento’ is just a good old-fashioned word that means knowledge, or learning, or lo que conoces. When you’re about to change, when something in your life is transforming itself, you get this ‘Aha! So this is what it’s about.’ That to me is *conocimiento*” (Lara, 2005, p. 44).

advantage; since using a border tongue is already read as a political act, we should use it for political purposes. Speaking a border tongue says that *atravesados* are legitimate, that the tongue spoken here— the otherwise “secret language”—is to be made public rather than kept private, affirmed instead of denied (Alessandri, 2015).

I have thus designed subsequent iterations of my course (2018-2021) to be progressively more bilingual.

If we momentarily pretend that “course content” is language-neutral, my redesigned course remains similar to the small number of other Latin American philosophy courses offered by institutions of higher education in the USA. This is true for at least two reasons: 1) I have followed the longstanding practice of designing my course by borrowing from my professional peers: trying to ascertain what materials are working well for professors who teach similar classes and whose syllabi are online or whose courses are more carefully presented in the *APA Newsletter on Hispanic/Latino Issues in Philosophy* (see for example Fall 2017, Vol. 7, no. 1); 2) a major limitation of teaching Introduction to Latin American Philosophy in an English-dominant context is the relative lack of texts available in English translation.¹³

So, in one sense, redesigning my course to be bilingual was as simple as providing the Spanish originals of the texts I was already assigning as English translations. In a few cases, I also needed to provide Spanish translations of the Nahuatl, Latin, and Portuguese originals. Here is the resulting list of Spanish-language texts along with their original dates of publication (as well as the original languages of publication when they are translations):

1. Julio Cortázar, “Axolotl” (1956)
2. Enrique Dussel, 1492. *El encubrimiento del otro: Hacia el origen del mito de la modernidad* (1992)
3. Miguel León-Portilla, *La filosofía náhuatl estudiada en sus fuentes* (1956)
4. Bernardino de Sahagún, Alonso Vegerano de Cuauhítlán, Martín Jacobita, y Andreés Leonardo de Tlatelolco, *Los diálogos de 1524: Coloquios y doctrina Cristiana con que los doce frailes de San Francisco, enviados por el papa Adriano VI y por el emperador Carlos V, convirtieron a los indios de la Nueva España. En lengua mexicana y española* (facsimile edition published in 1986 from the 1564 Nahuatl and Spanish original)
5. Bartolomé de las Casas, *Apología o declaración y defensa universal de los derechos del hombre y de los pueblos* (Spanish translation of the 1550 Latin original)
6. Bernardino de Sahagún y sus colaboradores indígenas, *El Códice Florentino o Historia general de las cosas de Nueva España* (Spanish portion of the 1577 Nahuatl and Spanish original)
7. Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, “Respuesta a Sor Filotea de la Cruz” (1691)
8. Simón Bolívar, “Carta de Jamaica” y “El Discurso de Angostura” (1819)
9. Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, *Facundo, o civilización y barbarie* (1845)
10. Juan Bautista Alberdi, *Bases y puntos de partida para la organización política de la República Argentina* (1852)
11. José Martí, “Nuestra América” (1891) y “Mi raza” (1893)

¹³ As a scholar, much of my work has been dedicated to improving this textual situation by publishing two philosophical translations of essays written in Spanish by Mexican philosophers (Enrique Dussel and Antonio Caso), publishing a 10,000-word overview of “Latin American Philosophy” in *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, and contributing a chapter on Mexican and Mexican American Philosophy to (Sanchez, 2019)

12. José Carlos Mariátegui, “El problema primario del Perú” (1924) y “El problema del indio” (1928)
13. Gustavo Gutiérrez, “Hacia una teología de la liberación” (1968)
14. Enrique Dussel, *Filosofía de la liberación* (1971)
15. Paulo Freire, *Pedagogía del oprimido* (Spanish translation of the 1968 Portuguese original)
16. Rigoberto Menchú, *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú y así me nació la conciencia* (1982)
17. Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional, “Ley Revolucionaria de Mujeres” (1993) y “Primera Declaración de la Selva Lacandona” (1994)
18. Gloria Anzaldúa, “La Prieta” (1981) and *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987)

