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A SOCIOLINGUISTIC STUDY OF SPANISH LANGUAGE MAINTENANCE AND LINGUISTIC SHIFT TOWARDS ENGLISH AMONG CHICANOS

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Chicanos, as a lingual minority, comprise speech communities in urban and rural *barrios* 'neighborhoods' throughout the Southwest. Such communities are diversified and complex due to a range of varieties that exist along a Spanish-English continuum among its speakers. Because language choice is highly subjective, there exists a multiplicity of social and linguistic factors that promote or impede the use of one variety over another given the context and interlocutors involved. This study adds to the data base of information by providing an overview of factors that surround language maintenance of Spanish and shift towards English among Chicano adolescents in two speech communities in Austin, Texas, along with a description of Spanish language varieties currently in existence and their designated functions and use.

1. INTRODUCTION

Language maintenance and language shift comprise important components of the overall language contact situation found within bilingual communities.

Numerous studies examining language maintenance of Spanish and a linguistic shift towards English have been conducted with a wide sampling of Chicanos representing several states within the geographic region known as the Southwest.[1] These studies include Amastae's (1982) research with college students from the Rio Grande Valley in South Texas, Floyd's (1982) study with college students from Colorado, the work in Albuquerque with 61 families by Hudson-Edwards and Bills (1982), Chávez' (1988) research with children and adolescents in northern New Mexico bilingual education programs, Thompson's (1974) study with male heads of households in East Austin, Texas, and López' (1978) work among East Los Angeles families.

This study hopes to add to the data base of information on language maintenance and language shift by examining linguistic and social data from Chicano adolescents in two urban, bilingual speech communities in Texas.

[1] *Chicano* is the ethnic label used in this paper to identify Americans of Mexican descent who reside in the U.S.. While the term has come to be associated mainly with militant, political activism on the part of young adults, I use the term to refer to an ethnic group, a speech community, and even language in lieu of the term *Mexican American* or *Hispanic*.

The Southwest is the geographic region of the United States comprised of California, Texas, New Mexico, and Colorado. The majority of Chicanos reside in this geographic region.

Through the utilization of ethnographic techniques and the incorporation of sociolinguistic methodologies as previously employed by Elías-Olivares (1976) in her work with the same speech community, I examined existing Spanish-English language varieties, their function and use, and attitudes toward these varieties.

Due to the bilingual composition of the speech communities under study, issues relevant to Spanish language maintenance and use as well as those factors affecting language shift were captured via taped interviews with the informants.

The selection of 1st-3rd generation Chicano adolescents for this study confirmed my hypothesis that a shift towards English would prevail over Spanish maintenance due to age and generational differences, even in those domains traditionally reserved for Spanish use.[2]

This study set out to answer the following five questions:

1) What varieties of Spanish are found in these speech communities?
2) What factors affect Spanish maintenance and for what purposes?
3) What factors impact a shift from Spanish to English language use?
4) Regarding the future status of Spanish, will these adolescents encourage or discourage the use of Spanish with their offspring?
5) Should these people remain loyal to Spanish or should they abandon it for the sake of learning English?

These and related issues will be addressed.

2. Description of communities and sample

East Austin and Montopolis were the two speech communities chosen for this study. They are large, close-knit *barrios* 'neighborhoods' in the eastern section of Austin, Texas. Comprised primarily of Chicanos, Mexican and Central American immigrants, and blacks, these neighborhoods can be described from a socioeconomic status perspective as being low to middle income where, in most cases, both husband and wife contribute to the family income. Both communities contain businesses, restaurants/clubs, and churches. Montopolis can boast of having the only Spanish movie drive-in in the area. Three federally-funded housing projects can be found in both communities.

A total of thirty adolescents (15 males/15 females) ranging from 14 to 19 years of age from both communities were selected through social networks. Of these, twenty-eight informants (93%) were born in Texas; two were born in Mexico. Parents of these

[2] *Generation* as a viable factor in Spanish language maintenance and language loss is defined by Sánchez (1983). She offers five categories: 1) first generation status involves those persons born in Mexico who are first generation in the U.S.; 2) second generation status involves those persons born in the U.S. with parents and grandparents born in Mexico; 3) second-third generation status involves those persons born in the U.S. with one parent born in Mexico and one in the U.S. and grandparents born in Mexico; 4) third generation status involves those persons born in the U.S. with native-born parent and foreign-born grandparents; and 5) fourth generation status involves those persons born in the U.S. with parents and at least one set of grandparents born in the U.S.

