New Immigrants in the United States
Readings for Second Language Educators

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John M. Lipski

Introduction: Central Americans in the United States

Latin American immigration to the United States is certainly not a new phenomenon, but the geographical areas of Hispanoamerica that are represented by the migratory trends have shifted over time, although always set against the constant background of immigration from Mexico. The major population shifts have come from Puerto Rico and Cuba, respectively, but in the 1980s and 1990s the immigration from Central America gave every indication of eventually attaining the same proportions as the Caribbean groups (Jamail & Stolp, 1985; Peñalosa, 1983; Wallace, 1989). Economic reasons were the original motivating factor, but political pressures in the convulsed Central American region played an ever more important role in stimulating the northward migration of economically stable family units, particularly during the 1970s and 1980s. Since Central America and the United States share no common border and since many families arrive by air or by sea, immigrants have a greater tendency to settle in geographically delimited population clusters, which then form centripetal nuclei attracting further immigration. Like their fellow Latin Americans, Central American immigrants commonly settle in cities with large Spanish-speaking populations; this follows both from the geographical location of such cities, which usually represent the southern border of the United States or a major airline terminus, and from the desire to live in a minimally foreign environment. Although the Central Americans who have moved to established colonies at first interact principally with their compatriots, before long the inevitable contact with other Latino Americans and American-born Latinos takes place, with the resulting transculturation and expansion of social horizons of all groups involved. Traditionally (i.e., before the political turmoil of the past three decades), the majority of Central Americans immigrating to the United States represented the professional classes, those with funds to travel and establish themselves in the United States. The lower middle classes have also come in large numbers, particularly to the major cities, whereas members of the lower working classes, particularly from rural regions of Central America, were not as frequently represented. As a result of the
Salvadoreans in the United States

Demographics and history of migration

Beginning around 1979 and ending with the peace accords of 1992, El Salvador underwent one of the most bloody, prolonged civil wars in the history of Central America. During the worst of the violence, wealthy Salvadorans fled the likely possibility of death or injury and loss of their property; middle-class citizens fled to establish small businesses in other nations rather than risk certain ruin in El Salvador. Left-leaning intellectuals and professionals fled to avoid falling into the hands of the police intelligence system, aided by a program of anonymous denunciations and death squads, which cast a pall of uncertainty and fear over large segments of the citizenry. Peasants fled the country following destruction of their villages by Vietnam-style scorched-earth tactics after having had home and family destroyed by confrontations between military forces and guerrillas or after having failed to find a safe haven in neighboring areas of Honduras and Guatemala. Tens of thousands of these Salvadoreans ended up in the United States. Although some Salvadoreans have returned to their home country or have been deported since the end of the political violence, the majority of those who arrived in the United States during the 1980s still reside there. As a result, the cross-section of Salvadoreans emigrés is very broad, as is the political spectrum, ranging from fierce right wing to revolutionary left wing and passing through a neutralist or isolationist desire for peace at any price. Salvadoreans have made their presence felt as a social force, a refugee group to be dealt with, a political-action current that must be handled cautiously by government agencies, and a further source of Latino identity in the United States. At present, an undetermined but large number of Salvadoreans are in the United States under questionable circumstances; immigration has dwindled from the huge influx during the 1980s, but small numbers of Salvadoreans continue to enter the United States, both legally and illegally. Legislation (under the broad heading of immigration reform) that would mandate the forced repatriation of all illegal Central Americans in the United States has been temporarily put on hold at this writing, but the political future of Salvadoreans and other Central Americans in the United States remains in jeopardy. Currently, the largest Salvadoran communities in the United States are found in Houston (Lipski, 1986a, 1989), Los Angeles (Penalosa, 1984), San Francisco (Saragana, 1995), Miami, and Washington, DC (Jones, 1994), with smaller groups scattered throughout the country, particularly in large cities with significant Spanish-speaking populations.
The linguistic situation of Central Americans

fore the outbreak of civil war, considering the small size and relative distance of that country. Some 73,000 Salvadorans appeared in the 1980 U.S. census (a small fraction of the total population residing in the United States), nearly all of whom had migrated during the 1970s. However, not until the outbreak of civil conflict in the late 1970s did Salvadoran emigration reach staggering proportions. In 1980, the total population of El Salvador was approximately five million inhabitants; in 1980–1981 alone, more than 300,000 Salvadorans, or 6% of the total population, left the country. The trends were similar for most of the 1980s, so that by the end of the period, a third or more of all Salvadoreans were living outside the country.