This reading list points to the plurality of places and languages—and thus the plurality of philosophies and cultures—throughout Latin America. In my previous monolingual English Introduction to Latin American Philosophy course, it was easier to miss the significance of the fact that the philosophies we study were originally published in Nahuatl, Latin, Spanish, Portuguese, and Tex-Mex. The philosophies, languages, and cultures covered in an introductory course can never hope to be exhaustive or even comprehensive, but I aim to make them representative. Nahuatl represents Indigenous Philosophy, Latin represents the importance of the Medieval Christian worldview and its impact on the Americas through European conquest and colonization, and Spanish represents the bulk of the Latin American philosophical tradition, with the major exception of Portuguese, which represents Brazilian Philosophy. The language of Gloria Anzaldúa’s work is contentious to name, but it is the closest to the bilingual tongues and bicultural identities of my students, and she invites her readers to approach it with an open heart and mind in the last paragraph of her preface to *Borderlands/La Frontera*:

The switching of “codes” in this book from English to Castilian Spanish to the North Mexican dialect to Tex-Mex to a sprinkling of Nahuatl to a mixture of all of these, reflects my language, a new language—the language of the Borderlands. There, at the juncture of cultures, languages cross-pollinate and are revitalized; they die and are born. Presently this infant language, this bastard language, Chicano Spanish, is not approved by any society. But we Chicanos no longer feel that we need to beg entrance, that we need always to make the first overture—to translate to Anglos, Mexicans and Latinos, apology blurring out of our mouths with every step. Today we ask to be met halfway. This book is our invitation to you—from the new *mestizas* (2012, p. 20).

I am not Hispanic or Latinx by birth, but I am a cultural and linguistic *mestizo* by choice in the sense that Anzaldúa develops in “*La conciencia de la mestiza: Towards a New Consciousness*” (2012). My course tries to meet Anzaldúa and my students—most of whom are Mexican, Mexican American, Latinx, or Hispanic by birth—halfway by making our classroom a place where we philosophize in tongues, discovering and/or uncovering the Spanish (and the Nahuatl in the Spanish) that lies just underneath or outside the monolingual English classrooms that have colonized the RGV. In the process, we can discover and/or uncover more than five centuries of indigenous, Spanish, Mexican, and Pan American roots that make us who we are and our campus in Edinburg, TX what it is.

Ordinarily, a philosophy course taught in the USA would provide all the course readings in English, covering over the roots of any ideas, concepts, or texts that have their origins in other languages. But when I provide all the course readings in a Spanish course pack (as well as an

English course pack), students can plainly see that almost all of the readings were originally published in Spanish. With three types of exceptions—students who are Mexican nationals, or who were educated at least partially in Mexico, or who were fortunate enough to have participated in a dual language program that ran all the way through high school—most students have never been encouraged to read difficult academic texts in Spanish. Many are surprised and excited to discover that they can do so. If they report back that they have trouble reading the Spanish, I explain to them that they will most likely have trouble reading the English as well because philosophy is hard to read in any language, especially at first! But I also explain that they are better prepared to understand the course readings given their degrees of bilingualism and borderlands experiences than the students I used to teach at Penn State.

My larger aim is to encourage students to go from being *ambivalent* about their bilingualism and bicultural identities to being *proud* of their bilingualism and bicultural identities. The path to achieve this is theorized best by Anzaldúa in the readings we discuss near the end of the course, but the whole course is structured historically to explore how our identities and worldviews have been shaped by European colonization and indigenous resistance across the Americas. The course develops the basic thesis that most Americans (North Americans and Latin Americans) are in fact *mestizos*—complex mixtures of the languages, philosophies, and cultures that have mixed in the Americas since 1492—but that our diverse heritages have been systematically covered over by the Eurocentric and Anglocentric education system so that we have trouble recognizing the “Latin American” side of “American” history and identity.

This “covering over” is theorized by Enrique Dussel as *el encubrimiento del otro* as part of what he calls *la invención de America* (1992). Challenging the simplistic narrative that Christopher Columbus *discovered* America in 1492, Dussel argues that Columbus *invented* the Indians by projecting an Asiatic character onto them because he wrongly believed that he had arrived in the West Indies. The Spanish *conquistadores y colonizadores* who came after him followed suit by violently “covering over” the indigenous peoples rather than truly encountering them as human beings. In an analogous way, the Spanish-speaking and Mexican or Latinx cultural characteristics of our students are typically “covered over” by Anglocentric educational ideology and practices. In other words, our students been academically taught to disassociate themselves from Spanish and their Mexican, Latin American, and/or Latinx identities.

