Lipski, John M. 2008. Varieties of Spanish in the United States. Georgetown University Press: Washington, D.C.

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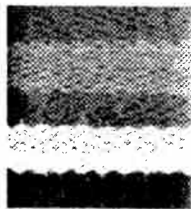
Spanish, English, or . . . Spanglish?



Introduction

When referring to racial and ethnic minorities in the United States, a number of words and expressions once used frequently and insensitively have fallen out of favor, and they are now shunned in favor of more accurate designations. Words once openly spoken in reference to African Americans, Jews, Italians, Asians, Native Americans, Latinos, and those with mental and physical disabilities, and found in radio and television programs, popular literature, films, and public discourse in general, are now socially and politically unacceptable. One particular subset of these terms refers to racially or ethnically mixed individuals or groups, generally included in ersatz cover terms such as *half-breed.* Of the racial/ethnic terms that have survived the enhanced focus on civil rights and social conscience, only one refers simultaneously to language use and—by inference rather than by direct indication—to specific ethnic groups: Spanglish. An obvious blend of English and Spanish, this word has become the less transparent *espanglish* in the Spanish-speaking world. Although Spanglish has at times been used to refer to a wide variety of phenomena (see Lipski 2004b for a representative survey), in the vast majority of instances Spanglish targets the language usage of Latinos born or residing in the United States. In a few instances Spanglish is a strictly neutral term, and some U.S. Latino political and social activists have even adopted Spanglish as a positive

affirmation of ethnolinguistic identity. In the usual circumstances, however, Spanglish is used derogatorily, to marginalize U.S. Latino Spanish speakers and to create the impression—not supported by objective research—that varieties of Spanish used in or transplanted to the United States become so hopelessly entangled with English as to constitute a "third language" substantially different from Spanish and English. This "third language" in turn is seen as gradually displacing Spanish in the United States, thereby placing U.S. Latino Spanish speakers at a disadvantage vis-à-vis their compatriots in Spanish-speaking countries and, ultimately, causing the deterioration of the Spanish language.

Within the United States the designation Spanglish is most commonly used by non-Latinos (or by Latinos who are openly critical of nonstandard language usage), in reference to the speech patterns of resident Latino communities. The most frequent targets are the nation's two oldest Hispanophone communities: those of Mexican and Puerto Rican origin. In the southwestern United States, Tex-Mex is often used (by non-Latinos) as a synonym of Spanglish, as is *pocho* among Mexican Americans. Spanglish is occasionally used to refer to the language spoken by Cuban Americans and increasingly by resident Dominicans; rarely if ever does one hear Spanglish used in conjunction with expatriates from Spain or Southern Cone nations, whose population is perceived as "white," thus suggesting an element of racism coupled with the xenophobia that deplores any sort of linguistic and cultural hybridity.

Despite the lack of empirical evidence, the view that Spanglish constitutes a specific type of language is widespread; one can find dictionaries, grammar sketches, greeting cards, t-shirts, bumper stickers, and an enormous number of editorial comments and references in popular culture, all suggesting that Spanglish has a life of its own.[1] One common thread that runs through most accounts of Spanglish is the idea that Latinos in the United States—and perhaps in Puerto Rico and border areas of Mexico—speak this "language" rather than "real" Spanish. Given that upwards of 50 million speakers are at stake, the matter is definitely of more than passing interest. The ambivalence and ambiguity that shrouds all things Spanglish is nowhere better illustrated than in definitions found in two of the most widely used and presumably authoritative dictionaries of the English language. The *American Heritage Dictionary* gives the generic and neutral definition "Spanish characterized by numerous borrowings from English." On the other hand, the prestigious and etymologically well-researched *Oxford English Dictionary* defines Spanglish as "a type of Spanish contaminated by English words and forms of expression, spoken in Latin America." Thus, from the outset, we are confronted with the ever-shifting and potentially insidious manipulation

of hybrid terms designed to undermine the credibility and human capital of internally colonized groups.

The first characteristic of Spanglish is the frequent use of unassimilated and assimilated borrowings and loan translations (calques). The second one is fluent code switching. Adopting this Janus-faced definition, let us return to the research questions posed at the outset.

Who Uses Spanglish and in What Circumstances?

