

SOCIOLINGUISTIC CONSIDERATIONS

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It is estimated that over 375 million people in the world speak Spanish today, ranking it second among the world's most widely spoken languages. Spanish is spoken in Spain, Spanish Morocco, Equatorial Guinea, the Philippines, in Latin America, and in the United States. According to Santiago de Mora, Director of the Instituto Cervantes, by the year 2010 there will be 400 million Spanish speakers in the world. With the projection that the population of Latin America is about to double early in the next century, Spanish may well become the most widely spoken language in the world. Currently, Spanish is one of the official languages of the United Nations, UNESCO, and the European Community.

Like all languages, Spanish varies widely across the regions of the world where it is spoken. For example, the Spanish spoken by over 40 million speakers in Spain is far from homogeneous. People in the central region of Spain speak the language with characteristics that are quite different from speakers from Andalusia or other parts of the country. We all know the primary characteristics of this "español centro-norteño" to include the "o" and an "s" and "x" that are different from other places where Spanish is spoken. In Andalusia, one of the noticeable features of the speech of the region is the aspiration of "s" at the end of a syllable, a trait that they would share with many speakers of Spanish in Latin America, particularly the Caribbean. Everyone knows that an "andaluz" will sound different from a "madrileño," and that a Colombian speaker of Spanish will sound different from an Argentinean and/or a Puerto Rican. Nevertheless, native speakers of Spanish would have little difficulty understanding each other in spite of differences in vocabulary choice and pronunciation.

Spanish is not the only language spoken in Spain, a country that has always had a multi-lingual tradition. There are two other Romance languages (Catalan and Galician) spoken there as well. Additionally, Basque (Vascuense) is spoken by over 600,000 people. Basque or *euskera*, however,

is not a Romance language, and its origin as one of the oldest European languages has not been traced by linguists thus far. Catalan, resembling French, is spoken primarily in the northeast region of Spain and enjoys a rich and prestigious literary tradition. Presently, it has more than 7 million speakers, including those who also speak it in Valencia, the Balearic Islands, and Andorra. Galician, spoken in northwest Spain, resembles Portuguese and like Catalan also has a rich cultural and literary tradition. After the death of the dictator Francisco Franco in 1975 and with the restoration of democracy in Spain, the Spanish Constitution of 1978 declared that Basque, Catalan, and Galician would enjoy official status along with Spanish.

SPANISH IN THE NEW WORLD

Near the end of the 15th century, Spanish was introduced to the New World by Christopher Columbus and subsequent explorers and colonizers. Numerous Spanish expeditions reached from Tierra del Fuego to the San Juan Islands in the Northwest to Penobscot Bay in Maine and even Newfoundland in the Northeast. David Weber, in his book *The Spanish Frontier in North America*, tells us that the French explorer Jacques Cartier reported that, upon exploring the coasts of Newfoundland, he and his men were greeted by the indigenous people there with the only European words they knew, "*acá nada*," evidence that the Spanish had already explored those far northern territories and found none of the gold and precious minerals they were seeking (Weber, 1992, p.3). As the Spaniards moved across North and South America, their language and culture became a part of the people and territories that they explored and colonized. The language evolved in multiple ways across the north and south hemispheres as it came into contact with the multiple indigenous languages used in the vast geographical extensions in the Americas. The Spanish language has been greatly enriched by the contributions made by the numerous indigenous languages as it incorporated words for the new flora, fauna, objects, peoples, cultures, and meteorological phenomena that the Spanish encountered (Lipski, 1994, p. 63).

The first documented contribution, *canoe*, came from *arahuaco* and appears in a letter from Cristóbal Colón to a Luis de Santángel sometime in October of 1492. The word *canoe* is also found in Colón's *Diario* in his entry of the 26th of October, 1492. Antonio de Nebrija includes this word in his dictionary of the Spanish language written in 1493. *Arahuaco*, a language that was spoken in the islands of the Caribbean, contributed other words to the Spanish lexicon. Among these are *iguana*, *comején*, *maíz*, *yuca*, *maní*, *tuna* (*fruto del nopal*), *ají*, *barbacoa*, *batata*, *huracán*, *sabana*, and *cacique*. Other indigenous languages added words as well, and the one that most contributed to Spanish was *náhuatl*, the language spoken by the Aztecs and still spoken by over half a million people in Mexico today. Some of the contributions from *náhuatl* include *tiza*, *hule*, *petaca*, *coyote*, *sinsonte*, *guajolote*, *chocolate*, *cacao*, *chicle*, *tomate*, *aguacate*, *cacahuate*, *tamal*, *jícara*, *camote*, *elote*, *nopal*, *guacamole*, and *cuate*. From