To help students begin to reflect on the history of this *encubrimiento* and how it might still haunt us, I have them prepare for our discussion of Dussel’s work by conducting a self-quiz. I ask them to take out a blank sheet of paper and list the names of as many Latin American countries as they can think of. I also ask them to list as many Latin American languages as they can. Emphasizing that this activity is not for a grade, I have students report how many countries and languages they were able to name. The following pattern consistently emerges: the vast majority of students cannot name more than two or three Latin American countries (besides Mexico, no country shows up consistently on their lists). At most 5%-10% of the students can successfully name more than five Latin American (or Caribbean) countries. There is usually some discussion about whether Puerto Rico is a country, which leads to a broader conversation about whether Latin American includes the Caribbean. I then show students the list of 33 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean according to the United Nations, and I ask them to brainstorm reasons that might explain why we as a class can name so few of them. Inevitably, someone will point out that they have been taught nothing (or almost nothing) about Latin America in

school.¹⁴ As for Latin American languages, students can only consistently name Spanish. One or two might name Portuguese. Most semesters, no one names an indigenous language like Quechua, Mayan, Guarani, Aymara, or Nahuatl (to name only the top five language groups among approximately 30 million speakers of indigenous languages in Latin America). At this point, I think students expect me to shame them for their ignorance following the deficit model, but I instead point out how these results illustrate Dussel's thesis that the indigenous languages, philosophies, and cultures of the Americas have ironically been "covered over" rather than encountered in the "discovery" of America. As we proceed to further discuss how America was invented (rather than discovered) by Columbus and other Europeans, I ask students to consider the possibility that Latin America—and by extension their Latinx heritage—has been "covered over" by the fact that they are not taught about it in school. In other words, their "ignorance" does not reflect their identity; it is rather something they have been taught! The very same public school system that has labeled them as "Hispanic" or "Latinx" or "English Learner" was carefully designed to prevent their encounter with the ongoing history of colonization and resistance in the Americas that makes them who they are.

In fact, most Latinx students have been taught that assimilating to an "American" way of being and doing things is the only way to succeed, but this "American" identity has been invented in a way that covers over many Americans. In contrast, my course highlights *multiple* ways of being American, including bilingual and bicultural ways, so that students gain a philosophical perspective that enables them to embrace *both* the U.S.-American aspects of their culture and identity *and* the Mexican or Latin American aspects of their culture and identity. I frame this by saying that the course will offer them the opportunity to discover Latin American philosophy and reflect upon how it is related to their past, present, and future.

Examples of Flexible Bilingual Teaching Strategies

I am always nervous on the first day of class, and speaking Spanish with anyone besides my own children makes me even more nervous. So I begin introducing myself and then the course in English. Here is the first paragraph of the course description from the English version of my syllabus:

To get an idea of how this historical Introduction to Latin American Philosophy will work, let's think critically about what people mean when they say that Christopher Columbus *discovered* America. Could Columbus truly discover a "New World" if roughly 50 million people already lived there (about the same number of people who lived in Europe at the time)? Instead of speaking about the "discovery" of "America," should we conceptualize these events and their legacies as: 1) the European *invention* of America, 2) the European *conquest* of millions of native peoples, and/or 3) the European *colonization* of more than one quarter of the Earth's lands (none of which were called "America" by the various peoples who had lived there for at least 15,000 years)? What then is America (or Latin America)? Who are the Americans (or the Latin Americans or Amerindians)? What are their philosophies? Is the story of America (or Latin America) a story of civilization and progress, a story of colonialism and violence? What does Latin American Philosophy have

¹⁴ There are usually at least a few students who received all, most, or much of their schooling in Mexico or another Latin American country. These students can typically name dozens of Latin American countries, which just proves the point.

to teach us here today in the South Texas-Northern Mexico borderlands? These are the kinds of questions that we'll think through carefully as we study over 500 years of Latin American Philosophy.

When I get to the end of the first page of the syllabus, I switch to Spanish. I explain (in Spanish) how it makes me uncomfortable to speak Spanish, but that I also think it is a beautiful language, that I had to learn it in order to become an expert in Latin American philosophy, and that I am so dedicated to my children growing up bilingually that I spoke with them exclusively in Spanish until my first child, Santiago, was five years old and his brother, Sebastián, was three. Después de contar esa historia personal, explico un poco de la visión B3 de UTRGV, e invito los estudiantes hablar English, Español, o Espanglish como quieran. Entonces empiezo a filosofar en español, preguntando a los estudiantes: *¿Quién descubrió América?* A veces alguien contesta que era los vikingos, pero normalmente me contestan: *Cristóbal Colón descubrió América*. Entonces sigo con otra pregunta: *¿Se puede descubrir un lugar donde ya viven 50 millones de personas?* If everything goes well, students begin to argue with me and each other about the philosophical definition of *discover*. If everything goes *really* well, the discussion takes place in Spanish, English, and Tex-Mex. For the rest of the semester, we use the bilingual course readings to explore core issues of Latin American philosophy, especially as they pertain to language and identity.

