

Spanish, English, or Spanglish? Truth and Consequences of U.S. Latino Bilingualism

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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 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 individuals or groups that result from racial or ethnic mixture, 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 2004 for a representative survey), in the vast majority of instances *Spanglish* targets the language usage of Latinos born in 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 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 speakers at a disadvantage vis-à-vis their compatriots in other countries, and ultimately resulting in 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 non-standard 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 Cuban-Americans and increasingly to resident Dominicans; rarely if ever does one hear *Spanglish* used in conjunction with expatriates from Spain or Southern Cone nations 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. Since upwards of fifty 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* (1966) 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* (v. XVI, 105) 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 re-shifting and potentially insidious manipulation of hybrid terms designed to undermine the credibility and human capital of internally colonized groups.

In Search of the Origins of *Spanglish*

A transparent linguistic blend such as *Spanglish* is likely to arise spontaneously whenever contacts between English and Spanish are under discussion, and therefore to assign the creation of this term to a single individual or event is unrealistic. *Spanglish* takes its place among a plethora of language-contact blends, including *Taglish* (Tagalog-English in the Philippines), *Hinglish* (Hindi-English in India), *franglais* (mixture of French and English), *portuñol/portunhol* (Portuguese-Spanish), *guarañol* (Guaraní-Spanish), and many others. Despite the unlikelihood that *Spanglish* has a unique parentage, the *Oxford English Dictionary* places the first known written attestation of this word—in Spanish rather than in English—in a setting that represents the quintessence of conflicting linguistic attitudes: Puerto Rico. The ambiguous status of Puerto Rico—at once a Spanish-speaking Latin American nation and a colony of the world's most powerful English-speaking society—has provoked a level of concern about the purity of the Spanish language and an ambivalence towards the English language unmatched in the Spanish-speaking world. The number of popularizing works that purport to describe and decry the “contamination” of Puerto Rican Spanish by English is enormous; serious linguistic studies are much fewer, but a pair of prominent monographs have kept the debate alive. The Spanish linguist Germán de Granda (1972), who resided briefly in Puerto Rico, described the *transculturación* of Puerto Rican Spanish in terms that would do credit to the spread of an epidemic. Granda is by no means a purist; his studies of Afro-Hispanic creole languages and the languages of Equatorial Guinea are legendary, as is his work with Paraguayan and Andean varieties, all based on rigorous fieldwork and a deep sense of appreciation and respect for the communities in which he lived. Granda's perspective on Puerto Rican Spanish can therefore not be summarily dismissed as an elitist neocolonial diatribe, although few scholars of Puerto Rican sociolinguistics would agree with his portrayal. The exiled Cuban linguist Paulino Pérez Sala (1973), a professor at a Puerto Rican university, spoke of the *interferencia lingüística del inglés* in Puerto Rican Spanish. Such interference no doubt occurs, especially under

the avalanche of English-language advertising, technical language, and scholarly discourse, but many of Pérez Sala's examples are typical of English-dominant bilinguals, and not of the Spanish-dominant population of the island.²

The term *Spanglish* (*espanGLISH* in Spanish) appears to have been coined by the Puerto Rican journalist Salvador Tío (1954), in a newspaper column first published in 1952. Tío—who certainly considers himself the inventor of this word (an opinion largely shared by others in Latin America)—was concerned about what he felt to be the deterioration of Spanish in Puerto Rico under the onslaught of English words, and waged a campaign of polemical and satirical articles over more than half a century. Tío (1954: 60) stated his position unashamedly: “No creo ni en el latín ni en el bilingüismo. El latín es una lengua muerta. El bilingüismo, dos lenguas muertas” (I don't believe either in Latin or in bilingualism. Latin is a dead language, bilingualism, two dead languages). Many of Tío's examples are legitimate borrowings from English—some in unassimilated form—that are found in modern Puerto Rican speech. Most refer to consumer products marketed in the United States or to aspects of popular youth culture, but Tío felt that Puerto Rican Spanish could suffer a far worse fate than simply absorbing foreign borrowings—which, after all, had been occurring in Spanish for more than a thousand years. Evidently not understanding that creole languages are formed under conditions far different from the bilingual borrowing found in Puerto Rico, he examined Papiamentu, an Afro-Iberian creole language spoken mainly in Aruba and Curaçao and concluded that it was a degenerate form of Spanish. He warned that the same fate could befall Puerto Rican Spanish (Tío 1992: 91): “Si en ese estado de postración cayó el español de Curazao y Aruba, también podría ocurrir algo similar en Puerto Rico si no se extrema el rigor para evitarlo. Puede tardar más tiempo por muchas razones pero si le ha ocurrido a otras lenguas en todos los continentes no hay razón para creer que somos indemnes al daño” (Tío 1992: 25) (If the Spanish of Curaçao and Aruba could sink to such depths, something similar could occur in Puerto Rico if stiff measures are not taken to avoid it. This could take longer for various reasons, but if it has happened to other languages in every continent there is no reason to believe that we are exempt from this danger). Tío's early article also contained humorous “Spanglish” words of his own invention, which were not used at the time and have not been used since, thereby creating some confusion between legitimate examples of language contact and sarcastic parodies. Although Tío had lived in New York City, and therefore had experienced first-hand true bilingual contact phenomena, he accepted uncritically others' parodies of Spanish-English interaction: “[el español] se pudre en la frontera nuevo-mejicana donde, como dice H. L.