The concept of *domain* as described by Fishman (1965) refers to locations such as home, school, church where a particular language is utilized.

adolescents are indicative of second generation status in that 77% were born in the United States. Seventy per cent of the grandparents were born in Mexico but eventually migrated to the United States.

The majority of the adolescents attended local high schools; two informants attended a community college.

Regarding the language background of these informants, self-reported data indicated that over one-half (57%) described themselves as English Dominant and 43% as Bilingual. No one described themselves as Spanish Dominant.

A breakdown by gender indicates that 73% of the females considered themselves Bilingual as compared to only 13% of the males.

A breakdown by speech community reveals that 61% of the East Austin informants describe themselves as being English Dominant; more so than their counterparts in Montopolis, who consider themselves to be equally English Dominant (50%) and Bilingual (50%).

3. Methodology

The development and administration of a Student Interview Schedule facilitated data collection which was demographic, socio-cultural, and linguistic in scope. These tape-recorded interviews were approximately sixty to ninety minutes in length. Data collection took place in the informants' homes; exceptions included a recreation center, a restaurant, and a church.

While easy accessibility and shared cultural and social norms with the informants facilitated data collection, methodological limitations do exist. A major limitation to gathering data employing questionnaires or interviews such as this one is the reliance on self-reporting information instead of observing the informants' language use/non-use with different interlocutors and in different settings.

4. Spanish language varieties

When a study utilizes ethnographic techniques, it strives to obtain the 'native's own views' about language, especially about the Spanish language varieties that exist in their respective communities.

Not surprisingly, no linguistic terminology or technical terms were used to describe these Spanish varieties currently found in East Austin and Montopolis. That is, no one knew that the term *Caló* was used by linguists to describe the variety of Spanish they considered or classified as 'slang' Spanish; however, the informants were quite competent in discussing the social demarcations of these varieties, i.e., what language variety was used and with whom.

At least three varieties of Spanish can be currently found in East Austin and Montopolis based on characteristics provided by these adolescents, as depicted in Figure 1.

In her investigation of language use within the East Austin speech community, Elías-Olivares (1976) discovered four varieties of Spanish: Standard Spanish, Popular Spanish, Mixed Spanish and Caló. Much like her informants, these adolescents are cognizant of the existence of a more formal, standard variety that they consider to be more traditional.

FORMAL SPANISH	*INFORMAL/SLANG SPANISH*	*MIXED SPANISH*
* Spanish spoken in Mexico * More traditional * Taught in school * Spoken by Mexicanos, older adults, parents * Used infrequently by teens with other teens * Spoken to parents by teens at home	* Developed in Texas * Low-class language * Different from school Spanish * Contains profanities and cursing * Used primarily by teens (both males/females) with friends * Not used with parents * Contains words like *vato, más triste, ese, órale, masota*	* Mixed with English * Referred to as Tex-Mex * Not 'correct' grammar * Used by teens with other teens/siblings * Contains words like *troca, daime*

Figure 1. Spanish language varieties in East Austin and Montopolis

This is a variety that is taught formally in school and is primarily spoken by older adults, who generally are Spanish monolinguals or Spanish bilinguals, rather than by adolescents or young children. Perhaps adhering to social and cultural norms, these informants are communicatively competent and utilize this variety when addressing their parents and grandparents as a form of respect and politeness.

The informal/slang variety is comparable to Elías-Olivares' Caló spoken mainly by younger Chicanos. This variety is relegated to a *patois* given its description by some informants as being "low-class and profane". For many third-fourth generation Chicanos, Caló has become their *lingua franca* that is primarily used with other adolescents and friends. The acquisition of a handful of lexical items to use with peers and to distinguish themselves from Anglos and blacks is a valid indicator of the Chicano's recognition of language, in this case Caló, as a symbol of ethnic and cultural identity. This notion of ethnic group affiliation is the source of socio-psychological investigations by Giles, Bourhis, and Taylor (1977). According to them, language and speech are valued dimensions of social identity and serve as in-group markers for making oneself distinct from outgroup members. The enhancement of in-group speech markers in search of a positive ethnic identity is referred to as *'psycholinguistic distinctiveness.'* Just as Caló is used to maintain solidarity among peers, adolescents refrain from using it with older adults, especially parents, for fear of being disrespectful and rude.

Finally, a variety designated as Mixed Spanish was cited by the informants.

