

Cruces y bordes la voz de la otredad

*El inglés y el español
en contacto en los Estados Unidos*

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in)(between.

Me gusta el español vario, incorrecto, múltiple, vivo, en el que a veces me cuesta entender en la boca de los taxistas neoyorkinos, también el limpio y cadencioso de Fray Luis y Cervantes, de Borges y Paz. No me gusta el español muerto y disecado de dómines meticulosos.

— RICARDO NAVAS RUIZ (2004)

La presente serie editorial pretende tratar el encuentro entre el inglés y el español en los Estados Unidos en todas sus variantes y vertientes en un momento de su historia particularmente delicado. En este panorama global y mestizo, de particular interés es el territorio estadounidense porque las continuas migraciones de hispanos hacia el Norte han cambiado el perfil de los Estados Unidos, no solo desde el punto de vista cultural, social y económico, sino también debido al contacto entre el inglés y el español que se produce cuando esas poblaciones se encuentran. La relación entre estas dos lenguas en esa peculiar realidad se caracteriza por muchos contactos e intercambios, generando una situación de compenetración y, se podría afirmar, de mutua dependencia.

Es necesario reflexionar acerca del hecho de que la lengua no está hecha porque cambia constantemente. En general, la sustitución lingüística se produce dentro de un proceso complejo de mestizaje social, cultural y lingüístico. En este ámbito deseamos reflexionar sobre las diferentes posturas de los estudiosos, y acerca de los retos, dilemas y complejidad de la situación lingüística, cultural, literaria *hispanounidense*.

Todo esto, sin olvidar el papel del translenguar como método pedagógico, y considerando las variedades que se denominan español estadounidense general y *espanglish*, también desde un punto de vista identitario, precisamente como indicio y símbolo de la construcción de una nueva identidad *in-between*.

Por lo tanto, la serie tiene la intención de albergar estudios filológicos, lingüísticos, literarios, lexicográficos, pedagógicos que pueden ayudar a la comprensión de los diferentes aspectos que esta “íntima” relación presenta.

La serie adopta un sistema de evaluación de texto basado en la revisión por pares (revisión por pares anónimos). Los criterios de evaluación se centrarán en el rigor metodológico, la calidad científica y la singularidad de los temas propuestos.

Franco Tondi

**Language Shift and Assimilation Patterns
of the Hispanic Ethnicity in the United States**





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Gioacchino Onorati editore S.r.l. — unipersonale

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00020 Canterano (RM)
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ISBN 978-88-255-3078-0

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1st edition: January 2020

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Introduction

Latinos residing in the US

The prime objective of this study, having a multiple content, is to examine language shift and assimilation patterns of Hispanics residing in the United States. (The terms *Hispanic* and *Latino* are used interchangeably in this work).

I also intend to recount succinctly the history of the Hispanic immigration to the US and subsequently to analyze the English and Spanish language usage of Hispanics from multiple perspectives, but primarily I shall delineate language shift. In order to fulfill this purpose, I focus on both the intergenerational and intragenerational language shift from Spanish monolingualism to English monolingualism pertinent to the third generation of Hispanics. Referring specifically to Mexican immigrants residing in the United States, I also want to emphasize the intrinsic features of their acculturation process in comparison with the acculturation patterns of the Asian ethnicity in the US.

To the so-called “Hispanic community” several different states ought to be included: it comprises prevalently people from Mexico and Cuba, but secondarily also many countries from Central America belong to the above mentioned category: Haiti, Puerto Rico, Honduras, Nicaragua, Guatemala, El Salvador, and the Dominican Republic. The term “Hispanic” referring to this group of people was adopted by the feder-

al government in 1976 to refer to residents of the US with Central or South American origins or roots in other Spanish speaking countries, whereas the word Latino was added to the official Hispanic term in 1997. Both terms are considered unique for the United States. They are not commonly used in other parts of the world and sometimes convey different meanings outside of the United States; both words had initially been employed in somewhat different connotations, but today the “US Office of Management and Budget”, uses them to define as persons of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South of Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin, regardless of race. They are used to refer to ethnicity (De Vos 2017: 7–8). Recent scholarship has shown, however, that Hispanics themselves have never adopted this term, especially when referring to their personal identities. Thus, when young American Hispanics are asked about their identity, a vast majority (52 %) thinks their country of origin identifies them best. A large number of them, does not use the term Hispanic or Latino in relation to their identity, and approximately 24 % of Hispanics aged 16 to 25 often identify as truly American. Similarly, 69 % of Latinos in the US are convinced that there is no common culture between them but they think their culture emanates from the country where their progenitors came from. Moreover, it has been determined that Hispanics are split on whether they identify as typical American. Nearly half (47 %) claim they are, whereas, another 47 % believe they are not truly American; and furthermore, foreign-born Latinos are less likely to say they are typical American (De Vos 2017: 25).