Loan translations and calques are typically used by all bilingual speakers, including those for whom one of the languages is a second language, learned in adulthood. The frequency and density of calques and assimilated loans in Spanish is inversely proportional to formal instruction in Spanish and the ready availability of Spanish-language mass media produced from all over the Spanish-speaking world. The opposite situation occurs in speech communities—such as much of the Caribbean coast of Central America and some former enclaves in Argentina and Chile—in which Spanish is the official language and English a nonprestige home language. Code switching, on the other hand, predominates among native bilingual speakers born or raised in the United States. Attitudes vary widely, and not all bilingual speakers spontaneously engage in code switching. No true bilingual is unable to speak exclusively in Spanish if necessary (for example, when the interlocutor is monolingual or will not allow code switching), although borrowings and loan translations may still be used at all times.

When and Where Is Spanglish Used and not Used?

Loan translations and borrowings are found in all Spanish-English bilingual communities, and many have spread to monolingual Spanish-speaking areas, in the language of consumer products, popular culture, and the Internet. Fluent code switching is confined to speech communities in which Spanish and English are used on a daily basis; such communities include bilingual areas of the United States as well as Gibraltar and some regions of Central America (Lipski 1986c, 1986g).

Is Spanglish a Language Distinct from English and Spanish?

No variety of Spanish that has absorbed a high number of lexical Anglicisms is any less Spanish than before—nor is code-switched discourse a third language, although fluent code switchers have arguably augmented their monolingual grammars with a set of grammatical and pragmatic constraints on switch points. Knowing how to switch languages does not constitute knowing a third lan-

guage any more than being ambidextrous when playing tennis constitutes playing a new sport when one switches the tennis racket to his or her other hand. Only in the unthinkable event that all immigration to the United States from Spanish-speaking countries were to cease—and that a bilingual enclave such as Miami, Los Angeles, or New York City were to be simultaneously cut off from the remainder of the English-speaking population—is it conceivable that after several generations the legacy of contemporary bilingualism would morph into a language empirically distinct from English and Spanish. In the world as we know it, Spanish and English will remain separate and distinct, although they will borrow and lend from each other whenever and wherever they come into contact.

Can Spanglish Be Characterized Technically as a Jargon, a Pidgin, or a Creole Language?

A variety of Spanish that has absorbed many Anglicisms is still Spanish (i.e., a complete, natural language), and consequently, it cannot be a reduced or partial form of a language, such as a jargon or pidgin. The same is true of code-switched discourse, which is predicated on fluency in two natural languages, albeit not always on prestigious varieties. As used by scholars of linguistics, the term *creole language* refers to a new language that arises when a reduced contact vernacular such as a pidgin—which, critically, is not spoken natively by anyone—is expanded in subsequent generations into a complete natural language (e.g., Holm 1988, 2000; Mühlhäusler 1986; Romaine 1988; Sebba 1997). In this sense, no manifestation of Spanglish qualifies as a creole language. If code switching were to coagulate into replicable patterns—in itself an unlikely possibility—then a permanently code-switched discourse might be considered an intertwined language. Outside of linguistics, the term creole is frequently used to refer loosely to the product of any language contact and mixing; in this sense U.S. Spanish can be called a creole language because it exhibits some hybrid traits; however, no creolization in the strict sense has occurred.

Does Spanglish Have Native Speakers? If So, Are There Monolingual Speakers of Spanglish?

There are certainly native speakers of Spanish varieties containing a large proportion of Anglicisms; so, if Spanglish refers to such dialects, then it has native speakers. Similarly, fluent code switching is most common among native bilinguals. However, because the product of code switching is not a language *per se,* it makes no sense to speak of native speakers of this bilingual discourse mode.

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Does Spanglish Have a Common Linguistic Core, Understood and Used by All Speakers/Listeners?

The key word here is *common*, because most Spanish speakers in the United States recognize both assimilated and spontaneous Anglicisms, and all bilingual speakers can readily understand code-switched discourse irrespective of personal preferences. Although there are lexical Anglicisms and calques (e.g., *para atrás)* that are used by nearly all bilingual Latino speakers, spontaneous creations are more common, which thus undermines the notion of a stable Spanglish core. Purported dictionaries of Chicano Spanish (e.g., Galván and Teschner 1977) or Spanglish (e.g., Cruz and Teck 1998; Stavans 2003) usually include a potpourri of items gleaned from numerous sources and regions, but such items do not constitute the lexical repertoire of any known speech community.

Do Regional or Social Dialects of Spanglish Exist?

Regional and social dialects of U.S. Spanish continue to exist, representing the dialects of the countries of origin of speakers, as well as the results of dialect leveling in some urban areas. Sociolinguistic differences are found throughout U.S. Latino speech communities. Neither the frequency of Anglicisms nor the use of code switching varies regionally or socially in correlation with U.S. Spanish regional and social dialects; therefore it makes no sense to speak of dialects of Spanglish.

