



# Spanish-Language Narration and Literacy

CULTURE, COGNITION, AND EMOTION

Edited by

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ALLYSSA McCABE is Professor of Psychology at the University of Massachusetts, Lowell. She founded and coedits the journal *Narrative Inquiry* and has researched how narrative develops with age, the way parents can encourage narration, and cultural differences in narration, as well as interrelationships among the developments of narrative, vocabulary, and phonological awareness. Her most recent work concerns a theoretical approach to early literacy called the Comprehensive Language Approach, which looks at ways that the various strands of oral and written language (e.g., vocabulary, phonological awareness, and print knowledge) affect each other in the acquisition of full literacy. A key concern is with assessment of preschool-aged children, especially preventing misdiagnosis of cultural differences in oral narration as deficits. Allyn & Bacon Publishers recently published Dr. McCabe's *Patterns of Narrative Discourse: A Multicultural Lifespan Approach*, coauthored by Lynn Bliss.

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PAOLA UCCELLI is Assistant Professor in Language and Literacy at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. Her research focuses on socio-cultural and individual differences in language and literacy development in Spanish and English. She studied linguistics at the Pontificia Universidad Católica in Perú, her country of origin, and then pursued graduate studies in human development and psychology at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. Two main lines of research characterize her work. First, she investigates early language development with a particular focus on understanding how children learn to translate experience into narrative. Second, she carries out research on reading comprehension instruction and assessment with a special interest in the challenges faced, as well as the strengths displayed, by language minority children. In both lines of research she explores how different language skills (lexical, grammatical, and discourse) interact with each other to either promote or hinder the meaning-making processes of expression and comprehension, within and across languages. Currently, she is also investigating the challenges involved in academic language development and instruction. She has written articles and chapters on these topics for the *Cambridge Handbook of Literacy*, the *Handbook of Educational Linguistics*, *Child Psychology: A Handbook of Contemporary Issues*, and in several journals. Her postdoctoral work was supported by the Institute of Education Sciences (IES).

## PREFACE

The initial idea for this book was simple: Alison suggested an edited volume that would recognize the impact Allyssa McCabe has had on two generations of researchers focusing on the study of narrative development. From the start, it seemed critical that Allyssa should be part of the editorial process – who better to make the book a strong contribution to the field? The extension of much of the pioneering work of Allyssa and her colleagues in the 1980s to populations of preschool and school-age children who do not have English as a first language made the choice of Spanish-language narration a natural one. Many of Allyssa's former students were concentrating on both the formal and informal contexts of narrative development in children from diverse backgrounds outside the U.S. mainstream – indeed, some outside the United States entirely. Contacting them and others who have been influenced by Allyssa's work to contribute chapters to the proposed volume set the book in motion.

### AUDIENCE: FOR WHOM IS THIS BOOK WRITTEN?

We see a number of audiences for this book: students of language development in speech-language pathology, linguistics, and psychology, as well as those involved in literacy acquisition in preschool and elementary education. The book could readily serve as the main text of a graduate-level seminar devoted to the study of narrative development in Spanish-speaking children, as well as function as an auxiliary text in a course on narrative development or language development more broadly written.

Preschool and elementary schoolteachers and the staff who support them (i.e., principals and school psychologists) in the United States and elsewhere should find the descriptions of narrative diversity presented in the chapters critical to their own understanding of the stories told to them by the Spanish-speaking children they educate. The text can play a key role in the preparation

of preservice teachers who will be working with Spanish-speaking children who hail from all over the Americas, as well as be a catalyst for comparison and discussion during the continued professional development of more experienced teachers.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First, we thank all the chapter writers for their excellent contributions to the volume. Their dedication to the project has meant that we have kept everyone we initially invited and we have managed to stay on publication schedule. On everyone's behalf, we also want to say a special "gracias" and "thank you" to the children, parents, and teachers all across the Americas whose narrative skills and experiences are at the very heart of this book.