In relation to different races and ethnicities residing in the US, the metaphor of the “melting pot” was introduced during the 18th and 19 century. As I have stated elsewhere (Ton-di 2017b: 9), the term melting pot gained popularity follow-

ing Israel Zangwill's homonymous play "The Melting Pot" which symbolised an idealistic vision of American society. In a certain sense, it was a political symbol used to strengthen and legitimize the ideology of the United States as a land of opportunity where race, religion, and national origin should not be barriers to social mobility. Today, a second nuance has been added to the above mentioned theory. There is a further interpretation of the melting pot symbol, which represents the emphasis on "Americanization" of immigrants around the turn of the century. Whereas the melting pot images suggest a blending of cultures, the process was essentially one of "angloconformity". Thus, immigrants were incited to learn English and to discard their foreign ways, their so-called ethnic culture (De Vos 2017: 13–14).

But I think it is appropriate to mention that racially speaking, the United States is zero percent Hispanic. This seems to be somewhat contradictory and surprising at least for America's nearly 58 million Hispanics in 2018¹. The United States census divides the US into six general racial categories: White, Black, Asian, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, American Indian or Alaska Native, and some Other Race. Thus, Hispanic, Latino or Spanish origin is commonly treated not as a race but as an ethnicity: someone may be white (Hispanic) or black (Hispanic) but not simply Hispanic; and consequently, a large number of Hispanics checks "White" or increasingly "some Other Race". In the 21st century, the third largest racial group in the US is "Some Other Race" mainly consisting of Hispanics².

Mexican immigration to the United States is a topic of particular interest today, above all for several political reasons.

1. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/30/.../united-states-census.ht>.

2. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/30/.../united-states-census.ht>.

Mexicans constitute the single largest group of foreign born residents in the US; thus, in 2013, the United States counted 41.4 million individuals of foreign birth, 11.6 million were Mexican. If census data are aggregated more broadly, adding together the foreign born and persons of Mexican extraction, who are citizens, the number totals 31,8 million in 2010, or roughly 10% of the country's total population³.

Since the Hispanic community in the US is rather numerous, Spanish is often regarded as a threat by most linguists in the 21st century, and the perception that Latino immigration has led Spanish to sideline or even to overtake English in the US is widespread. From 1965 to 2015, roughly half of all immigration has come from Latin American countries. This trend added some 30 million people, most of whom came speaking Spanish, to the American populace⁴. As a result, Spanish is the second most dominant language in the US, after English. It was spoken by 48.6 million people in 2018: 34.8 million Spanish speakers age 5 and older of various national-origin backgrounds, 11 million undocumented Latin American immigrants and an estimated 2.8 million non-Latinos who use Spanish as a home language⁵.

Census data on US demographic changes project that by 2060 the Latino population in the US — the group most likely to speak Spanish — will grow 115%, i. e. to 119 million⁶.

According to Carreira in 2013 there were approximately 50.5 million people who identified as Hispanics or Latino, and three quarters of them generally spoke Spanish in a familiar domain, whereas 15 million US residents spoke it as

3. <http://oxfordre.com/americanhistory/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780199329175.001.0001/acrefore-9780199329175-e-146>.

4. <https://qz.com/.../spanish-to-english-us-is-increasingly-monoling>.

5. <https://qz.com/.../spanish-to-english-us-is-increasingly-monoling>.

6. <https://qz.com/.../spanish-to-english-us-is-increasingly-monoling>.

a second language (Carreira 2013: 103). Today, 27% of New York's population of eight million are Hispanic; in the Bronx it is even 48% (MacNeil; Cran 2005: 91). This situation clearly distinguishes Spanish from other immigrant languages of the past, such as Italian, Polish, Swedish, and especially German, a language that is not replenished today, intergenerational transmission having ceased in the second part of the 20th century, (see my previous works, Tondi: 2017a, 2017b). However, after four decades of enormous growth, the Mexican immigrant population in the US began slightly declining after 2010. Between 2016 and 2017 the number of Mexicans residing in the US shrunk by about 300.000 due to a general amelioration of the Mexican economy and the long-term drop in Mexico's birth rates⁷. Moreover, according to one of the US Census Bureau's most recent population projections issued in March 2018, the non-Hispanic White population in the US is steadily decreasing. This is mainly caused by lower birth rates and higher mortality among non-Hispanic Whites. It has also been esteemed that in 2030, migration will replace natural increase as the driver of the total population growth in the US. This will eventually result in non-Hispanic Whites becoming the numerical minority in the US by 2045 (Vos 2017: 4).