By the middle of the 1980s, some 500,000 Salvadorans had been internally displaced, and as many as 750,000 had fled the country (Ferris, 1987, p. 22); this figure represents well over 20% of the national population. Some took refuge in Guatemala (100,000), Nicaragua (21,000), Honduras (30,000), Costa Rica (23,500), Belize (2,000), and especially Mexico (150,000–250,000), and still others made the longer trek to the United States (Ferris, 1987, p. 35; see also Montes, 1986, pp. 56–57; More, 1991). By the middle of the 1980s, as many as 850,000 Salvadorans lived in the United States (Ferris, 1987, p. 121; Aguayo & Weiss Fagen, 1988, p. 58). The emigration can be broken down roughly as follows, using the time period 1941–1987 as representative of Salvadoran emigration to the United States (Montes Mozó & García Vázquez, 1988, p. 9):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time period</th>
<th>Emigrants to the United States (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1941–1976</td>
<td>16.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977–1978</td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1979–1981</td>
<td>28.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1982–1987</td>
<td>48.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the period 1941–1981, some 34% of the Salvadoran emigrants had entered the United States legally, 46% were undocumented, and 20% were attempting to obtain legal immigrant status. (Montes Mozó & García Vázquez, 1988, p. 9). In the period 1982–1987, only 16% entered the country legally, 66% were undocumented, and 18% were applying for legal residence. Some more recent census figures for the Salvadoran population in the United States suggest that the numbers decreased following peace initiatives in El Salvador and the remainder of Central America, but given the undocumented status of most Salvadorans in the United States, the new numbers must be regarded cautiously. The 1990 U.S. census (Funkhouser, 1995, p. 29) shows the following breakdown of known Salvadoran immigrants by state (including some but not all those who entered the country illegally):
grants, but only 20% among displaced persons. A study carried out among Salvadoran immigrants in the United States gave similar results. Peasant farmers represented 12% of the reported immigrant population (9% among voluntary immigrants and 20% among displaced persons). According to Mones (1987, p. 84) breakdown of other occupations (as reported by family members remaining in El Salvador) was as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Profession</th>
<th>Voluntary (%)</th>
<th>Displaced (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laborer</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>9.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subordinate</td>
<td>25.5</td>
<td>9.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small business operator</td>
<td>13.1</td>
<td>8.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mechanical tradesperson</td>
<td>15.9</td>
<td>12.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic service worker</td>
<td>18.6</td>
<td>28.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farm laborer</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>19.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>8.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The figures are highly skewed according to gender. For example, domestic service represented 13% of the male immigrants but 33% of the females. Among laborers, 40.1% were male and 17.6% female. Educational levels varied widely, from illiterate rural residents to urban residents with the equivalent of a high school education. Taken as a group, the educational level of displaced Salvadorans ranged from 6 to 8 years (Mones, 1987 pp. 86-87; see also Suárez-Orozco, 1989, pp. 85-84).

The preceding data are quite limited as a result of the precarious situation of the Salvadoran community in the United States, the lack of visible background studies that may be used as a point of reference, and the constantly evolving nature of the political situation in El Salvador (Cahill, 1985; Peterson, 1986; Speed, 1992). Nonetheless, as is evident from the preceding remarks, the Salvadoran community in the United States is demographically and socially significant, particularly as more members acquire legal immigration status, learn English, become socially and economically more mobile, and begin to participate fully in the life of the United States outside limited Latino American neighborhoods.

**Linguistic particulars**

Salvadoran Spanish pronunciation shares with other Central American dialects the weak pronunciation of intervocalic /l/ and the velarization of word-final /l/ (i.e., pronounced as the -ng in English song). Most Salvadorans, particularly from urban and rural working classes, strongly aspirate not only word-final /l/ but also word-initial /l/ (as in la [la] (hemina, El [el] Salvador), in this distinguishing themselves from other Central
Americans except for some Hondurans (Lipski, 1983, 1985, 1986b). This trait alone, together with a tendency for many rural speakers to pronounce it as interdent (Lit like English th in thick) and to speak nasally, makes colloquial working-class Salvadoran speech difficult for speakers of non-Central American varieties to understand. Like other Central Americans, Salvadorans use the familiar second-person pronoun vos and its accompanying verb forms to the nearly total exclusion of ti. Combinations with hasta are used to signal the beginning of an event: ¿Has to the vnos el jef? (When will the boss arrive?). Salvadoran Spanish exhibits a construction also found at times in Guatemala, the combination indefinte article + possessive adjective + noun: una mi amiga (a friend of mine; normally mi amiga). The tag vnos? (right, you know), probably derived from verdad, is often used to punctuate conversations.