Getting each student to use their full language repertoire can be challenging. Many find it difficult to speak Spanish in the classroom, even though they might find it perfectly normal to speak Spanish with friends or at home. But that just gives us more to talk about as we explore why and how this happens. The linguistic foundation of the course is the fact that all readings are provided in both Spanish and English, and I refer to both versions of the text in every class, using mostly Spanish when discussing the Spanish text and mostly English when discussing the English. Some days, when I am feeling brave, I try to challenge myself by teaching more in Spanish than in English, but I rarely succeed. In any case, I try to respond to students in whichever language they address me in, or to translanguage with them if they translanguage with me. I like to think that being open and vulnerable about my own linguistic abilities, limitations, and desire for growth helps encourage students to step outside their own linguistic comfort zones, or perhaps more accurately, to expand their sense of where they feel *en casa* to our classroom and the university.

Of course, some students never choose to read, speak, or write in more than one language, and I make it clear that they will not be penalized. They can earn an A in the course using just one language. Instead of trying to force a language policy on them using some kind of stick in the tradition of linguistic terrorism, I offer them carrots by continuously incentivizing the use of more than one language with bonus points. For example, if they choose to take their first quiz in English, they can earn bonus points for writing even one of their answers on the second quiz in Spanish or for taking the Spanish version of the quiz but writing their answers in English. I use the same basic incentive structure for the course's three major essay assignments: a student who writes their first essay in English can receive points for writing their second essay in Spanish or even for writing a paragraph in Spanish or Spanglish if writing their whole 1500-word essay that way is too daunting. Students have multiple options for their final exam, but one of them includes producing a 3-5 minute digital testimonio that relates one of the topics discussed in class to their

own experiences or those of their family (Benmayor, 2012).¹⁵ I often find that students who did not feel comfortable with texts in Spanish nevertheless find it natural to narrate their testimonios in Spanish or by translanguaging. Regardless of what we are doing inside or outside of class, my aim throughout the course is twofold: to encourage bilingual and biliterate practices and, in doing so, to help students recognize these bicultural aspects of their identities as valuable and worth cultivating even though most have been trained *not* to do so in academic settings.

An anonymous written comment in response to the question “How has this class changed the way you see yourself?” illustrates the best of what I can hope for, and what I am always trying to redesign the course to achieve more fully:

Mi perspectiva cambió. Ahora veo al mundo con otros ojos. Pienso más al fondo las cosas, recapacite, encuentro estrategia para solucionarlo y ya no sentir esa pena como con my native language dónde no quería ni hablar en español por el miedo de ser avergonzada por mis compañeros, pero ya no, porque Texas era antes territorio mexicano, so why feel pena?

In the words of another student:

I had always been ashamed of the Mexican part of me. At a young age I witnessed how my kind of people were treated and it just made me want to hide my Spanish, but now I see myself as unique for being able to have two languages, or even three.

Building Institutional Support for Bilingual and Spanish Course Sections

The first two times I offered this course bilingually, in Spring 2018 and Fall 2019, there was no official “X” designation for bilingual course sections. When UTRGV first began piloting sections of formally designated bilingual course sections in Fall 2016, bilingual or translanguaging sections were labeled with the letter “E” for *español*. Spanish-only or at least Spanish-dominant courses did not have their own designation.¹⁶ Then, to more clearly mark which sections were Spanish-only or Spanish-dominant, the Registrar decided to designate these Spanish sections with an “E,” temporarily leaving translanguaging or bilingual sections like mine unmarked. But in Fall 2020, the Registrar implemented the current arrangement of “E” for *español* and “X” for bilingual courses, and my course sections received a formal bilingual designation for the first time.