Mencken en su obra *The American Language*, dos nuevo-mejicanos se saludan con esta joya de la burundanga lingüística: ‘¡Hola amigo! ¿Cómo le how do you dea?’ ‘Voy very welldiando, gracias’” (Tío 1992: 91) (Spanish is rotting on the New Mexican border [sic] where as H. L. Mencken says in *The American Language*, two New Mexicans greet each other with this gem of linguistic nonsense . . .). This example, from Mencken (1962: 650–51), does not actually come from the latter author, whose other observations on Spanish in the United States and its influence on English are in general well-documented and factually accurate. Rather, Mencken quotes (uncritically, it appears) a “recent explorer” (McKinstry 1930: 336), whose concern for linguistic accuracy was highly questionable. McKinstry wrote during a time when Mexican-bashing was an acceptable literary pass-time, and although his witty anecdotes about his linguistic experiences on the U.S.-Mexican border suggest that he actually spoke Spanish, his factual account of borrowed Anglicisms stands in stark contrast to his mocking account of the language skills of Mexicans living near the border:

While the Mexican of the border appropriates the words of his neighbor in a truly wholesale manner, there is neither hope nor danger that he will ever become English-speaking. It is only the bare words that are adopted. They are woven ingeniously into a fabric of grammar and pronunciation which remains forever Mexican. Although every other word your Nogales or Juárez peon uses may be English, he could not, to save his sombrero, put them together into a sentence intelligible to an American, that is, beyond such simple household phrases as *all right* and *goddam* [. . .] This mongrel jargon of the border is naturally shocking to the ears of the well-bred Mexican of the interior.

By uncritically quoting this crude parody together with legitimate examples of borrowing and calquing, Tío (and Mencken) contributed to the false impression of a “mongrel” language teetering on the brink of total unintelligibility.

Despite his affirmation of concern about the status of Spanish in Puerto Rico—and by extension in other areas where English threatens to overwhelm it—Tío offers his own version of *Spanglish*, a travesty of bilingual behavior that sets the stage for later debates on *Spanglish*. As an example, Tío creates new verbs based on whimsical convergences between Spanish and English:

Tree—árbol. To climb—trepar. To climb a tree—trepar un árbol. ¿Por qué no formar una palabra que exprese en ambos idiomas el mismo sentimiento? Para nosotros que somos bilingües la cosa es clara. Se acuña una palabra nueva y se ataca bien. Y ha nacido un nuevo idioma [. . .] *Trepar*. He aquí una palabra

llena de movimiento. Es una especie de taquigrafía lingüística cuya única dificultad consiste en que es más rápida que el pensamiento. Es una palabra que puede expresar, en dos idiomas a un tiempo, no ya dos palabras, dos oraciones completas. Y lo grande de esta idea, lo original, es que se pueden conjugar a un tiempo, no dos verbos, sino dos pensamientos completos en dos lenguas distintas. La lengua queda recogida en el verbo, y paradoja, se acaba la verborrea [. . .] Para decir "Me subí a un árbol" (I climbed a tree), basta decir: *treepé*. (1954: 64)

(Why not form a word that expresses the same feeling in both languages? For us bilinguals it's clear. You coin a new word and "rub it in." And so a new language is born [. . .] *Treepar*. Here's a word full of movement. It's a kind of linguistic shorthand whose only problem is that it is faster than thought. It's a word that can express in two languages at the same time not just two words, but two complete sentences. And the best part, the most original, is that one can conjugate at the same time not two verbs but two complete thoughts in two different languages. The language is contained in the verb, and, paradoxically, verbage is eliminated [. . .] To say "I climbed a tree" it's enough to say *treepé*.)

Tío continues in this fashion, creating other neologisms via similar leaps of logic; for example:

Rocking chair—sillón. De ahí formamos el sustantivo: *rollón* y el verbo: *rollar* (to rock—mecerse) [. . .] y para decir: "I get up from the rocking-chair" (Yo me levanto del sillón), basta decir: "Yo me desenrollo." (1954: 64–65)

(From this we form the noun *rollón* and the verb *rollar* [. . .] and to say "I get up from the rocking-chair", one just says "I unroll.")