The US has always been a nation characterized by a noteworthy ethnic diversity having a heightened consciousness of race, religion, language, and group culture which inevitably pose a threat to its national unity.

But although Mexican immigration to the US has diminished, the fear that Spanish could replace English as the most frequently spoken language in the United States is still particularly widespread. It has also been reported in this regard that the US had become the second largest Spanish speaking

7. www.migrationpolicy.org/article/mexican-immigrants-united-states.

nation in the world after Mexico. The highest concentration of Spanish speakers in the US can be found in New Mexico (47%), California and Texas (38%) and Arizona (30%) (Vos 2017: 4). The US could even become the largest Spanish speaking country in the world; and hence, approximately one third of the American population will have Spanish as its mother tongue (Vos 2017: 4).

Frequent consternations have been expressed in relation to the above mentioned theory, because the Hispanic ethnicity might constitute a serious danger, a challenge as far as the preservation of the Anglo American Protestant identity and the retention of the English language, are concerned. Such theories have been elaborated by numerous linguists, for example by Samuel Huntington, the author of a study entitled *Who are we* (2004). According to him, a sort of “Mexification” of the American Southwest could occur in the subsequent decades of the 21st century. He also regards Mexican immigration as unprecedented in American history and different both from past and contemporary immigration, because of a retardation of the assimilation process of Hispanics, which Huntington defines as an outcome of a combination of six factors:

a) *Contiguity*

It is unique for the United States and in the world, because no first world country has a land frontier with a third world country; and thus the economic disparity between both countries is noteworthy.

b) *Numbers*

A steadily increasing Mexican immigration flux has been observed since the second half of the 1960s, and their proportions were progressively growing. A large number of Mexicans decided to emigrate to the US in order to ameliorate their social status. More

than 640,000 Mexicans moved to the US in the 1970s, 1,656,000 in the 1980s, and 2,249,000 in the 1990s, accounting for 25 % of total legal immigration.

c) *Illegality*

Substantial illegal entry into the United States is a prevalently post-1965 and a Mexican phenomenon. After the adoption of the American Constitution, illegal immigration was virtually impossible, since a restriction or prohibition of immigration was not extant. This situation was drastically modified, however, by the immigration law in 1965. Consequently, two thirds of post-1975 Mexican immigrants entered the US illegally.

d) *Regional Concentration*

Hispanics often have tended to settle regionally: Mexicans migrate to Southern California, Cubans predominate in Miami and Puerto Ricans and Dominicans often move to New York City. Although the heaviest concentration of Hispanics are in the Southwest, mostly due to geographic propinquity, they have also established concentrated presences in various parts of the US. It is a well-known fact that the more highly concentrated immigrants are, the slower and less complete is their assimilation.

e) *Persistence*

The current wave of Hispanic immigrants is protracted. It could decline solely if the economic situation of Mexico were improving, hence exceeding the economic growth of the US. Such a high level migration often entails a retardation as far as assimilation is concerned. As a result, the Spanish speaking population is being continuously replenished by newcomers, and the usage of Spanish in the US will be a reality that cannot be changed very easily.

f) Historical Presence

The Hispanic ethnicity constitutes the sole immigrant group in American history asserting a historical claim to American territory. Large parts of Texas, Arizona, Nevada, California, and Utah were parts of Mexico prior to the “Texan War of Independence” and the “Mexican American War”. Following these wars, Mexico became obliged to cede the above mentioned territories to the US; and consequently, the vast majority of Mexicans is convinced that they have special rights to those regions which they consider their homeland aiming at reconquering it. Hence, they intend to impose their culture and their language on Americans. (Huntington 2004: 222–230)

By examining the six factors previously enumerated, it can be easily evinced that not all the statements expressed by Huntington are still valid today (in 2019), especially as far as persistence is concerned.