Interaction with other varieties of Spanish

The largest Salvadoran communities in the United States are in contact with Mexican and Mexican American varieties of Spanish, and given the precarious situation of many Salvadorans (undocumented and fearful of arrest and deportation by immigration officials), Salvadorans sometimes attempt to attenuate strikingly Central American traits and even to imitate what are perceived to be Mexican features. On a personal level, Salvadorans of all socioeconomic groups feel no negative emotions toward Mexicans or Mexican Americans but rather regard them as fellow Latinos. Some Salvadorans note that Mexicans and particularly Mexican Americans adopt an attitude of superiority and even hostility toward (illegally entering) Central Americans; this situation is likely to increase as the new immigration laws widen the social divisions among Mexican Americans (U.S. citizens), Mexican nationals who qualified for amnesty under the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act and who are already perceived by many Mexican Americans as undesirable competition for scarce jobs, and new arrivals, i.e., Mexicans and Central Americans who do not qualify for amnesty. At the same time, Salvadorans aspiring to acceptance in European American society are quick to perceive the stigma attached to being Mexican and spare no attempt to highlight the differences that separate Mexicans and Salvadorans. This has created considerable ambivalence among Salvadoran laborers who are working under illegal conditions; although many Mexicans in the southwestern United States work under similar conditions, the presence of Mexican workers is in itself not sufficient to trigger migratory investigations or raids (since Immigration and Naturalization Service officers in the Southwest often accept the de facto presence of illegal Mexican workers and intervene only randomly and sporadically), whereas a Central American may be singled out for presentation of documents and declarations of citizenship or migratory status. Therefore, most Salvadoran laborers, while trying to maintain their cultural identity as Salvadorans, try to fade into the background of the Mexican and Mexican American labor force in the hope that the current will carry them along; such is usually the case. The questions of identification and differences vis-à-vis Mexicans are strongly felt in language usage. Salvadoran Spanish differs in several major respects from the dialects of Mexican Spanish most commonly heard in the United States. Numerous differences exist in the lexical dimension as well as in the countless idiomatic expressions peculiar to each group. In the syntactic dimension, Salvadorans share many of the peculiarities of Central Americans, whereas on a phonological level Salvadoran Spanish exhibits striking differences from the most common Mexican speech patterns. In reality, most Salvadorans' attempts at masking their regional origins or mimicking Mexican Spanish are only marginally successful. The most consistent strategy is avoidance of vos and obviously regional expressions. Few Salvadorans can or will modify their pronunciation.

Domains of language use

The vast majority of Salvadorans in the United States come from the poorest rural regions of El Salvador. Many are illiterate, and virtually none knew English before arriving in the United States (Nackseth, 1993, p. 211). Precariously found employment in work sites staffed by other undocumented Spanish speakers and excluded through fear or by law from access to adult education programs, few Salvadoran adults have moved beyond the pale of Spanish-speaking neighborhoods. Most have acquired the rudiments of English, which allow them to conduct basic transactions in English, but at work and at home the Salvadoran community continues to be overwhelmingly Spanish speaking. With the coming of amnesty programs, a greater number of Salvadoran children are attending school, usually in bilingual education programs.

Educational needs

When Salvadorans first began arriving in the United States in large numbers, most were from rural regions and possessed little or no literacy in Spanish and no abilities in English. Given the undocumented status of the majority of refugees, many were reluctant to place their children in U.S. schools for fear of deportation. As Salvadorans discovered that most school systems accepted children without documentation of immigration status, larger numbers of Salvadoran children entered the U.S.
school system (Saragoza, 1995). These numbers increased even more after the amnesty of 1986, and even though many Salvadorans were excluded from amnesty or political asylum, today most young Salvadoreans in the United States are receiving public education. Since the originally arriving Salvadorans spoke little or no English, the children were normally placed in transitional bilingual education classes, often surrounded by a cohort of Mexican children. Salvadoran children were at a disadvantage for several reasons. First, their predominantly rural upbringing in contrast to the increasingly urban origin of recent Mexican immigrants meant that they were less familiar with any aspect of formal schooling; many were behind the grade level of their Mexican classmates. Furthermore, available bilingual education materials focused primarily on Mexican (or occasionally Caribbean) dialects of Spanish, particularly in vocabulary. Salvadoran children were at times alienated by these materials, and at other times they simply could not understand the items in question. Mexicans' náu (let's go), palote (kite), quiere (blond, fair-skinned), chamacote and huero (child), lani (money), and papote (soda straw), are as unknown to Salvadorans as the latter's puquina (corn pancake filled with cheese or meat), chiles (blonde), chucho (dog), pisto (money), pisca (kite), chipe (child), and caldo (sandals) are to Mexicans. Small Salvadoran children unaccustomed to verb forms associated with the pronoun tú did not always make the transition from ser tiene to tienses (sit down), sos to sos (you are), and so forth. Few bilingual teachers were familiar with Central American dialects, and not all reacted favorably to the unexpected words and pronunciation. Although there is little hard evidence of specific educational differences occasioned by culture and dialect clash, anecdotal accounts suggest that matters were not always easy. Teachers who did not obtain the rapid acknowledgment that they expected sometimes attributed the children's silence as shyness or even cognitive disorders. At this writing there are no comprehensive accounts of Spanish dialect differences appropriate for bilingual education teachers, but as the number of non-English-speaking Salvadorans entering the U.S. school system diminishes, group-specific educational problems are also on the decline. Finally, and perhaps most important for school achievement, many Salvadoran children arriving in the 1980s had personally witnessed political terror, torture, and murder in their homeland and had been traumatized to the point where academic success was an unattainable goal (Acroyo & Est, 1981). A number of students had been forced to leave school in El Salvador because of the fear of violence and death, which further hindered their entry into the U.S. school system. Currently, the number of Salvadoran children in U.S. schools who have personally experienced political violence has been significantly reduced, and their situation is falling into line with that of economic immi-