I mention this transition in labeling course sections to illustrate the challenges UTRGV has faced even in establishing the basic infrastructure for bilingual courses. Another major hurdle, especially for my colleagues who teach Spanish-only or Spanish-dominant “E” sections, was getting UTRGV’s Center for Online Learning and Teaching Technology to create a fully Spanish user interface and course shell to use on Blackboard, or getting UTRGV’s Office of Faculty Success and Diversity to update and distribute a Spanish syllabus template each semester. To this day, the software used by the Registrar’s office cannot handle accent marks, so a student whose

¹⁵ For this assignment, I remain grateful to a 2013 Faculty Development Program Grant that enabled me to participate in a 2-day workshop called “Incorporating Digital *Testimonios* as Critical Pedagogy” along with four other faculty affiliates of Mexican American Studies.

¹⁶ For more on the institutional history and context surrounding bilingual or translanguaging course sections at UTRGV, see (Ramírez & Saldívar, 2020).

last name is Peña will appear on my course roster as Pena, a microaggression that completely changes the meaning of their name. But at least anecdotally, I noticed a considerable shift in how much Spanish my students were using after my course was formally designated by the Registrar as bilingual. The “X” designation effectively conveys UTRGV’s formal academic recognition of the equal legitimacy of Spanish for course purposes, and I think it emboldened more students to speak, read, and/or write in Spanish or Spanglish. At the end of the semester, students anonymously completed their standard course evaluations, but I also added these optional questions:

This X course section was taught bilingually (English and Spanish). Do you think UTRGV should offer more bilingual classes?

98% of respondents (50 out of 51) answered “Yes”

What recommendations would you give Dr. Stehn to improve the bilingual aspects of the course?

The responses varied, but every single one cast the bilingual aspects of the course in a positive light. A few students mentioned that keeping up with our Spanish conversations was difficult but worth it. Others pointed out ways that the course still had more English than Spanish and made helpful suggestions about how I could incorporate more Spanish. Many expressed appreciation that they could use both languages, e.g., “I loved that I was able to show both my American and Mexican side [...] I was able to type my essays in English and switch to Spanish to really show the emphasis of what I believed.”

Student comments also suggest that they found the bilingual classroom environment to be *both* academically more challenging *and* more comfortable, which strikes me as the perfect winning combination. Here is a student response that clearly articulates this sense of comfort:

I think the course itself and Dr. Stehn give the students a sense of freedom or comfort of being who we are, therefore it’s not so much the quantity of how many times we speak in Spanish or English, but rather that we feel comfortable enough to talk with whichever we feel most comfortable in that moment/day. Anxiety or nervousness can increase the accent of a non-english speaker, so when speaking in large crowds, it helps to know that we are not forced to talk in either. We won’t be reprimanded because we all understand what the other person is saying, and eventually by the end of the course, I noticed how people who were shy to speak in Spanish were trying it out, and vice versa with Spanish speakers who were shy to speak in English. People came out of their shell.

Conclusion and Implications

Introducing my students, roughly 90% of whom are Hispanic or Latinx, to Latin American Philosophy rather than only offering the standard “Introduction to [Anglo-European] Philosophy” makes sense, but the radical idea of offering PHIL 1305X: Introduction to Latin American Philosophy as a bilingual course makes even more sense. Unfortunately, the educational system in the Rio Grande Valley, Texas, and the United States of America is still designed to encase students, including emergent bilinguals, in an English monolingual shell. For some, this eventually becomes academically comfortable, and speaking Spanish in academic contexts becomes strange, undesirable, or even unthinkable. A miniscule number of these students will

enroll in PHIL 1305X: Introduction to Latin American Philosophy. Those who do will learn to differentiate between the monolingual academic shell that was imposed upon them and the bilingual, bicultural, and biliterate identity that they might choose to cultivate academically in order to push back against the hegemonic monolingual, monocultural, and monoliterate ideology that has structured their schooling.

As a university, we need to continue increasing the number of courses and course sections being offered bilingually or in Spanish. But if UTRGV's B3 vision is to become a reality, we will need far more feeder schools with dual language programs from Pre-K to 12th throughout Region One with the broader support of the Texas Association for Bilingual Education and the Texas Education Agency. UTRGV will also need cultivate more partnerships with local parents, community organizations, and school districts; improve our bilingual teacher education program, especially the portions designed to facilitate teaching in Spanish for dual language programs (Guerrero et al., 2017); and offer more professional development opportunities for UTRGV faculty who would like to teach their courses bilingually or in Spanish. There is much work to be done, pero como dice Gloria Anzaldúa, vale la pena (2015, p. 22).

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