Tío then offers some lexical neologisms, for example from *piscina/swimming pool* come *pipool*, *polina*, *swicina*; from *mattress/colchón/colchonera* come *machón/machoneta*; the mixture of *pull* and *influencia* gives *opulencia*, and so on. Tío—perhaps inspired by McKinstry's grotesque parody—then illustrates what a dialogue in such *Spanglish* might sound like:

¿Espiblas Espanglish? —Yi, Minor. (1954: 65)

Yi is a blend of *yes* and *sí*; *espiblar* combines *speak* and *hablar*, and *Minor* is derived from *Mister* and *Señor*. Tío then echoes the affirmation that "anyone" can speak *Spanglish* by just making things up as one goes along. This xenophobic diatribe is frequently voiced in reference to creole language

such as Papiamentu, Lesser Antilles French Creole (known locally as *patois*), Philippine Creole Spanish (known as *Chabacano*), and so on i.e., that by simply "mixing together" two or more languages in a polyglossic free-for-all a new language is instantly created. For Tío:

Éste es un idioma que se aprende en tres lecciones. El resto lo pueden hacer ustedes por su cuenta. Por su cuenta y riesgo [. . .] Esta lengua que surge del choque de dos culturas es la única solución al problema de las Américas. No nos entenderemos mientras no hablemos el mismo idioma [. . .] Hay que crear una nueva lengua que no se preste a engaños. Por ahora sólo está en teoría, la teoría del "espanglish," la teoría para acabar con el bilingüismo en nombre del bilingüismo. (1954: 65)

(This is a language that can be learned in three lessons. You can do the rest on your own. On your own and at your own risk [. . .] this language that arises from the clash of two cultures is the only solution to the problem of the Americas. We will never understand one another as long as we don't speak the same language [. . .] we must create a new language that can't be tampered with. For now this language only exists in theory, the "Spanglish" theory, the theory that will get rid of bilingualism in the name of bilingualism.)

Although Tío offers this wry "if you can't beat 'em, join 'em" pseudo-solution to language and culture clash, his bitter refutation of English comes through clearly. Tío's many remarks about *Spanglish*—scattered across several articles and four decades—present an ambiguous picture. On the one hand, Tío shared with many other Puerto Rican intellectuals of the time the fear that United States cultural imperialism and the crushing weight of English would eventually displace a language that had landed with Columbus and had survived unaltered until only a few decades previously. After all, Tío could remember the English-only schools that arrived with the American occupation of Puerto Rico, and his first comments on *Spanglish* were written just after Puerto Rico had finally wrested from the United States government the right to elect its own governor and congress. By the middle of the twentieth century, world-wide Spanish already contained numerous well-integrated Anglicisms, and Puerto Ricans used even more, including those that had entered via the American school system, consumer advertising, American businesses located in Puerto Rico, and by the increasing tide of Puerto Ricans who emigrated to the mainland to work and returned with new English expressions. All these Anglicisms were either assimilated unaltered—except for the basic phonetic adaptations—(words like *welfare*, *teacher*, *míster* and *miss*) or were morphologically adapted

to Spanish patterns (*leak* > *liquiar*, *spell* > *espeliar*). False cognates might become true cognates in a language-contact environment (whence *aplicar* could mean “to apply for a job” and *registrar* “to register for a class”), the use of the gerund or progressive verb tenses might be more frequent than in monolingual Spanish (e.g., *le estamos enviando el paquete mañana* instead of *le enviaremos* [. . .]), and occasional idiomatic expressions from English might be calqued into Spanish—on the mainland but seldom on the island except among returning *nuyoricans* (e.g. *llamar para atrás* “to call back”).³ Nowhere did one find—in Puerto Rico or elsewhere among Spanish speakers in contact with English—bizarre linguistic chimeras like *treepar*, *rollón*, *pipool*, or *machoneta*. Tío had clearly never heard such items, nor was there any danger of his ever doing so. He deftly avoided any discussion of true language-contact phenomena, which have enriched Spanish for at least thirteen centuries, in favor of creating a xenoglossic straw man emblazoned with the epithet *Spanglish*, with which to bludgeon those who might not share his abhorrence of Spanish-English bilingualism. Tío, like McKinstry and scores of nameless commentators before and since, deliberately invented pseudo-bilingual monstrosities into order to denigrate legitimate bilingual speech communities individually and collectively. For McKinstry the prime motivation was racist supremacy: Mexicans were regarded as inferior to Anglo-Americans, hence incapable of adequately acquiring English but all too capable of losing their grip on their own native language once confronted—even at a distance and separated by a national border—with the English language juggernaut. Tío may well have harbored racist sentiments against Anglo-Americans—and his scorn for the Afro-American language Papiamentu provides a possible bit of evidence—because his harshest broadsides are directed at his fellow citizens for their failure to embrace monolingualism, for Tío a primordial virtue. Tío foreshadows a viewpoint that would later be taken up in the continental United States by expatriate intellectuals like Roberto González Echeverría (to be discussed next), namely that even educated Latinos willingly allow their language to be overrun by English in the mistaken view that this increases their upward social mobility.

