

Abstract

This article explores the present situation of Spanish in the USA. More precisely it should become clear that an ideological worldview is derived from socio-historically positioned perspectives, and therefore the importance of attending to awareness as a dimension of ideology. Hispanic culture has an internal hierarchy in which the persistence of the former cultural empire is implicit in the terms *hispanismo*, *hispanoamericanismo* and *panhispanismo* of Spain. This does not properly interpret local discourses of diversity or make sense of pervasive multilingualism, code-switching and code-mixing among Latin@s in the USA. Since it is not grounded in observable sociolinguistic patterns, it necessarily implied a condemnation to silence, a negation of the mixed identity of Latin@s.

Latin@s' language ideologies^[1] **By Albert Gineste Llombart**

Since each culture and society are the result of mix and interchange, there is no such thing as a *pure* language. 500 years on from the arrival of the first Spanish explorers to Florida, Spanish has been expressed in numerous forms. You can see it in the name of cities, streets, family names, food, clothes, sports, and notably in literature published by Latin@s in the USA (Ortega, 2004). These days, rap groups and Latin@ writers create a means of expression tinged with terms and rhythms plainly derived from both the English and Spanish languages.

In conversations with bilingual speakers, it is quite often for someone to begin a sentence in one language, follow it partially in the other and then perhaps return to the first in order to finish the same sentence. Mixing two languages can be found not only at the sentence level but in the word itself. Word borrowing, code-switching, code-mixing and the linguistic effects of language contact between English and Spanish in the USA have received unprecedented amounts of study. Accordingly, there are now many major studies by experts, such as Fishman (1971), Hernández-Chávez (1975), Peñalosa (1980), Amastae (1982), Sánchez (1983), Elías-Olivares (1985), Bergen (1990), Roca & Lipski (1993), García (1997) Zentella (1997), Stavans (2000), Otheguy (2001), Silva-Corvalán (2004), among others. Since these issues have been well studied and language is seen as a product of social, historical, political, and ideological processes, in this article we will instead focus on Latin@s language ideologies.

Two languages, one culture?

As English extends worldwide, its presence is widely viewed as beneficial. Aims such as international intelligibility are positive-sounding and forward-looking. Since Spanish also comes into contact with many languages^[2], most of them in

developing countries, we may ask ourselves whether Spanish is truly a global language or only an international one. Nevertheless, there is also another side to the coin, for English and Spanish are not always welcome. Linguistic history contains several examples of Spanish and English supplanting other languages. Thus, its presence may generate antagonism, especially when it is perceived to interfere with the character or use of local languages. Small countries or communities may feel particularly threatened, and their languages endangered and thus nationalistic movements may totally reject it, and not always peacefully, as people become increasingly conscious of the rights of minorities. This has happened several times in recent years. English has been replaced by other national languages in many countries in Africa and Asia (Crystal, 1997); and the role of Spanish in relation to other autochthon languages in Latin America (Hamel, 1994) and Spain (Siguan, 1992) is a continuing source of controversy.

While the English and Spanish languages often pose a threat, they can also be threatened themselves. In this context, we may place the conflict between English and Spanish in the USA. On the one hand, English speakers may feel alarmed by the substantial growth of an *immigrant* language in their country. As a result, major protectionist movements, such as English Only, have been prompted, and although Spanish was the first European language spoken in the USA, in many States (Crawford, 1992), there has been the declaration of English as an official language, whilst bilingual education has been eliminated. On the other hand, Spanish speakers living in the USA may feel threatened by such language policies. Altogether this has created a sociolinguistic controversy of unprecedented proportions.

Although there is always mutual influence as languages come into contact with each other, in a community some users of a standard language may become worried about the spread of a non-standard variety, especially one which shows a mixture of linguistic influences. Interferences and transferences (Gass, 1996) as well as code-switching (Heller & Pfaff, 1996) take place to some degree everywhere that a language is spoken alongside another language, and is a normal feature of bilingualism. Thus, we can find mixed languages everywhere in the world where two languages come in contact. Some are widely spoken although it is unusual to see any of these varieties in writing. The mixed varieties are given blended names to show their origins, such as Japlish, Swedlish, Anglikaans, Angleutsch, Wenglish, Spanglish, etc [³].