The linguistic situation of Central Americans migrants who have not lived under the shadow of terror in their homeland.

Nicaraguans in the United States

Demographics and history of migration

Nicaraguans have been present in the United States in small numbers since the early 1960s, but no large groups of Nicaraguans were to be found until the beginning of the Sandinista insurrection against the Somoza regime began in the mid-1970s. The rebels used the name of Agustín César Sandino, a Nicaraguan patriot who had died while leading a resistance to the occupation of Nicaragua by the U.S. Marines in the 1930s. Sandino's capture and death was followed by the installation of Anastasio Somoza, a military officer with close ties to the U.S. occupation forces. Four decades of dictatorial Somoza rule ensued, including rule by the father, two sons (Luis and Anastasio Jr.), a grandson in training (Anastasio III), and interim puppet presidents. This situation created the inevitable exile population, but most were found in Mexico or neighboring Central American countries. When the Sandinista armed insurrection began to gather force in 1978, the increasing death toll, political repression, guerrilla warfare in both urban and rural areas, shortages and blackouts, and a general climate of insecurity prompted many Nicaraguans with the means at their disposal to leave the country temporarily or at least to send their children abroad. The United States was a favored safe haven for those who could afford it, since other Central American countries had problems of their own. Honduras openly supported the Somoza government, Costa Rica increasingly favored the Sandinistas, and El Salvador and Guatemala were rapidly sliding down the path to civil wars of their own.

With the abdication of Somoza and the triumph of the Sandinista Revolution in July 1979, political violence temporarily stopped. However, the rapid social changes that accompanied the Sandinistas' rise to power provoked an almost immediate exodus of the wealthiest elements of Nicaraguan society, at least some of whom had actively contributed to the prosperity of the Somoza regimes and others who simply because of their socioeconomic status in this poor nation were regarded with suspicion and hostility by revolutionary supporters. Almost immediately after the Sandinista takeover, a counterrevolutionary movement was formed, spearheaded by former members of the Somoza National Guard and supported financially by Nicaraguans whose fortunes had diminished by the transition from Somocismo to Sandinismo; the U.S. government also provided crucial economic and logistical support.
through both public and clandestine channels. The contras began an active military campaign against the Sandinista regime, which in practice affected virtually all residents of the country. As a result of the intensified contra activity, together with the increasing Sandinista interference in all aspects of Nicaragua's life, the Nicaraguan exodus grew from a trickle to a torrent. Large numbers of Nicaraguans moved to the United States, especially Miami and Los Angeles, where they established small businesses or found other employment. Assuming at that time that return to Nicaragua would be imminent, the day felt the reality of exile, as matters in Nicaragua went from bad to worse. Stable Nicaraguan communities in the United States took shape, with an internal structure that duplicated patterns found in the home country. Particularly in Miami, the climate was favorable for educated, middle-class refugees from a leftist revolutionary government that also openly embraced Communist Cuban support. This is not to suggest that all exiled Cubans in Miami welcomed Nicaraguans with open arms, since both groups were often placed in competition for scarce resources, but the fact that they shared a common enemy served to smooth over many differences.

In response to international calls for elections, the Sandinistas held elections in 1984, which confirmed Sandinista rule. Although foreign observers reported no extraordinary irregularities, these elections were rejected both by the Nicaraguan opposition and, more importantly, for the future of the country, by the U.S. government. A new round of elections, with rigorous supervision by invited observers as well as opportunity for the diffusion of opposition views, was scheduled for 1990. Much to the surprise of even the most anti-Sandinista hopes, the presidency was won by the candidate of an opposition coalition, Violeta Barrios de Chamorro. Although Chamorro had openly aligned herself with the political wing of the contra movements, headed by ex-Somoza National Guard officers, she was clearly not in favor of a return to Somoism, since her husband, Pedro Joaquín Chamorro, a popular newspaper editor, had been assassinated in the later years of the last Somoza regime.