Other Viewpoints and Definitions

Even within Puerto Rico, not all regard *Spanglish* with animosity. Nash offers a somewhat different definition and set of observations on “Spanglish” in Puerto Rico:

In the metropolitan areas of Puerto Rico, where Newyorricans play an influential role in the economic life of the island, there has arisen a hybrid variety of language, often given the slightly derogatory label of Spanglish, which coexists with less mixed forms of standard English and standard Spanish and has at least one of the characteristics of an autonomous language: a substantial number of native speakers. The emerging language retains the phonological, morphological, and syntactic structure of Puerto Rican Spanish. . . . Spanglish as defined here is neither a language containing grammatical errors due to interference nor intentionally mixed language. (1970: 223–25)

Most of Nash’s examples represent the sort of lexical borrowing found in all bilingual contact situations.

In a recent survey of attitudes and inquiries about Spanish in the United States, Fairclough (2003: 187) defines *Spanglish* as simply “la mezcla del inglés y del español” (the mixture of English and Spanish). Odón Betanzos Palacios, president of the North American Academy of the Spanish Language is of the opinion that

El *spanglish* y el *engliñol* han sido y son dos problemas normales en comunidades donde conviven los de lengua española y los estadounidenses, comunidades en las que sus hablantes son monolingües y tienen necesidad de comunicarse. El de lengua española ha recogido palabras del inglés, de las que entiende su significado y, sencillamente, las españoliza; igualmente hará con las formas verbales y así, en su variedad de injertos, se aproximará a la comunicación con el de la otra lengua . . . el *spanglish* es, sólo, medio de comunicación temporal . . . Creo que [los que promueven la enseñanza del spanglish] no se han percatado del enorme error que cometen al querer hacer de amplitudes y querer enseñar una jerga de comunidades que ni siquiera podrán entender otras comunidades de sus cercanías. (2001: 2)

Spanglish and *Engliñol* have been and continue to be two normal problems in communities where Spanish speakers and Americans live together. The Spanish speaker has taken those English words whose meaning is understood and, simply, has Hispanized them; the same is done with verbal forms and with such hybrids, some approximation to communication in the other language will be achieved . . . *Spanglish* is only a temporary means of communication . . . I believe that those who promote the teaching of *Spanglish* are not aware of the huge mistake in teaching this jargon that cannot even be understood in neighboring communities.)

Adopting an anti-imperialistic stance and considering *Spanglish* to consist primarily of the use of Anglicisms by Spanish speakers, the distinguished

literary critic Roberto González-Echeverría laments the negative implications of *Spanglish*:

El spanglish, la lengua compuesta de español e inglés que salió de la calle y se introdujo en los programas de entrevistas y las campañas de publicidad, plantea un grave peligro a la cultura hispánica y al progreso de los hispanos dentro de la corriente mayoritaria norteamericana. Aquellos que lo toleran e incluso lo promueven como una mezcla inocua no se dan cuenta de que esta no es una relación basada en la igualdad. El spanglish es una invasión del español por el inglés. La triste realidad es que el spanglish es básicamente la lengua de los hispanos pobres, muchos de los cuales son casi analfabetos en cualquiera de los dos idiomas. Incorporan palabras y construcciones inglesas a su habla de todos los días porque carecen del vocabulario y la educación en español para adaptarse a la cambiante cultura que los rodea. Los hispanos educados que hacen otro tanto tienen una motivación diferente: algunos se avergüenzan de su origen e intentan parecerse al resto usando palabras inglesas y traduciendo directamente las expresiones idiomáticas inglesas. Hacerlo, piensan, es reclamar la calidad de miembro de la corriente mayoritaria. Políticamente, sin embargo, el spanglish es una capitulación; indicá marginalización, no liberación. (1)

(Spanglish, the language made up of Spanish and English off the streets and introduced into talk shows and advertising campaigns represents a grave danger for Latino culture and the progress of Latinos in mainstream America. Those who tolerate and even promote [spanglish] as a harmless mixture don't realize that this is not a relationship of equality. The sad truth is that spanglish is basically the language of poor Latinos, many of whom are illiterate in both languages. They incorporate English words and constructions into their daily speech because they lack the vocabulary and training in Spanish to adapt to the culture that surrounds them. Educated Latinos who use this language have other motives: some are ashamed of their origins and try to blend in with everyone else by using English words and literally translating English idioms. They think that this will make them part of the mainstream. Politically, however, Spanglish represents a capitulation; it stands for marginalization, not liberation.)