Here, the issue at stake is the increasing use of Spanglish. Spanish-speaking television shows made in the USA are reaching a Latin American audience – *Sabado Gigante*, *El Show de Cristina*, *Noticiero Univisión* – many of which regularly use Spanglish terms and patterns that are modifying the spoken and written language in Latin America (Villa, 2000). Has Spanish irrevocably lost its purity as a result or is English becoming less *Anglicized* on the tongues of Latin@s? Should Spanglish be endorsed by the intellectual and political establishment? Is it a slang in the process of becoming a dialect? Is it likely one day to become a fully fledged language in its own right? Are the major languages in the world exerting such influence on one another that one day they will create a universal tongue? If present trends persist it seems that the majority of the human beings will finish talking one vernacular language in their

everyday life and an international language (mostly English) for other *higher* activities.

Regarding the threat to the Spanish language, the use of Spanish varies from one community to another to such a degree that, in some cases, the homogenizing goal of the Spanish language in the USA could be seriously challenged (Bierbach, 2000). The privileged variety is the Spanish spoken by the educated Latin@ classes; indigenous languages and other varieties of Spanish and mixed Spanglish, especially those practiced by the members of the lower tiers of the cultural hierarchy, are thus excluded.

Thus, while there may be disagreements about the specific contours of what constitutes standard Spanish, it is clear that regional or national variations no longer pose a serious threat to its unity (Otheguy & Zentella, 2003). For instance, Ávila (2001) presented in the 2nd International Congress of the Spanish Language new results of his research about international Spanish mass media. In his work, he analyses the news of the main television channels of the Spanish-speaking world and concludes that the number of different words, non-common words, words that not all TV-watchers of different countries can understand is minimal: only 1.2%. Thus, does the possibility of creating a neutral, standard Spanish^[4] - which can serve all Spanish speaking countries - exist? Despite all the differences, and the greater influence of English over the Latin American Spanish varieties, the answer is positive if we take into account that the more cultivated a text is, the more homogenous will be the language used.

Would Spanglish mean a change, inevitably causing the fragmentation of the Spanish language, or could unity be preserved? Here, the intention is not even to attempt a prediction about whether Spanglish is a threat. Indeed, it seems unable to sustain the comparison between the fragmentation of Latin and the future of Spanglish in the USA. The linguistic facts in cultural, political, and social arguments all point to the relative intercommunication among the Latin@ communities through the mass media. Instead, the door is open for the necessary corrections that would channel language development in the direction of unity. In such a case, who should be in charge of channelling change in order to preserve this unity? Unity implies selection, codification, elaboration and acceptance of the Spanish standard of the USA. Debates over which individuals or institutions should control the linguistic norm and over the desirability or inevitability of fragmentation of Spanish because of the appearance of Spanglish as a language have come to symbolize the argument over the role of Latin@ intellectuals in the maintenance and development of a united Latin@ community. Cameron has written that we must "*pose searching questions about who prescribes for whom, what they prescribe, how, and for what purposes*" (1995:11).

Hegemonic language ideologies

Throughout the present article, it should become clear that an ideological worldview is derived from socio-historically positioned perspectives. Therefore, some intellectuals advocate a linguistic hierarchy by placing the common

people at the bottom, looking up toward a few individuals that represent everything to be imitated. According to this perspective, lower communities and social groups are disadvantaged, displaced and excluded when a certain version of Spanish is imposed and institutionalized, and when institutions, like a government education system, or the mass media, actively produce and reproduce ideologies of the elites.

Here, the hidden ideological presupposition is that some people are more prone to do what is *wrong* with their language. At the same time, another part of society are understood either to be better prepared or more knowledgeable regarding language matters, so they are left to *fix* it. This perspective is based ultimately on a particular vision of what society is or should be (Kroskrity, 2000). It communicates an obvious class bias that often conforms to the tastes of traditional elites, through which the popular classes are shown to be unable fully to understand their own productions. This failure to grasp what is good for them is then used to legitimate the interests of the educated class. Such meta-discursive strategies are relevant to the pervasive dismissal of *folk* linguistics within the academic disciplines (Schieffelin et al., 1998).

The importance of attending to awareness as a dimension of ideology is the reversal of a longstanding scholarly tradition of delegitimizing common people's views of language. Purists within the fractured Hispanic intelligentsia refuse to endorse Spanglish as a vehicle of communication. They claim that it lacks dignity and an essence of its own. However, children and adolescents learn it on a daily basis. As Stavans (2000:28) dryly observes:

"who are we scholars to withhold its legitimacy when millions are using it on a daily basis? For ivory-tower intellectuals to condemn their tongue as illegitimate seems preposterous to me. It signals the awkwardness of scholars and academics. Who are we, living in campus comfort, to require millions in East Los Angeles and Spanish Harlem to study proper Spanish? Who are we to dictate what is acceptable and what is not?"