Storytelling through its various media – oral, written, and visual – has a long-standing tradition across the Spanish-speaking Americas. In this book, we honor the unique ways in which oral stories are woven and shared by and with children. In choosing the cover for our book, we also wanted to honor the cultural heritage of visual storytelling; therefore, we chose to present an *arpillera*, a contemporary form of textile art created by Latin American women. The arpilleras, sometimes called *cuadros parlantes* (talking portraits) are three-dimensional sewn cloths that portray scenes of everyday life, much like personal narratives of everyday experience. The arpilleras began as a form of underground communication and political protest in the Chile of Pinochet, most notably as a way in which mothers protested *without words* the disappearance of their sons and daughters. Since then, this form of art has traveled north to give voice to the hands of other Latin American women. The arpillera on the cover is the work of Doña Julia Rosa Huaranga Vilchez from Lima, Peru, who was gracious enough to weave for us this tale of children playing in the streets of an Andean city. We thank her for her talent and generosity. We would also like to thank Carlos Fernández Loayza for helping us photograph Doña Julia Rosa's work.

At Cambridge University Press, we wish to thank Eric Schwartz, April Potenciano, and Ken Karpinski, who handled the creation of this volume so skillfully and painlessly from start to finish.

Finally, we gratefully thank our families and all of our friends for their continued support. Alison thanks Frank, Nick, and Will Ziolkowski for their love

and abiding interest in absolutely everything. Gigliana gives heartfelt gracias to Jaime for his unconditional support and dedicates her work in this book to the memory of her sister, Cecilia, *con mucho amor, estés donde estés*. Allyssa thanks Charlie, Nick, and Jessamyn for many reasons.

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## Introduction

ALISON L. BAILEY, ALLYSSA McCABE, AND GIGLIANA MELZI

A first task is to define the term used to describe the individuals we are talking about in this book. The primary term we have chosen is *Latino*; as the broadest and most inclusive term (Suárez-Orozco & Pérez, 2002), it reflects the complex issues involved in the identities of Spanish-speaking people – issues such as citizenship, ethnicity, race, native language(s), politics, gender, social class, and generation. The term *Latino* has all too often been used in American research to refer exclusively to individuals immigrating to the United States from a country in the Spanish-speaking regions of the Americas and the Caribbean. Instead, in this book we are expanding the use of the term to also include individuals who are still living in their country of origin across Spanish-speaking Latin America. In this way, we align ourselves with the use of the term *Latino* in Latin America itself (i.e., as an abbreviation of *Latino Americano*). In choosing the primary term *Latino*, we in no way mean to minimize the ethnic, political, social preference, and ideological orientations of individual authors and/or Spanish-speaking communities across the United States who may call themselves Chicano, Hispanic, Mexicano/Mejicano, and so forth. For an insightful personal discussion of these nomenclature issues, see Shorris (1992).

The common thread of the contributions to this volume is that they portray the development of narrative in Spanish either in monolingual or bilingual settings. All participants have a rich and complex background involving a mix of cultures, a strong sense of the importance of family, and numerous other cultural values that are identified in this introduction and concluding chapters. All chapters also involve children who are developing typically. Our decision to focus on these children stems from a real need to provide detailed information about typical narrative development in Spanish-speaking children to teachers, researchers, speech-language pathologists, and other professionals working with children. There is far too little information about narrative development in Latino children despite its identification as a critical precursor to literacy development in English-speaking children (e.g., Scarborough, 2001; Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998; Tabors, Snow, & Dickinson, 2001) and, therefore, a cornerstone



of academic success. As we mentioned earlier, without such knowledge, Latino children are at risk of having their cultural differences from European American culture mistaken for deficits and their deficits not properly identified. Moreover, practitioners need to work with the cultural grain of students who genuinely lag behind their peers in order to optimize chances for successful treatment. This volume makes explicit which aspects of narration are valued in the broad Latino community.

In the context of the United States, some argue that there is an overrepresentation of Spanish-speaking children enrolled in special education programs (Artiles & Trent, 1994). Much of the research conducted on Spanish-speaking children has looked at those who are identified using labels such as Specific Language Impaired or Delayed. This volume is an explicit effort to redress that tendency.

That said, Spanish-speaking children are not a monolithic group by any means. Lipski (1994) has a detailed discussion of linguistic variation in *The World's Spanishes*. Thus, our book includes diverse populations, including (1) U.S. Americans whose families come from Puerto Rico, Mexico, Dominican Republic, and El Salvador; and (2) Latin Americans in Peru, Puerto Rico, Costa Rica, Ecuador, and Venezuela. We also have some participants from mixed backgrounds. This diversity is representative of Latino communities around the world. We include a range of Spanish varieties spoken as a first language, along with diverse bilingual and trilingual communities, whose linguistic repertoires might include Spanish, English and indigenous languages such as Quechua (as used in Peru) or Quichua (as used in Ecuador).

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