This condemnation of *Spanglish* as a manifestation of defeat and submission by Hispanic communities in the United States recalls Odón Betanzos Palacios' lament (Betanzos Palacios, n.d.), when he speaks of "el problema de algunos hispanos en Estados Unidos, de los que no han podido ni tenido la oportunidad de aprender ninguna de las dos lenguas (español e inglés)" (the problem of some Hispanics in the United States, who have not had the opportunity to learn either of the languages [Spanish or English]). In another

commentary on *Spanglish*, the Spaniard Joaquim Ibarz offers the following observation, which clearly confuses regional and social dialects, youth slang, and language contact phenomena:

Hablar medio en español, medio en inglés, no es tan descabellado si se piensa en la mezcla de las culturas, las migraciones y todas las circunstancias que han hecho que estos dos idiomas puedan combinar . . . La lengua resultante del mestizaje entre español y el inglés, conocida como 'spanglish,' es hablada por más de 25 millones de personas a ambos lados de la frontera entre México y Estados Unidos, zona en la que residen cerca de 40 millones de latinos. La mayoría utiliza formas diferentes de este dialecto, que cambia según el país de origen de quién lo utiliza, como el cubonics de Miami, el nuyorrican de los puertorriqueños de Manhattan y el caló pachuco de San Antonio. (2002: 3)

(Speaking half in Spanish, half in English, isn't so crazy if we think about cultural mixture, migrations, and other circumstances that have brought these two languages together . . . the language resulting from the mixture of Spanish and English, known as 'spanglish,' is spoken by more than 25 million people on both sides of the U.S.-Mexican border, an area in which some 40 million Latinos live. Most use some variety of this dialect, which varies according to the country of origins, like Cubonics in Miami, Nuyorrican for Puerto Ricans in Manhattan and Pachuco caló of San Antonio.)

Another Spaniard, Xosé Castro gives a similar appraisal:

El espanglish tiene una lógica forma de ser y un origen explicable y comprensible. Su función es claramente comunicadora, pero sólo puede darse cuando existe una carencia de vocabulario en alguna de las dos partes que forman un diálogo. Cuando existe alguna duda o algo que obstaculice la comprensión, se echa mano de la versión inglesa, idioma que ambos interlocutores comprenden, y la comunicación, por fin, se completa . . . la marginalidad del espanglish . . . excluye al hispano que no entiende inglés, y al angloparlante que no entiende español. Se restringe, por tanto, a una reducida comunidad de hablantes. (1996: 3)

Spanglish has its own logic and a logically explained origin. It serves a clear communicative function, but it can only occur when one of the dialog partners lacks a vocabulary item. When in doubt, to eliminate any obstacle to communication, one reverts to the English version, understood by both interlocutors, and communication takes place . . . the marginal status of spanglish . . . excludes Latinos who don't understand English and English speakers who don't understand Spanish. It is therefore restricted to small speech communities. We must acknowledge that New

York Spanglish has little to do with its Los Angeles counterpart. Therefore we are not speaking of a single language but rather of a group of dialects as varied as the speech communities it represents.)

For the Cuban linguists Valdés Bernal and Gregori Tornada (2001: 5), *Spanglish* is in essence a phenomenon peculiar to Puerto Ricans living in New York, but these linguists (unable to travel to Miami to observe the situation first hand) assert that “el *spanglish* queda para los puertorriqueños en sus barrios neoyorquinos. Sin embargo esto ya es historia, y el spanglish, como era de esperar, ha hecho su aparición en Miami entre la nueva generación de los cubanoamericanos—los yacas—quienes se ‘divierten’ hablando esta variedad de lengua ‘en parte español anglosajonizado, en parte inglés hispanizado, y en parte giros sintácticos, que usan niños y adultos, a veces casi sin darse cuenta’” (Spanglish was for Puerto Ricans in their New York neighborhoods. But this is now history, and spanglish, as might be expected, has made an appearance in Miami among the new generation of Cuban-Americans—yacas—“mess around” speaking this dialect “part Anglicized Spanish, part Hispanized English, and part syntactic combinations used unconsciously by children and adults). Most of the cited examples include code-switching, but in some cases the results of language erosion among increasingly English-dominant bilinguals is taken as an indicator of *Spanglish* (for example the use of the familiar pronoun *tú* in conjunction with deferential address forms such as *señor alcalde* ‘honorable mayor’).