quechua, the language of the ancient Inca people in the Andean region of South America and still spoken today by over seven million people, Spanish received such words as *carpa*, *cancha*, *pampa*, *guano*, *papa*, *choclo*, *coca*, *llama*, *alpaca*, and *cóndor*. Other languages like *guaraní*, *aymara*, and *araucano*, spoken in South America, contributed such words as *chinchilla*, *jaguar*, *piraña*, *tapioca*, *ananás*, and *petunia*.

Differences in pronunciation and vocabulary exist in all the world's languages, and Spanish is no exception. For example, the letter "ll" in the Spanish of Buenos Aires may be pronounced like the "s" in the English word "measure" or the "sh" of "shoot." In some Andean regions of Bolivia and Ecuador it may be pronounced like the "ll" in the English word "million." In other parts of Latin America it may be pronounced like the "j" in the word "jet." As for vocabulary, an everyday word like "bus" can be referred to in the following ways: *camión* (Mexico); *ómnibus* (Argentina); *guagua* (Canary Islands, Cuba, Puerto Rico); *micro* (Chile and Perú); *colectivo* (Bolivia); *bus* (used in many countries). Words like *guagua* and *camión* have other meanings in other Spanish-speaking countries. For example, *camión* is more commonly used to refer to *truck*, and *guagua* is the word for a *baby* in Chile. Nevertheless, while salient and indicative of a certain speaker's origin, differences in pronunciation and vocabulary are never so great as to cause a total lack of comprehension among speakers from various regions of the Spanish-speaking world.

In the United States, according to some estimates, there are approximately 28 million speakers of Spanish. It is very common to see signs and billboards in Spanish in cities like New York, Los Angeles, and Miami. In Spanish-speaking areas of the larger cities of the U.S., it is not uncommon to hear more Spanish than English. Such is the case in a city like Miami, where more than half the population is Hispanic and where bilingualism, in general, is viewed as an asset, in part because of the city's proximity to Latin America. A similar situation exists in Los Angeles, which after Mexico City is the largest Spanish-speaking city in the world.

The Hispanic population in the U.S. ranks as the fifth largest in the world. Table 2.1 compares the U.S. Spanish-speaking population to the four countries that surpass it.

TABLE 2.1 POPULATION COMPARISONS

Country	Population in Millions
Mexico	94.7
Spain	40.2
Colombia	35.5
Argentina	35.0
United States	27.2

TABLE 2.2 ORIGINS OF SPANISH-SPEAKING POPULATION IN THE UNITED STATES

Mexico	17,481,700	64.2%
Central and South America	3,948,400	14.5%
Puerto Rico	2,859,100	10.5%
Cuba	1,307,000	4.8%
Other	1,633,800	6.0%
Total	27,230,000	

When we talk about Spanish in the United States, we cannot speak of one homogeneous variety; rather, it reflects the varieties of the language of the origin of the people who speak it. Thus, the Spanish spoken in the United States is an extension of the Spanish spoken all over the world. The four primary Hispanic groups are the Mexican Americans (Chicanos), Puerto Ricans, Cubans, and Central Americans. Because of political instability, economic or other reasons, immigration from Latin America, whether legal or illegal, is not likely to subside. Table 2.2 reflects the origin of the Spanish-speaking population in the United States.

SPEECH BEHAVIOR OF U.S. SPANISH SPEAKERS

In order to talk about Hispanic heritage language learners in the United States, one needs to begin by discussing some of the characteristics of the speech behavior of the Spanish-speaking population in the U.S. In the last two decades, the topic of Spanish in the United States has received much attention. Among the collections, which include studies addressing a variety of sociolinguistic questions, we find those of Silva-Corvalán; Roca and Jensen; Roca and Lipski; Klee and Ramos-García; Bergen; Elías-Olivares and Amastae; and Elías-Olivares, Leone, Cisneros, and Gutiérrez.