The Nicaraguan community in exile was jubilant over Chamorro's election, but, perhaps predictably, this event did not spur a large-scale, permanent return of expatriates. Many Nicaraguans had lived in the United States for 5-10 years, had established successful businesses, were living in comfortable and safe neighborhoods, had children in American schools, and were little inclined to return to a chaotic post-civil war environment in which economic fragility and political uncertainty were the order of the day. Return migration was slow, and Nicaragua has not experienced the torrent of returning immigrants that the number of displaced persons during the Sandinista period would suggest (Ortega, 1991). Within the country, the return of displaced persons to their origi
are, a trait that has earned them the reputation of being overly familiar, or confianzudo. Among typically Nicaraguan words are the interjections idio and chocho, the use of chocho for dog (the word means light switch to Cubans), chusalo and chuchico for small child, chunchic for unidentified or unimportant objects, realde for money, mate for male friend, chele for blond, fair-skinned individuals, and numerous foods, including gallo pinto (dish of red beans and rice), panol and pinolillo (drinks made of cacao and toasted corn) and aguacón (dish made of yucca and pork rinds).

Interaction with other varieties of Spanish

In Miami, Nicaraguan Spanish comes into contact with Cuban Spanish on a daily basis. Cuban Spanish, representing a variety of registers, generations, and degrees of bilingualism with English, defines the norms of Miami Spanish language broadcasting and journalism and is the de facto lingua franca in most parts of the city. It is nearly impossible for a Spanish speaker in Miami, particularly one who relies on Spanish more heavily than English, to avoid contact with Cuban Spanish, regardless of individual attitudes toward Cubans and their language. Less frequently, depending on personal circumstances, Nicaraguans, in South Florida, encounter other Spanish dialects, with Salvadoran, Colombian (of several regions), and Puerto Rican being the most common.

Virtually all Nicaraguans living in the greater Miami area have definite opinions and attitudes regarding Cuban Spanish, Nicaraguan Spanish, and the interface between the two. Those Cubans who are familiar with Nicaraguans and their speech have equally well-defined opinions. In a survey I conducted in 1991, a majority of middle-class Nicaraguans in Miami over the age of about 20 expressed at least some negative sentiments toward Cuban Spanish. Frequently, these feelings were vague and not associated with particular linguistic characteristics; they reflected cultural differences and perhaps concealed some resentment at the obviously dominant position enjoyed by Cubans in South Florida. Typeseal of these nonspecific negative comments (by no means characteristic of the entire Nicaraguan community) were the fact that Cubans speak "too loud," "too fast," "too nasty," and so forth. These are precisely the same unsubstantiated criticisms that neighboring Central American countries level against Nicaraguans and are typical of xenophobic attitudes worldwide. As with all stereotypes, there is always a kernel of truth. Compared with the baseline Central American varieties of Spanish, Cuban Spanish in the more emotionally charged registers is objectively marked by greater international swings, often perceived as absolute differences in volume. In animated conversations, Cubans (particularly Cuban men) tend to prefer simultaneous participation,

Linguistic particulars

Like other Central American dialects, Nicaraguan Spanish gives a weak pronunciation to intervocalic /l/ and velarizes word-final /l/. Word-final /l/ is aspirated to a much higher degree than in other Central American varieties, approaching the levels found in Caribbean varieties of Spanish. Nicaraguans share with other Central Americans the use of vos as the informal pronoun. Nicaraguans of all social classes are much more inclined to profer vos to total strangers than other Central Americans
with each intervention taking place at a successively higher volume level, instead of a greater emphasis on turn taking, which prevails throughout Central America. To the ear unaccustomed to such energetic exchanges, a Cuban conversation can seem impossibly rapid, deafeningly loud, and incredibly rude.

Claims of "vulgar" talking normally involve certain key lexical items that are inoffensive and common in one dialect but carry a heavy negative connotation in the other. Cuban Spanish is noted for the very frequent use of coño, an originally obscene epithet still very common in Spain but rarely heard in Latin America outside of the Caribbean. Nicaraguans are aware that coño is a "bad" word and are sometimes surprised at the ease with which well-bred Cubans, including women and children, employ it. Even more shocking to the Nicaraguan ear is the uninhibited use of comepeida for food or gullible person.

On a more specific basis, many Nicaraguans criticize Cubans for an excessive use of Anglicisms, particularly loan translations and slightly adapted borrowings. At the time of the survey, the Nicaraguan community in Miami had not resided in a bilingual environment long enough for this type of subtle syntactic Anglicism to penetrate vernacular speech. Nicaraguan adolescents picked these combinations up naturally, through contact with Cuban friends and simply by existing in the Miami Hispanic environment. Older Nicaraguans are predictably dismayed when their children begin using constructions from other groups, particularly when in the parents' eyes the combinations are socially unacceptable.

Nicaraguans do not frequently comment on Cubans' pronunciation of Spanish except to note neutralization of preconsonantal t/ and l/ giving rise to forms such as pocpe instead of porque (because) and cala in place of carta (letter). Objectively, the change from l/ to t/ is rather infrequent in Cuban Spanish, compared, e.g., to Puerto Rican and even Dominican dialects. In Cuba, it is characteristic of the lower classes in the central and eastern provinces and was not widely found in the Cuban exile community until after the Mariel boatlift of 1980, in which large numbers of less educated, working-class or rural Cubans arrived in the United States.