Conclusions

It is precisely the rapid shift to English after at most two generations that militates against the formation of any stable U.S. varieties of Spanish, let alone against any empirically replicable hybrid language such as Spanglish. In particular, Spanglish in any of its many avatars does not meet the definitions of true mixed or intertwined languages: that is, languages containing lexical category items (nouns, verbs, adjectives, etc.) from one language and functional elements (inflectional morphemes, prepositions, articles, etc.) from another.[14] Rather, Spanglish is an overly facile catchphrase that has been used to refer to so many disparate and inaccurately described language phenomena as to have become essentially meaningless. In speech communities where one Spanish-speaking group predominates, the corresponding regional variety of Spanish is retained, together with the inevitable introduction of lexical Anglicisms and some syntactic calques. In large urban areas where several Spanish-speaking groups converge (e.g., Chicago, Washington, New York, Houston, and parts of Los Angeles), some dialect leveling has taken

place, again with some introduction of Anglicisms, but the specific linguistic features vary from city to city. In no instance has a homogeneous and consistent U.S. dialect of Spanish emerged, nor is such a variety likely to develop in the foreseeable future. As a consequence, whereas monolingual Spanish speakers in their respective countries of origin (Mexico, Puerto Rico, Cuba, etc) can identify traits that differ from their own in the speech of their compatriots born or living extensively in the United States, each observer will come up with a somewhat different set of contrasts whose common denominators form a vanishingly small set. We may choose to designate as Spanglish the totality of the discrepancies between monolingual Spanish of other nations and the speech of Hispanophones in the United States, but to do so is to deprive this term of a place among the languages of the United States.

Who Needs Spanglish?

The bibliography of empirical research on varieties of Spanish in the United States is vast and continually growing, and all results converge on a single conclusion: there is no third language or cohesive Spanglish to be found anywhere in this country, nor can extrapolation from contemporary language contact environments project such a language in the foreseeable future. I suggest that Spanglish, as most commonly used, is no more than the latest addition to the list of epithets and slurs applied to the speech of the underclasses, and that the true nature of the Spanish-English interface must be sought from an additive rather than a subtractive viewpoint. Each Latino speech community retains the major dialect features of its country of origin, together with the inevitable dialect leveling in urban areas where several regional varieties of Spanish are in daily contact. In the aggregate, Spanish speakers living in the United States use more Anglicisms than their monolingual counterparts in other Spanish-speaking countries; these include loan translations, false and partial cognates, and assimilated borrowings. However, there are no instances in which basic grammatical principles of Spanish are violated among fluent speakers of Spanish, although patterns of usage may vary. Only among second- and third-generation English-dominant speakers is it possible to find combinations that would be grammatically unacceptable in fully fluent Spanish. This, however, is not Spanglish, but rather the natural consequence of the LANGUAGE SHIFT > LANGUAGE LOSS trajectory typical of most immigrant speech communities.[15] The implicit failure to distinguish between fluent bilinguals and semifluent heritage language speakers is partially responsible for misleading statements about the prevalence of Spanglish among U.S. Latino communities.

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What is the future of Spanglish? Will it continue to be the whipping boy for purists and xenophobes, or will it emerge into the sunshine as the positive affirmation of U.S. Latino identity? To address these questions within an academic context is to engage in mere speculation, but some factual points may be brought to bear. First, despite the enormous bibliography of empirical research on U.S. varieties of Spanish—spanning nearly a century of scholarship and covering nearly every Spanish-speaking community residing within the United States—little of this knowledge has penetrated elementary and secondary education, the mass media, the entertainment industry, or the diplomatic service. Although there is greater reluctance to employ offensive terms in public discourse, popular notions about the language of U.S. Latinos differ little from those in vogue more than half a century ago. At the university level matters are much more salutatory: courses on U.S. Latino culture and literature and on Spanish language designed for native and heritage language speakers are encouraging portents, but seldom does this enlightenment penetrate the "town versus gown" barrier. It is therefore difficult to envision an eventual widespread acceptance of Spanglish as a proud affirmation of ethnolinguistic identity. In the history of U.S. sociocultural discourse, no term has risen from bigotry to splendor. It is true that within Mexico *Chicano* has often been used as a negative stereotype for Mexican Americans, but the word itself is simply a retention of the archaic pronunciation of *mexicano*. No racial or ethnic slur has been transformed into a favorable epithet across wide sectors of American society.[16] Items like *African American, physically challenged, Asian, Native American, domestic partner,* and the like are modern usages that bear no resemblance to the host of ugly tags once found in common parlance. If the term *Ebonics* survives unscathed—and it is very much up for grabs—it will be at least in part because of its lack of similarity to any of the popular or academic terms previously used to designate these language varieties.