This variety appears to be the product of language contact between Anglo speaking and Spanish speaking populations and has as its most salient characteristic a great quantity of loan words and borrowings, as seen in the examples of *troca* 'truck' and *daime* 'dime'. Sánchez (1983) and Peñalosa (1980) state that this is what many consider to be the major feature of Southwest or Chicano Spanish. The informants perceive this to be an 'incorrect' variety of Spanish but they claim to use it with other teens and their siblings.

5. Factors affecting Spanish maintenance

Even though the majority of informants described themselves as English Dominant, all of the informants expressed possessing receptive abilities in Spanish. For many, Spanish had been the first language acquired either from grandparents and/or parents. Spanish use was confined to the domains of home, church, neighborhood

restaurants/stores. Within the home, it was used to communicate primarily with grandparents, parents, other relatives, and some limited use with siblings. A more formal variety was utilized in these domains and with these interlocutors. Outside the home, Mixed Spanish and an informal/slang variety (Caló) were the main varieties utilized in social interactions with peers and siblings.

Informants with close ties to Mexico expressed a need to maintain the language when visiting relatives. What other factors are important for Spanish maintenance, according to these adolescents?

They cited the following:

—Parents making concerted efforts to teach Spanish to their children.
—The importance of being bilingual for future marketability when seeking employment.
—The need to communicate with grandparents/relatives in Spanish.
—The continued use of Spanish media —television, radio, and newspapers.

Interestingly, while many of the parents of these adolescents were bilingual, they made it a point to speak only English to them and their siblings, consequently retarding their ability to understand, use, and maintain Spanish. They felt that in order for the language to be maintained and be transmitted from one generation to the next, the critical factor would be parents' willingness to teach their children Spanish. This lack of language maintenance or transmission resulted in feelings of frustration and linguistic insecurity among several informants who were unable to fully participate in conversations with grandparents and other relatives. As one bilingual male informant stated regarding the need to maintain the Spanish language: "My parents want me to learn more Spanish, to learn my language, my background."

One informant 'blamed' parents for this and stated how proud she was that her grandmother stressed the importance of speaking Spanish. She offered an anecdote that during *las fiestas patrias* '16th of September festivities' all queen candidates had to give a brief speech. The girls who spoke in English were booed. She, however, chose to give her speech in Spanish, consequently receiving applause from a receptive audience who were in accord with her linguistic choice.

In cultural events such as these, she felt that it was the parents' responsibility to instruct their daughters to use Spanish in order to avoid such embarrassments. A mother of a bilingual female told me that she could not comprehend why parents of these adolescents do not promote Spanish use.

Although it was not part of the study to discuss language choice with the parents, several were present during these interviews. When they heard me ask their sons/daughters if they spoke Spanish, they readily offered explanations to justify their decisions why their children did not speak the language. One mother told me the reason her sons did not know Spanish was that, when she attended kindergarten, she mostly spoke Spanish causing her to feel embarrassed and inferior in school. As a result of her negative school-related experiences, she vowed that her children would attend school already speaking English, not Spanish. Another parent told me that she never spoke Spanish at home because she did not want her children having problems in school. Based on these few observations, it appears that conscious decisions were and continue to be made by parents not to teach or speak Spanish to their offspring in

order to avoid discrimination, segregation, or grade retention within a school context. Consequently, linguistic choices on the part of parents not to teach their children Spanish has resulted in a generation of Spanish-surnamed individuals who possess little or no ability to communicate with family members/relatives except perhaps within the narrow confines of the home.

6. Factors affecting linguistic shift towards English

The following statement was made by a male from Montopolis expressing his attitude toward Spanish:

> I don't wanna use that language because people will make fun of me and they're gonna go "well, you know Spanish, you're part of those *wetbacks* that come over here and all they wanna do is work" and you get stereotyped with a class just because you know a language.

Christian and Wolfram (1979:1) state that "language attitudes are generally shared by the members of a cultural group leading to a common evaluation of certain language patterns and the people who use them." Thus, not only is the language evaluated but the speakers as well.