Language was conceived in the romantic and post-romantic era as the embodiment of the *Volksgeist*, and therefore, as one of the essential components of any specific culture. It became imperative for any supralocal community to achieve the desired unity by exercising a strict control over language. Selected institutions and individuals would thus be assigned the task of determining the legitimate forms of speech and of developing mechanisms that influenced people's linguistic behaviour and attitudes.

However, homogenous language is as much a figment of the imagination as is a homogenous community (Kroskrity, 2000). A social group or a language may be imagined as homogenous and its internal variation disregarded. Because a linguistic ideology is a totalizing vision, elements that do not fit its interpretive structure - that cannot be seen to fit- must be either ignored or transformed. Thus, the ideology imagined inherent natural links between a unitary mother tongue, a territory and an ethno-national identity, the ideal political order of one nation speaking one language ruled by one state within one bounded territory is arbitrary, and not real. Latin@ linguistic diversity failed to correspond to social and ethnic boundaries so that classic sociolinguistic research sought first of all

to demonstrate that linguistic diversity did not necessarily produce or imply social disorder. Yet, Latin@s' multiple languages are still assumed to indicate multiple loyalties and thus a temperamental flaw, a lack of trustworthiness.

The imagined existence of a unique Hispanic culture, lifestyle, characteristics, traditions and values, all embodied in its language, the idea that USA Latin@ culture is nothing but Hispanic culture transplanted to the USA, and the notion that Hispanic culture has an internal hierarchy in which the persistence of the former cultural empire is implicit in the terms *hispanismo*, *hispanoamericanismo* and *panhispanismo* of Spain. According to del Valle (2002), even now, Spain still occupies a hegemonic position, with the Spanish language serving falsely, as a symbol of unity and a seal of fraternity among its speakers.

We must not ignore the variety of culturally and often politically significant forms of linguistic differentiation - the register, dialects, and languages- present in the linguistic repertoires of speakers. Linguistic change can be illuminated if we attend to the ideologizing of a sociolinguistic field and the consequent reconfiguring of its varieties through processes such as iconization, recursive projection, and erasure (Kroskrity, 2000:37-38). The Spanish language, a certain variety of it, its orthography, or its history, have often become iconized, that is, they have often been discursively associated with features that supposedly reflect the spirit of the community (del Valle, 2002).

The general acceptance of the standard of the Hispanic community as a whole is the responsibility of the linguistic elite who must secure linguistic control by earning the consent of the people. The construction of social consent depends on the linguistic elite's ability to create an appealing image of the language and to present themselves as the true interpreters of the community's collective will and linguistic identity. Thus, a discourse is said to represent *the language* and tries to impact and shape people's linguistic behaviour. At the same time, it produces an ideologically charged discourse with direct implications for intellectuals' attempt to regain or maintain its hegemonic position.

The high quality of intellectuals' works and their well-deserved stature as linguists inevitably dispose us to interpret their linguistic discourse as objective and ideologically neutral. The development of a standard language is a key element in creating an emblem of national identity widely available to all. Thus, they do not just assume or imagine a linguistic homogeneity, they attempt to impose it - erasing internal linguistic differences in favour of producing a contrast of now homogenized languages that iconically fits the contrast of oppositional groups. Language homogeneity is regarded as a natural state rather than something that is constructively produced by language ideologies of the group, thereby, privileging the modern and traditional elites who control the various sources of language.

In other words, language unity is attempted through the designing of language planning, which involves deliberate, although not always overt, future oriented change in systems of language code and/or speaking in a societal context. Successful language planning efforts will persuade people that speaking a certain way and holding certain linguistic beliefs are in their best interest, or even better, *natural* to them. The goal of these strategies is to naturalize and

legitimize the behaviour and attitudes that the language planning agencies are trying to promote.