Urgently needed is a greater public awareness of the reality of U.S. Latino language, and if Spanglish is allowed to creep into the (re)education of the American public, I fear the results of any remediation. As a term, *Spanglish* is as out of place in promoting Latino language and culture as are the words *crazy, lunatic, crackpot,* or *nut case* in mental health care, or *bum, slob, misfit,* and *loser* in social work. From the perspective of a linguist who has spent more than three decades studying the Spanish language in its U.S. setting, Spanglish will always be a signpost on the wrong road, a road whose many way stations range from misunderstanding to intolerance. The expression "*el que habla dos lenguas vale por dos*" (one person who speaks two languages is worth two people) does not admit qualifiers, and neither should our acceptance of the nation's largest bilingual community.

Mexican Spanish

in

The United States

Chapter 4

Mexico to the United States is not always or even principally from rural regions, but rather comes frequently from the urban working classes. Emigrants also do not necessarily come from the most economically depressed Mexican states, and the states that border the United States no longer overwhelmingly dominate Mexican migration. These facts are reflected in the profile of contemporary Mexican American Spanish in the United States, which is not entirely circumscribed by the rustic variants described in many classical studies. When rural residents of Mexico emigrate to the United States, they may congregate in rural agricultural areas. Matus-Mendoza (2002, 2004, 2005) describes one such cohesive Mexican American community in rural Pennsylvania, which characterized by considerable return migration to a single area of rural Mexico. As a result of these differences, linguistic probes among recently arrived Mexican farmworkers in the United States and their immediate descendents may well reveal a number of rustic forms. Urban working class Mexican immigrants are often more attracted to urban areas; hence, linguistic surveys of urban Mexican American communities will usually turn up fewer rustic Mexican elements. Although some rural residents of Mexico do end up in urban areas of the United States—just as rural-to-urban emigration within Mexico displaces many rural residents—the reverse trend is seldom observed. Most urban Mexican natives migrate directly to urban areas of the United States.

The "Dialects" of Mexican American Spanish versus Dialects of Mexico

The varieties of Spanish included in the Mexican American category have never been cut off from Mexico, and most are replenished by contact with Mexico, through family ties, travel, or continued immigration. Nonetheless, there is a tendency to describe Mexican American Spanish as though it were a discrete dialect with uniquely definable characteristics. A glance at the available bibliography reinforces this notion. In addition to studies of Mexican American Spanish as spoken in particular cities, there are dictionaries and glossaries that claim to represent "Chicano" speech. Among such works it is possible to discern at least three viewpoints. At one extreme is the opinion that Mexican American Spanish is indistinguishable from dialects in Mexico, except for the inevitable incorporation of lexical Anglicisms. At the opposite end is the notion that Mexican American Spanish is a degenerate Mexican Spanish, the result of imperfect bilingualism sometimes compared with creolization (e.g., Webb 1980). Proponents of this view claim that Mexican American Spanish is a conglomeration of errors, misperceptions, and unacceptable simplifications, as well as bearing an overwhelming structural influence from English: in other words, a language created by individuals who

think in English while speaking Spanish. This pessimistic viewpoint, although supported by little empirical evidence, is widely diffused, known by such unflattering terms as *Tex-Mex, pocho, border Spanish, Spanglish,* and the like. In reality, Mexican American Spanish is not a discrete dialect, but a continuum of language-contact varieties encompassing a wide range of abilities in both English and Spanish. The sociodemographics of the Mexican American population in the United States reflect in the aggregate a predominantly rural population that has received little or no formal education in Spanish (Hidalgo 1987). Early descriptions such as Espinosa (1913), Ornstein (1951), Rael (1939), Post (1933), Sánchez (1972), and Peñalosa (1975, 1980) may create the misleading impression that Mexican American Spanish is a patchwork of nonstandard and archaic forms, highly reduced pronunciation, and transparent borrowings or loan-translations from English. Ironically, this is the only speech mode which might lay claim to being distinct from the speech of Mexico, but it fails to adequately describe hundreds of thousands of Mexican Americans whose speech is characterized by more prestigious forms convergent with those of educated Mexicans. Studies of wider scope, such as Bills and Ornstein (1976), García (1977), Hensey (1973, 1976), Hidalgo (1987), Ornstein (1972), Peñalosa (1980), and Sánchez (1978, 1983), give a more realistic perspective on the range of linguistic phenomena which can properly be called Mexican American.