In the case of Spanish in these two speech communities, the preceding statement reflects the general attitude towards Spanish and its speakers in East Austin and Montopolis. Spanish is perceived as being less prestigious than English and its speakers are categorized as being illegal aliens (more commonly and pejoratively referred to as *mojados* 'wetbacks'). Although varieties like Caló function as a vehicle for solidarity and in-group identity among younger Chicanos, Spanish is also perceived as the language of the less-educated, the poor, the old, and the foreign. A subtle but altogether real demarcation of social and linguistic identities is established by the larger Chicano community as its members try to distinguish themselves from other Spanish-surnamed individuals who oftentimes reside next door. This phenomenon is becoming all too common as *barrios* throughout the Southwest are being populated with large numbers of immigrants from Mexico and Central America. This pressure to maintain a positive ethnic identity and to distinguish themselves from outgroup members in the community is an interesting and growing socio-psychological phenomenon that merits further study.

Why are Chicanos shifting towards English use? These adolescents stated the following reasons:

- —English is being used because Spanish is not taught by parents.
- —Existence of negative attitudes toward Spanish and its speakers (e.g., immigrants).
- —Busing and desegregation affect being with members of the majority culture or other non-Spanish speaking populations.
- —Linguistic insecurity due to speaking Spanish.
- —English is the language of home/school/media/literature.
- —English is the language used with siblings/friends/parents.
- —Schools stress English, not Spanish.
- —Society is becoming more 'anglicized.'

As previously cited, parental decisions regarding language choice for their children is a key factor in either the maintenance or loss of Spanish or the sole adaptation of English in all domains. Based on conversations with parents present during the interview, it appears that there is a correlation between parents' negative school experiences and the transmission of the mother tongue to their offspring.

Due to the socio-historic circumstances surrounding Spanish in the Southwest, especially within a pedagogical context, it is not uncommon to hear parents (including my own) describe incidents whereby they were punished for speaking Spanish in school and made to feel inferior because of their linguistic and cultural heritage.[3] It is unfortunate that our present educational system along with local schools throughout the Southwest have had such a powerful influence and made such a negative impact on the Chicano population, so much so that parents now make conscious decisions not to speak Spanish to their children just so they will not be targeted as being different, deficient, or foreign by the school and their teachers.

An East Austin male summarizes his views about restricted Spanish use and its domains that are quite prevalent in East Austin and Montopolis among these adolescents:

> Not too many people speak Spanish nowadays. Used to be you'd speak English out of the house and Spanish in the house like to your parents and now, English is everywhere. You don't hear very much Spanish. I think it's drifting away. Even your Spanish teacher talks to you in English!

English is the 'unofficial' language of the majority culture. It is stressed and promoted in all facets —education, employment, and the media. Adolescents are aware of this fact in their own segregated neighborhoods and adhere to this reality.

Veltman (1983) defines the language shift process among U.S. minorities as *anglicization* and describes four types of language behavior permitting us to classify the range of language practice on the continuum between minority language retention and anglicization. They include the following:

1) *Minority language monolingualism* —the linguistic situation whereby there is sole use of the mother tongue.

2) *Simple bilingualism* —the linguistic situation of persons who retain their mother tongue as their principal language of use but who also speak English.

3) *English bilingualism* —the mother tongue has been retained as a second language but English is the main vehicle of communication.

4) *English language monolingualism* —the mother tongue has been abandoned or may be used in very specialized settings and English used for all intents and purposes.

[3] Rodolfo Acuña (1981) provides an in-depth historical account of the Chicano situation in *Occupied America: A history of Chicanos. Chicano discourse* by Rosaura Sánchez (1983) adopts a Marxist perspective for a comprehensive analysis of the social and economic reality of the Chicano and its ultimate effect on language.

Figure 2 describes the language shift process:

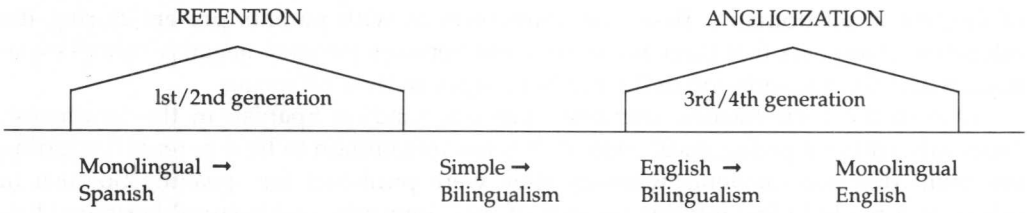

Figure 2. Spanish-English bilingualism and the language shift process.

Each type is dependent on the previous type defined and represents a further degree of movement to the English language group based on corresponding social and historical factors. Given this framework, it appears that age and generational differences correlate with either the retention or anglicization process. First and second generation adults are the most likely candidates of mother tongue retention. Meanwhile, the linguistic situation among third and fourth generation Chicanos is that while their grandparents and parents speak Spanish, they do not. They consider themselves to be English Dominant or English Monolingual instead.