Some countries dispose of formal academies of language in order to control the language. That is the case of the Real Academia de la Lengua Española, which is scattered throughout the 21 Spanish speaking countries, including the USA. The existence of a cultural elite loyal to the administrative and literary standard was the obvious legacy of a long tradition that culminated in 1713 with the creation of the Spanish Royal Academy, that was to be continued in the 20th century in the form of a prestigious school of philological and linguistic studies, and that will be maintained, it seems, into the 21st century by highly publicized, state and corporate funded, cultural-linguistic institutions. Activities of such organizations may be passionately pursued, though any success is likely to be limited to restricted domains, such as official publications or committee dictionaries and grammars^[5].

If English seems always to be ready to increase its lexicon through the acquisition of loan words, the reaction of other languages, borrowing heavily from English, may be perceived as far less positive (Crystal, 1997). People may complain about the excessive influence of English on their language, and their country may even try to legislate against it. Lexical invasion is feared because it is seen as the thin end of a wedge. External influences coming from other languages and cultures are usually seen with suspicion and considered to be most dangerous for the preservation of the language identity. However, the existing variation of a language is consistent with the life of any modern language (Bernárdez, 2004) and does not threaten its unity (Walter, 1994).

In the 19th century Spanish intellectuals, suspicious of French cultural influence, warned against the destructive effect of Gallicisms. Much the same way, their 20th century disciples, such as Molinero (2004) and Gimeno (2001) decry the flood of Anglicisms threatening the Hispanic essence of their treasured lexicon. English loans are perceived both as aggression against the dignity of Spanish and as threats to its unity (Betanzos, 2004); and thus as promoting the idea of a unified Spanish language. All these remarks share essential characteristics: they are, very obviously, evaluative comments, they bring forth a picture of language decay, an image which implies the existence of better times in the past, and they call for immediate corrective action in order to prevent some sort of imminent cultural collapse. Yet, why are Hispanic intellectuals offended, and believe that Spanglish strips the virtue from Spanish, and not from English?

The mass media in the USA are confronted by different subsystems of varieties of Spanish, which reflects the Spanish pertaining to the origin countries of each group. The mass media tend to simplify the language, by avoiding regionalisms, terms or expressions that can complicate the comprehension of the message (Knauer, 2004), producing an imagined community. Homogenization presupposes a hierarchical conceptualization of linguistic diversity which is the result of an operation that consists of establishing which variety is valid and which is not. Such operation is known, in the sociology of language, as *selection*.

Certain institutions, such as the NAHJ, the National Association of Hispanic

Journalists which groups the main journals, radios and television in Spanish of the USA, has created a working group made up by journalists of different mass media and different nationalities in order to elaborate a *manual de estilo de español internacional*, a standard Spanish style book^[6]. Thus in the mass media in the USA, journalists proceed from different Spanish-speaking countries. Step by step, almost without noticing it, they will converge to a Spanish variety which is valid for all (Ramos, 2002), accomplishing the immediate objectives of the intervention of power in language use: uniformity of linguistic behaviour and unity of the communicative code.

However, rather than the choice of a clearly defined variety, such as the Mexican variety, since it is the majority within the minority of Latin@s, selection consists of the identification of forms that exist in different areas of language use bringing them together to form a supposedly systematic whole. It is precisely the supralocal character of the legitimate variety that makes it possible to *imagine* linguistic homogeneity in such a large territory as the USA. The consensus and agreement on a single norm among Latin@ intellectuals should play an active role in the spread and maintenance of the selected uniform variety; supported, for instance, by businesses dedicated to the commerce of products which are sold worldwide and, thus, who are not interested in creating a new version for each Spanish-speaking community.

Other languages ideologies

Nevertheless, another disruption of linguistic order comes from intellectuals who defend the legitimate rhetorical and communicative value of hybrid linguistic behaviours. This radical argument is that it absolutely rejects the dominant language ideology, based on a standard language, as appropriate or valid for Latin@s. The representatives of the dominant language ideology feel uncomfortable accepting the worthiness of Spanglish. Therefore, its value, its power as a communicative and symbolic instrument is minimized when not forgotten by the dominant ideology. Spanglish is a hybridized Spanish/English that is the result of its appropriation and transformation by Latin@ cultures of the USA. According to this perception, Latin@ cultures and Spanish language are and have not been dominated and destroyed by Anglo culture and English language, but rather have emerged in a mixed subversive process of transculturation. In this context, *transculturation* means the process of legitimization and validation that this variety receives through the action of a dominant field or market.