In order to understand the specifics of Mexican American Spanish, it is necessary to take a closer look at dialect differentiation within Mexico, particular the speech of economically distressed regions, which have contributed the majority of Mexican immigrants to the United States in the last half century or so. A number of monographic studies, as well as countless articles, provide a core bibliography for Mexican Spanish. The basic facets of Mexican dialectology are summarized in Lipski (1994a). Regional features of Mexican pronunciation are treated in Moreno de Alba (1994). In general, Mexican Spanish is linguistically more conservative than the Caribbean dialects, in retaining in unmodified form many sounds that have been altered or eliminated in the Spanish-speaking Caribbean. There are a few regions of Mexico, primarily along the southern (Pacific) and Caribbean coasts, where pronunciation approximates varieties heard in the Caribbean, but these dialects are scarcely represented in Mexican American communities. Even to the untrained ear, Mexican Spanish of nearly any geographical origin "sounds" different than any Cuban, Puerto Rican, or Dominican variety. Mexican Spanish bears greater resemblance to Guatemalan Spanish, a not surprising fact given the common border between the two nations; similarities with Salvadoran Spanish are fewer but still considerable. At the same time the proportion of vocabulary items of non-Romance origin is proportionally higher in Mexican Spanish than in

Caribbean varieties; most such words are of Nahuatl origin. Mexican Spanish also presents some grammatical innovations not found in other Spanish dialects.

Although regional variation is considerable, a number of common linguistic traits are found in most of central and northern Mexico, the areas from which the majority of Mexican Americans derive their origins. All these traits can be found to varying degrees in every Mexican American speech community as well. There is little evidence of English interference in Mexican American pronunciation, except among semifluent speakers (Foster 1976; Phillips 1967, 1972, 1975, 1976). Common Mexican and Mexican American Spanish traits are described below:

Phonetics and Phonology

- The most striking feature of Mexican Spanish pronunciation as compared with Caribbean dialects is the strong sibilant pronunciation of syllable- and word-final /s/ (Lipski 1994c). Mexican Spanish shares this trait with northern Spain, central Colombia, and the Andean countries. Syllable- and word-final /s/ is often aspirated along the Caribbean states (particularly in the states of Tabasco and Chiapas, but also in Veracruz) and along the Pacific coast, from Oaxaca to Baja California. In the remainder of the country, significant reduction of final /s/ is largely confined to rural northwestern Mexico, including the state of Sonora (Brown 1989), and part of Sinaloa and Baja California Sur (Hidalgo 1990, López Chávez 1977). Among U.S. Spanish dialects of Mexican origin, /s/ does not normally reduce at significant rates, because these varieties are derived from dialects of central and northern Mexico in which word-final /s/ remains strong. In southern Arizona, bordering on Sonora, a weaker /s/ is sometimes observed. The weak final /s/ of traditional New Mexico Spanish evidently comes from much earlier times; this is covered in chapter 12.
- Word-final /n/ is alveolar in most of the interior, and velar [ŋ] in the Yucatán and coastal zones of the Caribbean and the Pacific. Virtually all Mexican Americans realize word-final /n/ as alveolar [n], in sharp contrast to Central Americans and speakers of Caribbean origin, who velarize word-final /n/ to [ŋ], as in English *sing*.
- The phoneme /r/ is an alveolar trill throughout most of Mexico. The velarized trill found in Puerto Rico and the preaspirated [hr] trill common in the Caribbean are not heard in Mexican Spanish.
- There is a tendency for /e/ to be laxed to [ɛ] as in English *let*, particularly in final closed syllables, as in *inglés* (Matluck 1963). This feature is found throughout Mexican American communities.
- Intervocalic /j/ is weak in many central and northern regions and tends to disappear in contact with /i/ or /e/, as in *gallina* (hen), *sello* (stamp), *milla* (mile), and so forth. Although the weakened pronunciation of /j/ by no means characterizes all varieties of Mexican Spanish (for example, the prestigious dialect of Mexico City does not

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weaken /j/ appreciably), the weakened pronunciation of /j/ typifies much Mexican American speech, given the strong representation of northern dialects in most Mexican American communities.