Many professional educators have viewed terms like *Spanglish* with alarm. Milán specifically recommended that researchers and educators [in New York City] refrain from using the term “Spanglish” and use instead neutral designations such as “New York City Spanish” (202–203). Acosta-Belén observed that “Speakers of the non-defined mixture of Spanish and/or English are judged as ‘different,’ or ‘sloppy’ speakers of Spanish and/or English, and are often labeled verbally deprived, alingual, or deficient bilinguals because supposedly they do not have the ability to speak either English or Spanish well” (151). On the other hand the linguist and Latina activist Zentella (1997: 82) has demonstrated that younger Puerto Ricans in New York and other cities of the Northeast United States are beginning to adopt the word “Spanglish” with pride, to refer explicitly to code-switching: “. . . more NYPR’s are referring to “Spanglish” as a positive way of identifying their switching.” She concludes that “Contrary to the attitude of those who label Puerto Rican code switching ‘Spanglish’ in the belief that a chaotic mixture is being invented, English-Spanish switching is a creative style of bilingual communication that accomplishes important cultural

and conversational work” (112–13). Zentella’s proposed grammar of “Spanglish” is in reality a compilation of grammatical and pragmatic constraints on code-switching.

Latino Activism and the New *Spanglish*

The evolving social and political identity of the U.S. Latino communities and the resurgence in dialog between intellectuals and activists has resulted in a rebirth of the notion of *Spanglish* in new guises. Just as *Chicano* has vastly different connotations and implications than this word had in Mexico and the southwestern United States a few decades ago, so has *Spanglish* been deliberately reclaimed as linguistic and cultural patrimony, albeit with no single unifying thread. To illustrate the range of ideas and viewpoints encompassed by “neo-spanglish,” the writings of two well-known protagonists will be examined. Ed Morales takes a politically-grounded stance, linking *Spanglish* with the notion that:

Latinos are a mixed-race people . . . there is a need for a way to say something more about this idea than the word “Latino” expresses. So for the moment, let’s consider a new term for the discussion of what this aspect of Latino means—let us consider Spanglish. Why Spanglish? There is no better metaphor for what a mixed-race culture means than a hybrid language, an informal code; the same sort of linguistic construction that defines different classes in a society can also come to define something outside it, a social construction with different rules. Spanglish is what we speak, but it is also who we Latinos are, and how we act, and how we perceive the world. It’s also a way to avoid the sectarian nature of other labels that describe our condition, terms like Nuyorican, Chicano, Cuban American, Dominican, or New York. It is an immediate declaration that translation is definition, that movement is status quo. (2002: 3)

While acknowledging that many observers—particularly from other Spanish-speaking nations—regard Spanglish as “Spanish under siege from an external invader” (5), Morales goes on to celebrate the emerging Latino language as an affirmation of resistance and the construction of a powerful new identity. The remainder of his work deals with manifestations of the Spanish-English interface in literature, popular culture, and political discourse, and represents the most eloquent manifesto of *Spanglish* as an originally derogatory term that is being co-opted by its former victims as a badge of pride and courage.

A very different perspective comes from the self-declared admirer and promoter of *Spanglish* Ilan Stavans, an expatriate Mexican writer now teaching in Massachusetts, whose prolific popular writings on *Spanglish* and purported specimens of this “language” have made him a lightning rod for polemic as well as a widely-cited source among international scholars unfamiliar with the reality of Spanish-English bilingualism in the United States. Rather than applying *Spanglish* to an already existent discourse mode or sociolinguistic register (as done, for example, by Ed Morales or by the New York Puerto Ricans cited by Zentella 1997), Stavans invents his own mixture of Spanish and English, loosely modeled after true intrasentential code-switching typical of U.S. Latino communities. Stavans initially defines *Spanglish* innocuously as “The verbal encounter between Anglo and Hispano civilizations” (2003: 6). His anecdotal accounts of learning *Spanglish* upon arriving in New York City from Mexico reveal an often less than affectionate reaction: “But to keep up with these publications [Spanish-language newspapers in New York City in the 1980s] was also to invite your tongue for a bumpy ride. The grammar and syntax used in them was never fully ‘normal,’ e.g., it replicated, often unconsciously, English-language patterns. It was obvious that its authors and editors were *americanos* with a *lo* connection to *la lengua de Borges*” (Stavans 2003: 2).

