

Abstract

"Estudio etimológico: una perspectiva socio-lingüística e histórica del habla Chicano,"

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This article consists of a sociolinguistic study of the Spanish language of the Southwest. Its aim is to trace etymologically words in common usage by the Spanish-Speaking of Mexican ancestry. It, moreover, attempts to dispel the concept of "Tex-Mex" or the idea that the Spanish used by the Spanish-Speaking of this area is a corruption of English via hispanicized English expressions. Rather, this writer reveals that the language used in the Southwest is derived from four distinct language systems. They are (1) Archaic Spanish (2) Gypsy Calo or Romany, (3) *Aztekah Nahuatl*, and (4) English. It is through an etymological analysis that one can trace the origin, location and time period of the linguistic impact to the Spanish language of the S.W. Another objective of the study is to demonstrate how language can be used as a tool for social and racial discrimination. It shows how archaic speech, while pure Castillian of the Middle Ages, is seen as vulgar and barbaric among the *Campesino* and Chicano populations. It, further, points to the problem of language purity often used as a linguistic position against the poor by language Academies or Professors of Academia. Such positions were taken by the Colonial Spanish vis a vis Spanish-America as well as twentieth century American Spanish teachers in the public schools. It should be noted that Spanish is a mixture of many different linguistic influences.

Language is always in evolution and continuous change. Due to racial segregation and factors of isolation, certain populations have maintained an archaic lexicon and upon coming in contact with mainstream groups, are looked upon as inferior and uneducated. Although Chicano Sociolinguistics is a fairly new field, work on the Spanish language of New Mexico was done as early as 1909 by Aurelio Espinosa.

This study follows the format of analysis of the four distinct language systems that impact the Spanish spoken in the Southwest. Archaic Spanish is seen in groups that have been isolated geographically from other sectors of society. This can be due to natural causes as is the case with the New Mexicans of northern New Mexico, or due to racial discrimination as seen with the Spanish against Native-Americans and Mestizos during colonial times. Another group that has retained archaic Spanish expressions is the Campesinos of Mexico and older or isolated Chicanos. Some examples include the following archaic words: *mesmo* (world standard Spanish—*mismo* or same), *trujo* (world standard Spanish-*trajo* or brought), *vide* (world standard Spanish-*vi* or saw), *rede* (world standard Spanish-*red* or net), *asina* (world standard Spanish *asi* or in this manner). These words can be traced back to early middle Ages in the *Poema del Mio Cid*. “*Asina*”, popularly used in the Rio Grande Valley of South Texas comes from the archaic *Ansi* which evolved to *ansina*, then *asina* and finally *asi*. There are some expressions, while ancient, which can be traced to other languages that have impacted the Spanish of Spain. The barrio expression *huisa* (*guisa* or girlfriend, woman) used by *Cholos* or low-riders today can be traced back to the Old German of the Visigoths. The archaic Old German for woman or girlfriend was *weise* which, when pronounced correctly in German, has essentially the same pronunciation as the current *huisa* (the h is silent) as used by *Cholos* or low riders today.

One of the most pre-dominant languages to impact the Spanish of the Southwest is Aztec Nahuatl, Currently; there are literally thousands of words that derive from pre-Columbian sources known as *Mexicanismos* or Mexicanisms. Since Aztec Nahuatl was the lingua franca of Mexico in pre-Hispanic times, it influenced to a great extent, the Spanish of Colonial Mexico. Some examples include *zacate* (grass from *zakatl*), *esquite* (popcorn from *esquitl*), *piscas* (crops from *pixka*), *calcas* (shoes from

Kactli) etc. The word *calcos* used by low riders today is thought to be Calo by this group. This word, like *shante* (house from *Shantli*), is a loan word directly from Aztec Nahuatl and thus, properly belongs to that category. The word *mayate* in pre-Columbian times had no relationship to people. Rather it was used to refer to a black bug. During colonial times when the Spanish began to make racial distinctions, the word was modified to mean a black person in a pejorative manner. Today, among Chicanos and Mexicans there are two ways to refer to an African-American: (1) *Negrito* or *Moreno* and (2) *Mayate*. The former is non pejorative while the latter is pejorative pointing to the racism passed on since colonial times by the Spanish.