- Much of central Mexico exhibits high rates of unstressed vowel reduction and elision. This process is most frequent in contact with /s/ and affects /e/ and /i/ with the highest degree of regularity. Thus, *entonces* (then) may emerge as *entons, presidente* as *presdente,* and *camiones* (buses) as *camions.* This pronunciation is not frequent in Mexican American dialects in the southwestern United States, where dialectal features of northern Mexican Spanish predominate. However, reduction of unstressed vowels can be heard with some frequency in Mexican American communities throughout the United States, particularly in midwestern states, where speakers of central and southern Mexican dialects are proportionately more numerous.
- Syllable-final /ɹ/ is often pronounced as a voiceless sibilant almost like [s] throughout central and southern Mexico. In the northern states, a flap or trill pronunciation predominates. As with unstressed vowel reduction, sibilant final /ɹ/ is not often heard along the U.S.-Mexican border, but occurs as an occasional variant in many Mexican American communities across the United States.
- In central Mexico, the posterior fricative /x/ (written as *j,* or as *g* before *e* and *i*) receives audible friction, particularly before front vowels, as in *México.* In the rest of the country, /x/ is weak, much like English *h.* Most Mexican Americans pronounce /x/ weakly, although a stronger velar fricative is always an acceptable variant.
- Pronunciation of /tʃ/ *ch* as a fricative [ʃ] (as in English *ship*) is a common feature of northwestern Mexican dialects, particularly in rural regions. This pronunciation is found throughout New Mexico, Colorado, and Arizona, where linguistic ties to the Mexican states of Chihuahua and Sonora are strong. In other Mexican American communities, fricative pronunciation of /tʃ/ is not common, although it does sometimes occur.

Morphological Characteristics

- Mexican Spanish, like Caribbean varieties, uses *tú* as the familiar subject pronoun, together with the normal *tuteo* verb conjugations. There are a few areas where *vos* and accompanying verb forms are still used, particularly in Chiapas, but this usage has not penetrated Mexican American speech.
- Although Mexico is *loísta* (use of the clitic *lo* for masculine direct objects, both animate and inanimate), Mexican Spanish frequently adds the clitic *le* to intransitive verbs or uses *le* as a generic direct object. This usage is particularly frequent in imperatives. In addition to the ubiquitous Mexican *ándale* (let's go, okay), *órale* (come on, let's go), *híjole/jíjole* (an expression of surprise), and *úpale* (said while lifting a heavy object), one hears commands like *ciérrale* (close [the door]), *dele* (do it, let 'em have it), and so forth. Police officers directing traffic say *pásele* (move on), and *apúrale* (hurry up) is a common way of urging haste. This use of *le* carries over into Mexican American varieties.

Syntactic Characteristics

- Mexican Spanish does not use noninverted questions such as those found in Caribbean Spanish, as in *¿cómo tú te llamas?* (what's your name?), nor are overt subject pronouns such as *tú* and *usted* used as frequently as in the Caribbean, particularly in tag phrases such as *tú sabes* (you know).
- Infinitives with subjects such as *antes de yo llegar* (before I arrived) occur occasionally, but not nearly with the frequency found in Caribbean Spanish varieties.
- Mexican Spanish prefers *qué tanto* to *cuánto* for "how much," and uses *qué tan* + ADJECTIVE in expressing degree, as in *¿qué tan grande es?* (how big is it?).
- The colloquial superlative of adjectives is formed with *mucho muy*, as in *es mucho muy importante* (it is very important).
- Mexican Spanish is noted for frequent use of *no más* for "only, just" as in *no más quería platicar contigo* (I just wanted to talk to you).
- The Spanish word *mero* is used in the sense of "the very same, one and only," as in *está en el mero centro* (it's right in the middle of town). *Ya mero* means "almost," as in *ya mero me caigo* (I almost fell).

Syntactic Characteristics of Mexican American Spanish

Mexican American Spanish is beginning to diverge syntactically from mainstream dialects of Mexico, although this is primarily true of Mexican Americans who live away from Mexican immigrant communities (García 1977). One gradual shift is the increasing use of the indicative for the subjunctive in some constructions (Floyd 1978; Ocampo 1990; Silva-Corvalán 1997; Escamilla 1982). There are subtle changes in the use of some prepositions, as well as past tense forms (Chaston 1991; Floyd 1982). Occasional erosion of noun-adjective gender concord occurs among Spanish-recessive bilinguals,[1] as does convergence of *ser* and *estar* (Gutierrez 1990, 1992, 1994; Kirschner and Stephens 1988). Loan translations abound among Spanish-English bilinguals. Most escape the notice of all but the closest observers, and many are disputed as true Anglicisms even in Latin American countries. Combinations involving *para atrás* (*patrás*) to translate the English particle "back" are frequent, as in other varieties of Spanish in the United States: *llamar patrás* (to call back, return a call), *dar patrás* (to give back, return a borrowed item), *pagar patrás* (to pay back [a loan]), *pensar patrás* (to think back, reflect), and so forth. These expressions are treated in more detail in chapter 12. Found particularly in California and sometimes in New Mexico and Arizona are configurations like *hacer fix* (to fix) and *hacer improve* (to improve), which Reyes (1976a, 1976b) has analyzed as an example of code switching, but which are really more profound syntactic modifications. This construction is less frequent than the simple creation of

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new verbs, such as *taipiar* (to type), *espeliar* (to spell), *frizar* (to freeze), or *tochar* (to touch).

