

## Spanglish: myths and realities

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### 1 Introduction

‘Spanglish’ has provoked the expression of alarmist opinions from journalists, academics, creative writers and the general Spanish-speaking public.

But it is a term that is unclearly defined and applied to a lot of different scenarios.

The aims of this talk are (a) to be rigorous in our description of these cultural and linguistic phenomena and (b) to assess objectively the basis for the popular alarm.

### 2 What is Spanglish?

- The speech of native Spanish speakers in Spanish-speaking countries who use a large number of words of English origin (typically young people), e.g.:

*Vamos al shopping a comprar un cd y luego vamos al showcase a ver Stars [sic] Wars y a comer popcorn* (Mallo & Bertazzi, 3, reporting on Villa Mercedes, Argentina)

- Use of English terminology in certain fields of meaning, especially business, computing (*cyberspanglish*), etc.:

*marketing, stand, spot, boom*

*software, laptop, e-mail, web, bit, floppy, cliqupear* (‘to click’), *comando* (‘command’), *fax, módem*

- Mixing of Spanish and English by the Hispanic population of the US (Text A)
- Alternation of Spanish and English (Text B)

### 3 Language contact and borrowing

#### 3.1 Some apparently universal properties of language exemplified by Spanish

- All languages (or at least all living languages) borrow from others.
- There is a need to label new concepts
- There are some ‘economic’ advantages of borrowed words  
*joystick / palanca de mando emailearse* ‘to exchange e-mails’
- The desire of speakers to be ‘trendy’ or to show off
- Most words, once borrowed, become a part of the host language’s system, often serving as a basis for new creations:  
*fax - faxear*  
*chat - chatear*  
*click - cliqupear*
- Spanish derivatives of English words can even represent economically concepts which can’t be neatly expressed in English:  
*emailearse* ‘to exchange e-mails’

### 3.2 So why are linguistic authorities so hostile to borrowings?

- Borrowings threaten the ‘purity’ of the language  
But Spanish has borrowed extensively from Basque, Visigothic, Arabic, Provençal, Italian, French, English, Latin (learned) during its history
- Borrowings indicate cultural inferiority or lack of prestige in certain areas  
But borrowings make good that situation and give the host language a full range of expression
- Borrowing is equated with submission to imperial conquest  
But although English is becoming the universal world language, Spanish-speakers have little to fear for the future of Spanish
- Borrowing = change; change is seen as bad  
All languages change and, overall, change is impossible to resist

## 4 Spanish in the US

### 4.1 Some general considerations

- Spanish is not an official language, though it is more widely used than any language other than English
- There is no separate US standard for Spanish
- The Hispanic population consists (a) of the descendants of original inhabitants of the two-thirds of Mexico that was ceded to the US under the Texas Annexation of 1845, the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo of 1848 (parts of California, New Mexico, Arizona, Nevada, Utah and Colorado), the Gadsden Purchase of 1853, and (b) of immigrants, the main concentrations of whom are in New York (Puerto Ricans), California (Mexicans) and Florida (Cubans)
- Dialect groupings are unclear: in many cities there is a Hispanic population of mixed origins which has led to LEVELLING.
- The majority of speakers are from lower socioeconomic classes
- There is extensive contact with English and a great incentive towards bilingualism

### 4.2 Relations with English

- The situation heavily favours borrowing from English
- It is difficult to distinguish borrowing from CODE-SWITCHING

#### 4.2.1 Integrated borrowings

Examples: *chainer* [tʃajne'ar] ‘to shine’, *la suera* ‘sweater’, *mapear* ‘to mop’, *el jira* ‘heater’

#### 4.2.2 Calquing

Examples: *tener un buen tiempo* ‘to have a good time’ (standard *divertirse, pasarlo bien*)  
*llamar p'atrás* ‘to call back’ (standard *volver a llamar*)

### 4.2.3 Code-switching

#### 4.2.3.1 Stylistic variation in the speech of Hispanics

Standard (Mexican) Spanish  
 Popular Spanish  
*Español mixtureado (pocho, Tex-Mex)*  
*Caló (pachuco)*  
 Chicano English  
 Standard (American) English

#### 4.2.3.2 Some characteristics of code-switching

Typically cultivated by bilinguals  
 Favoured by young people  
 A creative, 'playful', activity

#### 4.2.3.2 Constraints on code-switching

- No switch in the middle of a word (unless the root is a borrowing, in which case it isn't a switch) [The FREE MORPHEME CONSTRAINT]  
 \**run+eando* is not possible
- Order of the elements before and after the switch point must be grammatical in both languages [The EQUIVALENCE CONSTRAINT]  
*El siguiente play*  
 \**La pared red* is not possible

But it is not possible to predict when a code-switch will take place, so a code-switching language is a mode of speech rather than a fixed language.

#### 4.2.3.3 Success of code-switching ('Spanglish' proper)

It is seen as a badge of identity by young Hispanics (Text C)

It is used artistically in rap (Text D) and cultured literature, especially poetry (Text E)

### 5 The prospects for 'Spanglish' (= code-switching)

- As a standardisable hybrid? (Text F)  
 There are many hybrid languages in the world (eg Camfranglais in Cameroon, the *fronteirico* of the Brazil/Uruguay border), but they seem to be essentially unfixed
- As a variety of Spanish heavily influenced by English?  
 Depends on many factors:  
 The prosperity of Hispanics  
 The prestige of standard (Mexican?) Spanish  
 This would constitute the most serious challenge to the unity of the Spanish-speaking world
- Learnable as a foreign language?