One of the first terms that is useful in understanding the speech behavior of this group is *dialect*. Dialect can be used to refer to a specific social or geographical variety of a language that is not the “standard” one. For many, including an astounding number of teachers, this term carries a negative connotation, suggesting a speech variety that is substandard or even defective. Wolfram and Christian (1989, p. 2) point out that some people prefer to use terms like *language variety*, *language differences*, and *linguistic diversity* to convey the technical meaning in order to avoid the misinterpretations resulting from different uses of the word *dialect*. Technically, the term refers to any given variety of a language shared by a group of speakers. Everyone speaks a dialect, even persons who use the educated standard variety of a language. It is important to remember that all

dialects are equal, just as languages are. A standard variety's status has nothing to do with its intrinsic worth.

Another concept closely tied to the use of the term *dialect* is *language attitudes*. These are views held by people about the way others may speak a certain language. For example, the issue of whether "r" is pronounced or not in English is a good example of the arbitrariness of the linguistic features which attract attention. There is nothing intrinsically good or bad about "r" pronouncing. Yet, as Holmes (1992, p. 344) puts it, some communities regard it as an example of "good" English while others view it as humorous, rustic, and as evidence of a lack of education. Ultimately, attitudes to languages and dialects reflect attitudes to the users and the uses of those languages and dialects, and the link can often result in social prejudice.

While linguists are deliberately nonjudgmental in viewing languages and dialects, there is no point in denying that some regional dialects are seen as having more *prestige* (or higher social status) than others, as Wolfson (1989, p. 3) indicates. Clearly, some regional dialects enjoy greater prestige than others, and within each region greater prestige is attached to the speech habits of the upper socioeconomic groups than to those of the lower ones. Some speakers of non-prestige varieties will make a conscious effort to change their speech patterns in order to disguise what they associate with lower status or what sociolinguists refer to as *stigmatized features*.

Heritage speakers of Spanish are usually bilingual. We are using the definition of bilingualism that is most commonly used by researchers in this area and one that is the most liberal definition possible (i.e., anyone who has some competency in at least one skill in a second language is considered to be bilingual). The skills in the second language can range from minimal understanding or reading ability all the way to native competence in the second language. In the case of heritage language learners, many may have difficulty reading and writing Spanish, but they speak and understand the language. Thus, by this definition, they would be considered bilingual. It is important, then, to understand the use and functions of English and Spanish among heritage learners.

Because heritage speakers are bilingual, they are part of what in sociolinguistic terms are known as *diglossic communities*. A diglossic situation exists in a society when it has two distinct codes that show clear functional separation; that is, one is employed for one set of circumstances and the other for an entirely different set. This means that while one language is used for all formal or what are termed high functions, the other is used in all informal or low functions (Wardhaugh, 1986, pp. 87-88). In the case of the United States, English is generally considered appropriate for formal exchanges (political rallies, business meetings, announcements, sermons, lectures, etc.), and Spanish is used in informal situations such as within the home and among other members of the speech community. As a result, heritage speakers will seldom have the opportunity to hear Spanish used for the high or formal functions, as Valdés (1992, p. 67) has pointed out. Thus (except for radio and television, where available), they have no models for this register of the language and will not develop this level of Spanish.

Certain social factors are extremely important in determining the language chosen by bilinguals in their daily interaction with others both within and outside of speech community. One such factor known to affect language choice is the setting where the interaction takes place. A number of settings have been identified in describing the language choice of bilingual speech communities and are referred to as domains of language use (Fishman, 22). Five common domains that can be identified in most communities are: 1) family, 2) friendship, 3) religion, 4) education, and 5) employment. It is possible to use the notion of domains to describe the way heritage speakers select either English or Spanish in different situations and can be useful in capturing broad generalizations about the language choice of any speech community. For example, for heritage speakers of Spanish in the United States we might propose the following:

Domain	Variety/Code
Family	Spanish
Friendship	Spanish
Religion	English
Education	English
Employment	English

While this is an oversimplification of the complexity of bilingual interaction, a model such as this can be useful in describing which domains and varieties are relevant in language choice among heritage speakers of Spanish in the U.S.