As the balance of bilingual abilities shifts towards English, syntactic patterns typical of English and less frequent or even inappropriate in monolingual varieties of Spanish begin to appear in Mexican American speech. One issue is noun-adjective order, in which the predominant placement of descriptive adjectives after the noun in Spanish (*la casa grande, el libro azul*) exhibits alternatives with preposed adjectives, in circumstances when the usual exceptions for preposed adjectives in Spanish do not apply (Denning 1986).

Silva-Corvalán (1982, 1983, 1986, 1988, 1990, 1991a, 1991b, 1993, 1994) has documented a number of features of second- and third-generation Mexican American bilinguals in Los Angeles that may be the result of reduced fluency in Spanish and/or syntactic convergence with English. These phenomena include use of the copula *estar* in contexts where *ser* would be preferred in monolingual varieties, use of redundant subject pronouns, a simplification of the verbal tense system, less flexibility in clitic placement, and a more rigid subject + verb word order, to the detriment of frequently postposed subjects and other alternative constructions found in fully fluent monolingual or bilingual varieties of Spanish.

Code switching, meaning the switching between Spanish and English within the confines of a single sentence or conversation, is common in Mexican American Spanish, as in other Spanish-speaking communities in the United States. This topic is treated in more detail in chapter 12. Mexican American Spanish has provided the greatest number of research studies of code switching, as well as a growing literary expression in which code-switched discourse is the primary language.[2] Code switching only takes place among fluent bilinguals, and a code-switched conversation will abruptly stabilize in a single language upon arrival of a monolingual speaker or one who is known to disapprove of code switching (e.g., a parent, older relative, or neighbor). This provides clear evidence that bilingual speakers are always aware of which language they are speaking, and that code switching is neither "confusion" nor a hopeless tangle of two languages, but rather a deliberately chosen strategy that may be suppressed at will. Code switching is therefore not an anomaly, but rather a natural result of fluent bilingualism.

Lexical Characteristics of Mexican Spanish

Mexican Spanish retains a number of archaisms that were once commonplace in Spain (Lope Blanch 1964). Few are exclusive to Mexico, although some are more prominent in that country. Most "Mexicanisms" are words of Nahuatl origin,

although some patrimonial Spanish words receive a different meaning in Mexico. The majority of Mexicanisms are also found in Mexican American Spanish, except for the most regionalized or rustic words in Mexico. Common Mexicanisms include the following:

ándale (let's go, that's OK, I agree [in response to a suggestion], you're welcome [when being thanked])
bolillo (American, Caucasian foreigner [derog.])
camión (bus)
¿bueno? (said upon answering the telephone)
chamaco (small child)
charola (tray)
chingadera (unspecified object [vulg.])
chingar (to have sexual intercourse, to ruin, to bother)
escuincle (small child, brat [central Mexico])
gavacho ([Anglo-] American [derog.])
güero (blond, fair complexioned)
híjole/jíjole (expression of surprise or awe)
huerco (small child [mostly northern Mexico])
¿mande? (said in requesting repetition of something not understood)
naco (crybaby, in bad taste, pretentious [central Mexico])
órale (come on, let's get going)
padre (very good, super)
pinche (cursed, damned) This word derives from a noun meaning "kitchen helper," but is normally used in Mexico as a derogatory adjective: *no entiendo este pinche capítulo* (I can't understand this cursed chapter).
popote (soda straw)
troca (truck, pickup truck)
úpale (said when lifting heavy objects)

The Mexican American Lexicon

Delimiting just what is the Mexican American or Chicano vocabulary is a controversial topic, because much of what has been attributed to this category are either English borrowings or vernacular Mexicanisms. The patrimonial Spanish component of the Mexican American lexicon is shared with Mexico, including words of Nahuatl origin and numerous archaisms among the rural population. As in any bilingual community, Anglicisms are freely created, and many are widely accepted. Most Anglicisms are based on the spoken form, resulting in written forms that frequently bear little resemblance to the English equivalent: *mira* (meter), *cuara* (quarter [25 cents]), *espica* (speaker), *juila* (wheeler), and so forth.

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Such Anglicisms are often created spontaneously and do not necessarily represent core vocabulary as used by Mexican Americans; the transparent phonetic derivation of such items makes them easy to recognize even when they are spontaneous creations. Other Anglicisms (many of which are now in use in Latin America) have been more extensively modified to fit Spanish phonotactics: *troca/troque* (truck), *lonche* (lunch), *bonche* (bunch), *rufa* (roof), and so forth.