While perhaps initially offended by varieties of Spanish that seemed exotic to one coming from Mexico and by the frequent code-switching, loan translations and assimilated Anglicisms characteristic of these typical bilingual environment, Stavans came to profess a deep admiration for code-switching discourse, which for him forms the essence of *Spanglish*. Stavans appears to regard all code-switching as a deliberate act of creativity, whereas most linguists who have studied code-switching—in a wide variety of language-contact environments throughout the world—analyze spontaneous code-switching in spoken language as a loosely monitored speech mode circumscribed by basic syntactic restrictions but largely below the level of conscious awareness. Only in written language, particularly in creative literature, is deliberate manipulation of code-switching to achieve specific aesthetic goals a viable option. Beginning in the 1970s, the use of code-switching in U.S. Latino literature has become increasingly common, first in poetry and eventually in narrative texts as well. Such writers as Alurista, Tato Laviera, Roberto Fernández, and Rolando Hinojosa have fine-tuned the language of U.S. Latino communities to create a striking “third language” in their innovative literary texts. Even in their most creative flights of fancy, these writers almost always adhere to the syntactic and pragmatic rules that govern spontaneously-produced bilingual speech. The most general restriction on mixing languages within the same sentence

is that no grammatical rule in either language be violated, and in particular that the point of transition be “smooth” in the sense that the material from the second language is in some way as likely a combination as a continuation in the first language. Fluent code-switching may therefore produce combinations in which, e.g., a switch occurs between article and noun, between a complementizer and a subordinate clause, between a conjunction and one of the conjuncts, and so on.⁴ Spontaneous code-switches not accompanied by hesitations, pauses, or interruptions, are normally unacceptable in the following circumstances: 1) between a pronominal subject and a predicate; 2) between a pronominal clitic and the verb; 3) between a sentence-initial interrogative word and the remainder of the sentence; 4) between an auxiliary verb (especially *haber*) and the main verb; and 5) adverbs of negation are normally in the same language as the verbs they modify. The restrictions reflect the general need to maintain the grammatical rules of each language, following the linear order both in English and in Spanish, and to retain easily identifiable chunks of discourse.

Although surrounded by bilingual discourse since arriving in the United States, Stavans reports on a particularly apocryphal experience that revealed the creative potential of written code-switching. During an early teaching assignment, some Latino students frustrated with the treatment of Latinos by the American “system” expressed their alienation by rendering the Pledge of Allegiance, the United States Constitution and the Declaration of Independence into a humorous but obviously non-authentic mixture of languages:

(a) Yo plegio alianza a la bandera de los Unaited Esteits de America . . .

(I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America.)

(b) Nosotros joldeamos que estas truths son self-evidentes, que todos los hombres son creados equally, que están endawdeados por su Creador con certain derechos inalienables, que entre these están la vida, la libertad, y la persura de la felicidad.

(We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness.)

(c) We la gente de los Unaited Esteits, pa' formar una unión más perfecta, estableheamos la justicia, aseguramos tranquilidad doméstica, proveidamos pa' la defensa común, promovemos el welfér, y aseguramos el blessing de la libertad de nosotros mismos y nuestra posterity, ordenando y estableheando esta Constitución de los Unaited Esteits de América.

(We the people of the United States, in order to form a more perfect union, establish justice, insure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.) (Stavans 2003: 15)

Although these cynical parodies do not violate any major grammatical restrictions on language mixing, they contain unlikely Anglicisms (*joldeamos*, *endawdeados*, *establisheamos*) and an admixture of colloquial speech forms (*pa'* for *para*, *tranquildá* for *tranquilidad*) that clash with the solemn and formulaic language of these iconic texts. For Stavans, these parodies constituted "an exercise in ingenuity . . . show[ing] astuteness, a stunning capacity to adapt, and an imaginative aspect . . . that refuses to accept anything as foreign." He was inspired to try his hand at similar "recasting" of classic literary texts, with the following results:

(a) Sudenmente fuera del air estéril y drowsy, el lair de los esclavos Como un light-ning Europa dió un paso pa'lante . . . (Walt Whitman, *Leaves of grass*)

(b) You no sabe de mí sin you leer un book by the nombre of *The Aventuras of Tom Sawyer*, pero eso ain't no matter (Mark Twain, *Adventure of Huckleberry Finn*)

(c) La tierra was ours antes que nosotros were de la tierra. It was nuestra tierra más de cien años pa'tras (Robert Frost, "The gift outright") (16)

Like his students' parodies, Stavans' imitations combine improbable Anglicisms (*sudenmente*) and rapid-speech forms (*pa'lante*, *pa'tras*). In addition, there are violations of basic code-switching restrictions, e.g., between pronominal subject and verb (*sin you leer*, *you no sabe*) as well as inappropriate combinations in Spanish (*sabe de mí*). The linguistic differences between Stavans' bilingual texts and those of his students underscore the fact that fluent code-switching forms part of the basic competence of native bilingual speakers and is not easily acquired among second-language learners.

