Introduction

During the last two decades there has been a major socio-demographic change, popularly called ‘a demographic revolution’: Hispanics\(^1\) have become the largest minority in the United States. In 2000 the United States Census data began going public with the rattling headlines: ‘At 34.5 million Hispanics make up 13% of the national population, outnumbering African-Americans and making people of Hispanic origin the nation’s largest ethnic or race minority’ (US Census Bureau, 2001). In a CNN report entitled ‘Will Spanish become America’s second language?’ (Hochmuth, 2001), the lead read: ‘It’s not just your imagination. In cities, from coast to coast, the use of Spanish is booming, and is proliferating in ways no other language has done before in US history – other than English of course. It’s a development that’s making some people nervous. It’s making others rich.’ By 2010 the number of Hispanics increased to 55.5 million\(^2\) or 16.3% of the population, i.e., the US Hispanic population worldwide ranked second in size with only Mexico (110 million) having a larger Hispanic population (US Census Bureau, 2010). California is home to 13.5 million Latinos\(^3\) and together with Texas (8.9 million), they represent 48% of all Latinos living in the United States. In 2007, 35 million US residents 5 years and older spoke Spanish at home, i.e., 12% of the total population of the US (more than half of these Spanish speakers spoke English ‘very well’) (US Census Bureau, 2008). These figures are relevant in as much as they help us understand the use of Spanish in the United States. Together with this demographic change there has been a shift in terms of the value of Spanish as the most frequently spoken second language in the United States: Spanish has moved beyond the family context into the public.
arena, where its presence is obvious in social, artistic, economic, and even political circles.

According to one of the latest media reports, the spending power of the Hispanic population is exploding (Gorney, 2007). In 2007 the Association of Hispanic Advertising Agencies estimated a buying power exceeding $900 billion:4

The estimate worked up by the Association of Hispanic Advertising Agencies for 2007 is $928 billion. Those are dollars spent inside this country by Hispanic consumers, American-born citizens as well as green-card residents and the undocumented, on things they want or need: batteries, iPods, laundry soap, lawn chairs, motor oil, Bulova watches, new home loans, Volvos, takeout pizza, cellphones, power saws, swimming pools, deodorant, airline tickets and plasma TV’s. It’s $200 billion more than was spent two years ago ... There are more than a hundred United States ad agencies, not including the publicistas in Puerto Rico, that now work almost exclusively in Spanish. (Gorney, 2007, pp. 2–3 my emphasis)

The value of speaking Spanish as a marketing tool is transcending the family circles and reaching mainstream businesses, with most of the marketing tools for the Hispanic population being done in Spanish or bilingually in Spanish/English. This chapter looks at the use of Spanish and the Latino culture in signs and advertisements in the United States as a multicultural society, contrasting and comparing whenever possible those signs and advertisements (henceforth ‘ads’) that are specifically aimed at Latinos and those which are designed for the English-speaking population. My analysis draws on analytical approaches within the theoretical framework of Systemic Functional Linguistics (Halliday, 1978, 1994, 2009; Halliday and Matthiessen, 1999, 2004) including multimodal text analysis (Kress, 2010; Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996/2006, 2001; Stenglin and Iedema, 2001) and Appraisal theory (Martin, 2000; Martin and White, 2005). The purpose of this chapter is to investigate how these signs and ads aim at attracting and aligning with the different communities that speak English and/or Spanish. The focus of the analysis will be on the linguistic and visual systems of the signs and ads.

There have been many studies that look at multimodality in the media in different languages; in what follows I address just a few of those studies. Bateman (2008) introduces a systematic and corpus-based approach to the description and analysis of multimodal texts and explains how language, rhetoric, images, typography, colour, and space, among others,