The most legitimately "Chicano" form of expression, rooted in Mexican Spanish but uniquely formed in the United States, is Pachuco or *caló* slang. The precise origins of this lexical subvariety are unclear. A widely held view is that this was once the jargon of thieves and prisoners, which like similar varieties in other cultures, was gradually adopted by youth as an in-group slang, and eventually penetrated the speech of the middle class, devoid of any sinister connotations (Barker 1950; Coltharp 1965; Webb 1976; Ornstein-Galicia 1987). This assertion remains to be definitively proven and may embody a simple rejection of rebellious youth by more traditional Mexican families and a negative attitude toward Hispanics by Anglo-Americans. Pachuco seems to have entered the United States in Texas, possibly in El Paso. Oral tradition posits as a possible etymology for Pachuco the deliberate distortion of *[El] Paso,* with a resident of the city being known as a *vato del Pachuco.* Pachuco speech spread to California in the 1920s and 1930s, and became associated with cultural patterns that at one time included zoot-suits and slick hairstyles, and whose contemporary reincarnation is the Low Rider. Pachuco or *caló* is and has traditionally been a male language, used by young men as an expression of individualism and independence, and only occasionally and semiseriously by older men. Women do not generally use this language form, except in abusive interchanges. More recently, female variants of *caló* have emerged, but this usage carries strong connotations of rebellion and defiance of linguistic norms (Galindo 1992, 1995). Many Mexican Americans resent that what may have once been an underworld slang is frequently identified with all of Mexican American culture, but the fact remains that Pachuco language and cultural patterns are a uniquely Mexican American phenomenon.

Linguistically, Pachuco uses a characteristic singsong intonation, as well as deliberate distortion or clipping of words, which partially obscures the meaning to noninitiates. Typical examples of "traditional" Pachuco vocabulary, now outmoded, are *simón* and *sirol* for *sí* (yes), *Los* for *Los Angeles* (e.g., *me tiro pa Los* for "I'm going to Los Angeles"), *Califa* (California), *Mejicle* (Mexico), and the universally known *La Migra* (*imigración*) for "U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service," and its most common manifestation, the Border Patrol. The Pachuco vocabulary also includes numerous slang terms, some of which are used in

general Spanish with another meaning. Like *lunfardo* of the Río Plata, Pachuco is in constant evolution—new words are coined and old words pass out of circulation. Some other protypically Pachuco words, recognized if not used by most Mexican Americans, include *ranfla* (car), *ruca* (girlfriend), *birlotear* (to dance), *refinar* (to eat), *chale* (no, shut up), *carnal/carnala* (close [Mexican American] friend, soul brother), *vato* (guy, dude), (*la*) *raza* (Mexican Americans; e.g., *ahí va pura raza* for "only Mexican Americans go there"), and *a(h)í te huacho/nos huachamos* (see you later).

Scholarship on Mexican American Spanish

The bibliography on Mexican American Spanish is vast, spanning more than a century of published research from all across the United States and representing more publications than all of the other U.S. Spanish varieties combined. It is impossible to do justice to this enormous quantity of scholarship within the confines of a single chapter. Many important studies are cited throughout this chapter, as well as in chapter 1. The following section will trace some of the historical research milestones, will mention some of the more contemporary lines of investigation, and will highlight some panoramic presentations. The selection is admittedly personal but is hopefully representative of work already done and suggestive of future research topics.

From the earliest studies of Mexican American or "Chicano" Spanish and continuing through the final decades of the twentieth century, attention focused almost exclusively on deviations from cosmopolitan Spanish usage, on rustic or archaic forms carried over from rural Mexican dialects, on English borrowings and loan-translations, and in some cases on objectively measurable losses of competence in Spanish as language shifts in the direction of English occur. This is not unexpected given that the aim of most traditional dialectological studies has been to highlight unique or noteworthy features of a particular variety, especially elements felt to be quaint, rustic, or archaic, rather than stressing the potentially much larger common ground shared by other dialects of the language. In the case of Mexican American Spanish, however, the combined impact of the published literature has often been taken to imply a Spanish dialect that is both (1) internally quite homogeneous and (2) characterized by a very high degree of archaic, rustic, nonstandard, and even ungrammatical elements. In reality, Mexican American Spanish is a continuum of idiolects and sociolects that span the entire spectrum from a weak second language of third-generation speakers to full fluency and expressive potential at the level of educated native speakers. Moreover, the proportion of archaic or nonstandard elements is often quite low, except for in

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