The unity and uniformity of a homogenous and hegemonic standard or the assumption of one-to-one relationship between language and identity among Spanish in the USA carries with it a latent hierarchical order. This order does not properly interpret local discourses of diversity or make sense of pervasive multilingualism, code-switching and code-mixing among Latin@s in the USA. Thus, it necessarily implied a condemnation to silence, a negation of the mixed identity of Latin@s within the USA. The misrecognition of practices of plurilingualism, code-switching and code-mixing - ignoring the variety of culturally and often politically significant linguistic differentiation present in the

linguistic repertoires of speakers (Zentella, 1997) - betrays the power that nationalist ideologies have on scholars of language ethnocentric language ideologies, assumptions and interpretations prefigured by nationalist ideologies rather than grounded in observable sociolinguistic patterns.

Although writers and singers have already begun to put Spanglish on paper, and sections like the classified ads in newspapers and music and sports magazines cannot avoid its' use, it remains, for the most part, an oral code of communication made of two codes of English and Spanish, free in spirit and defying standardization. Although dictionaries about US Spanish-English vocabulary have long existed, their central focus has traditionally been the impact of English on Spanish in particular geographic regions and among individualized national groups. Stavans who translated the first chapter of *Don Quixote* into Spanglish, also elaborated the first Spanglish dictionary embracing the whole varieties of Spanglish. In the future, are we going to see the elaboration of a Spanglish grammar?

Spanglish is beginning to be surrounded by a halo of respectability and legitimacy that is only possible as a result of such intellectuals' symbolic power and their association with academic texts. Comparing varieties of Spanglish spoken by groups of Latin@s in the USA, such as the Nuyorricans, Chicanos, Cuban-Americans of Florida, and the new Latin@ groups, Spanglish has not yet acquired the level of full standardization. However, thanks to radio, TV, newspapers and particularly the Internet, it shows in its turn its own inclination toward the homogenization of the linguistic diversity by which is established which variety of Spanglish is valid and which is not.

In sum, we should not denigrate the use of any variety of a language on the ground that it does not fit a certain model or norm. After all, among other reasons, such usage is the consequence of certain situations (Llombart, 2003a & 2003b). Generally, people use a language in order to express and to communicate in society the best they can. If the result is a popular, vulgar or mixed use, it is because the socioeconomic and sociolinguistic conditions have exerted a specific series of influences. Moreover, today for many Latin@s, Spanglish, or the creation of different repertoires of language (Zentella, 1997), is more than a tongue and a marketing tool, it is a political stand that encourages the maintenance of multiple, distinct languages and their associated identities.

Saussure's assertion of the *arbitrariness of the sign* (Culler, 1987) is often celebrated as the original moment of modern linguistics. But publicly voiced claims about the inherent properties of particular languages, or of standards - as opposed to dialects and other varieties - have not abated in contemporary life.

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NOTES

¹ The use of @ is intended to emphasize the incorporation of both genders more plainly than, for instance, Latino(s), which is the traditional form in Spanish.

² This range from countless indigenous tongues in Latin America, to Portuguese in Europe and South America, to Basque, Catalan, Galician and other languages and dialects in Spain, to Arabic in Spanish Morocco, to English and Philippine languages in the Philippines, to multiple varieties of American English in the United States and Puerto Rico. In the Caribbean, Spanish meets French, French Creole, Papiamentu, English and Dutch. Additionally, Judeo-Spanish is found in Israel and the Balkans, as well as other parts of the world where, with some local peculiarities, it has survived for centuries in contact with many other languages.

³ Moreover, in Spain we can find mixed speeches of Spanish and the other autochthon languages as well as other non-official languages present in the territory. In Latin America for instance, in the border between Uruguay and Brazil you can hear *Portuñol*, a mix of Portuguese and Spanish, or in Mexico *Nahuañol*, a mix of Spanish and Nahuatl, just to name a few. Traditionally, all these linguistic mixes have a poor reputation.

⁴ *Variación léxica del español en el mundo* is a pilot project of Hiroto Ueda researching the present situation of the Spanish lexicon worldwide, looking for an international neutral variety of Spanish (VARILEX)

⁵ The 22 Spanish Academies are working on a new common Spanish grammar in order to substitute that of 1931. For the first time it seems that it will be taken into account the real situation of the language not only in Spain but also in the rest of Spanish-speaking countries as it has been already done with the new editions of the dictionary (Cuadernos Cervantes de la Lengua Española, 2004).

⁶ see international Spanish style book in: www.nahj.org/spanish/stylebook/book_sp.html