## Texts

### A An example of code-switching in Hispanic speech:

...yo voy comer allí poquito, y yo voy comer allá poquito so I can... so they can be happy. When we come here from California, we... I... eat beans over here and chiles — same thing like back home pero porque tienen papitas con chiles, papas — potatoes with chile and all that — they think we don't like it because it's [fixed] that way. But I eat the same thing over here because we like them that way. I don't like... no quiero venir a comer dicen, porque... porque son papas con chiles, y no! No! I eat that at home pero se les hace porque you just don't feel like [eating] the food. They get mad, you know... you have to eat no matter where, everywhere you go — just a little bit so they'll be satisfied.

(Source: Leonora Timm, 'Spanish-English code-switching: el porque and how not to', *Romance Philology*, 28, 1975, p.482.)

### B Ricky Martin: *Jaleo* (Spanglish):

I have lived a thousand lives or more  
 Stolen broken hearts behind closed doors  
 Seen the seven wonders of the world  
 And everywhere I go your name is in my soul

I can feel you underneath my skin  
 You're the reason for the shape I'm in  
 On your lips I kiss, it tastes of sin  
 I wanna take your naked heart into my hands

Take me back and make it happen  
 Get on the floor, cause a chain reaction

Atrapado, moribundo  
 Con esas ganas de bailar contigo

Dame jaleo leo leo leo la  
 Dame jaleo leo leo leo la  
 No te detengas no me esquives  
 Déjate llevar  
 Porque esta noche tú serás mía

Dame jaleo leo leo leo la  
 Dame jaleo leo leo leo la  
 No te detengas no me esquives  
 Déjate llevar  
 Porque esta noche tú serás mía

Dame jaleo leo leo leo la  
 Dame jaleo leo leo leo la  
 Hypnotize you by the gypsy moon  
 And if for one night you will be mine

Dame jaleo leo leo leo la  
 Dame jaleo leo leo leo la...

(<http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/rickymartin/jaleospanglish.html>)

### C Ernesto Quiñonez, *Bodega Dreams*

"See, it's alive," he said, and right that minute, at a window next door to us, a woman yelled to her son down on the street. "*Mira*, Juanito, go buy *un mapo*, *un contén de leche*, and tell *el bodeguero yo le pago* next Friday. And I don't want to see you in *el rufo!*"

We both laughed.

"You know what is happening here, don't you? Don't you? What we just heard was a poem, Chino. It's a beautiful new language. Don't you see what's happening? A new language means a new race. Spanglish is the future. It's a new language being born out of the ashes of two cultures clashing with each other. You will use a new language. Words they might not teach you in that college. Words that aren't English or Spanish but at the same time are both. Now that's where it's at. Our people are evolving into something completely new." (Ernesto Quiñonez, *Bodega Dreams* (New York: Vintage Contemporaries, 2000), p.212).

**D Rap:** Yolanda Pérez, *Estoy enamorada*, from the album *Déjenme llorar*

...tú y mi mamá no cambian  
son bien aburridos  
ya no están en su rancho  
están en Estados Unidos

A mí me vale madre si es mi rancho  
o es el norti  
yo lo único que quiero  
es que mi hija se comporti  
cada día están más cortas  
esas faldas que te pones  
tengo miedo que un día de estos salgas en puros  
calzones

tú no me entiendes dad!  
yo no soy niña dad!  
yo voy a tener novio and I don't care if you get mad

estoy enamorada y mi padre no lo entiende  
(no entiendo ni me importa entender  
no quiero ver ese muchacho por aqui)...

(<http://www.lyricsdownload.com/yolanda-perez-estoy-enamorada-lyrics.html>)

**E Bilingual poetry**

WE'VE PLAYED COWBOYS

we've played cowboys  
not knowing  
nuestros charros  
and their countenance  
con trajes de gala  
silver embroidery  
on black wool  
zapata rode in white  
campesino white  
and villa in brown  
ranchero brown  
y nuestros charros  
parade of sculptured gods  
on horses  
—of flowing manes  
proud  
erect

they galloped  
and we've played cowboys  
—as opposed to indians  
when ancestors of mis charros abuelos  
indios fueron  
de la meseta central  
and of the humid jungles of yucatán  
nuestros MAYAS  
if we must  
cowboys play  
—con bigotes  
y ojos negros;  
negro pelo  
let them be  
let them have the cheek bones  
de firmeza y decisión  
of our caballeros tigres.

Alurista, from *Floriscanto en Aztlán* (Los Angeles: Chicano Cultural Center, U of California, 1971)

**F Ilán Stavans' translation into 'Spanglish' of *Don Quijote*:**

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 greyhound para el chase. A cazuela with más beef than mutton, carne choppeada para la dinner, un omelet pa' los Sábados, lentil pa' los Viernes, y algún pigeon como delicacy especial pa' los Domingos, consumían tres cuarers de su income.

(Ilán Stavans, *Spanglish. The Making of a New American Language*. New York: Rayo, p.253)

En un lugar de la Mancha, de cuyo nombre no quiero acordar-me, no ha mucho tiempo que vivía un hidalgo de los de lanza en astillero, adarga antigua, rocín flaco y galgo corredor. Una olla de algo más vaca que carnero, salpicón las más noches, duelos y quebrantos los sábados, lantejas los viernes, algún palomino de añadidura los domingos, consumían las tres partes de su hacienda.

*Some further reading*

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Valenzuela, Javier 'El vigor del "spanglish"' (<http://www.elcastellano.org/elpais.html>)