Fasold (1984) describes this as an example of *intergenerational switching* where one generation is bilingual but only passes on one of the two languages to the next. Chicano adolescents from Austin, Texas seem to conform to the patterns of language retention/anglicization as described by Veltman.

7. Spanish language loyalty and maintenance

Despite linguistic assimilation towards English among younger generation Chicanos in Austin, linguistic and cultural ties to Spanish still exist. There is a sense of optimism among this generation that Spanish will prevail among future generations. When asked if they would consider speaking and teaching Spanish to their offspring, 93% of the informants said 'yes'. They want their children to be able to communicate with their grandparents and not encounter the same difficulties or insecurities many experienced. They equate Spanish with their heritage and culture and they also recognize the pragmatic value of speaking two languages.

Should Spanish-speaking immigrants remain loyal to their language or abandon it for the use of English? As large waves of immigrants arrive and settle in the *barrios* throughout the Southwest, they are faced with a need to learn English. In spite of negative perceptions of these immigrants held by many of the informants, all of them felt they should maintain their Spanish but also learn English to seek employment and for survival purposes.

8. Conclusion

Informants who profess to be bilingual, who are female, who have parents that stress the value and importance of speaking Spanish, and whose family maintains close ties with Mexico, are more likely to have a stronger sense of language loyalty towards Spanish and its varieties. Informants, primarily males, who claim to be English Domi-

nant with limited Spanish-speaking abilities restricted to a home domain did not have the same degree of language loyalty towards Spanish as their female counterparts. Males rather than females wanted to maintain distinctions between themselves and Mexican immigrants through the use of English rather than Spanish.

Adolescents demarcate the use/non-use of Spanish based on generational differences. In the company of parents, grandparents, and other relatives, Spanish is used; with younger brothers and sisters, it is not.

A slang variety of Spanish, namely Caló, prevails and continues to be used as the linguistic vehicle for in-group solidarity, ethnic indentity, and peer interaction in informal settings in the neighborhood and in school, according to 83% of the informants.

Co-occurring with Spanish maintenance in East Austin and Montopolis is the dramatic and continuous shift to English, especially among younger generations. A variety of factors interplay to promote this shift; yet, it appears that parental decisions not to transmit the mother tongue to their children based on negative school-related experiences had a tremendous impact on Spanish language loss or non-use by these adolescents. Desegregation and busing to schools that are predominantly Anglo in composition, where English is stressed and Spanish is discouraged as well as societal and economic pressures to adopt English for economic survival and social acceptance, are additional factors cited.

An observation is made that even though informants continue to reside in segregated, low-income neighborhoods, this shift to English is not directly correlated with social/economic mobility. Rather, it appears that the shift is based more on negative attitudes towards Spanish and its speakers that may be conveyed by the speech communities as a whole.

Finally, there appear to be what I term *linguistic contradictions* regarding Spanish maintenance and use. On one hand, the informants seem to have negative perceptions about the language and its speakers; however, they feel a sense of language loyalty by wanting to preserve and transmit the language to future generations as an integral part of their cultural heritage and as a symbol of ethnic identity.

9. Implications for future research

The existence of bilingual speech communities throughout the Southwest provides fertile grounds for the continuation of language maintenance and language shift research. Future investigations should focus on the impact of urbanization vs. ruralization and their respective roles in the survival and maintenance of Spanish.

With regard to the degrees of co-occurrence of these linguistic phenomena, what are the similarities or differences in a segregated *barrio* in an urban setting such as Houston, Texas compared to a segregated *barrio* in a rural community like Pecos, Texas?

Border communities like San Diego, California, Nogales, Arizona, and Laredo, Texas merit serious consideration to see how these phenomena co-exist with one another, especially within this unique context where Spanish rather than English is the language of wider communication.

Sample populations for language maintenance and language shift studies must be expanded beyond students in university settings. For the most part, they are and should not be considered as true representatives of bilingual communities. To capture generational issues regarding language choice, I advocate the sampling of children/

adolescents and their parents as well as recent emigres and their children from south of the border who are currently residing in ethnic enclaves throughout the Southwest. Not only will such a study reveal important sociolinguistic findings about language choice, but it can shed light into some pedagogical issues surrounding minority languages and their speakers.

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