Stavans' early attempts at creating a literary *Spanglish* were largely unknown until he revealed them in his 2003 book, but the end result of his linguistic manipulations have made Stavans and his definition of *Spanglish* a much-quoted commodity among intellectuals in other Spanish-speaking countries who decry the state of Spanish in the United States. In a tour de force which thanks to the World Wide Web has reached untold thousands of readers,

Stavans has offered a purported "translation" of the first chapter of *Don Quijote* into *Spanglish*:

In un placete de La Mancha of which nombre no quiero remembrearme, vivía, not so long ago, uno de esos gentlemen who always tienen una lanza in the rack, una buckler antigua, a skinny caballo y un grayhound para el chase. A cazuela with más beef than mutón, carne choppeada para la dinner, un omelet pa los sábados, lentil pa los viernes, y algún pigeon como delicacy especial pa los domingos, consumfan tres cuarters de su income. El resto lo employaba en una coat de broadcloth y en soketes de velvetín pa los holidays, with sus slippers pa combinar, while los otros días de la semana él cut a figura de los más finos cloths. Livin with él eran una busekeeper en sus forties, una sobrina not yet twenty y un ladino del field y la marketa que le saddleaba el caballo al gentleman y wiedeaba un hookete pa poder. El gentleman andaba por allí por los fifty. Era de complexión robusta pero un poco fresco en los bones y una cara leaneada y gaunteada. La gente sabía that él era un early riser y que gustaba mucho huntear. La gente say que su apellido was Quijada or Quesada—hay diferencia de opinión entre aquellos que han escrito sobre el sujeto—but acordando with las muchas conjeturas se entiende que era really Quejada. But all this no tiene mucha importancia pa nuestro cuento, providiendo que al contarlo no nos separemos pa nada de las verdá. (2002: 5–6)

This text contains numerous syntactic violations of code-switching, together with phonetically unlikely combinations (e.g. *saddleaba*), and hints of popular or uneducated Spanish (e.g., *pa* < *para* 'for,' *verdá* < *verdad* 'truth') which implicitly reinforce the notion that only uneducated people speak *Spanglish*. That Stavans' *Quijote* is not simply a foreigner's innocent attempt to mimic authentic bilingual speech is amply demonstrated by his considerable proficiency in producing realistic code-switched language in his expository prose writings (e.g., Stavans 2000, 2003). Regardless of Stavans' motivations, his *Quijote* rendition has been widely cited—always disapprovingly—as "evidence" of the deplorable state of Spanish in the United States.

Spanglish: Who Needs It?

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. Each

Latino speech community retains the major dialect features of the countries 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 in no cases are basic grammatical principles of Spanish 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.⁵ The implicit failure to distinguish between fluent bilinguals and semi-fluent heritage language speakers is partially responsible for misleading statements about the prevalence of *Spanglish* among U.S. Latino communities.

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 essay 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 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 salutary; courses on U.S. Latino culture and literature and Spanish language courses designed for native and heritage language speakers are encouraging portents, but seldom does this enlightenment penetrate the "town vs. 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.⁶ 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 *Ebonics* survives unscathed—and this is very much up for grabs—it will be at least in part due to 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 for any remediation. *Spanglish* is as out of place in promoting Latino language and culture as are *crazy*, *lunatic*, *crackpot*, *nut case* in mental health care, or *bum*, *slob*, *misfit*, *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* (the person who speaks two languages is worth twice as much) does not admit qualifiers, and neither should our acceptance of the nation's largest bilingual community.

Notes

1. *Spanglish* has even made its way into children's literature, for example, in a humorously didactic novel by Montes (2003) in which a Puerto Rican girl is teased by her English-only classmates. The cover blurb sets the stage:

Maritza Gabriela Morales Mercado (Gabí for short) has big *problemas*. Her worst enemy, Johnny Wiley, is driving her crazy . . . Gabí is so mad she can't even talk straight. Her English words keep getting jumbled up with her Spanish words. Now she's speaking a crazy mix of both, and no one knows what she's saying! Will Gabí ever make sense again? Or will she be tongue-tied forever?

The book provides a touching lesson in cultural sensitivity and a few examples of realistic code-switching, although the idea that bilingual speakers 'jumble up' their languages when they become angry is unlikely to score any points in the bilingual education arena.

2. Similar viewpoints have been expressed by the journalists Lloréns (1971) and Varo (1971). See Lipski (1975, 1976) for a different viewpoint.
3. For a discussion of *patrás* and similar phenomena, see Lipski (1985b, 1987), Otheguy (1993).
4. The literature on the syntactic constraints which govern code-switching is vast and

still growing. Summaries of relevant theories and approaches are found in Lipski (1982, 1985a) and Toribio (2001a, 2001b).

5. See the examples in Bills (1989, 1997), Bills et al. (1995, 2000), Lipski (1985c, 1992, 1993, 1996a, 1996b), Silva-Corvalán (1994).
6. It is true that *nigga* has positive attributes in African-American hip-hop culture, but this term is not freely available for use by non-members of this community and is rejected by more conservative African-Americans. *Queer* has become accepted in academic circles (to wit queer studies, queer theory), but "on the street" it retains the traditional locker-room flavor.

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