Because heritage speakers here live in a society where Spanish is not the dominant language, one is often able to detect the influence or presence of English when they speak Spanish. This influence can manifest itself in numerous ways, and Valdés (1988, p. 121) identifies the most common as *semantic extension*, *borrowing*, and *code-switching*.

By *semantic extension* we mean that a Spanish word can take on certain meanings conveyed by its English cognate. For example, the word "aplicar" in both Spanish and English can mean "to apply" as one would an ointment or a lotion. In English it can also mean "to seek employment" where standard Spanish would use the word "solicitar empleo." Because of the contact with English, the word "aplicar" among heritage speakers of Spanish has taken on the meaning of "to seek employment" like its English cognate.

Borrowing is another common feature of the Spanish used among heritage speakers. All languages frequently borrow words from other languages, and over time they become so widely used that they are incorporated into the language that borrows them. For example, the English word "stress" has been borrowed by Spanish, and in the process we can see how the new Spanish word "*estrés*" has been integrated into the phonological and morphological system of Spanish. Over time, many of these borrowings are accepted officially by la Real Academia de la Lengua Española. Other borrowings, while

frequently used, may never enjoy this official status. An example of this is the English verb "to watch" which becomes the Spanish verb "*wachar*," a regular *-ar* verb which in turn can be conjugated in any of the many Spanish verb tenses (e.g., *wachaste*, *wachase*, *había wachado*, etc.). There are numerous examples of this phenomenon, and, again, because English is so dominant in this society, it is much more frequent among speakers of Spanish in the U.S.

The third feature of the language use of heritage speakers involves *code-switching*; i.e., a switch from one language to the other in the midst of a conversation or utterance. Code-switching is a complex procedure that has many underlying social functions. A speaker may switch to another language as a signal of group membership or shared ethnicity with the person with whom they are speaking. Holmes (1992, p. 42) points out that even speakers who are not very proficient in the second language may use brief phrases and words for this purpose and illustrates this in the following way:

SPEAKER A: Well I'm glad to meet you.

SPEAKER B: *Ándale pues*, and do come again.

Here Speaker B uses Spanish to signal a shared ethnic background and a future relationship. The use of "*ándale pues*" serves as a solidarity marker between two minority ethnic group members whose previous conversation had taken place completely in English. Valdés (1988, p. 125) points out that "code-switching is different from borrowing in that each switch into Spanish or English consists of unchanged Spanish or English words, and these words are pronounced by the speakers as a native speaker of the language would pronounce them" and uses the following examples to contrast the two processes:

SPEAKER A: Estábamos *janguinando* allí en la esquina.

SPEAKER B: No tengo tiempo ni para estar *hanging out* con los amigos.

We can see that with Speaker A, the English verb "to hang" has been incorporated into the morphological and phonological system of Spanish, while with Speaker B there is a clean switch to the English idiom "hang out." Code-switching is an extremely complex linguistic phenomena, and, while there are instances when speakers may shift to English because of a lexical need, there are many other situations when the speaker may switch in order to convey important personal and social information (Valdés, 1988, p. 128).

It is important that instructors who teach Spanish to U.S. Hispanic bilinguals recognize that their attitudes can have a significant impact on how students view their language abilities in Spanish, and by extension, their culture, their heritage, and themselves. To stigmatize our students or to make them feel that their language is inferior is pedagogically unsound.

A healthier approach entails allowing students first to appreciate what they are already able to do with Spanish. After all, many of these students get along perfectly well speaking and understanding the Spanish spoken in their own bilingual communities. Our job as instructors should not be to "fix" their "broken" Spanish, but to expand their linguistic repertoires; learn to use

more formal varieties of Spanish; learn to interact with people in a fashion more appropriate for a business environment; learn to make oral and written presentations that are at a professional level, and communicate more effectively with a wider pool of individuals from the Spanish-speaking world. In other words, students would expand their vocabularies, their registers, their styles. Thus, students will be better equipped to function well in a monolingual Spanish environment and to have at their commands more formal registers of Spanish useful in business, academic, and other professional settings.

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