Relatively few Cubans in Miami have close enough contact with Nicaraguans to have formed clear opinions regarding Nicaraguan Spanish. Among those Cubans who do mention specific features, the use of vos stands out as the most striking difference. Cubans' reaction to this distinctly non-Caribbean phenomenon range from "strange" to "incorrect." A few Cubans comment on Nicaraguans' weak pronunciation of intervocalic /y/, especially in contact with /l/ and /I/, which makes gallina (hen) sound like gania and sella (stamp) sound like sella; others comment on the frequency with which Nicaraguans use puer (pehr) [well], a trait of which Nicaraguans themselves are also aware. Among the more shocking differences is the use of jodo as a casual greeting among Nicaraguans of both sexes. To Cubans, use of this word in anything less than an insult would be unthinkable.

Nicaraguans are not exempt from feelings of linguistic insecurity, but the Nicaraguan community in the United States is less affected by such sentiments than other Central American groups are. A high level of education and a more comfortable socioeconomic status is probably the main contributing factor, aided by a certain smugness about being the bearers of a form of Spanish as yet unaffected by the overwhelming influence of English. Few Nicaraguans consciously alter their language when speaking to Cubans, and even fewer willingly adopt Cubanisms into their own speech. With regard to the characteristically Central American use of vos, a majority of Nicaraguans stated that they used such forms to Cubans who had attained a level of confianza which warranted such usage. A few confessed to employing tu so as to not shock or offend Cubans.

Nicaraguans in Los Angeles are primarily in contact with Mexican speakers of Spanish, together with smaller numbers of Salvadoran and Guatemalan speakers. To date there is no evidence of significant dialect clash between Nicaraguans and other Spanish speakers in the Los Angeles area, although individual incidents do occur.

Domains of language use

In U.S. cities with large Nicaraguan communities, the Nicaraguans tend to cluster in ethnically homogeneous neighborhoods. The largest such colony is in far western Miami, where entire subdivisions and shopping centers re-create a Nicaraguan lifestyle. A smaller neighborhood in central Miami also contains a high concentration of Nicaraguans. Those Nicaraguans coming from middle- or upper-class backdrops (a significant proportion of the total) learned some English before going to the United States; many of their children attended American schools in Nicaragua. In the United States, Nicaraguan children have been rapidly absorbed into the school systems, receiving bilingual education when necessary. There is a natural tendency for Nicaraguan children to cluster around other Spanish speakers, but the increasingly English-dominant young Nicaraguan population is broadening its social networks. Nicaraguans who arrived as adults live in neighborhoods and frequent stores and businesses where all linguistic interchanges take place in Spanish. Most Nicaraguans also work in Spanish-speaking businesses, preferably owned or staffed by other Nicaraguans. There is interaction with the wider English-speaking community, but, particular-
by in Miami, the combination of recent immigrant status and the over-
whelming presence of Spanish facilitates retention of Spanish as the
main language for all domains.

Educational needs
The majority of Nicaraguans entering the U.S. school system after the
immigration surge of the 1980s spoke little or no English and were
placed in bilingual education classes. Most had attended school in
Nicaragua and experienced little shock upon entering school. Linguistic
differences with respect to the prevailing Spanish dialects (Cuban in Mi-
ami, Mexican American in Los Angeles and most other cities) have been
noted, but anecdotal testimony suggests that few Nicaraguans experi-
enced educational difficulties due to dialect clash or the lack of bilingual
materials that reflected Nicaraguan usage. The relatively high average
educational level of their parents is one important factor in accounting
for this difference, and it is not irrelevant that most Nicaraguan children
have not been perceived as penniless refugees on whom educational re-
sources need be spent. The current generation of Nicaraguan Americans
entering the schools is proficient in English, and although some
Nicaraguan children continue to be placed in bilingual programs, immi-
gration from Nicaragua has diminished greatly. Nicaraguans from the
creole/English-speaking Caribbean coast tended to enter English lan-
guage programs, although the English spoken by these Nicaraguans
differed from U.S. usage. In Miami, where the majority of Atlantic Coast
Nicaraguans reside, local schools are accustomed to dealing with West
Indian students, and English-speaking Nicaraguan children have largely
been able to make a smooth transition to the U.S. educational system.
There is no information on the Miskito-Spanish bilinguals residing in
Texas; this population is marginal within Nicaragua and appears to
have slipped between the cracks of bilingual programs in Texas.