Calo or Romany is the language of the Gypsies. Gypsies, like Jews and Moors were highly persecuted by the Spanish. During the first voyages to the Americas, only the undesirables of society made up the crews of Spanish and Portuguese ships. Among them included Moors, Jews and Gypsies who made their way to the “New World” contributing linguistically throughout the Spanish-Speaking Americas. Calo can be identified in different parts of the Spanish-Speaking world: in Spain it is called *Germania*; in Portugal it is *Calao*; in Chile it is *Coa*; in Argentina it is *Lufardo*; in Peru, *Replana*. Since it was a language that was spoken in the isolated urban areas away from mainstream society, it became a type of underground language with groups that can be classified as the underclass. The addition of Calo to Spanish has produced very colorful, elastic and original linguistic creations. Its descriptions are colorful and poetic. As pointed out previously in the Aztec Nahuatl section, there are a number of expressions that have been borrowed largely because of their occult and secretive quality. Calo was the argot of the *pachuco* (Mexican Zoot-Suiter) of the forties and of the *Cholo* and low rider of the current generations. It is spoken most in the penitentiaries where Chicano inmates are known as *pintos*. Pintos have asserted that Calo is so secretive that many words remain forever, never leaving the walls of the Penitentiary. It should be stated that Calo has also borrowed from Haitian, Hebrew and other languages to maintain secrecy as an underground language; the idea, therefore, is to not be understood by society at large. Some examples of pure expressions in Calo are *chavalo* (youngster), *jura* or *gura* (cops), and *baisa* (hand). The word *nelli* from the Aztec Nahuatl is borrowed because of the phonetic sound of

negation but in actuality, it does not mean “no” in Aztec Nahuatl but rather “yes.” Some examples of colorful speech include “*Ontablas que no te habia vidrios?*” *Ontablas* is a combination of the archaic form *Onde* (where) and *tablas* (boards). Here *tablas* is used to conceal the real verb and *vidrios* (glasses) is likewise used to conceal the past participle. It should be noted that its non-sensible content (where boards that I did not glasses?) is intentional; its aim is to *not* be understood. However, after reviewing the potential sentence content and lexicon, it becomes clear that *ontablas* comes from “*onde estabas*” or “*Donde estabas*” (Where were you?) and *vidrios* is the past participle “*visto*”(seen) which makes sense when combining the Spanish “*que no te habia*” (that I had not) with *visto*,(seen) (similar in sound to *vidrios* or glass) to give in summation :Where were you that I had not seen you? This is one of the simplest examples in view that there are some that cannot be made out even when one knows various languages.

English impacts the Spanish of the Southwest for obvious reasons: there is a constant bombardment of English in the media, the schools, stores etc. When this is present, there exists loan borrowing and hispanicized English expressions. This is not unlike other areas where there are two languages at play. One similar scenario is in Louisiana where there is an exchange of Cajun French and English. While the examples of hispanicized English expressions are many, it should be noted that there are some words in English that have no equivalent in Spanish, e.g. Sheriff, thus the phonetic representation in the hispanicised *cherife* and also in *daimé* for dime. Some words exist in Spanish but because of their phonetic likeness to particular English words, they are used, e.g. *mecha* which actually means wick, is used for match. In other cases they may borrow the name of a State to phonetically reproduce an entirely different idea, e.g. for U-turn, the neologism *yuta* (from Utah) is used. These vary geographically within the U.S. In New Mexico, they may use *brecas* for brakes but in Texas *manella* is used. The former is an example of an hispanicized Spanish expression while the latter is an old Spanish term for Hand Brake used in wagons of the XIX century and the early Model T Fords vehicles. A Chicano in Texas uses *chispas* (sparks) for Spark plugs while the New Mexican will use *ploga* (plug) for the same. The former is a legitimate word while the latter is an hispanicized Spanish

expression. This writer has observed that Mexicans (from Mexico) along the border are adapting to many Chicano expressions as they become more familiar with English (e.g. *chispas*). Moreover, in the large metropolitan areas of Mexico, it is chic for the Middle Class and Upper Class to use English expressions or hispanicized English expressions. Heretofore, Chicanos were criticized and labeled *Pochos* by the Middle Class Mexicans and Anglos for mixing English with Spanish. However, it is O.K. socially for Middle Class Mexicans and Spaniards to use “*pochismos*” or hispanicized English expressions. Once, while visiting Spain, a Spaniard from Barcelona insisted in stating that “to park” in Spanish was “*parquiar*” when it is common knowledge that *estacionar* is the world standard Spanish.

In summation, we can conclude the following with respect to the language of the Southwest: (1) language has been used for centuries as a tool for social and racial discrimination by the Middle Class Mexican (of Mexico and the U.S.) as well as by the Anglo-American of the Southwest; (2) There is no such thing as a pure language. Language is in a state of constant evolution and change. The language used in the days of Ben Franklin today is seen as vulgar; the language of today will likewise be seen in the same manner in the future, (3) Calo as the language of the underclass of the barrios is used as an underground language that gives identity and authority to the speaker. Its purpose is not to be understood. It is, however, creative, metaphoric, poetic and rhythmic, (4) Calo was accepted by the Chicano Movement because of its association with the underdog of society, (5) Code switching, word loans, etc. are a natural phenomena in different parts of the world where there is an interaction of two or more languages, (6) Etymological tracing of words reveal historical immigrations of peoples and languages. South Texas, for example, has many Spanish expressions in common with the State of Tabasco, and (7) The Spanish language of the Southwest is not comprised of “Tex-Mex” but rather, an original blending of four language systems which interact in both the *barrio* and mainstream society.

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