In 1993, Time magazine dubbed Miami “the Capital of Latin America.” At the time, Miami’s Hispanic / Latino population was at roughly 50% and was overwhelmingly Cuban-origin. In the ensuing two decades, Miami’s Hispanic / Latino population has continued to grow, reaching 65% in Miami-Dade County and 78% in the City of Miami in 2010. At the same time, the Cuban-origin share has fallen to below 50%. Both of these developments owe to the economic and political crises in Latin America in the 1990s and 2000s that brought unprecedented numbers of Colombians, Venezuelans, Peruvians, Dominicans, and other Spanish-speaking groups to South Florida. As a result of the socio-demographic changes, Miami is now both the most Latino large city in the U.S. (79%) and the most foreign-born (65%). It is also most likely to be the most bilingual large city in North America and the most dialectally-diverse Spanish speaking city in the world. The richness of the sociolinguistic landscape raises important questions about the ways in which Miami’s linguistic diversity is mentally represented and enacted in social interaction. How are Spanish and English perceived in terms of sociocultural prestige? Which language is thought to be most valuable for success in Miami’s boom-and-bust economy? Do Latinos and non-Latinos differ in their perceptions of English and Spanish? Do Miami residents exhibit implicit biases toward Spanish or English? If so, how do these biases vary according to social categories, such as ethnicity? Do biases co-vary with length of residency in Miami? And does living in Miami strengthen or diminish an individual’s automatic preferences for English or Spanish? In this talk, I present the findings of two ongoing perceptual studies conducted with over 500 residents of Miami-Dade County. The first is a matched guise experiment (Lambert et al. 1956) designed to test perceptions of English and Spanish across a range of sociocultural and socioeconomic factors, including warmth and competence personality traits. The second is an implicit association test (IAT, Greenwald, McGhee, and Schwartz, 1998) designed to test biases to textual and oral stimuli in Spanish and English. Findings from both studies are considered in light of competing national narratives about Spanish in the United States: Spanish-as-threat (Chavez 2008) and Spanish-as-commodity (Dávila 2008).

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