Guatemalans in the United States
Demographics and history of migration
The total Guatemalan population in the United States is not large, even
in comparison with other Central American communities. In some ar-
areas, however, significant groups of Guatemalans are concentrated, and
it is feasible to speak of pockets of Guatemalan Spanish in the United
States. These communities are typically formed of indigenous
Guatemalans speaking a variety of Mayan languages, and in some in-
stances these languages take precedence over Spanish, even in the Unit-
ed States. The largest Guatemalan community is located in Los Angeles.
A smaller and locally almost unknown group lives in rural southern
Florida (Miralles, 1986), where community members work in agriculture
alongside immigrants from Mexico and the Caribbean. Smaller
groups of Guatemalans are found in Houston (Hagan, 1990), New Or-
leans, the Pacific Northwest, and Washington, DC. An assessment of
Guatemalan Spanish in the United States, requires a focus on bilingual
indigenous communities, whose use of Spanish is often little studied and
receives little prestige either in Guatemala or abroad.
Guatemalans in the United States are mostly refugees from the desper-
ate political and economic situation that, though always difficult,
reached crisis proportions by the late 1970s. It is estimated that between
50,000 and 75,000 Guatemalans died as the result of political violence
between 1978 and 1985 alone; during the same period, the Guatemalan
army admits to having destroyed more than 440 villages (American
Friends Service Committee, 1988, p. 4). By the mid-1980s, some 80,000
Guatemalans lived in Los Angeles, with smaller groups in San Francis-
co, Chicago, Washington, DC, and Houston (Universidad para la Paz, 1987,
p. 172). In 1985, it was estimated that 220,000 recent immigrants from
Guatemala were living in the United States (Suárez-Orozco, 1989, p.
57), and by 1988, at least 200,000 known Guatemalans were living there
(Aguayo & Weiss Fagen, 1988, p. 23). Some 100,000-150,000 lived in
Mexico as well (Aguayo & Weiss Fagen, 1988, p. 38; Ferris, 1987, p. 35;
Montes, 1986, p. 36). Some 3,000 Guatemalan refugees lived in neigh-
boring Belize, and at least 4,000 in Honduras. Internally, at least
400,000 Guatemalans were displaced during the first half of the 1980s
Like Salvadorans, few Guatemalans have been able to obtain legitimate
immigration or political refugee status. During the 1980s, only about
0.3% of Guatemalan requests for political asylum in the United States
were approved (Suárez-Orozco, 1989, p. 57). A breakdown of the loca-
tion of Guatemalans in the United States during the late 1980s follows
(American Friends Service Committee, 1988, p. 24):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Los Angeles</td>
<td>60,000-100,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Houston</td>
<td>10,000-20,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington, DC</td>
<td>10,000-20,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York City</td>
<td>10,000-20,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chicago</td>
<td>10,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Orleans</td>
<td>1,000-3,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phoenix/Tucson</td>
<td>1,000-3,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miami</td>
<td>1,000-2,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Guatemala, Nahua-derived cultures and languages were not the
primary indigenous force, although some Nahua and Pipil groups oc-
of Guatemalans in the United States speak Spanish, often having acquired greater proficiency while living there. Superficially, Guatemalan Spanish might be mistaken for a Mexican variety, particularly as regards pronunciation; textbook vocabulary will clearly identify Guatemalans, but few observers from outside the Latino community possess this degree of sophistication. As with the Salvadoran community, many Guatemalans are undocumented and fear detection and deportation; in trying to blend in with the Mexican American population, occasional attempts to deemphasize Guatemalan traits or acquire Mexican traits can be observed. The strategies are normally quite superficial, such as suppression of the pronoun vos and the often exaggerated use of stereotypical Mexicanisms, such as andaí, orale, and the universal obscenity chingon. The film El Norte, which documents the struggle of Guatemalan refugees crossing Mexico and seeking entry into the United States, contains examples of the sort of informal dialect tutoring that goes on among the refugee community.

Educational needs

Of all the Central American groups in the United States, Guatemalan refugees are in the most precarious situation vis-à-vis the educational system. In addition to their dubious immigration status, most Guatemalans living in the United States are at best only receptive Spanish-Mayan bilinguals, and some speak no Spanish at all. A large number are illiterate, and many are unaware of even the most rudimentary aspects of U.S. immigration and refugee law (Nackert, 1993, p. 211). In some areas (e.g., the state of Oregon), bilingual court interpreters who speak Mayan languages have been found, but more often than not Mayan-speaking Guatemalan children find no accommodation in bilingual programs and attend school only sporadically, exacerbating the already difficult situation of undocumented itinerant laborers in this country. Spanish-speaking Guatemalans fare little better, since the combination of low literacy rates and little familiarity with urban schools results in poor attendance and academic performance (Vlach, 1984).