Moreover, Huntington claims that American national identity is undergoing destabilizing changes with threatening implications for America’s national cohesion and capacity to articulate and achieve collective goals. In his view, American identity is defined not by race or ethnicity but by the fusion of its democratic political creed and an Anglo Protestant culture that combines the English language, religious commitment, individualism, a strong work ethic, and a sense of obligation to try and create a heaven on earth. He delineates three specific threats to American national identity. As has already been noted, Huntington considers immigration from Latin America, especially from Mexico, immense and continuing; and as a consequence, there will be two *de facto* nations: an English speaking Anglo America, and a Spanish speak-

ing “Mexamerica” that will regard itself as a distinct society (Huntington 2004: 246). Huntington also speaks about declining patriotism among the leading bureaucratic, business, and intellectual elites in the US, which constitutes a challenge to the country’s historic sense of its own uniqueness. Huntington’s critics, however, state that it is erroneous to claim Anglo Protestant culture as the core of American national identity, since American customs and values have evolved as the country’s population has changed.

Similar sentiments, however, have been expressed in the past by other linguists, as well, for example by Richard Rodriguez, according to whom Spanish is unofficially the second language of the United States, and a large number of Americans are worried about immigration and a possible Mexification of the Southwest. They hear Spanish rather frequently and fear that English is declining (MacNeil; Cran 2005: 91). Thus in the 2000 Census it has been esteemed that the states with the largest Hispanic immigrant concentration (based on number of people who speak Spanish as a home language), are New Mexico (29%), Texas (27%), California (26%), Arizona (20%), Florida (16%), Nevada (16%), New York (14%), New Jersey (12%), Colorado (11%), Illinois (11%) (MacNeil; Cran 2005: 98).

In relation to this issue the Mexican writer Elena Poniatowska argued that due to immigration, Mexico is recovering the territories it lost in the 19th century. Many common, indigent people moved to the United States, a country that needs to speak Spanish, because it has approximately 33,5 million Hispanics who are imposing their culture (MacNeil; Cran 2005: 90).

Hence, I intend to examine in the first chapter of this work the history of the Spanish language in the United States; and moreover, I shall delineate old and above all contemporary Hispanic migration to the US in relation to Hispanic assimilation characteristics in the 21st century.

The history of the Hispanic immigration to the us

The history of Hispanic immigration to the US has complex origins rooted in the nation's territorial and economic expansion. Immigration from the nations to the south of the United States has long been dominated by Mexicans. Between 1820 and 1930 approximately 750.000 Mexican immigrants entered the United States, about 425.000 came from the West Indies, 43.000 from Central America, and South America contributed about 113.000. The absolute majority of them were close neighbours of the United States, and an indeterminable number of them were only sojourners who returned home (Daniels 2002: 307).

In order to be more precise in this regard, it can be mentioned that historical events in relation to Hispanic immigration to the US occurred in the first half of the 19th century and were characterized by the surrender of the United States to their claims of the Mexican province of Texas, after Spain had ceded Florida by treaty in 1819.

In 1829 the US wanted to buy Texas, but their attempt was rejected by the Mexicans. Six years later, Texas declared itself independent; and consequently, Mexico sent a potent army under General Santa Anna to fight against the rebels. The Texas force, consisting of 187 men, retreated to an old Spanish mission in the vicinity of San Antonio, called the Alamo. They resisted for 12 days and were finally killed.

(These events were excellently portrayed by John Wayne in his historical epic western “The Alamo”, released in October 1960¹).

Then, Santa Anna captured 300 hundred Texas soldiers and executed them, and subsequently the Mexican army was routed in San Jacinto. Finally, Santa Anna had to surrender and to accept the independence of Texas (MacNeil; Cran 2005: 89–90).

The first significant influx of Latino immigrants to the United States occurred during the California Gold Rush, as a result of the modern boundary between the US and Mexico at the end of the US–Mexican War (1846–1848) (Gutierrez 2016: 108). But for nearly a half–century after the annexation of Texas in 1845, the immigration flux ought to be considered merely a trickle; initially there had been solely a rather noteworthy migration in the other direction, because it concerned prevalently Mexican citizens leaving the newly annexed US territories and resettling in Mexican territory². Those territories increased the US size by one third. The legacy today is a two thousand mile border between two nations marked by the largest income disparity of any adjacent countries in the world (MacNeil; Cran 2005: 89).

Thus, it can be stated that the Mexican immigration to the United States began in 1846 and persisted without any significant interruption, in comparison to European, Asian, or African immigration fluxes which were by far more varied in trajectory and timing. They were characterized by initial massive movements, due to famine, political strife, or burgeoning economic opportunities in the US, but subsequently they slowed and tapered off terminating abruptly. This fact explains why Mexico has been the single largest source of im-

1. www.imdb.com.

2. [Time.com/3742067/history-mexican-immigration](http://time.com/3742067/history-mexican-immigration).