Small Central American communities: Hondurans and Costa Ricans

Although the most prominent Central American varieties of Spanish in the United States are those of El Salvador, Guatemala, and Nicaragua, in declining numbers of speakers, there are significant Honduran communities in several cities. The most prominent is found in New Orleans, where the Honduran community first arose part of the banana indus-
try, which linked the northern Honduran ports of Tela and La Ceiba via maritime routes with the port of New Orleans. By the late 1980s an estimated 60,000-70,000 Hondurans lived in New Orleans (American Friends Service Committee, 1988, p. 24). Another large group of Hondurans (as many as 80,000), mostly from the central part of the country, is found in New York City, where they do not enjoy the same sense of community identity as in New Orleans (although they have published a small newspaper, *El centroamericano*). Los Angeles has more than 15,000 Hondurans, and smaller numbers are found in other large U.S. cities.

Costa Ricans have never emigrated to the United States in large numbers, since Costa Rica enjoys the highest standards of living and the lowest level of political violence and social unrest in all of Central America (González, 1989; Redden, 1980). The Costa Rican army was abolished in 1948 after a brief civil war, and during a time period when neighboring countries were beset by military coups, dictatorships, and counter-revolutions, Costa Rica devoted its resources to public education, health, and economic infrastructure. The price for demilitarizing the country has been a high level of political dependence on the United States, whose military bases stationed in the Panama Canal Zone have constituted a de facto deterrent to attacks on Costa Rica. The Costa Rican government openly sympathized with the Sandinista rebels during the insurrection against the Somoza dictatorship, but once the Sandinistas were in power, relations quickly soured. The United States pressured Costa Rica into allowing the breakaway ex-Sandinista *comando* Eden Pastora to establish a counterrevolutionary force in the northern part of the country, and for several years Costa Rica was subject to the whims of Cold War politics in Central America. Despite this brief departure from the customary Costa Rican neutrality and political equivocation, the country has remained relatively prosperous, and those Costa Ricans emigrating to the United States usually come for higher education or as established professionals. The number of illegal immigrants from Costa Rica is vanishingly small; there are no political refugees, and there are no homogeneous Costa Rican neighborhoods in the United States.

**General recommendations**

Despite the fact that they come from a well-defined geographical region, Central American students are sufficiently diverse in language and personal background to warrant individual consideration. The best tool a teacher of Central American students can bring to the classroom is knowledge of the culture, language, and recent sociopolitical history of the countries involved. This knowledge need not entail a major research effort, since the basic facts are available in most libraries. At issue, however, is not so much mastering the peculiarities of individual Central American Spanish dialects but rather reaching out to students by acknowledging their unique background. Knowledge of specific linguistic differences among Spanish dialects, in particular those features that differ in the students' native varieties and textbook presentations, can help the teacher smooth over momentary misunderstandings, and the overwhelming mass of language shared by all varieties of Spanish will facilitate the remaining communication. However, a teacher can use awareness of the students' home language and culture in more subtle ways as a means for drawing the pupils more closely into the educational environment. Acknowledgment of regional words, foods, and cultural practices, accompanied by paraphrases of the remarks to the remainder of the class, goes a long way toward creating an inclusive atmosphere in which student responsiveness can be increased. Teachers who are pressed for time can consult regional glossaries (Lipski, 1994, provides references as well as samples of regional vocabulary). Those with more resources at their disposal can consult collections of folktales and customs from the countries represented by their students. Students themselves, their friends, and their family members are an invaluable resource in teaching the teachers; contacts ranging from brief conversations to extended interviews can provide teachers with the appropriate mix of words, phrases, and cultural references to enliven the classroom and enhance the self-esteem of students.

**Conclusion**

The title of this chapter suggests that Central Americans are a homogeneous group, and indeed, historical, cultural, and linguistic factors link the peoples of the isthmus. Within the United States, however, Central Americans find little unity in the midst of their great diversity, and a brief recapitulation of the salient social and educational needs of the various Central American groups is worthwhile.

Guatemalans in the United States are predominantly of indigenous background, and many speak Spanish only as a second language, if at all. As the poorest end of the spectrum, Guatemalans who arrived as refugees during the 1980s and 1990s represent the greatest challenge to educators, in view of the double language barrier, high illiteracy rate, rural upbringing, and great distress of all official agencies.

Salvadorans in the United States represent a broader socioeconomic spectrum; semiliterate rural dwellers share social spaces with practitioners of skilled trades and professions, and lifestyles range from highly
Suggestions for further reading


Most linguistic studies of regional Spanish dialects contain more detail than is required by classroom teachers. In addition to the general works mentioned above, the following are useful sources of regional vocabulary: Geoffrey Kivas (1978) for El Salvador; Márquez (1989) for Nicaragua; and Armas (1971) and Rubio (1986) for Guatemala. Good samples of folktales and popular beliefs are Lara Figueroa (1984) for Guatemala, Palma (1987) for Nicaragua, and Gutiérrez (1993) for El Salvador.

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